

America

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THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

The Vexing Fight for
Religious Liberty

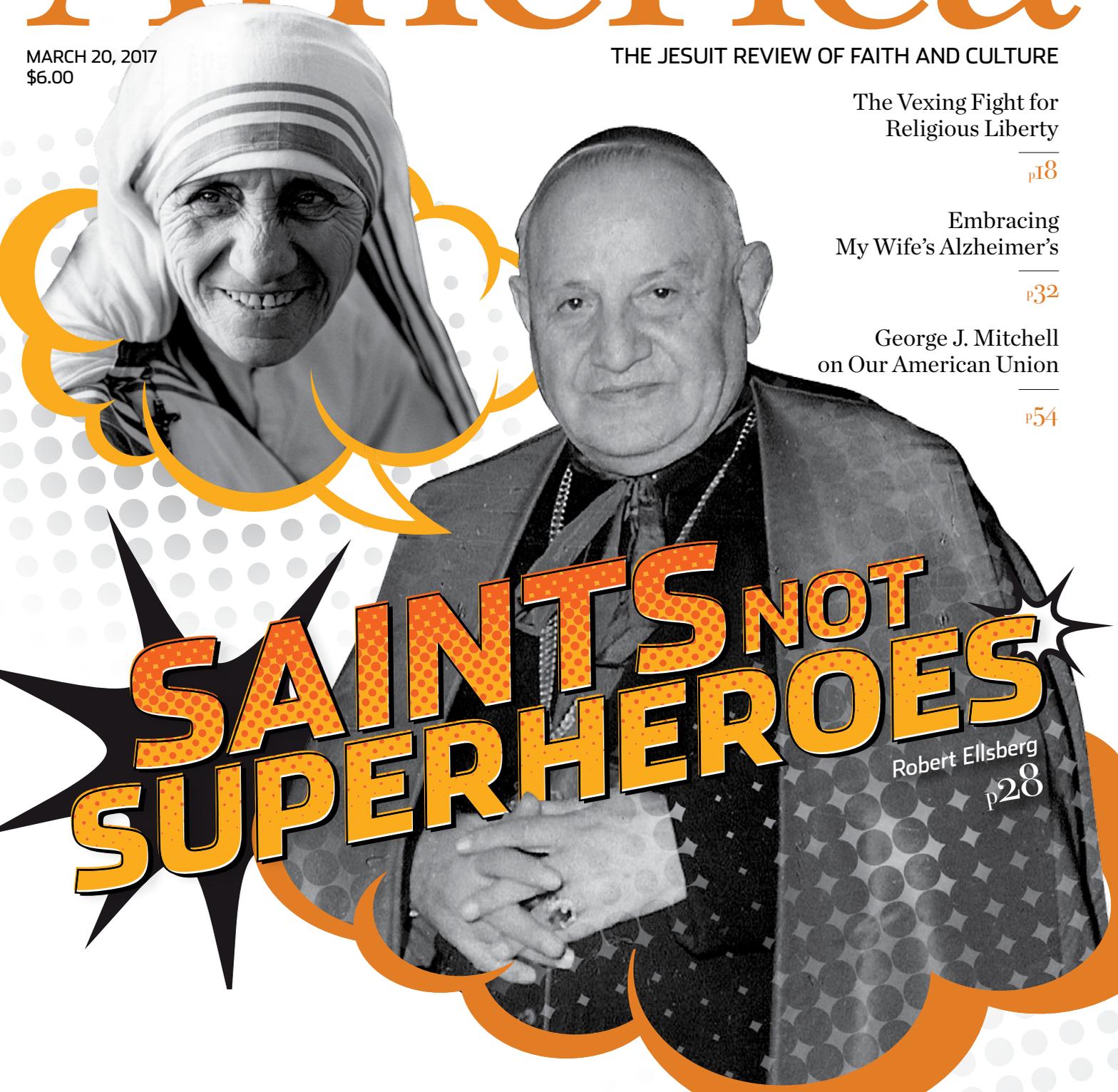
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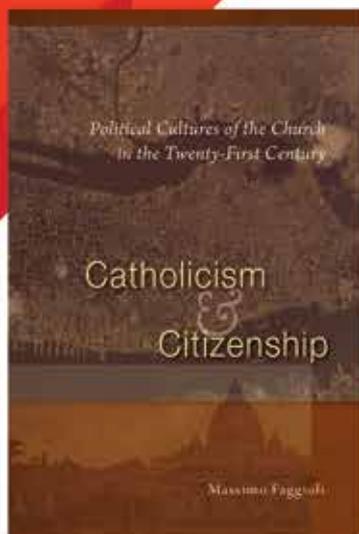


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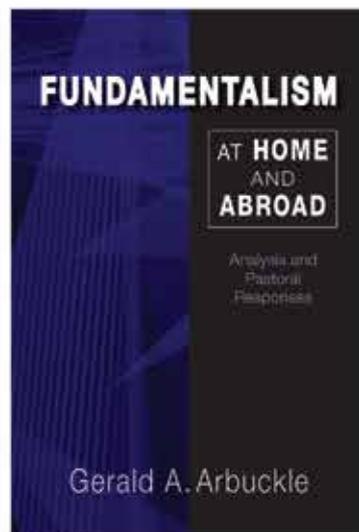
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European experience and theology. Sparks of insight and information fly from every chapter."

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For most people, fundamentalism in the modern world has become synonymous with a radical form of Islam, but fundamentalism in many shapes and forms is also very much present in Western societies. Yes, fundamentalist economic, political, nationalistic, and religious movements are aplenty in the West. Using the lens of cultural anthropology,

Gerald A. Arbuckle examines fundamentalist attitudes and movements in this book, exploring why they arise and how readers can constructively respond to them.

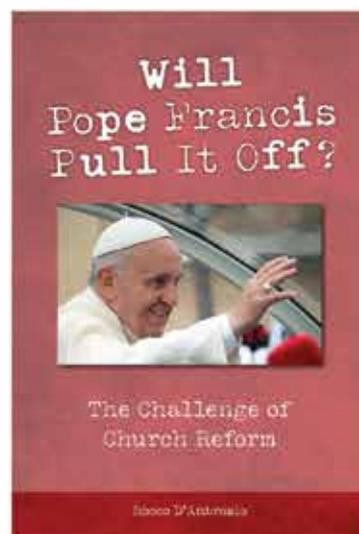
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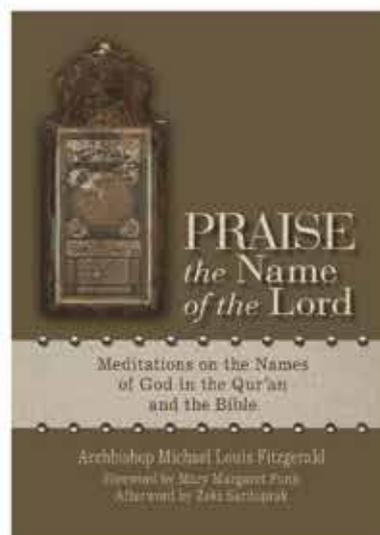


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At a time of real division, how can we help clear the air? First, breathe.

Matt Malone, S.J., is traveling abroad.

Last year, while preparing for childbirth, I often heard about the importance of my breathing, how it would help me to bear the pain of bringing new life into the world. What no one told me was the importance of taking time to catch my breath in the tiring, trying, beautiful months that followed. And so the words of Pope Francis' Ash Wednesday homily struck me as particularly relevant this year and have stuck with me as the weeks have passed: "Lent is the time to start breathing again."

Scientists, psychologists and spirituality gurus have pronounced the health benefits of controlled breathing. But Francis' advice to breathe is not rooted in a desire to lower ones blood pressure (though perhaps it could help) or even to provide quick stress-relief for harried parents. Rather, it aims to provide a deeper sense of peace. It is advice, he says, for all those who "yearn for this breath of life that our Father unceasingly offers us amid the mire of our history." And who doesn't feel deep in that mire these days?

Francis' words compel us to ask ourselves how we might find the inward peace that Christ brings to us and then to share that with the world. He invites us to ask: At a time of real and often stifling division, how can we help to clear the air? How do we say "no to the spiritual asphyxia," as he puts it? Perhaps we can begin by saying yes to those signs of God's mercy

already at work in our world. Perhaps we can begin by breathing in the hope offered by our neighbors and allowing it to fill our spiritual lungs. Let us breathe in the hope within a church basement in New Jersey packed with neighbors who show up, days after the president's first executive order on refugees, wondering how to help refugee families coming to this country; of the friend willing to listen; of the Muslim communities who came together to raise funds to help repair vandalized Jewish cemeteries in St. Louis, Mo., and in Philadelphia; of those people who look others in the eye and truly see them; of the men and women who wake up and work in the fields and factories to provide for our nation; of those who have been warned and yet persist; of the sisters fighting their way to the Supreme Court; of the saints who would rather not be known as such; of those who march and rally and fight for life, for peace, for the earth, for children, for the dying, for the sick, for equality.

Let us breathe out and blow away those things that would divide us: our dishonesty, our hypocrisy, our anger that festers, our resentment and despair. Let us sit and be quiet for a moment in these holy days of this season of Lent, so as to better discern how to raise our voices for the poor, the lonely, the marginalized, to discern how we might be a breath of fresh air to others.

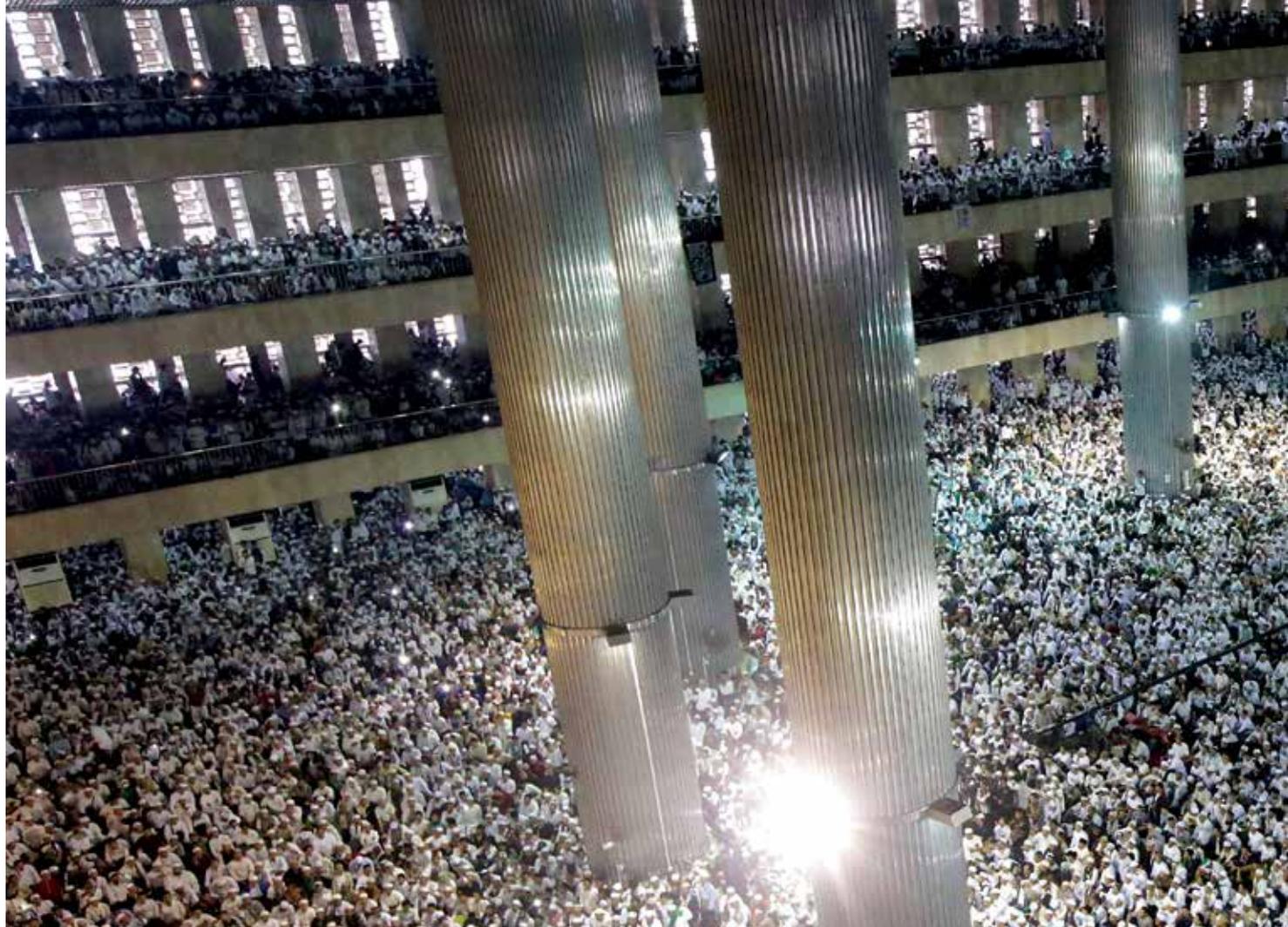
"It is not the time to rend our garments before the evil all around us, but instead to make room in our life for all

the good we are able to do," Francis reminds us. "It is a time to set aside everything that isolates us, encloses us and paralyzes us."

In a speech given in December 2016, Valarie Kaur, a Sikh activist and lawyer, made a plea at an evening service following the shooting of a Sikh man in Kent, Wash., who was told, "Go back to your country." The video of her speech has since gone viral. In it Ms. Kaur compares our messy experiment with democracy to the pains of childbirth: "What if the story of America is one long labor?" she asks. The answer, she argues, is the advice that has been given to expectant mothers for ages: "What does the midwife tell us to do? Breathe. And then? Push.... Tonight we will breathe. Tomorrow we will labor in love through love, and your revolutionary love is the magic we will show our children."

Christ's revolutionary love for us—the cross!—changes everything. Yet knowing that we are loved and that we act in love does not relieve us from all pain. But it can help make it bearable. We know that our God remains with us through our discouragement, our isolation, our disharmony, our despair. As we approach the final days of Lent, we must remember that our journey does not end at Easter. Take a deep breath. We have a way to go. Let us go together.

Kerry Weber, executive editor.
Twitter: @Kerry_Weber



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Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta, Indonesia, on Feb. 11.

Photo: CNS /Bagus Iadahono, EPA

Cover image: Composite, Catholic News Service

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The blind man could see Jesus. Can we?

As Jesus raised up Lazarus, so we must raise each other.

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LAST TAKE

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GEORGE MITCHELL

Remember, those who were once called "other," are now called "American."

Which religion's liberty is most threatened in the United States?

In response to the question above, a striking majority of survey respondents told **America** that the religious liberty of Muslims is threatened more than that of any other religious group in the United States today. This reflects a wider perception of Muslims as suffering the most from religious discrimination in the United States and is connected to recurrent reports of Islamophobic attacks across the country.

A majority of readers who had witnessed religious discrimination wrote about observing Islamophobic harassment, sometimes committed by Catholics, particularly of women who wore hijabs. Julene M. Newland-Pyfer of Seattle, Wash., wrote that she had seen women wearing hijabs “verbally abused and insulted by white men, who accused them of being evil.” “Get out of my country! You and your kind don’t belong here,” Ms. Newland-Pyfer described hearing the men say. From Colorado, Morgan Iacono witnessed a similar attack on a college campus, where young Muslim-American women were told to remove their hijabs and “go back home.” Other readers highlighted the prevalence of Islamophobic content on social media and spoke of Muslim friends being detained unlawfully at airports and “Muslim children being laughed at and excluded because of their religious practices.”

Surprisingly, considering the recent spate of attacks against Jewish people and their places of worship, more readers identified a prominent threat to the liberty of Christians rather than of Jews. Among the 10 percent who selected Christianity as the most threatened religion in the United States were Catholic readers who described denominational conflicts and prejudices. For example, Lee Wilkins from Alabama mentioned that as a child growing up in the 1970s, “Southern Baptists did not think Catholics were Christians.”

Although only 5 percent of our sample of readers saw Judaism’s religious liberty as the most threatened, many described instances of discrimination against Jewish people. Anti-Semitic threats were witnessed by readers like Philip Moore from Ohio, who as a Roman Catholic had not experienced religious discrimination himself. Mr. Moore wrote, “The local Jewish center about a mile from my home has received bomb threats.” A number of readers also described witnessing anti-Semitism toward classmates in Catholic school settings. From Illinois, Muriel Quinn drew attention to how people of various faiths can violate one another’s religious liberty. “Let’s understand,” he said, “Religious discrimination can also mean using one’s own religion to discriminate against others.”

Have you ever witnessed religious discrimination?

No	56%
Yes	44%

Have you ever experienced religious discrimination first hand?

No	68%
Yes	32%

Which religion's liberty is most threatened in the United States?



“Religious discrimination can also mean using one’s own religion to discriminate against others.”

The results of this unofficial poll are representative of a sample of **America** readers who responded to our questions on Facebook, Twitter and through our email newsletter.

The Common Good

Re “The Political Gets Personal” (Editorial, 3/6): Seeking the common good has been largely forgotten in politics lately. The Republican refusal to participate in governing during the Obama administration was a prime example. Not all purchases have a political aim, but in the current worship of money, boycotting products and companies is a way of refusing to worship at a particular altar. Sometimes that is the only way to be heard.

Lisa Weber

Online Comment

Sympathizing With the Skittish

Re “Hate Confession?” by James Martin, S.J. (Last Take, 3/6): I totally sympathize with the skittish. I didn’t go to confession at all for at least 25 years, and now I go twice a year and that is plenty for me. I try to do everything right—that is, prepare ahead of time—but I still get terrified. This is no fault of the priests—so far they have all been kind and have said moderately helpful things. Here’s my advice for the reluctant: Don’t expect to feel better, or to get advice on solving your problems, or to be unburdened. Just do it because you can. Confession is an opportunity for an encounter with Christ that is unlike any other, and if you believe in the sacrament you know you are forgiven, even if you aren’t feeling anything. I think that’s plenty. (And many times, you do end up feeling better—if not right away—and you do get some good advice. But those things are a bonus.)

Kate Gallagher

Online Comment

Persuasive and Telling

Re “Social Studies,” by Gus Hardy (3/6): What a profoundly insightful, touching and honest piece. I worked in education and special education for 45 years, the vast majority of those in a school that specialized in teaching and treating children with a variety of challenges, including those on the autism spectrum. The author avoided the clinical lingo of “theory of mind” and “circumscribed interests” that often dominates the professional literature on autism. Instead he goes right to the heart of it all and acknowledges his personal struggle and how he deals with it—and he does it magnificently. I have always found first-person descriptions of autism to be the most persuasive and telling, but few capture the condition as Mr. Hardy has, with such determination. It is disappointing that he still encounters people who are simultaneously insensitive and oblivious to

his challenges. What is uplifting, however, is that such encounters only spur Mr. Hardy on. Spectacular!

Charles P. Conroy

Lancaster, Mass.

Niche in the Church

We need more authors like Mr. Hardy; he gives a positive perspective to something that is not discussed in the church. I can’t tell you how this article helped me. Like Mr. Hardy, I have a form of autism and have struggled to find my niche in the church.

Michael Ware

Online Comment

A Natural Synergy

Re “Kanye, Kendrick, Chance & the Surprising Christian Language of Rap,” by Zac Davis (3/6): I think early hip-hop and religion always had a natural synergy, which stemmed from the origins of hip-hop and rap as anti-oppression and anti-establishment, constantly seeking escape, release, salvation from earthly struggles. In the late ’90s the middle class was bootstrapped, grew more affluent and became more entranced by materialism and commercialism, and the music reflected that. With the new sociopolitical movements like Black Lives Matter, I guess hip-hop is just finding its way back home.

Charles Arinze Okonkwo

Online Comment

The Big “Why?”

Re “Inside the Changing Catholic Church,” by Leah Libresco (3/6): This piece does not ask the big “Why?” about changing demographics. There has been a loss of faith in traditional Catholic population centers, and the rise of immigrant populations elsewhere bring their cultural influences with them. Who is to say that those new residents will not also lose their faith eventually? The polls show a rise in “nones” and a monumental decrease in priests since the 1960s. Perhaps more traditional priests will recapture the loss of faith across the country, and their practice model will spur a rise in seminarians.

Raymond Dombkiewicz

Online Comment

Supreme Extremism

Weeks in advance of Judge Neil Gorsuch's testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee, a number of Democratic senators had already declared that they would vote against confirming the Supreme Court nominee. Senator Jeff Merkley of Oregon, who was one of the first to make a public statement, justified his opposition on the grounds that the nomination is for "a stolen seat being filled by an illegitimate and extreme nominee."

America's editors have opposed the unprecedented obstructionism of Senate Republicans who refused even to hold a hearing for Judge Merrick Garland after his nomination by President Obama, arguing that if they believed "that approving this nominee would result in unacceptable outcomes, resolving fundamental questions of social policy in the wrong direction," then they should have had the courage to say so explicitly and vote his nomination down. While it could be argued that the Democratic senators opposing Judge Gorsuch are showing such courage now, they have—dangerously—pitched their refusal to confirm both as a tit-for-tat response to the last nomination and also in terms of the nominee's supposed extremism. Both approaches will further entrench the stalemate in which the Supreme Court, by resolving constitutionalized questions of social policy, must constantly be the front line of the culture wars.

The Republican response to the Garland nomination was understandable on political grounds and indefensible on constitutional grounds. Democratic opposition to the Gorsuch nomination as payback is in exactly the same situation. But the attempt to

portray Judge Gorsuch as "extreme" goes further. It is, in part, code language that expresses the expectation that he will not support the decisions in *Roe v. Wade* or *Casey v. Planned Parenthood* or other cases that have made the Supreme Court the only feasible venue for adjudicating the abortion question. Senator Ed Markey of Massachusetts identified Judge Gorsuch's "opinions that have demonstrated hostility to women's reproductive rights" as a principal reason for his opposition. These opinions, however, are not on the fringe. Around 40 percent of Americans believe abortion should be illegal in all or most cases; and 8 in 10 favor restrictions on abortion, many of which are largely impossible to implement under *Roe's* line of constitutional interpretation.

Preserving an absolute right to abortion does not justify pre-emptive opposition to a Supreme Court nominee. Even if Judge Gorsuch were to cast a deciding vote against the precedent of *Roe v. Wade*, that would simply return the question of abortion regulation to democratic resolution by Congress and state legislatures, where a debate could unfold and be resolved.

It is possible that an open debate over Judge Gorsuch's nomination—in Senate hearings, without pre-declared opposition—would allow for reflection on how the Supreme Court ought to function and what moral and policy questions must be decided on constitutional grounds. Refusal to confirm a Supreme Court nominee because of expected policy outcomes is understandable, even if unwise. American democracy, however, will be healthier if the Senate acknowledges that nomination hearings are not an adequate

arena for a serious policy debate. Like Judge Garland, Judge Gorsuch's qualifications are excellent. He cannot be opposed on those grounds.

Standing With Our Jewish Brothers and Sisters

On Feb. 27, Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia denounced the rise in anti-Semitic attacks and threats to Jewish community centers in the United States. "As a community, we must... continually and loudly reject attempts to alienate and persecute the members of any religious tradition," Archbishop Chaput said in a written statement. He called on "members of diverse faith and ethnic communities" to "stand up for one another and improve the quality of life for everyone by building bridges of trust and understanding."

This statement arrives at a critical time. According to the Anti-Defamation League, in 2015 alone there were over 900 anti-Semitic incidents in the United States; over 10 percent occurred on college campuses. Last year also saw an increase in online harassment. According to the A.D.L. report "Anti-Semitic Targeting of Journalists During the 2016 President Campaign," over 800 journalists received anti-Semitic tweets. And so far this year, there have been over 50 bomb threats called in to Jewish communities across the country.

Institutions and communities with histories of anti-Semitism, including the Catholic Church, have a special obligation to denounce these expressions of hate. Archbishop Chaput reminds us that as Christians, it

is our duty to stand with our Jewish brothers and sisters and decry any instance of anti-Semitism as “a blasphemy against God’s chosen people.”

Payday for Private Prisons?

In late February, Attorney General Jeff Sessions rescinded a policy of President Obama’s that aimed to curtail the use of private facilities by the federal prison system. This repeal will probably have little effect on the growing private prison system. Mr. Obama’s policy did not apply to state prison systems, which include the great majority of private prisons, or to immigrant detention centers. But this repeal sends a clear message: Profit is more important than people.

How many deaths will it take to end for-profit prisons? This was the question posed by the editors of **America** last year in light of reports that prisoners had died from medical neglect and violence. We wrote, “The problems with for-profit prisons are well documented—a lack of oversight, a commitment to shareholders rather than the public good” (2/29/16).

In spite of these deficiencies, private prison companies have seen their stocks rise by over 100 percent since Election Day, in no small part because of President Trump’s avowed commitment to incarcerate undocumented immigrants who “are criminal and have criminal records, gang members, drug dealers.” This windfall for private prison companies comes at far too high a price.

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How the church can prevent climate displacement

In Malawi, there is no question that climate change is real. It is already affecting vulnerable populations across the world, in places that are the least able to adapt.

The recent drought related to El Niño—the worst the region has seen in 30 years—has exposed the vulnerability of Malawi to the long-term effects of climate change. Eighty-five percent of Malawians reside in rural areas, and almost all rural communities subsist on rain-fed agriculture. Drought puts further pressure on farmers to engage in income-generating activities that are environmentally harmful, like burning trees to make charcoal to sell. The feedback loop between the adverse effects of climate change and poverty-related environmental degradation represents a pernicious and growing threat to small farmers. And the adverse impacts of climate change are expected to worsen. One study predicts that by 2050 there will be 500,000 more deaths annually across the globe related to food insecurity.

In his seminal encyclical on the environment, “*Laudato Si’*,” Pope Francis wrote, “We have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”

How can we best respond to the cries of the earth and the poor when there is an increasingly clear causal relationship between climate change, food insecurity, environmental degradation and forced migration?

The Jesuit Center for Ecology and Development and the Jesuit Refugee Service are working to address the impact of climate change on the

most vulnerable in Malawi and to spur socioeconomic development for the vulnerable and marginalized.

J.C.E.D.’s programs address climate change and environmental degradation by encouraging sustainable stewardship of land. It works to reduce charcoal usage and deforestation through energy-efficient stoves; to enrich the land and empower young and single mothers through a vegetable farming project; and to promote “conservation agriculture” through organic food production and reforestation.

At the same time, the J.R.S. runs environmental programs in the Luwani refugee camp, a settlement on the southwest border with Mozambique. I recently visited the camp, and the refugees proudly demonstrated their solar-powered water pump, seedling production and biomass briquettes for fuel. The Mozambican refugees in the camp are fleeing violent conflict but also drought. It is often difficult to isolate climate as the only factor in migration that is related to slow-onset disasters.

The Jesuits have a rich history of commitment to environmental stewardship that is predicated on reconciliation, justice and conversion. Part of the Society of Jesus’ mission, as articulated by its 35th General Congregation in 2008, is to address environmental and ecological challenges: “Our concern for ecology and creation has to be seen primarily in the context of two other sets of relationships: with God and with others.” Recognizing and upholding relationships between human beings, God and God’s creation calls for more than an academic awareness of climate change; it requires a conversion of heart.

The Catholic Church’s holistic approach to climate change and poverty has much to teach not only Catholics but also secular leaders. To address the intertwined issues of climate change and environmental poverty, food insecurity and forced migration, the church could leverage the energetic global Catholic community to foster policy change and protect the most vulnerable among us.

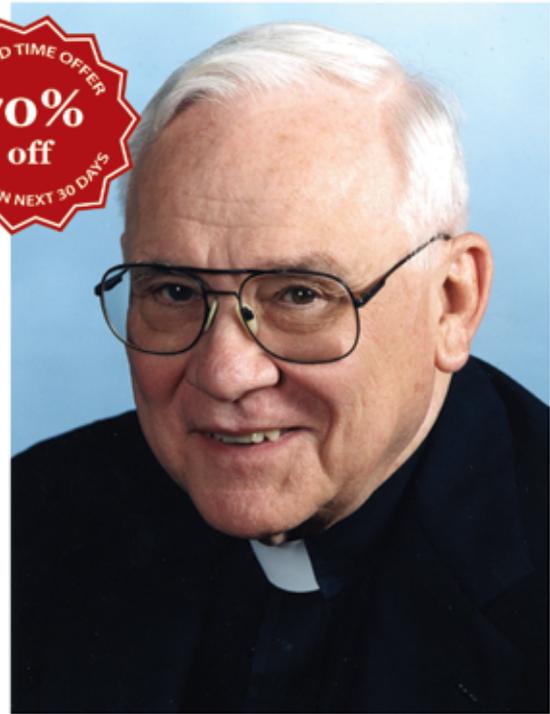
The stakes and consequences for the most vulnerable and marginalized are too great to ignore. Through reconciliation and restoration of right relationships with our faith, others and creation, and a conversion of the heart, the global Catholic community can adapt to and mitigate the worst effects of climate change.

At the turn of the new millennium, the biblically inspired Jubilee Year campaign called for the forgiveness of the external debt of the poorest, most heavily indebted countries in order to free up spending for health care and education. The campaign effectively used Catholic social thought to elicit change. We must once again mobilize our network of parishes, schools and community-based organizations to raise a collective voice in favor of action on climate change that serves the needs of the global poor.

Tessa Pulaski, a graduate of Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service, is an intern at the Jesuit Center for Ecology and Development in Lilongwe, Malawi.

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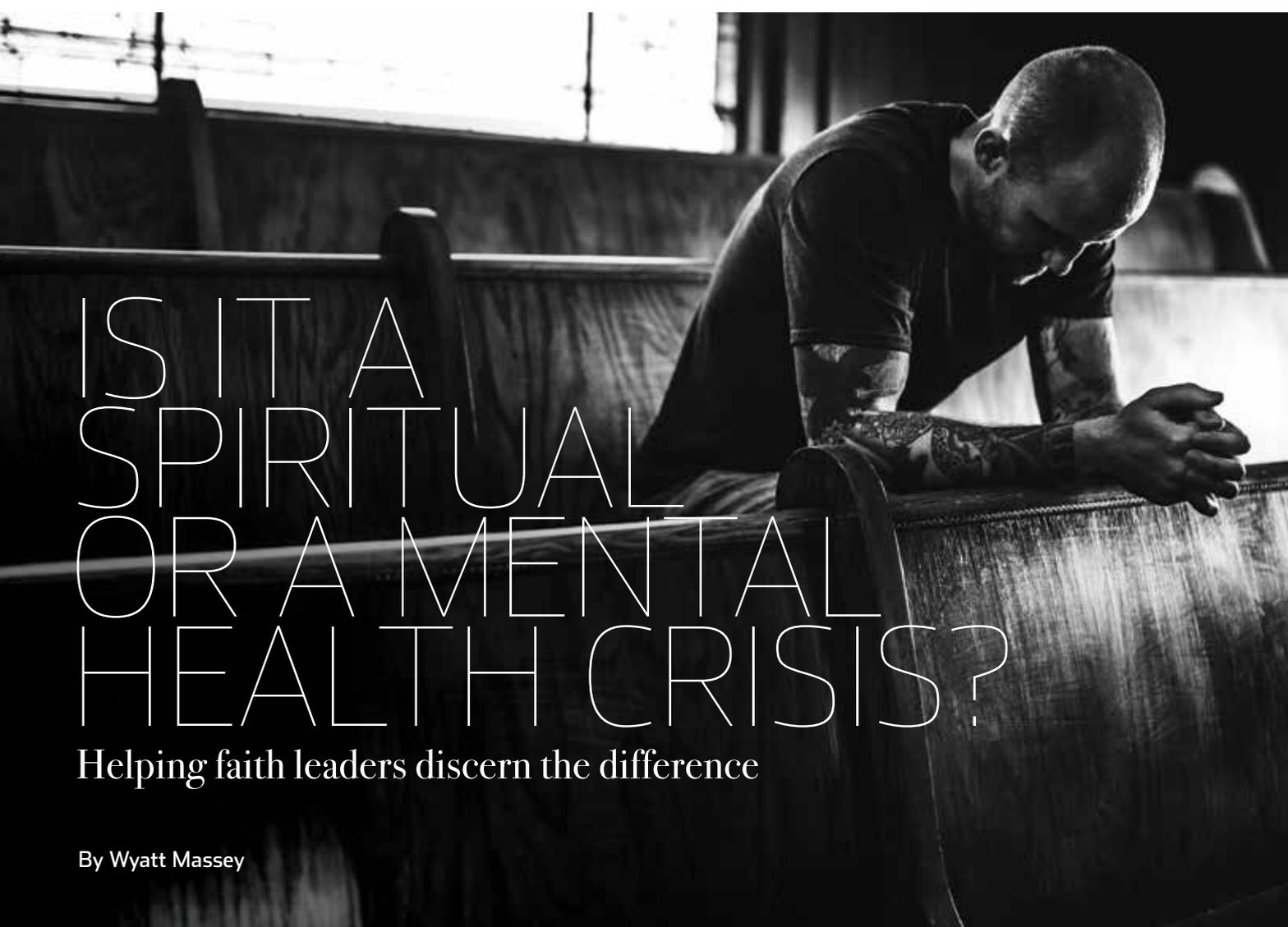
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IS IT A SPIRITUAL OR A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS?

Helping faith leaders discern the difference

By Wyatt Massey

People who are more religious report better mental health and a higher quality of life. They also experience lower rates of suicide—perhaps because of the sense of wellness and community religion provides. Sometimes, though, prayer is not the only answer to personal psychological struggles, and religious leaders must be able to identify when someone needs professional help.

It is crucial that they do so. About 8 percent of Americans report symptoms of depression, but less than a third receive treatment for it, according to a study reported last year by JAMA Internal Medicine.

In a mental health survey in 2015, “severe psychologi-

cal distress” over the previous 30 days was reported by 3.6 percent of U.S. adults, up from 2.4 percent in 1999. And between 1999 and 2014 the U.S. suicide rate steadily increased, from 10.5 per 100,000 people to 13.0–20.7 among men and 5.8 among women. During that timeframe, the suicide rate for women rose by 45 percent, compared with 16 percent for men.

Faith leaders received training in spotting mental health problems at a recent summit organized by the New York Commission of Religious Leaders. Around 200 faith leaders and laypeople gathered at the Sheen Center for Thought & Culture in New York City on Feb. 13 to learn

Composite photo: iStockphoto.com



about mental health awareness, suicide prevention and pastoral wellness from mental health researchers and advocates.

In confronting this vast national challenge—more than 42 million Americans suffer from some form of mental illness each year—pastors are on the front lines of both spiritual and physical care, Cardinal Timothy Dolan said during a press conference at the summit. “One of the things churches can do, one of the things communities of faith can do, is create a climate of trust, security, safety, where people really feel they’re at ease to speak from the heart, from the soul,” he said.

Rabbi Joseph Potasnik underlined the need for mental health training for clergy, saying the faith community has been silent for too long on the subject. “We would talk openly about different ailments,” he told summit participants. “But when it came to mental health, we were somewhat on the silent side.”

Locating the source of the strain between religious leaders and mental health care providers means going as far back as the Enlightenment. In the 18th century, science redefined mental illness as an issue to be addressed medically rather than spiritually. But religious individuals can still feel stuck when a doctor’s advice contradicts that

of a religious leader, and clergy felt their role in treatment was sometimes undermined by the mental health professionals, according to a study of relationships between the church and the mental health community.

That antagonistic relationship started to thaw in the 1980s as both groups recognized how a coupling of spiritual and medical support provided more holistic treatment to individuals. Groups like the Archdiocese of Chicago’s Commission on Mental Illness emerged in the mid-1990s to provide educational resources about mental illness. Deacon Tom Lambert of Chicago founded the group and later the National Catholic Network on Mental Illness,

which assists church leaders about how to support people facing mental health challenges in their congregations.

Chirlane McCray, first lady of the City of New York, told the summit participants that faith leaders play an important role in connecting people to mental health services, since some people may be more willing to talk to a priest than see a psychiatrist. In 2015 Ms. McCray helped launch a comprehensive mental health plan for the city, ThriveNYC. The plan aims to encourage discussion about mental illness and to close treatment gaps. More than 500 New Yorkers from 160 faith-based organizations have been trained in “first aid” for mental health through the program, she said.

“A faith leader can do so much in helping a person feel comfortable in talking about what’s plaguing them, what’s making them feel uncomfortable, and help them get to the right type of care,” Ms. McCray said.

Dr. David Ginsberg, a clinical professor and vice-chair of the New York University Department of Psychiatry, taught the audience of faith leaders how to administer the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale, which identifies the likelihood of self-harm and the level of intervention urgency. Removing means of self-harm and directly asking individuals about suicidal thoughts are important intervention tactics, he said.

Dr. Jamila Codrington, a clinical supervisor at Astor Services for Children and Families in Rhinebeck, N.Y., described in detail the warning signs of mental illness in children and adolescents, among them declining performance in school, avoiding friends and feelings of hopelessness. Poverty, abuse, the death of a loved one and stress over immigration status are all risk factors for adolescent mental health problems, Ms. Codrington said, and children must be cared for differently than adults.

Many young people “express their reality, perceptions and experiences through play,” she said. “Compassion and active listening—those two things can be done by anyone.”

Yet the good work of clergy should not come at the cost of personal health, said Dr. Derek Suite, sports psychiatrist and founder of Full Circle Health. The overwhelming nature of caregiving can lead to decreased compassion and burnout, he said, which is why leaders should make sure they have a community of counsel for times of need.

“We can have life and death before us,” Mr. Suite said. “The risk that you all face, and we all face, as caretakers is that our senses get overloaded.”

Clergy should also make sure they are sleeping enough and eating healthily, too. Observing the sabbath can be one of the most difficult things for clergy to do because of the workload demands of religious life, he added.

Greater challenges await ahead. Even though the incidence of depression and psychological distress is about the same for all racial groups, white Americans were more than twice as likely as African-Americans and Hispanics to receive treatment. Low-income and minority communities are at an increased risk from untreated mental health problems because the psychological effects of long-

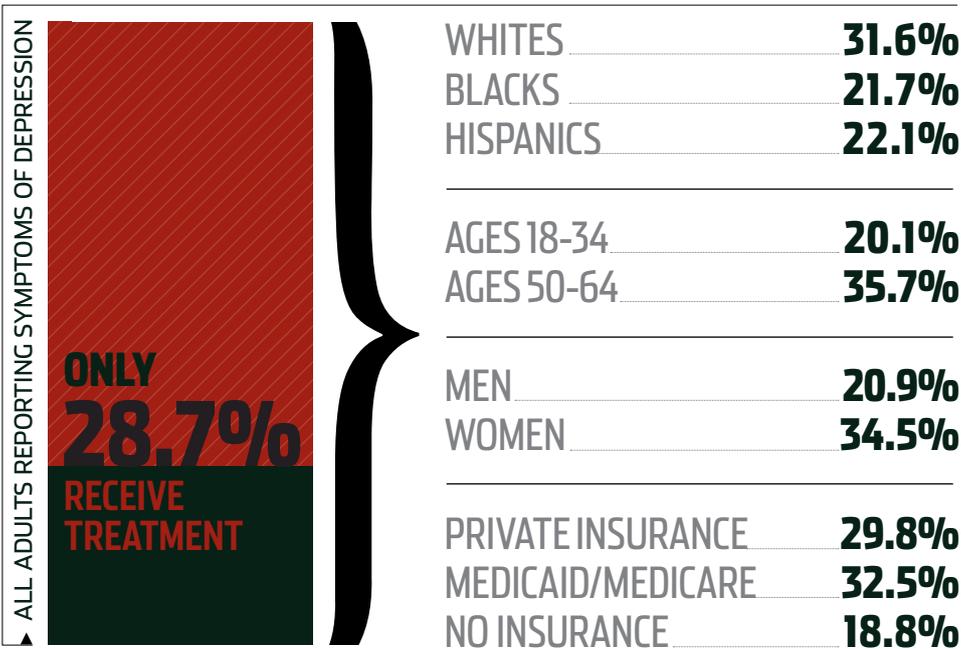
term stress from financial problems or discrimination can be passed from one generation to another.

A greater worry looms as talk of the repeal of the Affordable Care Act continues in Washington. That could mean that 1.3 million people with serious mental illness and 2.8 million people struggling with substance abuse would lose health care coverage, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Wyatt Massey, O'Hare fellow at **America**.
Twitter: @News4Mass.

MENTAL HEALTH IN AMERICA

LIKELIHOOD OF SEEKING AND RECEIVING TREATMENT FOR DEPRESSION

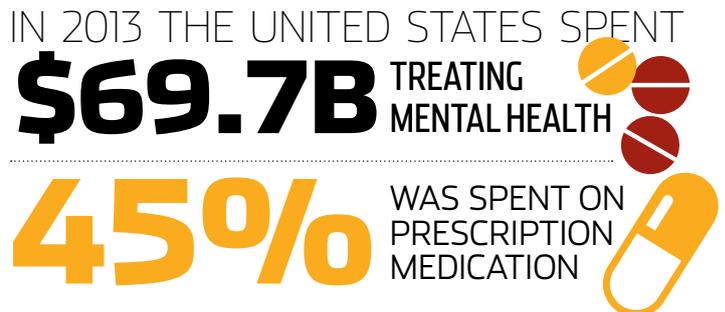


25.7% OF ALL ADULTS AGES 18-64 SUFFER FROM MENTAL ILLNESS OR DRUG ABUSE

SUICIDE RATE (PER 100,000 AMERICANS)



SPENDING



Sources: "Treatment of Adult Depression in the United States," by Mark Olfson, Carlos Blanco and Steven C. Marcus, JAMA Internal Medicine, August 2016, based on responses to Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, 2012-13 (8.4 percent of adults screened positive for depression based on self-reported symptoms); reported incidence of mental illness or drug abuse from MACPAC analysis of National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2010-12; suicide rates from the Centers for Disease Control; cost data from Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, Agency for Health Care Research and Quality.

Pope Francis calls for action as famine declared in South Sudan

Pope Francis has appealed for concrete action to get food aid to famine victims in South Sudan, arguing that words are not enough to prevent millions from being condemned to death by hunger.

The pope's appeal on Feb. 22 came a day after President Salva Kiir of South Sudan promised "unimpeded access" for all aid organizations to reach the hungry. Mr. Kiir's government has repeatedly promised such access but with little effect. Some 275,000 children in South Sudan are severely malnourished, and more than five million people are urgently in need of food and agricultural assistance, according to Caritas Internationalis, the church's global relief and development agency.

The pope called on the international community to speed aid to South Sudan, "where a fratricidal conflict compounded by a severe food crisis condemns to death by starvation millions of people, including many children." He added, "At this time it's more necessary than ever for everyone to not just stop with words, but to take concrete action so that food aid can reach suffering populations."

The United Nations declared a famine in parts of South Sudan's oil-rich Unity State in February. This is the first time the United Nations has issued a famine declaration since the crisis in Somalia in 2011, when 250,000 people died.

In a strong condemnation of the continuing strife in South Sudan issued on Feb. 24, the nation's Catholic bishops implored a response before conditions worsen. "Our people are struggling simply to survive," they wrote. "While there have been poor rains in many parts of the country, there is no doubt that this famine is man-made, due to insecurity and poor economic management.

"Hunger, in turn, creates insecurity, in a vicious circle in which the hungry man, especially if he has a gun, may resort to looting to feed himself and his family. Millions of our people are affected, with large numbers displaced from their homes and many fleeing to neighboring countries, where they are facing appalling hardships in refugee camps." The bishops deplored the violence perpetrated by both sides in the conflict, especially since so much of it appears directed at unarmed civilians, including killings, looting and rape by government and opposition forces.

Michel Roy, secretary general of Caritas Internationalis,



A young boy at an emergency medical facility supported by UNICEF in Kuach, South Sudan.

lis, called the famine "a direct consequence of a protracted conflict and almost four years of indescribable violence and abuses committed against the population." An ongoing civil war has destabilized the world's youngest country for more than three years as a political power struggle between Mr. Kiir and former Vice President Riek Machar continues.

The conflict in South Sudan, a nation with a significant Christian minority, pits supporters of Mr. Kiir, primarily members of the dominant Dinka community, against supporters of Mr. Machar, who are mostly Nuer. That power struggle, joined with drought and a collapsing domestic economy, has brought communities "already living on the brink to their knees," according to Caritas. Many farmers in South Sudan were unable to harvest last August and September. Now the second planting season that normally begins in April is threatened because of the continuing and often unrestrained violence.

According to the United Nations, more than 20 million people in South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and northeast Nigeria are facing devastating levels of food insecurity. The United Nations is seeking \$4.4 billion in aid from international donors to address the crisis in South Sudan and other nations of the region.

Kevin Clarke, chief correspondent. Twitter: @clarkeatamerica.

San Diego's Bishop McElroy encourages Catholics to be hope-filled 'disruptors'

At the U.S. Regional World Meeting of Popular Movements, Bishop Robert W. McElroy of San Diego electrified attendees with a challenging analysis of what he called this “pivotal moment as a people and as a nation.” He told the audience in Modesto, Calif., on Feb. 18 that the fundamental political question of the age is whether the nation’s powerful economic interests “will enjoy ever greater autonomy” or become constrained “to safeguard the dignity of the human person and the common good of our nation.”

“In that battle,” he said, “the tradition of Catholic social teaching is unequivocally on the side of strong governmental and societal protections for the powerless, the worker, the homeless, the hungry, those without decent medical care, the unemployed.”

On Feb. 20, he spoke with **America** about the impact of his address and several areas of concern he outlined. Noting that the Diocese of San Diego includes as many as 200,000 Catholics who are undocumented, Bishop McElroy said, “We simply can’t stand by and watch them get deported.

“What we’re facing is a step-by-step move toward a massive deportation of people who are undocumented, who have committed no major crime, who are now facing great fears because they are getting swept up in these new raids.”

In his Modesto speech, he urged Catholics to be “disruptors” of the status quo. One way to do that, he explained, “is simply being in solidarity with individual people we know who are undocumented and terrified right now.... The church needs to be with them, and we as individuals, as people of faith, need to be with them and help them through this.”

According to Bishop McElroy, the bishops of California are reviewing state legislative responses to new federal policies to discern which “substantively make sense and are aligned with the Gospel.” He added, “We want to provide some help for the undocumented here and also prevent the law enforcement community from getting entrapped in a situation where the undocumented community feels totally alienated from local law enforcement and thus aren’t cooperating.”

Responding to economic inequities through the filter of Catholic social teaching is another arena where the church can make a significant contribution, he said.

Though the free market is an essential economic engine, throughout U.S. history it has been recognized that, “unfettered,” it can “create immoral consequences,” Bishop McElroy said, citing child labor and egregious industrial exploitation that had to be addressed in the past. Now elements of the free market that “need to be curtailed” include “the growing acquisition of wealth by a very small number of people who are involved in financial speculation.”

According to the bishop, the rewards of increased labor productivity in the U.S. economy are not being equitably shared with wage earners. “The shrinking of the middle class is a great worry for our society, along with the increase of inequality.”

He urged Catholics to maintain throughout their engagement with U.S. social and economic life “a spirit of hope that is realistic.” Discussing the parable of the sower and the seed, Bishop McElroy noted that even though a small percentage of seeds may sprout, the harvest can still be bountiful. In biblical times, he said,



professional sowers moved from field to field, often without ever seeing the fruits of their labor.

“In so many areas where people really give of themselves in this world, helping others, they don’t get to see the harvest,” he said. “Our hope is rooted, in the end, in God’s grace. But that’s why God tells us to have faith that that growth takes place, to not lose heart in these efforts to preach the Gospel, to try and discern what the Gospel is calling for at the present moment and to try to live out the Gospel as best you can.”

Jim McDermott, S.J.,
Los Angeles correspondent.
Twitter: @PopCulturPriest.



A boy holds U.S. flags as people gather for an immigrant rights rally in front of the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington.

'Amoris' opens the door to Communion for Catholics in irregular unions

In an upcoming book the Vatican's top legal expert affirms that Pope Francis, in his post-synodal exhortation on the family, "Amoris Laetitia," made it possible for Catholics in irregular unions, including civil remarriage after divorce, to receive Communion under certain conditions. Cardinal Francesco Coccopalmerio is the president of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts and a member of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and of the supreme court for church law.

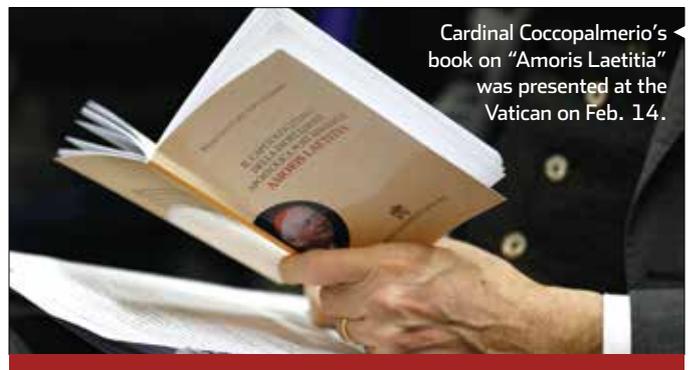
He cited as an example the case of a woman who enters into a relationship with a married man whose wife had left him with young children. In such a case, he explained in an interview on Feb. 17, "the children would now consider her their mother, and for the man, she is his life," as she means everything to him.

If she eventually recognizes "the problem with her situation" and decides to leave, he said, then her husband and children will find themselves in great difficulty. But if she concludes she cannot do such harm to them, "then this situation, where she wants to change but cannot change, opens the possibility of admissions to the sacraments."

He explained that in that example there is a recognition of sin and a sincere desire to change but also the impossibility of making it happen. In this situation, he would tell her, "Remain in this situation, and I absolve you."

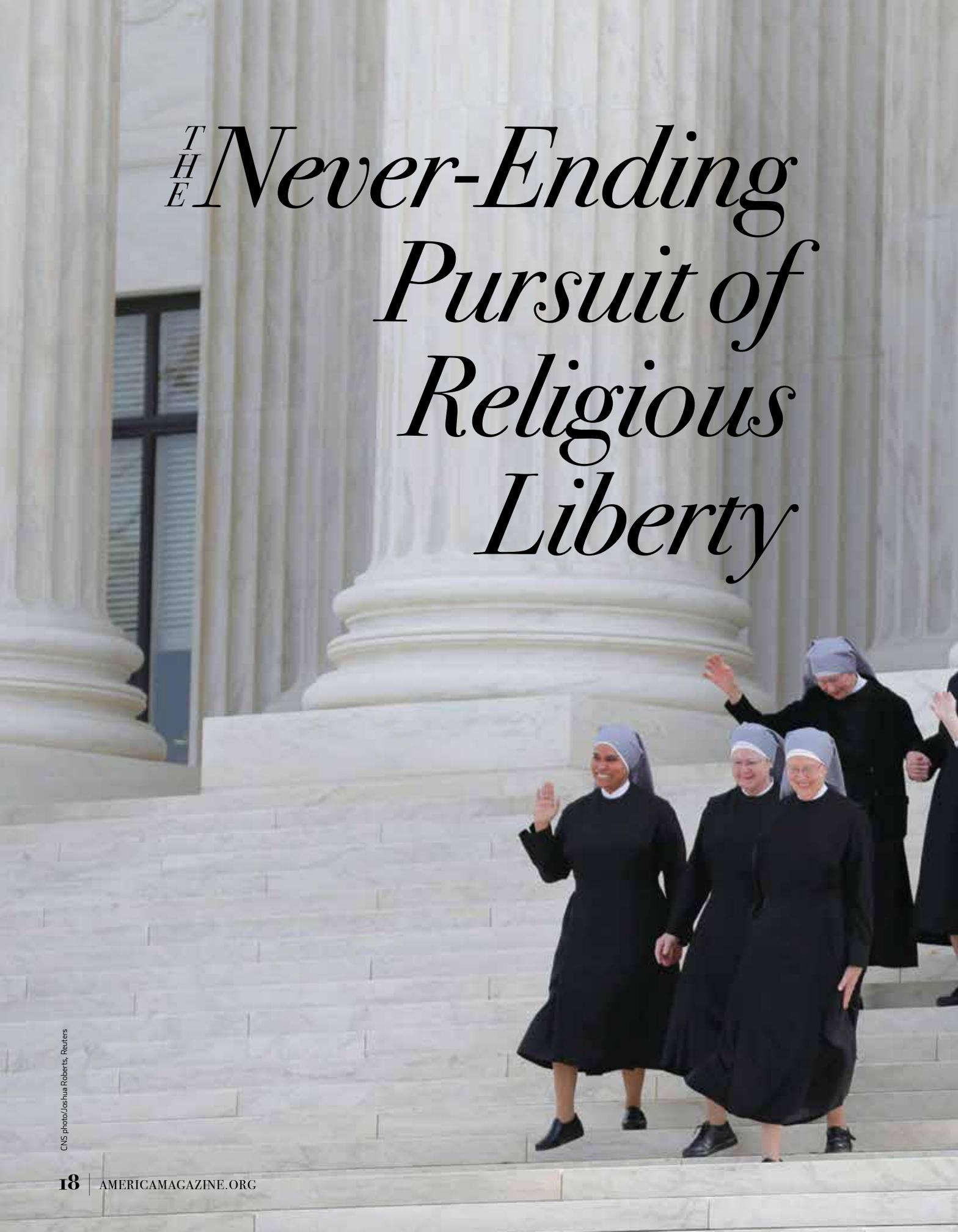
Cardinal Coccopalmerio emphasized that when it comes to the question of whether to allow persons in irregular marital situations to receive the sacraments, "Amoris" states clearly that this possibility "must be evaluated by the competent ecclesiastical authority." The cardinal said that should be the parish priest, "consulting if necessary with the ordinary, so that he can say to the couple, 'Yes, you can go to the sacraments.'"

Gerard O'Connell, *Vatican correspondent*. Twitter: @gerryrome.



Cardinal Coccopalmerio's book on "Amoris Laetitia" was presented at the Vatican on Feb. 14.

CNS photo/Paul Haring

A group of nuns in black habits and blue veils are walking down the wide, white marble steps of a grand building with large, fluted columns. The nuns are smiling and waving. The background shows the architectural details of the building, including a window with a cross-like pattern.

*THE Never-Ending
Pursuit of
Religious
Liberty*

CNS photo/Joshua Roberts, Reuters

The Bill of Rights has failed to protect religious groups from legal assault on a number of occasions. Can it happen again?

By Stephanie Slade



The Little Sisters of the Poor took their case against facilitating birth control access for their employees to the Supreme Court in March 2016.

“I feel the country was founded on Christian principles,” Sandra Long, an 80-year-old resident of Mahanoy City, Pa., and a lifelong Democrat, told CNN before the election. “And now, if our ministers don’t marry a gay couple or refuse to marry a gay couple, they can be arrested and taken to jail.”

Long was mistaken. Despite the Supreme Court’s legalization of gay marriage two years ago, ministers are not required to perform same-sex wedding ceremonies. But the perception that they might soon be—and that the government is continually encroaching on the ability of houses of worship and even individual Americans to live out their beliefs—seems to be widespread. Moreover, it likely played a role in the decision of many voters, such as Ms. Long, to support now-President Trump last November.

As Megan McArdle, a columnist at Bloomberg View, wrote in December, “When you think that you may shortly see your church’s schools and your religious hospitals closed, and your job or business threatened in the private sphere by the economic equivalent of ‘convert or die,’ you will side with whoever does not seem to set its sights on your conservative beliefs.”

The Catholic writer Mary Eberstadt, in her recent book *It’s Dangerous to Believe*, called this “the new intolerance” and said that what many believers “feel to the marrow these days is fear.”

And just before the election, Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, encouraged his fellow Catholics “to take a moment to reflect on one of the founding principles of our republic—the freedom of religion.” It is up to voters, he implied, to ensure that “the rights of people to live their faith without interference from the state” are respected by those in positions of authority.

Believers appear to be listening. In 2016, according to exit polls, white born-again Christians supported Donald Trump by an even higher margin (65 percentage points) than they did George W. Bush—himself a white born-again Christian—in 2004 (57 percentage points). And the trend is not limited to evangelicals. Catholics, who narrowly favored Al Gore over Mr. Bush in 2000, broke for Mr. Trump by an estimated seven percentage points.

Fears about religious liberty were, to be sure, one among many reasons the vote turned out as it did. Still, there is no doubt the concern is widespread. If the government can force family-run businesses to provide services for gay weddings and Catholic sisters to facilitate access to





Today efforts continue to push the boundaries of what the government may do at the expense of religion.

birth control, people are asking, what might be next? Could laws be on the way that criminalize traditional beliefs about sex and marriage? Or punish churches for excluding gay men and women from ministerial positions? Or, as Sandra Long assumed was already the case, compel houses of worship to host and solemnize same-sex weddings?

For every American raising the alarm over these questions, there is someone else throwing cold water on them. The political left is quick to assure their brothers and sisters of faith that our rights are safe. After all, they say, the First Amendment protects the freedom to believe whatever you want, and any attempt to constrain that freedom would surely be invalidated by the courts.

Douglas Laycock, a law professor at the University of Virginia, is an expert on issues of religious freedom and not one to downplay the extent of the attacks on this right. Still, he says, some fears go too far: “The ministerial exception decision,” a 2011 Supreme Court case that upheld the ability of religious organizations to decide for themselves who to hire for positions that involve passing on the faith, “was unanimous. It’s not going anywhere. And nobody on the gay rights side thinks the pastor should have to do [a gay] wedding.”

But Professor Laycock acknowledges the line is moving all the time. During arguments in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the case that legalized same-sex marriage nationwide, Justice Samuel Alito asked the Obama administration’s lawyer whether a college could have its tax-exempt status revoked because it opposes traditional marriage. “It’s certainly going to be an issue,” the solicitor general replied. “I don’t deny that. I don’t deny that, Justice Alito. It is going to be an issue.”

There have also been attempts to legally define churches as places of “public accommodation,” thus opening them up to state and federal regulations that normally do not apply to houses of worship. Last year, the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination said that welcoming non-congregants to a spaghetti supper would be enough to subject a church to state rules about transgender bathroom use. (It has since removed that language from its guidelines.) Some people even argue that “if you make your church available for weddings for anyone other than your members, you have to make it available on a nondiscriminatory basis,” Professor Laycock notes. And

the Notre Dame law professor Richard Garnett says, “I’ve seen it argued that some church sanctuaries should count as places of public accommodation if they’re tourist spots.”

Both men think this kind of reasoning would be an overreach by government—but that does not mean it could not happen.

In fact, history suggests that believers’ fears may not be so outlandish. The Bill of Rights has failed to protect religious groups from legal assault on a number of occasions since our nation’s founding. In some cases, American citizens have been forced to renounce central teachings of their faith or else be stripped of fundamental civil rights. And so long as the moves are supported by a political majority, the courts have often been willing to overlook even glaring constitutional defects.

What Once Was

Ninety years before the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments in *Zubik v. Burwell*, the case meant to decide whether the Little Sisters of the Poor and other religious charities could be forced to facilitate birth control access for their employees (the Supreme Court ended up sending the case back to lower courts last May), another group of Catholic sisters appeared before the highest court in the land.

At issue in *Pierce v. Society of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary* was an Oregon law passed by voters two years earlier, at the behest of the anti-Catholic Scottish Rite Masons, to require all children to attend public schools. “The effect of this law will be, if upheld by the courts, to close every private school in the State,” *The New York Times* reported. “That was its purpose, openly avowed in public discussions preceding the election.” Not coincidentally, many of the state’s private schools were affiliated with the Catholic Church.

The measure had the enthusiastic support not just of the state’s majority-Protestant electorate but also of the Klu Klux Klan, newly arrived in the Pacific Northwest. “We are against the Catholic machine which controls our nation,”



Alphonse Mary Daly, S.N.J.M., Oregon provincial superior of the Society of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, c. 1920.

Photo: Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, U.S.—Ontario Province

A Mormon saint and wives, c. 1880.

Photo: New York Public Library/Robert N. Dennis collection of stereoscopic views of Utah/ Charles Westfale



explained “Kleagle Carter,” according to a book about the Oregon chapter of the Klan edited by David A. Horowitz.

The story has a happy ending: The Supreme Court justices unanimously struck down the statute. But they did so not on the grounds that a ban on parochial schools violated the First Amendment rights of the church or its students. Rather, they decided the law threatened to destroy the sisters’ business without due process. It was a property law decision.

Not every violation of religious liberty has been stopped by the courts. More than 30 states have on their books to this day some form of legal prohibition on public dollars going to religious institutions. Known as Blaine amendments, after the House Speaker James G. Blaine, who tried to get an amendment added to the U.S. Constitution in the 1870s, these “no-aid” provisions purposely put faith-based organizations at a disadvantage. While secular nonprofits are free to apply for government grants, and secular private schools are free to accept government scholarships on behalf of their students, religiously affiliated groups are disqualified solely because of the nature of their beliefs.

As with the Oregon private school ban, all accounts suggest that the Blaine amendments were motivated by

deep animus toward Catholics. “They were passed in a series of outbursts of anti-Catholicism, there’s no doubt about the history,” Professor Laycock says. The federal effort “arose at a time of pervasive hostility to the Catholic Church,” Justice Clarence Thomas wrote in *Mitchell v. Helms*, a 2000 Supreme Court case on school vouchers, “and it was an open secret that ‘sectarian’ was code for ‘Catholic.’” Yet the state-level “baby Blaines,” as some now call them, remain in force.

As bad as anti-Catholic sentiment has been at points in America’s past, however, it is nothing compared with the vitriol directed at smaller religious groups over the years.

In 1862, fearful of a fringe sect known as the Mormons, Congress passed the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act, which banned plural marriage in federal territories (including Utah). Over the next three decades, penalties and enforcement were ratcheted up until finally, in 1890, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints abandoned its defense of the practice.

The single-minded efforts to force the Mormons to that point belie modern claims that the courts and the Constitution can always be relied on to protect the free exercise of religion. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, the government used every means at its disposal, including the

“
As bad as anti-Catholic sentiment has been at points in America’s past, it is nothing compared with the vitriol directed at smaller religious groups over the years.”

denial of basic rights, to coerce the Mormons into changing not just their actions but their teachings as well.

The Edmunds Act, passed in 1882, made polygamy a felony everywhere in the United States and “bigamous cohabitation” a misdemeanor. It also revoked polygamists’ right to vote, disqualified them from jury service and prohibited them from holding public office. Myriad reports suggest it was used against anyone who stated a belief in the Mormon doctrine of plural marriage, even without participating in it. Five years later, the Edmunds-Tucker Act went even further, with the federal government threatening to “disincorporate” the L.D.S. Church and seize most of its assets unless its leadership recanted the institutional belief that God wanted Mormon men to take more than one wife.

Test oaths were introduced, requiring individuals to swear not to “directly or indirectly, aid or abet, counsel or advise, any other person to commit” the crime of plural marriage. Thus, even spreading a central tenet of the faith could lead to disenfranchisement. Believing that refusing God’s demands would cost them “enjoyment in the eternal worlds,” many church leaders took their families into hiding.

Five decades’ worth of attempts to achieve statehood for Utah territory were meanwhile denied until the Mormon people agreed, in the 1890s, to write a categorical ban on plural marriage into their founding document. The result is a rather nonsensical provision in the Utah constitution, reading: “No inhabitant of this State shall ever be molested in person or property on account of his or her mode of religious worship; but polygamous or plural marriages are forever prohibited.” For 19th-century Mormons who believed plural marriage was an important aspect of practicing their faith, the claimed protection must have rung hollow.

The whole thing amounted to “an unfair targeting and persecution of a religious minority,” says Patrick Q. Mason, dean of the School of Arts & Humanities at Claremont Graduate University and an expert on Mormon history.

The point is not, of course, that Catholics should celebrate or condone polygamy. The point is that modern-day activists who say America’s institutions will necessarily protect believers against violations of their rights are failing to grapple with the uncomfortable reality that what exactly counts as “religious freedom” is often in dispute.

As the historian Kenneth H. Winn wrote in his book *Exiles in a Land of Liberty*, 19th-century Mormons “warned other Americans that it was in their self-interest to put down all encroachments on liberty, as well as to give justice to those whose rights had been injured. ‘The fate of our church now,’ they cautioned, ‘might become the fate of the Methodists next week, the Catholics next month, and the overthrow of all societies next year.’” The country did not listen.

What Is Today

Today efforts continue to push the boundaries of what the government may do at the expense of religion. When it comes to the free exercise of faith, “unless you understand how important and how central this has been to American culture and society and law, it’s easy for any kind of other value to trump that right,” says Allen Hertzke, a political scientist at the University of Oklahoma who also sits on the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. Indeed, in recent years we have heard that everything from abortion access to chickens’ rights are more important than religious freedom.

Since 2006, Catholic Charities agencies in Boston, San Francisco and multiple Illinois dioceses have been forced to shut down their adoption services or comply with dicta from the state or city government that all such agencies must place children with same-sex couples. The branch in Washington, D.C., had its contract terminated by the city on the same grounds.

In an effort to wipe out dissent on the issue of gay marriage, these regulations hurt one of the most vulnerable populations: children in need of homes. People think,

“Why shouldn’t social-service institutions that accept public money have to serve all clients equally?” Walter Olson, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* in an op-ed article in 2011. But “purism on the equality front sometimes comes at the expense of clients in need.”

As my colleague Scott Shackford put it in the November 2015 issue of *Reason* magazine, “Being denied service by one agency does not prevent a gay couple from finding and adopting children. But eliminating Catholic Charities from the pool does reduce the number of people able to help place kids in homes.”

Some activists are now invoking a similar rationale to try to force religiously affiliated hospitals to carry out abortions. In 2015, the American Civil Liberties Union sued a Catholic medical system, Trinity Health, on the theory that abortions are sometimes medically required. The lawsuit alleged that these institutions should be legally compelled to do something the church calls intrinsically evil, and that laws protecting the right of hospitals and their staffs not to participate in the taking of an unborn human life are a form of discrimination against women.

A federal court dismissed the challenge last April. But the very fact the challenge was brought should be chilling. “Those who doubt that anyone would ever try to force someone to commit an abortion need only look at this case,” says Matt Bowman, a lawyer with the Alliance Defending Freedom, the firm representing Trinity Health. Nor did the ruling stop the A.C.L.U. from bringing another suit last July, this time with the goal of stopping public money from supporting the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in their work caring for underage immigrants along the southern border. The problem, according to the lawsuit: The bishops’ care does not include contraception or abortion.

Catholics are not the only ones bearing the brunt of these attacks. Last year in California, an animal-rights group petitioned to stop a Jewish atonement ceremony called *kapparot*, which involves the killing of a chicken on the eve of Yom Kippur. The federal judge agreed to a restraining order that temporarily prohibited the ritual before realizing his error and reversing course. But by the time the ban was lifted, the time period for performing the ritual had passed.

In this way, activists stopped a religious congregation from engaging in an explicitly religious practice. What is

more, they did so using a legal sleight of hand of claiming the ritual counted as a “business practice” and was thus subject to an antitrust provision of the state’s Business and Professions Code. As Howard Slugh wrote in *National Review*, “It is one thing to argue that a religious institution engages in a business practice if it runs a restaurant or a shoe store. It is an entirely different matter to argue as the plaintiffs do here: that core religious functions are business practices...open to government regulation.”

This development is troubling in part because of how widespread the view has become that a person forfeits religious freedom rights when engaging in commerce.

In 2007, the Washington State Board of Pharmacy issued a “delivery rule” mandating that all pharmacies—including family-run businesses—carry abortifacient drugs. “Facilitated referral,” or the right of a worker with moral or ethical objections to refer customers to another nearby store to fill such prescriptions, was banned. Pharmacies could decline to stock medications for a variety of secular reasons, and often did. Religious reasons were intentionally excluded.

Washington officials had never bothered to enforce requirements that pharmacies stock certain drugs, “except in these emergency contraceptive cases,” Professor Laycock points out. “It’s absurd, but there it is.”

The American Pharmacists Association, in conjunction with more than 30 other state and national pharmacy groups, came out strongly against the regulation. The rule “effectively eliminated pharmacists’ right not to participate in actions they conscientiously oppose,” they later wrote in an amicus brief to the U.S. Supreme Court, “even though a ‘right of conscience’ has always been integral to the ethical practice of pharmacy.”

More shocking still, the state Board of Pharmacy itself had tried not to issue the rule at first. The body signed off on the regulation only after the state Human Rights Commission sent a letter “threatening Board members with personal liability if they passed a regulation permitting referral,” and then-Gov. Christine Gregoire sent another letter that “publicly explained that she could remove the Board members” if she deemed it necessary.

The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the constitutionality of the “delivery rule” in 2015, finding no right “to own, operate, or work at a licensed professional business free from regulations requiring the business to engage in activities that one sincerely believes lead to the

“ When public opinion changes, it is reasonable to expect that judicial decisions will turn out differently as well.”

taking of human life.” Short a member on the bench after Antonin Scalia’s death, the Supreme Court opted last summer not to take up the case, and so the circuit court’s ruling remained in place.

Any one of the above instances could perhaps be interpreted as the messy but natural give-and-take of democracy in action. Take them together, however, and it becomes harder to escape the conclusion that strong forces hostile to traditional belief are on the march. As Justices Alito, Thomas and John Roberts noted in their dissenting opinion on the pharmacy challenge, “those who value religious freedom have cause for great concern.”

What Is Still to Come

If a study of Supreme Court history makes one thing clear, it is that there is no fixed line differentiating the kinds of laws that are acceptable under the First Amendment from the kinds that go too far. Where lawmakers and the courts come down on contested questions is often influenced by what a majority of Americans seem to favor.

“I think that if a case went to the Supreme Court today and the question was if it’s O.K. for the government to pull the tax exemption from the Catholic Church, I predict the Court would say no,” says Prof. Garnett of Notre Dame. “And part of the reason would be that the justices would be aware that public opinion is not quite there yet. But these things can build up over time.”

None of the experts I talked to thought the Supreme Court literally keeps an eye on poll numbers as it hands

down decisions. But they all agreed that as fallible humans, even the most upstanding jurists will be affected by the cultural zeitgeist. “It might not be that it’s conscious on the justices’ part,” Professor Garnett says, “but we’re all shaped by the cultural air we breathe, and as the cultural air we breathe changes, we can become conducive to other arguments.”

Consider the bans on polygamy from a century ago. At the time, Orson Pratt, a leader of the L.D.S. Church, traveled the East Coast arguing that Congress was “seeking to debar the Mormons from the enjoyment of a religious right.” But with *The New York Times* urging the federal government “to exert its power for the extermination of this great social evil,” the legal system almost always sided with the majority of Americans who saw marriage as a union between one man and one woman only.

“The Supreme Court was reflecting popular sentiment,” says Brian Cannon, a historian at Brigham Young University. “It wasn’t preserving the rights of minorities, which I would like to think is one of its chief responsibilities.”

Of course, public opinion can change. Gay marriage is among the most vivid illustrations of that. For decades, public support for legal recognition of same-sex unions was a minority position. Between May 2011 and May 2012, according to Gallup, the numbers flipped. On May 9, 2012, President Obama suddenly announced that his views had “evolved” and he was now in favor of same-sex marriage. Thirteen months later, the Supreme Court ruled the federal Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional. Two years after that, it struck down all statewide bans on same-sex unions.

Within hours of the Obergefell decision, people began suggesting the precedent should be extended even further. Fredrik DeBoer wrote an article for *Politico* titled “It’s Time to Legalize Polygamy.” Similarly, in 2013, Jillian Keenan had argued at *Slate* that “Legalized polygamy... would actually help protect, empower, and strengthen women, children, and families.” If marrying whomever you want is a fundamental right, they wondered, shouldn’t the same be true of taking multiple spouses?

In a sense, the idea was already old news. In 2013, responding to a challenge by Kody Brown, a star on the reality television show “*Sister Wives*,” a judge threw out a Utah provision outlawing “bigamous cohabitation.” It was part of the same anti-polygamy legislation the courts had repeatedly upheld 100 years before.

If something that was constitutional yesterday can be unconstitutional today, it is impossible to predict what might happen tomorrow. When public opinion changes, it is reasonable to expect that judicial decisions will turn out differently as well.

Sometimes that will be for the best, as when the Supreme Court, in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, overturned its own abhorrent precedent and decided the “separate but equal” doctrine to be unconstitutional. On the other hand, if society really is becoming not just more tolerant of new beliefs but less tolerant of old ones, the fear that government is encroaching in on religious freedom starts to look more credible. That makes recent poll numbers—like those from the Pew Research Center, which found 67 percent of Americans, including half of Catholics, saying employers should have to offer contraception coverage regardless of religious objections—all the more discouraging.

As government grows larger and more entwined with our lives, it gains powerful new levers for exercising control over people of faith. Recall that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops came under attack by the A.C.L.U. because it does not provide access to contraceptives or abortion services while accepting federal funds for its work with refugees. As Professor Garnett puts it: “They don’t have to ban pastors from reading from the book of Leviticus. There are other ways to impact [a religious institution’s] ability to function.”

“It’s pretty unlikely that the government would ever say, ‘No church may adopt as one of its tenets the traditional view of marriage,’” he continues. “But the reality is that the government has a really strong ability, because it controls so many benefits”—from licensing and accreditation to tax exemptions, grant money and student loans—“to attach conditions to those benefits and thereby put a lot of pressure on religious institutions.”

So what are we to conclude from all this history?

A better lesson—at once more accurate and more hopeful—is that institutional protections are only as strong

as the underlying culture. If people are willing to see a minority group’s rights disregarded, neither the courts nor the Constitution is an airtight safeguard against abuse. But if the majority is unwilling to see liberties infringed, those in positions of authority are likely to take notice.



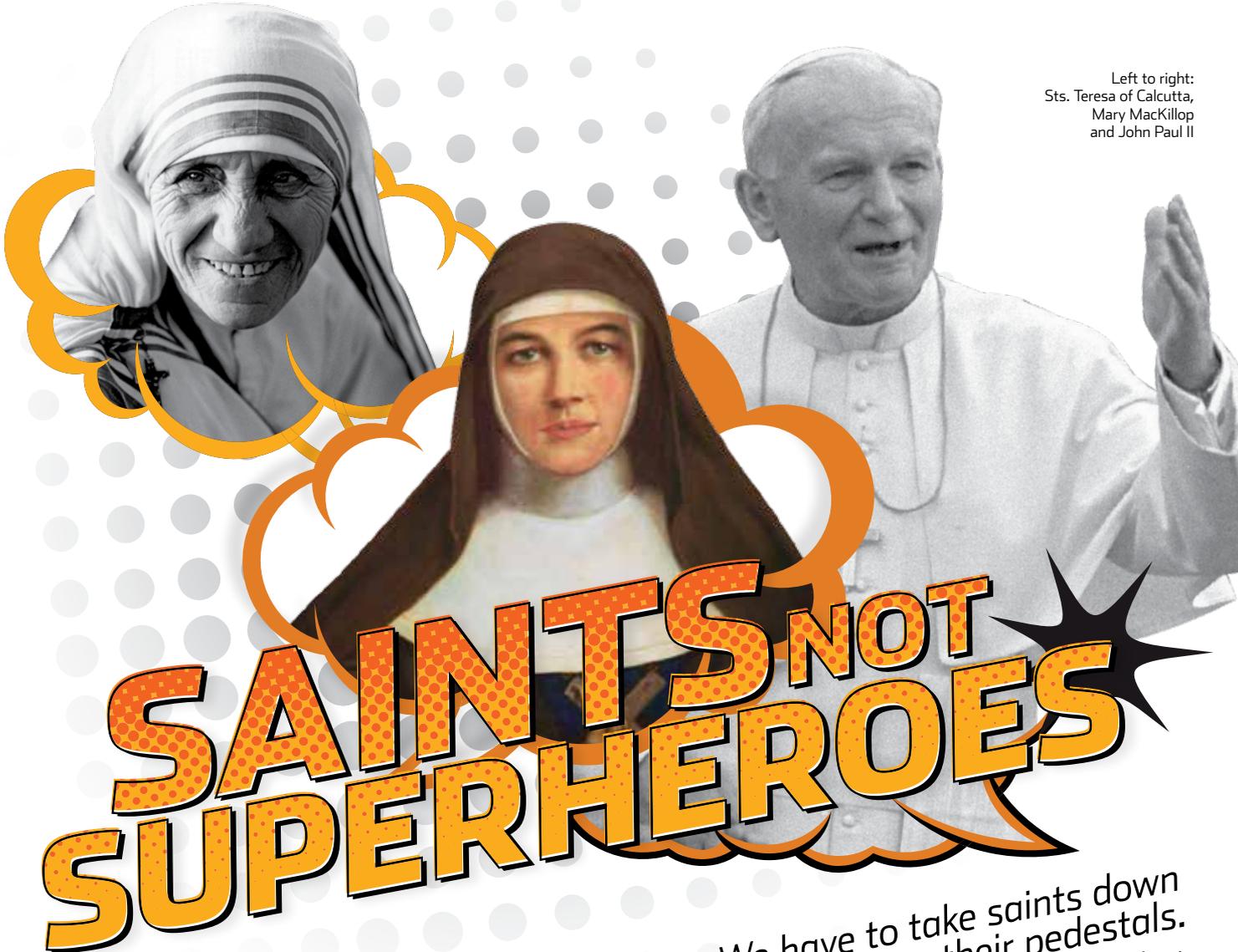
Mary Diana Dreger, O.P., a physician, at St. Thomas Family Health Center South in Nashville, Tenn. Catholic hospitals have recently been targeted by the American Civil Liberties Union.

“We’ve developed sort of an amnesia about the importance of protecting this fundamental freedom,” Professor Hertzke observes. “We need to reconnect religious liberty to the grand liberal tradition.”

Martin Luther King Jr. famously said that the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice. It might have been truer if he had said it can be bent, assuming enough people are willing to do the hard work of persuasion. In other words, if what counts as “religious freedom” is eternally in dispute, it matters who shows up to the debate.

Stephanie Slade, *managing editor at Reason magazine and a 2016-17 Robert Novak Journalism fellow, is a contributing writer for America.*

Left to right:
Sts. Teresa of Calcutta,
Mary MacKillop
and John Paul II



SAINTS NOT SUPERHEROES

We have to take saints down
from their pedestals.
By Robert Ellsberg

The saints should not be viewed as legendary, perfect superheroes, close to God but not quite human. Since the earliest days of Christianity, the church has remembered exemplary Christians. The early Christians venerated in particular the memory of the martyrs; they preserved their remains and gathered at their graves on the anniversaries of their deaths. As Tertullian said of these witnesses, their blood was the seed of the church. It was also the origin of the cult of saints. But as the early era of persecution faded, it became clear that there were other ways—no less heroic—of living out one’s faith in the world, through prayer, asceticism and selfless service. New models of holiness

emerged: desert monastics, teachers, missionaries, servants of the poor.

Over time our relationship to saints shifted. Miracles were attributed to their relics. The stories of their lives became increasingly embellished by accounts of supernatural power. People began to look on the saints not so much as examples of heroic faith but as wonderworkers—heavenly patrons—who had God’s ear and could do us favors. Every town, guild or station in life—whether sailors, musicians, blacksmiths, cheese makers or musicians—had its special patrons. St. Catherine of Alexandria (a saint who in all likelihood never existed) became the patroness of

Photos: CNS

maidens and women students, philosophers, preachers and apologists, millers and wheelwrights.

All of this gave the impression that saints have little in common with ordinary folk. This was enhanced, over the centuries, by the overwhelming preponderance of nuns, priests and monks among the list of official saints. Look at the stained glass windows in any church and count the number of lay people represented. Thus, holiness became the attribute of people living in a special “religious realm,” beyond the reach of those who make up the vast majority of believers.

Even today, when we call someone a saint, we generally mean that he or she can do something—whether live with the poor or go to prison in the cause of peace—that would be unthinkable for normal people like ourselves. Dorothy Day bristled when people would say, “Those Catholic Workers are saints.” They meant it as a compliment, but she felt it was a way of letting themselves off the hook. “When they call you a saint,” she said, “it means basically that you are not to be taken seriously.”

Yet she herself was enormously devoted to the saints. She saw them not just as figures to be venerated, but as models, friends and companions, who responded to the needs of their time and so encouraged us in our efforts—no matter how limited in comparison—to do the same. That didn’t mean she was above praying to St. Joseph, patron of workers, for help in paying the bills. The point of the saints, however, was not just to do us favors, but to inspire us to be more like them—to respond more faithfully to our own call to holiness.

Being more like the saints does not mean aspiring to become another St. Francis or St. Teresa of Avila—any more than following Jesus means taking up carpentry. It means striving, in our lives, to be illuminated by the same self-giving love. More specifically, it means trying to become the particular saint that God created us to be: responding to the particular challenges of our own time, relying on our own talents and temperament, contending with our own limitations and weaknesses. And there was never a saint free of limitations. But the forms of holiness are countless. For one person that might mean marrying and raising a family; for another, it might mean becoming a scholar or writer, a farmer, a nurse, a monk or missionary, a peacemaker. There were saints who did all these things. The question is, what is *our* own path to holiness? Or as Charles de Foucauld put it: “Which is *my* road to heaven?”

When we contemplate the saints, we tend to look at a finished product. But before Francis of Assisi became “St. Francis,” he was just Francesco di Bernardone, the wealthy son of a cloth merchant. Before he became St. Ignatius, Iñigo Lopez de Loyola was a vain young soldier. There was a time when the woman who became Mother Teresa was simply Sister Agnes, an Albanian nun working in her order’s school in India. All of them started somewhere, in some unremarkable way, before venturing off the charts, taking a step into the unknown, responding to a voice that seemed to call them farther, deeper.

As often as not, in the lives of the saints, that voice came to them from the needs of their poor neighbors—the sick, the orphaned, the prisoner—or a moment in history that seemed to call for some ultimate choice: Whom shall I obey? To whom am I ultimately accountable?

All my life I have been fascinated by the examples of people who responded to that call, whether saints or other great souls. In my youth, I was particularly impressed by the example of young men, just a bit older than me, who were willing to go to jail rather than participate in what they believed was an unjust war. Some of them inspired my father, Daniel Ellsberg, to risk 115 years in prison for copying the top secret Pentagon Papers and making them available to the press. Many of them were inspired by Gandhi, Thoreau or Martin Luther King Jr. Some were alumni of the Catholic Worker movement.

Their example prompted me to drop out of college in the 1970s and join the Catholic Worker community in New York City, where I had the opportunity to know and work with Dorothy Day, who has now been proposed for canonization. I won’t say that everyone I met there was a saint. But as St. Benedict said of his monastery, it was a school of holiness, a place where people were drawn to seek out the face of Christ in the poor and see what it might be like to live as if the Gospel were true. Some stayed for a lifetime. Others, like me, came for a while, in search of a vocation, searching for what we were supposed to do with our lives.

Dorothy was familiar with such motivations. “What’s it all about—the Catholic Worker Movement?” she asked in one of her last columns. “It is, in a way, a school, a work camp, to which large-hearted, socially conscious young people come to find their vocations. After some months or years, they know most definitely what they want to do with their lives.... They learn not only to love, with compassion, but to overcome fear.”



“Becoming a saint is the work of a lifetime.”

Volunteers at a soup kitchen run by the Missionaries of Charity in the South Bronx section of New York

That was certainly true for me—not necessarily the part about overcoming all fear, but at least the part about finding my vocation. Among other things, I became a writer—and a particular kind of writer, you could say: a hagiographer, the fancy name for someone who writes about holy people, or saints. It is a word that has fallen into disrepute. Hagiography has become identified with a particularly saccharine, credulous and pious style of writing that conforms its subjects to a stereotypical mold—the proverbial “plaster saint.”

Such saints, wrote Thomas Merton, are presumed to be “without humor, as they are without wonder, without feeling, and without interest in the common affairs of mankind.... They are always there kissing the leper’s sores at the very moment when the king and his noble attendants come around the corner and stop in their tracks, mute in admiration.”

Needless to say, that is not the effect I strive for. The great hagiographer Alban Butler described the saints as “the gospel, clothed as it were in a body.” That doesn’t mean that becoming a saint is like being fit into a pre-fab suit of clothes. It is more like a process, one that is never really finished but is the work of a lifetime. It is the process, as St. Paul put it, of putting off the old person and putting on Christ. As a result of this process, we do not emerge as another St. Francis, or for that matter another Merton or Day. In fact, as Merton would ultimately reflect, “For me to be a saint means to be myself.” If that is the goal of the Christian life, then I think we have much to learn from those who have walked this path.

But first we have to take the saints down from their pedestals—to show them as flesh and blood human beings,

who tried as best they could to live out the challenge of the Gospel in their particular moment in time. At the same time, I have also tried to expand the models of holiness. As Simone Weil said, “It is not nearly enough merely to be a saint, but we must have the saintliness demanded by the present moment.”

So what are the needs of the present moment?

Previous models of sanctity tended to emphasize a world-denying asceticism. Think of St. Simeon Stylites, who perched for many decades on top of a tower. In this era of ecological consciousness, when our planet is threatened by greed, waste and indifference, we need a spiritual vision that affirms the earth, bodily existence and our relationship with nature.

There are many examples of holiness expressed in the practice of charity. We need more examples, like Dorothy Day, who combined service to the poor and needy with the struggle for just social structures. As she said in her youth, “Where were the saints to change the social order; not just to minister to the slaves but to do away with slavery?” It is a question she answered with her life.

Many saints of old operated out of chauvinistic attitudes toward other cultures and religions. Think of the Crusades and the conquest of the Americas. We need models of saintliness that seek out and affirm the presence of God in other cultures and religious paths.

In a canon of saints that remains dominated by men, we need more examples of female holiness, and more examples from outside the cloister, examples of holiness lived out in the ordinary world. Speaking for those people who have ordinary jobs, and live in ordinary households, the French missionary Madeleine Delbrel, wrote, “We, the



ordinary people of the streets, believe with all our might that this street, this world, where God has placed us, is our place of holiness.”

I have tried to seek out and describe such people. In writing about such “saintly witnesses,” I have ventured to include figures beyond the Catholic or even Christian tradition. Personally, I think it is important that we step outside the box that makes us think only Catholics are God’s special friends, that only officially canonized saints can open our hearts to the sacred or inspire us to love our neighbors or stand up for justice. The power of great minds and souls is not restricted to those who pass the rigorous test of canonization. Pope Francis organized his talk before Congress last year around those he called “four great Americans”: Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr., Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day—only two of them Catholic, only one of them a candidate for canonization. Such figures, he said, offer “a new way of seeing and interpreting reality.” In fact, in that phrase, I think he offers us a new way of seeing and interpreting the function of saints—while also helping us transcend the somewhat artificial boundary we set up between ourselves and the select company of the canonized.

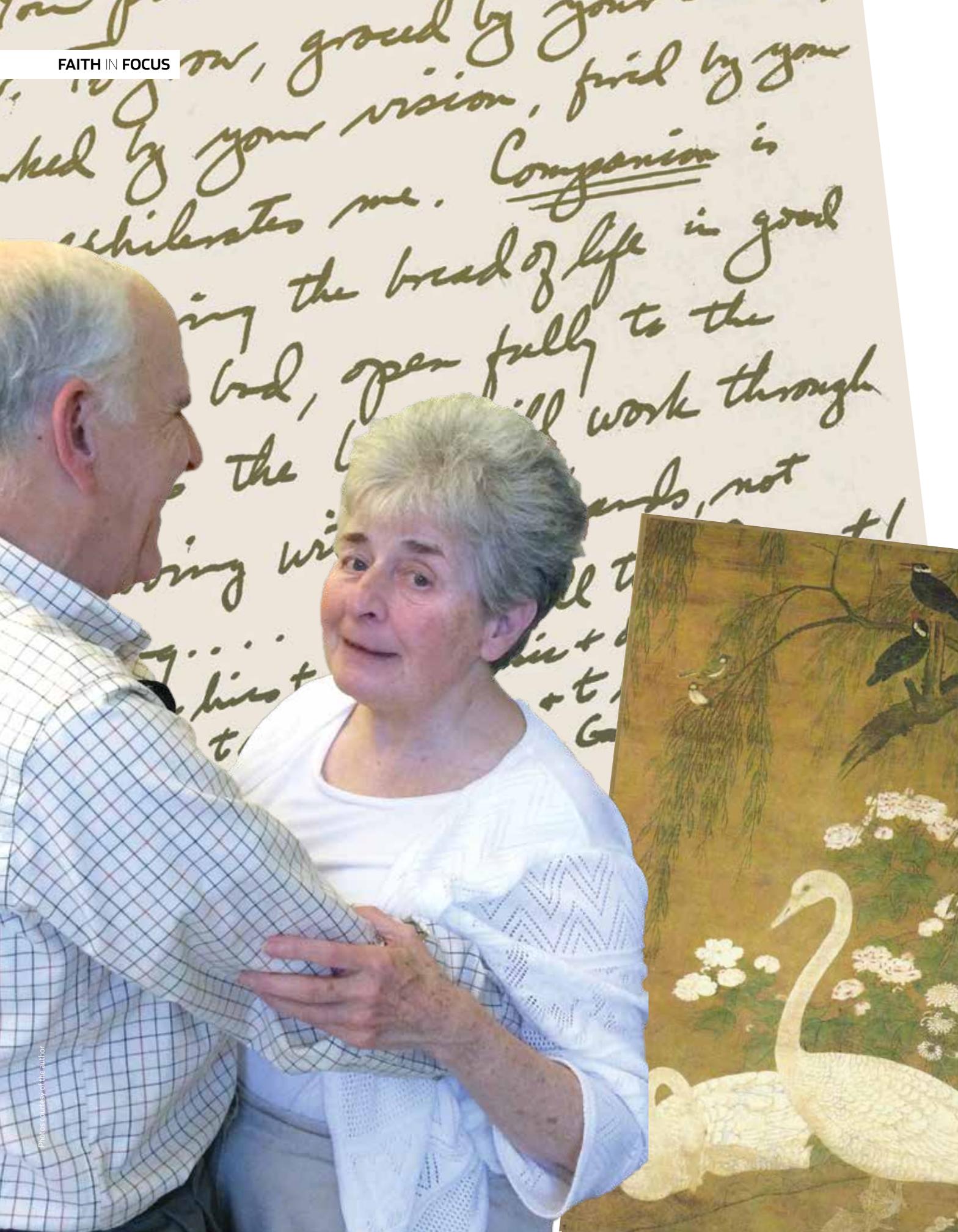
But we could go back to the Gospels and see how often Jesus looked past the good religious people of his time to hold up those on the margins—outsiders, foreigners, sinners—as models of faith or charity. Think of the good Sa-

maritan. Think of how Jesus described the criteria for our salvation: “I was hungry and you fed me.... I was a stranger and you welcomed me....”

There are many great saints who did these things. But there are others—some obscure, perhaps not Christians or Catholics, not entirely orthodox, not entirely pure, whom I am confident God will welcome into paradise before those of us who fail the test of mercy. I hold them up not as candidates for canonization, but with the hope that in their stories someone might hear the voice that is calling them to go farther, to go deeper.

Jesus never outlined the criteria for canonization. But he enumerated a list of those who were “blessed”: the poor in spirit, the merciful, the pure of heart, the peacemakers. These are not exactly the traditional criteria for naming saints. But they come closer to characterizing the qualities that unify the diverse men and women whose stories are recounted in my books, all these “blessed among us.” They are not perfect people, much less superheroes. But in their own individual ways they have shown what it means to be one’s true and best self. And in doing so, they inspire us to do the same.

Robert Ellsberg is the editor in chief and publisher of Orbis Books. This article is adapted from a talk given at the Sheen Center in New York City on Sept. 28, 2016.



Photos courtesy of the author.

Love in an Age of Alzheimer's

By James Ruck

Why I embraced the disease that will take my wife

“Alzheimer’s.” The dreaded diagnosis given to my wife in 2010 landed like a death sentence. Not just for Gail but for us, for our marriage as we knew it. We had waited long for each other, meeting when I was 43 and she 45,

both on the other side of midlife crises.

The idea of losing any of our remaining years together to this disease was heart-wrenching.

But it also set in motion a journey, one available to anyone who faces such life-altering news and is willing to ride on the power of faith and love. We had a choice to make: Do we move into Alzheimer’s or run from it, fight it? When Gail and I met in 1987 we found in each other the spark and the values—faith, community and service—that we had each long been looking for.

How could I choose other than to embrace Gail along with the Alzheimer’s? We decided to move into the disease, to make the most of our life together, one day at a time, walking consciously into the unknown. It was a decision made once but reaffirmed countless times since.

After the diagnosis, we intensified our volunteer commitments, Gail in hospice care and parish activities and me at a soup kitchen and as a volunteer chaplain at the county jail. We trav-

eled a bit until that became too overwhelming for her. We maintained an active life: walking, getting out to movies and parks, collaborating in household tasks. As the disease progressed, I accompanied Gail to her efforts and brought her along to mine. Friends near and far who learned about Gail’s condition held us in their concern and prayers. We rode, and continue to ride, on their energy.

Before the summer of 2014, I was not yet doing intensive caregiving. Then things changed. One by one, Gail’s involvements became too problematic to continue. Her hallucinations and agitation intensified—the demons of frustration, anger and fear attacking and belittling her deteriorating mind. We figured out how to cope with incontinence, her loss of interests, her decline in speech. Still, the strain of being present to Gail, feeding her and supervising all her activities, doing the practical work of running the house, coordinating doctor visits and overseeing medications—it was intense.

In the New Year, Gail’s mental and physical decline accelerated. Caring for her at home alone, I realized that we were on thin ice, one setback away from disaster. One devastating day, an infection left Gail too limp to stand on her own after going to the bathroom. There she was on the toilet, a mess and with pants down, and I was unable to help her for hours until friends came to our rescue.

The ice finally cracked in May. A bad chest infection and a urinary tract infection set in. Gail had a major seizure that landed her in the hospital and from there, unable to walk, a nursing home.



A PRIVILEGED TIME

I have been told, “You cannot be both caretaker and husband.” This bothers me: How can I not be both caretaker and husband to Gail? Our relationship has evolved into one that includes much caretaking. If I had family in town, or three hands, maybe Gail would still be at home. But I do not. So the Willows nursing home it is, on the fourth-floor dementia unit.

I go every day, feed Gail lunch and supper and stay until she falls asleep. I want to do everything I can to reassure her, to ease any lingering fear. I try to keep Gail engaged in life through little routines we repeat each day: helping her to stand and walk, listening to music, pushing her wheelchair through the facility to connect with others and through the lovely surrounding neighborhood. Gail is still a loving, social person. She brightened the lives of staff, residents and visitors last year by saying: “I love you. You are so special.” She does the same now just by shining her sparkling smile when they make eye contact. For 29 years, I have been blessed by this smile and love. It is a delight to see her light up the lives of so many others.

From the outset, I knew I was powerless to defy Alzheimer’s. I still experience this realization daily. Hard as it is, we have experienced abundant blessings all along the way. For me, two attitudes are necessary. The first is living in the present. Here, trust is key: trust in God; in my own creativity as new challenges arise; in friends and the power of their love, concern and prayers. We can certainly make ourselves worriers, feeding all the feelings triggered by overwhelming challenges. To purposely refuse to fuel these fears, worries, guilt, feelings of inadequacy is crucial. God gives us the cross but also the help to carry it. This I believe, and it has so far proven to be true—not always to

the head but to my feet, one step at a time.

The second is trusting that the loss experienced each day is only part of the picture. Dealing with Alzheimer’s, we are at the edge of mystery: the medical unknowns, the mystery of diminishment, death and whatever is beyond. No one knows what God has ahead for us. Jesus understands our anguish: “My God, my God, why did you abandon me.” The belief that there is life beyond death does not ease the pain of approaching it. But do I cultivate hope or wallow in despair when God has been so good to us in the past?

Death is coming. I have many experiences of bone-crushing sadness. But I refuse to let death claim our lives before it arrives. Trying to make each day as good as I can is worth the effort. We sit. My mind wanders, and I do not know what is going on in Gail’s head. I remember a comment from a friend whose wife died of a brain tumor: “I dreamed of us sitting on the porch when we were old.” Gail is far too young to be old. I do not know how much older she will get. But sitting outside looking at the lovely scenery, sitting waiting for her to fall asleep—these moments are special in a way I cannot describe. Time is empty in a way, rich in a way—punctuated periodically by “I love you,” me to her or still, occasionally, her to me. I do not know how much Gail benefits from my presence. I think she does. I hope that it dissolves any lingering fear she might have. I know that I benefit from her presence. To care for her is a privilege.

A couple of times a week I read Gail the letter I wrote on the day I asked her to marry me: “Sharing the bread of life in good times and bad, open fully to the miracles the Lord will work through us. Loving with open hands, not clinging.... All this I want. I want our lives to make music and dance together, overflowing to others...to cry, to laugh, to love! I love you, Gail!” I reassure her that this is just as true today. Even though she cannot understand the words, I can usually still spark a smile. Caregiving frames these moments to treasure. This is the blessing of our lives. I want to nurture the spark of our love for as long as I can.

James Ruck was a teacher and campus minister at the De La Salle Christian Brothers’ Central Catholic High School in Pittsburgh, Pa., for 30 years and then worked for the Lasallian Volunteers Program. He is now retired.

Photos page 32: James and Gail dancing at The Willows Nursing Home in 2016; the front and back of the marriage proposal card. This page: The newlyweds in 1988.



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Should Catholics be feeling March Madness?

It is national tournament time in college basketball. And, once again, several men's and women's teams from Catholic and Jesuit universities are participating. Of course, not all the players who play sports at Catholic universities are Catholic. But a reasonable person could be excused for asking: Why are Catholic schools participating in big-time sports in the first place?

First, it is important to recognize that Catholics have been playing sports for many centuries. In the medieval period, laypeople regularly played sports on feast days—times of leisure and celebration that made up as much as one third of the calendar year—and on Sundays. The humanists of the Renaissance and early Jesuits were the first to educate primarily laypeople and included sports in their schools. When large numbers of Catholics started coming to the United States, they made sure that the schools they started included time and space for students to play sports as a matter of course. By the late 19th century, Catholics began to view sporting competitions between Catholic and public high schools and universities as a way to show that they were as strong, smart and capable as members of the dominant Protestant majority. And they were remarkably successful at this endeavor.

The emergence of a religious culture that so easily incorporated play and sports was made possible by several factors. These included the Christian understanding of the material world as good and of the human person as a unity of body and soul; the view that virtue was associated with moderation; and an understanding of faith and culture that tended toward the acceptance of non-Christian customs and cultural traditions that were good in themselves (or at least not objectionable on moral grounds). St. Paul himself had provided a biblical precedent for engagement with sports when he made use of experiences from athletics to explain the dynamics of the Christian life in his letters to Greeks in places like Corinth.

At the heart of church teaching about sports is that athletics should serve the human person in his or her integral development. In order to understand whether they are doing this or not, it is crucial to pay attention to the experiences of persons playing sports. Dynamics that have shaped the world we live in direct our attention away from such experiences, however. The Puritans associated godliness with one's work or calling but tended to regard play and sports



with suspicion. It is not by chance that Americans became more comfortable with sports in the course of the 20th century when they became profitable or related in a meaningful way with work and business. Our universities today tend to regard big-time sports as a means to an end as well. And the stakes are high. The National Collegiate Athletic Association is being paid \$10.8 billion by CBS Sports and Turner for the right to broadcast the March Madness tournament from 2011 to 2024, and has recently signed an eight-year extension that will pay them \$1.1 billion per year through 2032.

In addition, a Cartesian mind-body dualism continues to shape how universities approach athletics. Within a dualistic perspective, bodily activities such as sport are not considered to be related to meaning-making for our students or expected to provide them with insight into their lives. This is why we typically do not ask most university students to think about their embodied experiences in sport in the classroom.

From a Catholic perspective, theological reflection about sport at any level needs to start with the experiences of the participants, because this is the only way we will know if sport is serving their integral development or not. Such reflection will also help us to begin to get an understanding of the internal goods associated with sport and to think about the ways these can be related to education. The problem with not paying attention to the experiences of players is that money and prestige become the driving forces, which dictate the choices of athletic departments at too many Division I universities in the United States. It is important to remember that St. Paul, who opened the door to Christian engagement with sports, also wrote that the “love of money is the root of all evil.”

Patrick Kelly, S.J., is associate professor of theology and religious studies at Seattle University. He is the author of *Catholic Perspectives on Sports: From Medieval to Modern Times* (Paulist Press) and the editor of *Youth Sport and Spirituality: Catholic Perspectives* (University of Notre Dame Press).

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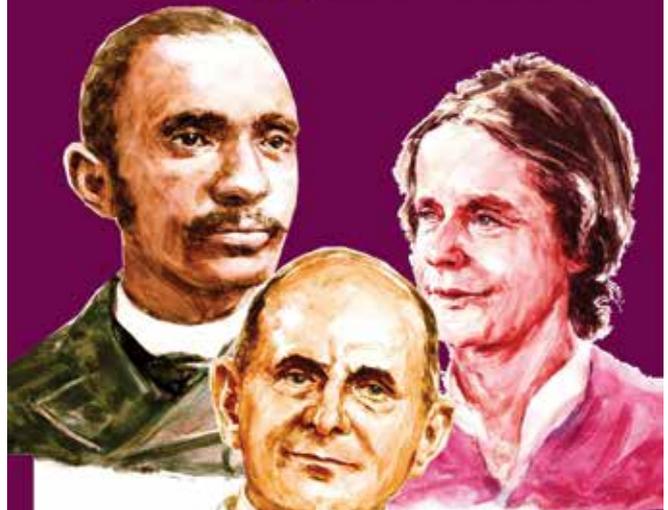
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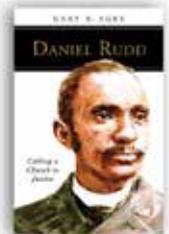
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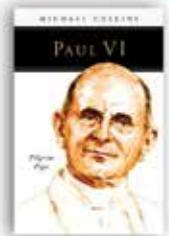
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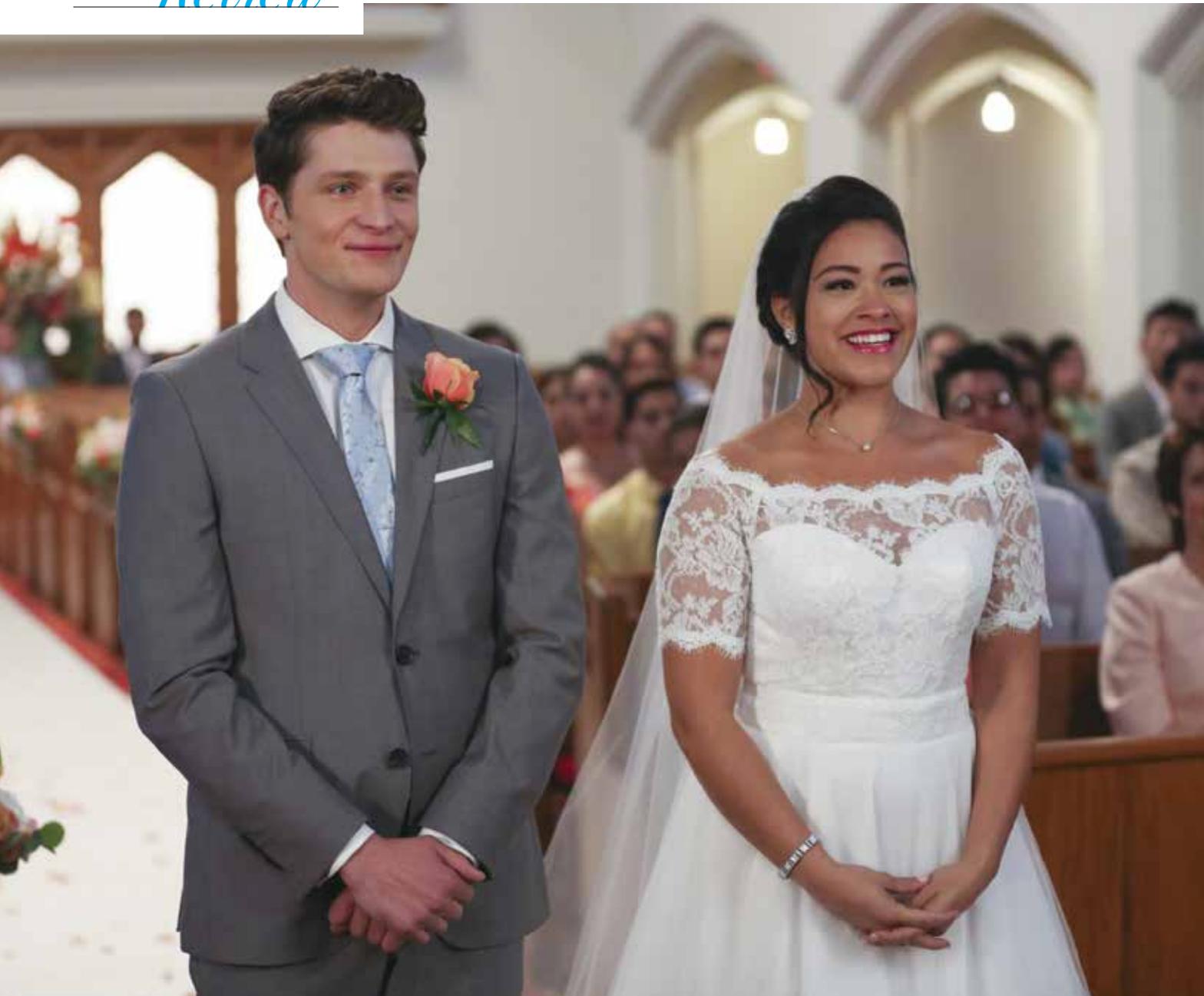
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*“Jane the Virgin”
offers a refreshing look
at Christian sexuality.*

By Catherine Addington

The emotional high points of “Jane the Virgin” often center around Catholic sacraments. Jane (Gina Rodriguez) and Michael (Brett Dier) were married in season 2.

In the pilot episode of **Jane the Virgin**, the wildly popular television show now in its third season on the CW, Jane’s grandmother instructs her to crumple up a white flower and then try to restore it to its former state. Understanding the lesson, Jane promises her grandmother to remain a virgin until marriage, like the good Catholic girl she is.

Fast forward to Jane in her early 20s, when a mix-up at a routine gynecological appointment leads to her accidental artificial insemination. The virgin is with child.

Almost more surprising than Jane’s status as a virgin mother is her portrayal as a committed virgin in the first place. Though her mother, Xiomara, embraces a more permissive lifestyle, Jane chooses a different route. Her commitment to chastity is not based on fear of her grandmother, Alba. Instead, Jane’s commitment is an act of trust—in her grandmother, in her past self and in the wisdom of tradition. Crucially, she also trusts her future partner to accept and support her decision.

Writing in *The Federalist*, Josh Sabey articulates a common criticism of the show among traditional viewers, lamenting that Jane’s chastity is portrayed as little more than a personal choice, with no explicit moral reasoning behind it. Addressing the characters’ sexual ethics, he writes, “The show replaces religious belief with personal commitment so that no one has to feel guilty about his or her decisions.”

It is untrue, however, that religious belief is erased from the show.

Alba’s insistence on chastity, far from a stereotypical portrait of piety, is grounded in her own life. When she lost her virginity to her first boyfriend, Pablo, she was punished by her family and society. When she married the love of her life, Mateo, his family disowned them to keep her from inheriting any of their oil money. Later, as a widow finally ready to make her first move in decades, Alba ends up asking out a man who turns out to be a priest. It is no wonder that she sees every relationship as a high-stakes opportunity for life-ruining scandal. Her instinct toward shame and paranoia is based not so much on her religion as her life experience.

Meanwhile, Alba’s faith is portrayed as a constant that helps her family navigate fear rather than cause it. For instance, when Alba is hospitalized and threatened with deportation in “Chapter Ten,” Xiomara and Jane both instinctively recite the prayers they learned from her. The show may not always agree with Alba, but it always respects and understands her. Such treatment is rarely afforded to religious characters on television today.

Jane may not articulate her chastity in terms of virtue, but she certainly lives her life that way. She is not the angry, repressed Catholic we have come to expect in pop culture. She learns from both her grandmother’s faith and her mother’s openness and takes the best from each role model. Jane lives out a chastity that is sustainable precisely because it is a “personal commitment”: a daily, constant decision that is cultivated, evaluat-

ed and intentionally preserved. She enjoys romantic intimacy, struggles with temptation, reaffirms her commitment and ultimately enters into a fulfilling, life-giving marriage. That model of modern Christian sexuality is hardly seen, let alone celebrated, in any other media.

But the show is not always so thoughtful, especially on the question of abortion. In the show’s pilot episode, when Jane is considering her options regarding her pregnancy, Alba confesses that she had advised Xiomara to have an abortion when she became pregnant with Jane at the age of 16. Alba tells Jane: “I carry that shame in my heart every day. Because now, you have become the best part of my life.”

In season three, when Xiomara does choose to have an abortion, the event receives none of the thoughtful solemnity that accompanied Jane’s choice. Instead, it is a lighthearted story mainly focused on avoiding Alba’s fire-and-brimstone judgment. Alba and Xiomara have a falling out but ultimately make peace. Xiomara’s actions are not given any moral weight whatsoever. In other storylines, pregnancy serves to aid character development, but here it is little more than a fable of “choice” that comes off as an out-of-character performance of progressivism.

Despite the writers’ need to shoehorn a pro-choice narrative into the story, the rest of the show is resplendently pro-life. Jane is a control freak who responds with generosity to completely out-of-control circumstances and is blessed by them



in return. On this show, unexpected children are a gift. As a teenager, Xiomara gives birth to her best friend in Jane. Jane's own father, who did not know of her existence until she was an adult, is profoundly transformed as he learns to put another person first. Finally, at the show's heart is Jane's son, Mateo, who inspires responsibility in his father, flexibility in his mother and open-heartedness in his stepfather.

The characters are not just pro-life at birth but deeply committed to the family. The profound joy that Alba, Xiomara and Jane share when Mateo smiles for the first time is emblematic. After a full episode of agonizing over this particular "first," the payoff brings laughter and tears as it revels in the trivialities of parenting. The show dedicates as much, if not more, narrative energy to Mateo's milestones—from first words to preschool visits—as it does to complicated drug-

ring conspiracies. This, incidentally, is a virtue of the genre; telenovelas are fundamentally domestic dramas that privilege intimate emotion over the wider plot arc.

While the show's pro-life, pro-family attitude is never explicitly linked to the characters' Catholicism, their faith is an active, integrated part of their lives. The emotional high points of the series often center around Catholic sacraments. While Mateo's baptism lacked liturgical authenticity, the characters' joy at welcoming a new member to the church community was exuberant. Meanwhile, Jane's wedding to her longtime sweetheart, Michael, was not only a tearjerker involving bilingual wedding vows, Bruno Mars and a spectacular (and modest!) wedding dress, but it also allowed audiences to witness the phrase "sacrament of marriage" being spoken unironically on national television. Jane and Michael have

come a long way from their awkward experience with pre-Cana in season one, and they go on to have a healthy, mutually supportive marriage.

The rest of the time, the show is steeped in Catholic cultural references that are often tongue-in-cheek but never outright disrespectful. While there are certainly jokes based on tired Catholic stereotypes, like the stern nuns who employ Jane as a teacher, they generally come with a twist. In this case, it is that the scheming principal, Sister Margaret, had hired Jane in order to exploit her virgin-mother status to attract pilgrims and profit to her school. Jabs like these work because they do not occur in a vacuum, without positive representation of Catholics. They are told in the same clever, mischievous tone that the show uses to poke fun at telenovelas—an insider's self-deprecation rather than an outsider's disdain.

Photo: Tyler Golden/© 2016 The CW Network, LLC. All rights reserved.

◀ The characters in “Jane the Virgin” are not just pro-life at birth but deeply committed to the family.

When the show does decide to engage Jane’s Catholic faith, and not just her cultural background, the result is moving. In “Chapter 51” (or, per the episode’s title sequence, “Jane the Virgin the Guilty Catholic”), Jane argues with Mateo’s father, Rafael, over whether their son should be attending Mass. As usual, Alba serves as Jane’s rumbling conscience. At the beginning of the episode, Alba asks Jane if she will be joining her at Mass. “It’s just that you haven’t been to church in a while,” she says innocently. “You just have to decide if you want Mateo to have God in his life. And if he doesn’t, well, I guess he’ll deal with the consequences....”

Jane freaks out, pleading with both Rafael and her self-identified “C and E Catholic” husband to support her in taking their child to Mass. In the midst of a heated discussion with Rafael, her reinvigorated religiosity quickly brings out the judgmental tendencies she had been trying to outgrow. “Maybe if you went to church you would know right from wrong,” she snaps.

The writers could have easily committed to this Catholic-guilt narrative, but instead they went beyond the stereotype to draw out more complicated emotions. While digging into an art smuggling operation—don’t ask—Jane finds herself in a convent, talking to one of the nuns in what she thinks is a distraction so Rafael can search the superior’s office. Instead, in the course of her conversation, Jane realizes what is

behind her anxiety regarding taking Mateo to church. It is not Alba’s guilt trip but her own insecurity about her increasing distance from God. In one of Gina Rodriguez’s finest performances, Jane finally allows herself to break into tears as she confesses her anger at God, how her husband’s recent near-death experience tested her faith like nothing ever had before. She realizes that she cannot hope to raise Mateo in the faith unless she is prepared to serve as an example for him, and that in order to do so she must mend her own relationship with God. This scene was remarkable for its emotional power, but also for a spiritual depth that transcended a mere cultural attachment to the Catholic tradition.

“Jane the Virgin” does not understand itself to be “the Catholic show” any more than it understands itself to be “the Latino show,” but in both cases, the show is under immense pressure to be both representative and commercially successful in order to pave the way for future stories. As a result, the show is subject to unreasonably high standards. “Jane the Virgin” cannot represent all Catholic stories, or all Latino stories, no matter how astute the writing. Rather, its specificity to one family doing its best to grow in love is precisely what makes it valuable—not just to Catholic viewers but to everyone.

Catherine Addington is a doctoral student in Spanish at the University of Virginia.

Al Kiddush Hashem

(to sanctify His name)

By John Bellinger

We will climb this last cold hillside
where morning leaves its breath
upon the uncomplaining stones,
its voice of light come just beneath
the sky’s grey arch and arbor.

You will carry my wood to your altar.
Your back is broad, bronzed;
I have come old—have
grown tired of mortality
and the bright golden nonsense
of angels.

This Mitzvah is yours:
To lie down on this ramshackle altar, to
steady this arm enfeebled with grief
that holds a quick death
at your throat.

Never will you utter
the smallest sin nor sound.
Your eyes will burn with candescent love
even as I deliver you—even as I fail you—
even as your Mother screams
like something lost below,
like some animal left
in the cruelest of traps,
enshrined in a world bright with sorrow.

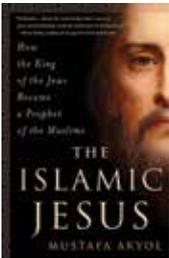
John M. Bellinger is the former managing editor (2006-9) and a current staff editor of *The Comstock Review*. His writing has been published in *The Comstock Review*, *Blue Unicorn*, *The Small Pond Magazine of Literature*, and *Ekphrasis*.

A mosaic of the Virgin Mary and Child Christ at the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Turkey, near a sign reading “Allah.”



A Muslim journalist sets out to investigate Jesus Christ.

By Thomas P. Rausch



The Islamic Jesus
How the King of the Jews Became a Prophet of the Muslims
By Mustafa Aykol
St. Martin's Press, 288p
\$27.99

Mustafa Aykol, a practicing Muslim who writes a column for The International New York Times, begins his book by relating how one day in Istanbul he received a copy of the New Testament from a Christian missionary. Before going to sleep he opened it to the Gospel of Matthew and quickly became fascinated. Within a couple of weeks he had finished the entire New Testament. While there were parts of it he as a Muslim could not

accept, much was not contradictory to his own faith, and parts were strikingly similar to the Quran. Like a good investigative journalist, he began a study of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim sources that come together in the story of Jesus of Nazareth. This book is the result.

The book traces the complex relations between the Gospels, Judaism and Islam. From the beginning the author contrasts Pauline Christianity, with its emphasis on the divinity of Jesus, with early Jewish Christianity, especially as it comes to expression in the “Q” sayings source, the Epistle of James and later Jewish-Christian sects like the Ebionites. How to explain the startling connections between the theology of the Jewish followers of Jesus who saw him as the promised messiah but not divine and

the Arab followers of Muhammad?

Jesus is honored in the Quran as born of the Virgin Mary, the Messiah of the Jews and a reformer but not divine; he appears in 93 verses in 15 different Quranic chapters. Aykol shows parallels between a number of Quranic stories of Jesus and Mary with some of the apocryphal gospels, the *Protoevangelium of James*, the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, the *Arabic Infancy Gospel* and the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*—for example, the story of Jesus making birds out of clay and then giving them life—imaginative stories rejected by mainstream Christianity. As a Muslim, Aykol believes in the Quran as divinely revealed, though he suggests that the similarities show that the Quran was in dialogue with various traditions present at its time of origin, both the apocryphal gospels and various Jewish-Christian sects, some of which believed in the virgin birth. He sees another parallel in the expression “Two Ways,” appearing in

both the *Didache*, a late-first-century Christian text, and the Quran, which offers salvation to those who are devoted to God and benevolent toward other humans—in other words, salvation through faith and good works, not “faith alone,” as in the Protestant understanding of Pauline Christianity. This is the teaching of Jewish Christianity, reflected in the Epistle of James.

But his contrast of early Jewish and Pauline Christianity is much too facile. He falls into an approach first popularized by liberal Protestant theology of speaking of the “Platonization” (or Hellenization) of Christianity, making recognition of the divinity of Jesus a late development, an approach long since abandoned by mainstream scholars. The church’s high Christology is rooted in the Jesus of history, in his use, at the time unprecedented, of the familial term *Abba* in his prayer, the fact that he referred to himself as “Son” and in his claim to authority to interpret the Mosaic law and proclaim the forgiveness of sins, both of which scandalized his contemporaries. Theologians as critical as Walter Kasper and Edward Schillebeeckx find evidence that Jesus understood his death as tied in with his mission, promising his disciples a renewed fellowship beyond it.

Akyol does not seem to appreciate how the church’s Christological language developed slowly within the New Testament period as the early Christians reread their experience of Jesus against their Jewish tradition. For example, while Mark’s Christology is still inchoate and his use of “Son of God” did not mean what it would mean two decades later, there are clues that he is struggling to express a mystery that goes beyond the lan-

guage available to him. His account of Jesus walking on the water is clearly a theophany, using the expression, “He meant to pass by them” (Mk 6:48), jarring in context, to echo a verse in the Book of Job where Yahweh walks on the “the crests of the sea” and might “pass by” (Job 9:8, 11).

From the beginning, both Jewish and gentile Christians used the divine title “Lord” (*Mari* or *Maran* in Aramaic, *Kurios* in Greek) for Jesus. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (third to second centuries B.C.E.), used *Kurios* to translate the Hebrew *Adonai*, which took the place of the holy name Yahweh. Jewish Christians used *Mar* to avoid pronouncing the divine name. Even the Epistle of James refers to Jesus consistently as “Lord” or “the Lord Jesus Christ.” Larry Hurtado points out that Paul can use the Aramaic invocation *Maranatha*, “Our Lord, come” (1 Cor 16:22), to his largely Gentile church at Corinth without translating it, as it was certainly familiar to them. He notes that Jesus, from very early in the Christian movement, was the object of the prayer and worship ordinarily reserved for God and that there is evidence of pre-existence theology even prior to Paul. Akyol pays little attention to the Gospel of John beyond commenting on its high Christology. But John is a very Jewish Gospel; its Prologue, which most probably predates the Gospel, speaks of Jesus as the divine Word, active in creation, a recasting of the Wisdom theology that developed in the late Old Testament.

In spite of the author’s efforts to explain the church’s Christology in terms of an aberrant tradition, there is much to recommend in this study. Akyol writes with a clarity that is

admirable, and the book is well researched. (The footnotes take up 55 pages.) He finds common themes within the Scriptures of the Abrahamic religions, the People of the Book, a term originating in the Quran. Both Muslims and Christians can learn from it. Muslims might see in the example of Jesus inspiration to focus on the spirit of their tradition rather than legalistic or fundamentalist interpretations, or his teaching that the law—whether Torah or Shariah—is for man rather than man (and woman) for the law, or his words in Lk 17:21, “The kingdom of God is within you,” for Akyol evidence that Jesus transformed the kingdom of God—which Muslims would call the caliphate—from a political kingdom into a spiritual one. Christians will be introduced to a more irenic vision of Islam, one that has come to terms with modernity. The fact that the sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity and Islam have far more in common than is generally known should lead to greater mutual respect and to the reconciliation so needed today.

Thomas P. Rausch, S.J., is the T. Marie Chilton Professor Catholic Theology at Loyola Marymount University. His *Systematic Theology: A Roman Catholic Approach* (Liturgical Press) appeared last spring. *The Slow Work of God: Living the Gospel Today* (Paulist Press) will appear early in 2017.

A theology that weeps

Clemens Sedmak writes elegantly about a church that is poor and for the poor. This church does not simply happen, without commitment. The poor are not just objects of our charity or concern but our evangelizers. They have much to teach us, since they know the sufferings of Christ. Experiencing poverty (in ourselves or in solidarity with the poor) helps us to understand vulnerability, nakedness, mortality and decay, shame and the loss of belonging. Our option for the poor serves as a necessary epistemic correction for the church.

The book's subtitle links what choosing to become a church of the poor does to our understanding of orthodoxy. Sedmak insists that orthodoxy has its center in a loving re-

lationship with God. So orthodoxy is not just about propositional truths. There is an existential orthodoxy. We can not have a right relationship with God if we do not have a relationship with the poor. God and Jesus favor the poor because God has a special closeness to the defenseless. There is no true orthodoxy without simultaneous orthopraxy and orthopathy. We need a kneeling, weeping theology and not just a theology of propositional truths. Propositional orthodoxy is not enough. It could be a dead orthodoxy. Doctrines have to be lived.

An option for the poor leads us to joyful orthodoxy. Joy, as Pope Francis insists, is central to the gospel: joy at being created, saved, being affirmed. Joy is an overflowing and cooperative good. The common good is served by a

church that opts for the poor as central.

So orthodoxy is generous. It is a pilgrim's orthodoxy. It is also humble knowing that the fullness of truth always lies beyond us. Sedmak's careful analysis is not only illuminating; it deeply touched my heart and moved me spiritually.

John A. Coleman S.J., a sociologist, is associate pastor of St. Ignatius Church in San Francisco.

Russia needs a truth commission now.

At a book event sponsored by Columbia University, I asked the author, David Satter, a journalist who writes critically about Russia, whether Vladimir Putin is capable of murder. Satter's reply was, "Read my book."

The Less You Know, the Better You Sleep: Russia's Road to Terror and Dictatorship Under Yeltsin and Putin is the history of Russia from the mid-1990s to the present, in which a corrupt president, Boris Yeltsin, and his successor, Putin, try to reconstruct the country as a world power. But it remains corrupt, with a bloated business class and, worst of all, a culture with no respect for human life. Satter demonstrates this with accounts of a series of massacres and murders, most of which are never solved or ad-

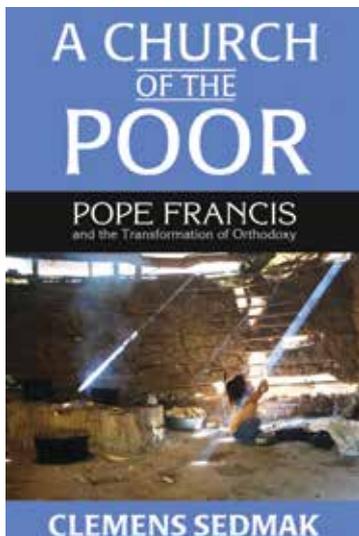
equately investigated.

In September 1999, a truck bomb blew up in Dagestan killing 64 people. A few days later, a bomb exploded in a Moscow basement killing 100. Next, an apartment building on a Moscow highway was reduced to rubble, with 124 dead. On Oct. 1, Russian troops invaded Chechnya. According to Yeltsin and Putin, Chechen terrorists were responsible for these attacks. Satter and others argue the bombs were planted by Russia's main intelligence agency, the F.S.B., in order to win public support for another war.

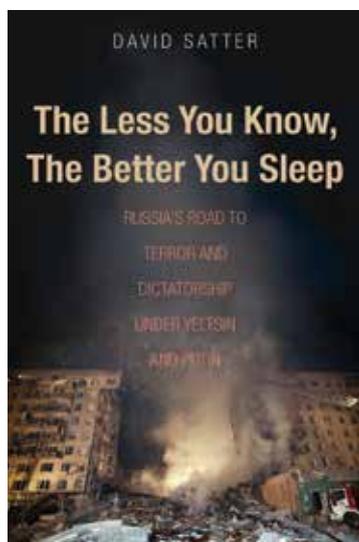
In Dubrovka, 40 heavily armed Chechen terrorists entered a theater and took the audience hostage to force an end to the war. After 48 hours, Putin said he sent an envoy to negotiate; but the F.S.B. forces pumped poison gas into the ventilation system, then

swarmed in and killed all 40 terrorists, while 129 hostages died from the gas. Satter visited the scene, convinced that the authorities had facilitated the takeover. He concludes this demanding little volume by arguing that more than anything else, Russia needs a truth commission. Meanwhile, Satter suggests, President Trump should approach Putin with caution.

Raymond A. Schroth, S.J., books editor.



A Church of the Poor
Pope Francis and the
Transformation of Orthodoxy
By Clemens Sedmak
Orbis Press. 218p \$32



The Less You Know, the Better You Sleep
Russia's Road to Terror and Dictatorship under Yeltsin and Putin
By David Satter
Yale University Press. 221p \$30

The dawning of America's imperial ambitions

In the 19th century, Great Britain, France and Germany acquired colonies to flaunt their status as great powers. As the century drew to a close, the United States was poised to join their ranks, having defeated Spain and being on the verge of acquiring Cuba, the Philippines and Puerto Rico.

The debate that followed, Stephen Kinzer writes, was “arguably even more momentous than the debate over slavery.” Leading those who believed it was America’s destiny to acquire an empire were Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts and Theodore Roosevelt, a newly minted war hero. On the other side was the Anti-Imperialist League, led by Andrew Carnegie, William Jennings Bryan, Mark Twain and two former presidents, who believed that the United States should allow foreign peoples to govern themselves. Kinzer shows how the interventionists won every major vote in Congress, soundly defeated the league at the polls and dominated foreign policy for the rest of the 20th century.

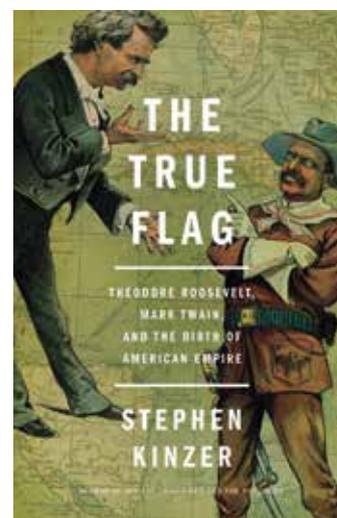
The urge of the United States to intervene in world affairs reflects a deep ambivalence, Kinzer believes. On the one hand, Americans believe that nations should decide their own destinies. On the other, Americans see themselves as the indispensable nation, unique in its capacity to change the world for good. Kinzer documents, however, how the best of intentions have consistently made things worse.

In the Philippines, for example, a war that lasted 41 months killed more Filipinos than three and a half centuries of Spanish rule. Americans practiced water torture, killed civilians,

burned villages and slaughtered farm animals to crush an insurgent rebellion. By the time Theodore Roosevelt was re-elected president in 1904, the rebellion was crushed and he had lost his appetite for further imperial adventures.

Kinzer believes that the peace movement might have succeeded, and the Philippine War might have been avoided, had Bryan not endorsed a free silver platform at the 1900 Democratic convention. This stance alienated many anti-silver voters who would have supported Bryan’s anti-imperialist agenda. Kinzer writes that no decision by a presidential candidate at a party convention ever shaped American history more profoundly. More likely, however, had Bryan acted otherwise, he would have lost the support of free silver voters, to whom he owed his political career.

Mark J. Davis, a retired attorney, lives in Santa Fe, N.M.



The True Flag
Theodore Roosevelt, Mark Twain, and the Birth of American Empire
By Stephen Kinzer
Henry Holt & Co. 289p \$28



The British Michael Moore investigates the Church of Scientology

The British television journalist Louis Theroux first presented himself to audiences in the mid-1990s on Michael Moore's Emmy Award-winning show "TV Nation." With his overcorrected posture and unblinking gaze, the Oxford graduate confronted Ku Klux Klan members with polite questions and happily endured the awkwardness that followed. In one episode, Theroux meets the K.K.K.'s national director, Thomas Robb, who is trying to rebrand his group's racism as nationalism. "Do you hate being called a hate group?" Theroux asks.

Later, he picks up a branded cigarette lighter, commenting, "This could be handy for cross burnings." His interviewee fumbles, "No, that's not cool... you can't use a lighter for a cross burning, you have to use a torch.... [That would be too] tacky."

Mundane details such as these pepper Theroux's later documentaries, all the while revealing the peculiar logic of his subjects. Today Theroux is one of the U.K.'s best-loved documentarians, having produced dozens of series for the BBC. All of his works capitalize on his willingness to throw himself into

strange situations, in which he flounders while affably drawing his interviewees into conversation.

In his latest documentary, "My Scientology Movie," Theroux continues his career-long fascination with religion in the United States. He wrote in *The Guardian* that "[the Church of Scientology] is a gold-plated example of something I've tried to make a central theme in my documentaries: well-meaning people making decisions that might look bizarre to the outsider, but making them for very relatable human reasons."

As his career has progressed, Theroux has taken on more sober subject matter, though his sense of humor remains. Of his best-known works, "The Most Hated Family in America" (2007) provides a surprisingly compassionate look at the Westboro Baptist Church. His most-lauded film, "When Louis Met Jimmy" (2000), discloses the bizarre lifestyle of British broadcaster Jimmy Savile, who was posthumously revealed to be a prolific pedophile.

As with his mentor, Moore, Theroux's style as a documentarian relies on both his persona and his willingness

to get his hands dirty. While Moore is eager to make theater by performing protest stunts to great effect, Theroux tends to be quieter, gentler. Yet he is by no means spineless. In fact, Theroux does something that is arguably more difficult: he consistently positions himself alongside his subjects, no matter how unapproachable or detestable they may seem.

In "My Scientology Movie," the few Scientologists Theroux meets are impervious to his charms, and he does not get the chance to investigate the church's dogma in much depth. This leads him to focus on the abuse of Scientologists by their church superiors. In doing so he practices both solidarity and more traditional, investigative journalism. A subject of particular fascination is the elusive longtime Scientology leader David Miscavige, who Theroux describes as a pope who has "hijacked" his church. With no hope of reaching Miscavige, Theroux responds by re-enacting Scientologist practices with the help of defected church member Marty Rathbun, whom he also interrogates.

"Do you think my questions are

Photo courtesy of Magnolia Pictures.



Louis Theroux consistently positions himself alongside his subjects, no matter how unapproachable they may seem.

inine?” Theroux asks Rathbun as they drive together around Los Angeles. Theroux is in his element in this scenario, wearing Rathbun down with small talk. Finally Rathbun snaps, demanding to be asked something “interesting.” Theroux seizes the opportunity with a shrewd, daring question.

Out of so little, Theroux manages to tease out an interesting and inevitably incomplete portrait of the Church of Scientology—its hierarchy, its secrecy and many of its practices. It is his improvisation with re-enactment, along with years of research, that makes the film. This feat of creative, incisive journalism is perhaps even more captivating than the film’s subject. “My Scientology Move” allows us to see Theroux unfurl a controversial American enigma against all the odds, always striving for compassion—even when it seems impossible.

Eloise Blondiau, *producer*.
Twitter: @eloiseblondiau.

John Oliver is good for the Republic. Or not.



Jake Martin: HBO’s “Last Week Tonight With John Oliver” began its fourth season on Feb. 12, not a moment too soon. Oliver slammed the door shut on his season finale last November with a thorough journalistic and comedic interrogation of the incoming administration, which proved yet again that “Last Week” is the best example of the power that humor can have to bring about change in the sociopolitical realm.

There have been those who suggest that “Last Week” is representative of all that is wrong with the liberal elite, that it reeks of smug intellectual self-satisfaction and is fundamentally disconnected with the everyday Joe or Jane. But this argument is counterintuitive when considering that the position of the comedian or the comic is always from outside or below, which means that the best, most authentic humor always comes from a place of observation or low status. The best humor is always that which is intelligent and thought-provoking—and, most important, true.



Zac Davis: John Oliver continues in the tradition of Jon Stewart, adding reinforcements to the “liberal” bubble. He coddles his viewers by convincing them how right they are and how wrong their political opposites are. The assault of fact after fact, without any time given to admit the weak points in his own argument, robs his viewers of the opportunity to think or come to any deep understanding of an issue. Worse, the false sense of solidarity prompted by sharing an Oliver segment on Facebook is an invitation to apathy, not resistance.

Some will say, as Stewart often would, that Oliver is only a comedian. He is not a journalist or politician. But journalists, politicians and comedians alike would do well to learn that they not only reflect society and its discourse—they shape it.

Read the full debate at americamagazine.org.

Jake Martin, S.J., *special contributor*.
Twitter: @jakemartin74.
Zac Davis, *assistant editor*.
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John Oliver: comic crusader or coddler of the liberal elite?

Photo courtesy of HBO

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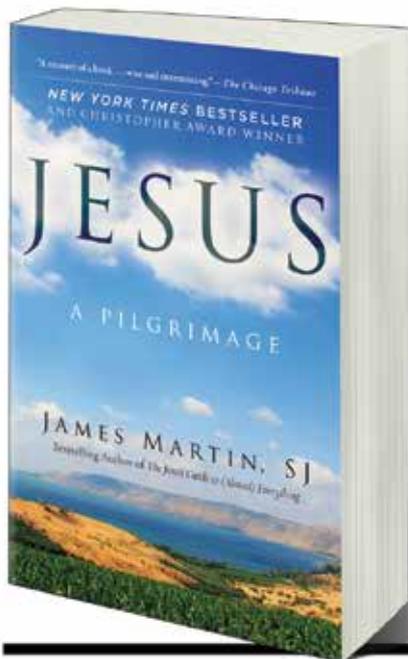
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The Jesus Who Cannot Be

Readings: 1 Sm 16:1-13, Ps 23, Eph 5:8-14, Jn 9:1-41

John did not include this story in his Gospel to warn us about the blindness of the Pharisees, although it is true that, in this instance, they did not see. John wrote this Gospel to show how easy it is for any of us to lose sight of Jesus, even when he works openly.

In the mind of the Pharisees, it was impossible that Jesus should be the Messiah. The coming Messiah was clearly predicted in the prophets, and they saw in Jesus none of the signs. The man was an obvious charlatan, the kind of fraudster who “healed” those already well. This in itself would have been bad enough, but he did so even on the Sabbath; this was unconscionable.

One should never forget that the Jews of Jesus’ day were captives in their own homeland. Sometime in Jesus’ childhood, the Romans had ousted the last native king and began ruling the Jews directly through imperial bureaucrats. In the years that followed, foreign elites took possession of much of Israel’s agricultural land. Although the Romans generally supported local customs and traditions, they found it difficult to accommodate Jewish observance

You shall indeed hear but not understand, you shall indeed look but never see.

(Mt 13:14)



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

If Jesus were to show up today as a member of a cause you work against, would you recognize him?

Who are the “blind beggars” in our own lives who might be able to point out Jesus in places we miss?

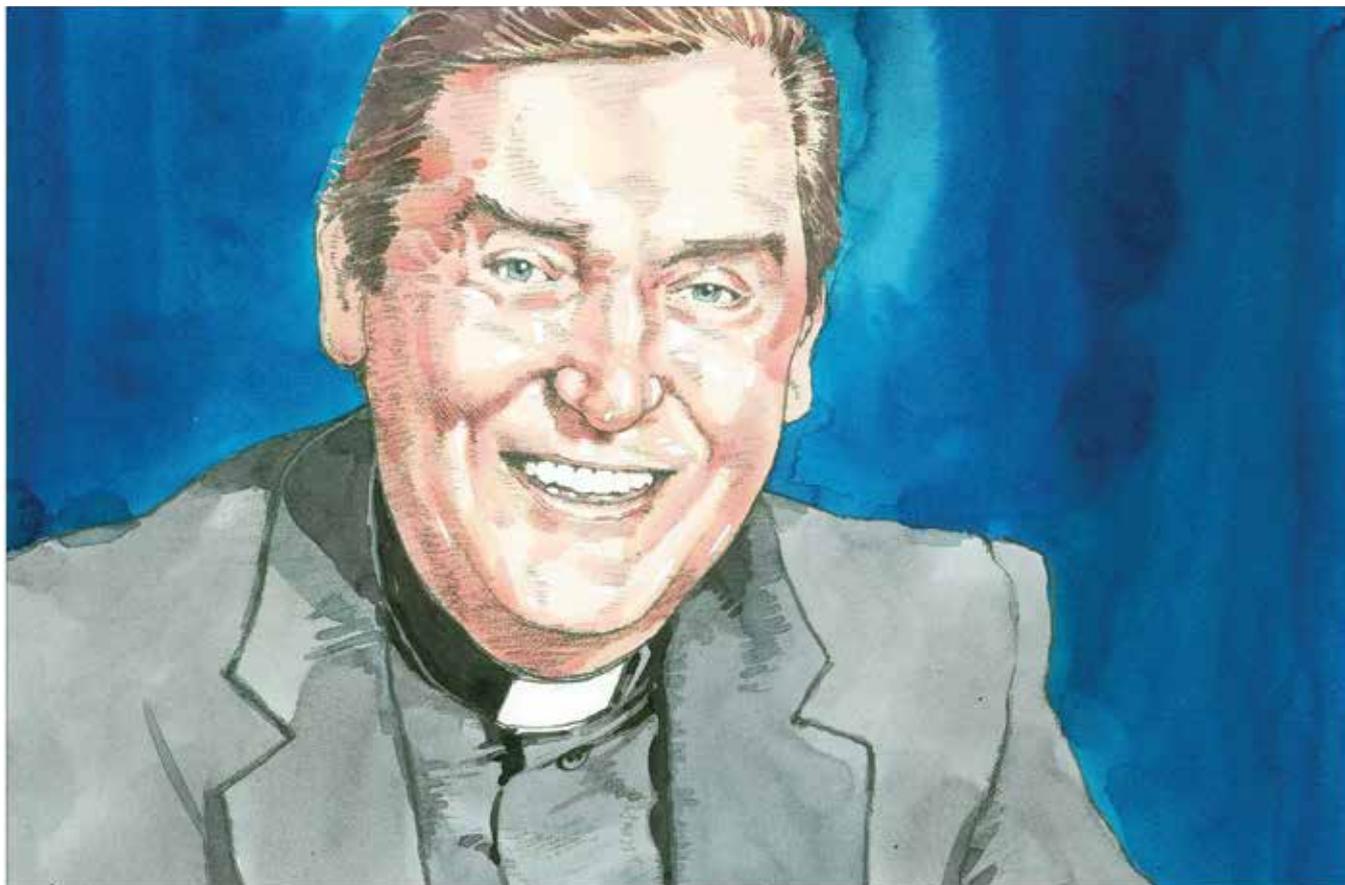
of the Sabbath. The Roman author Juvenal, for example, held up the Sabbath as a sign that the Jews were inherently lazy. It is not hard to imagine the corrosive ways that Israel’s foreign rulers pushed back against this obligation. It is also not hard to imagine the remnant of Israel’s leadership growing ever more strident in their demands to preserve it. The Sabbath was a primary symbol of Jewish nationality; it had to be protected at any cost.

Into this politically charged environment came a wandering Galilean rabbi, performing his putative “miracles” on the Sabbath. It is no wonder that certain synagogues refused admission to Jesus’ disciples. Either Jesus was dangerously naïve or, as the Gospel elsewhere witnesses, he worried less about the risk of political upheaval than the needs of a single desperate man. The Father’s will was apparent: “Heal the sick!” Jesus fulfilled that will without hesitation.

The fact that this sick man was well known, and that many witnesses (including his parents!) attested to his blindness put the Pharisees in a difficult position. If they acknowledged that Jesus had indeed healed a blind man on the Sabbath, they would be admitting both that Jesus was legitimate and that the Sabbath could be violated. If they kept calling him a fraud, they might protect the Sabbath, but they would lose credibility in the eyes of all who knew the blind man—a considerable number.

These Pharisees are a warning for us. We must never lose sight of the fact that God is at work, even in places we think he cannot possibly be. How many Christians today would recognize Christ if he appeared among a group they had dismissed as fraudulent or corrupt? Yet Christ’s love is everywhere, bringing whatever is good to fulfillment. The blind man, who had nothing to lose, was able to see Jesus. By contrast, those who claim to understand with great clarity are often the most blind.

Michael R. Simone, S.J., is an assistant professor of Scripture at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.



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I Will Raise You Up

Readings: Ez 37:12-14, Ps 130, Rom 8:8-11, Jn 11:1-45

Early Christians realized that something made them distinct from their neighbors. They attributed this distinction to the risen Christ present among them. They gave his presence different names: Holy Spirit and fire, grace, salt and light, Paraclete, Spirit of Truth, new life. With each of these expressions, early Christians tried to give a name to the spiritual dynamism that had transformed their own lives and that continued to build up the community.

John's Gospel speaks of this presence as new life. This fits into John's wider theology, which understands Jesus to be the herald of a new creation. John's Gospel emphasizes this new creation in its very first words, "In the beginning..." which echo the opening words of Genesis. The first 11 chapters of John's Gospel chronicle the signs by which Jesus revealed this new creation to his disciples. Several of these signs represent triumphs over death's agents—want, hunger, sickness and chaos. In today's Gospel passage, Jesus reveals that the new life he bears gives him authority over death itself.

Many Jews of Jesus' day believed in the resurrection of the dead. This is clear from statements about resurrection in Jewish texts like 2 Maccabees or 1 Enoch. It is also clear from Martha's statement in today's Gospel, "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day." Martha's belief reflected Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones (Ez 37:1-14), the last verses of which we hear in our first reading. This resurrection was an eschatological event expected to occur just before the final judgment.

When Jesus calls himself "the resurrection and the life," he transforms this belief. The resurrection was not an event in time, but rather a core reality of his ministry. In Jesus Christ, the universe received a second chance at creation. Anyone who believed in his death and resurrection, and followed his teaching and example, could participate in this new creation. "I am the resurrection and the life...everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." During his earthly ministry, Jesus embodied this new

You will not abandon my soul among the dead, or let your beloved know decay.
(Ps 16:10)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How did Christ visit you with new life?
From what tomb did he call you forth?

Who in your life needs to hear Christ's commandment, "Come forth!"

creation with such fullness that, in his presence, death retained no dominion over the living.

The victory is won, but the battle is not yet complete. Death's agents are still at work in the world, gnawing at every human heart and threatening every human community. Many of us entomb ourselves—often with a significant investment of time and energy—in materialism, vanity, pride and lust. Many of us can also remember the day we first heard Christ's command, "Come forth!" Leaving our tombs, we can encounter the same new life that gave such dynamism to the first disciples. We might not embody this new life with such Christ-like perfection that we can raise the dead, but we can reveal the new creation in other ways. As Jesus raised up Lazarus, so we must raise each other. Filled with his new life and with a heart like his—both broken and loving—we seek out those in the tombs and cry out to them, "Come forth!"

Michael R. Simone, S.J., is an assistant professor of Scripture at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

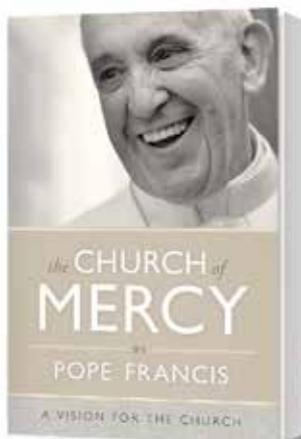
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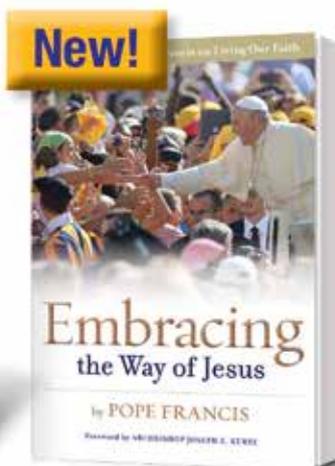
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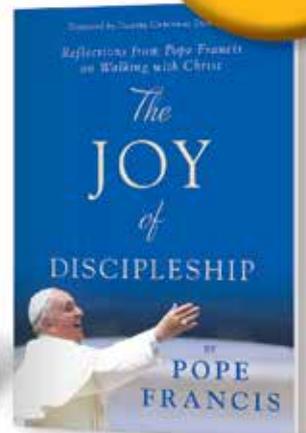
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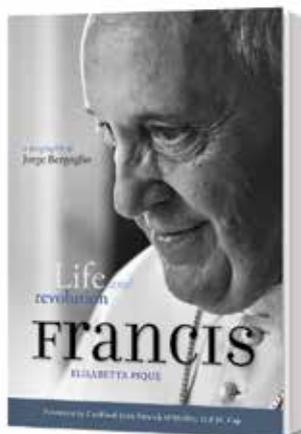
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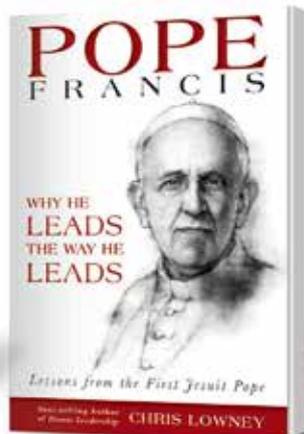
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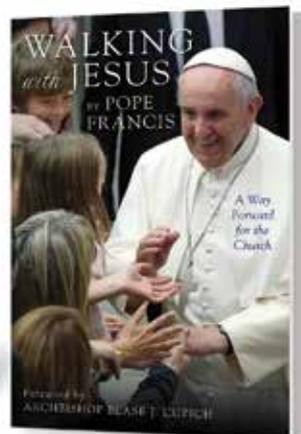
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Our American Union

A nation of immigrants, bounded by ideals

By George J. Mitchell



On St. Patrick's Day, we celebrate our Irish heritage and our good fortune to be Americans. The success of America is the result of the work of people from every part of the world—of different backgrounds, religions and languages, coming together, committed not to a race or a religion but to an ideal. This is an ideal best expressed by our greatest president, Abraham Lincoln, whose goal was “to form a more perfect union.”

Yet hostility to those who are different is as old as civilization. Fear and anxiety in times of transition are not new. The United States initially welcomed immigrants to help fill a vast continent. The first restriction was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, a reaction to the entry of Chinese workers who helped build the transcontinental railroad.

In 1906 an earthquake and fire devastated San Francisco. Unable to accommodate all the children whose schools were destroyed, the city prohibited children of Japanese ancestry from attending public schools, requiring them to enter a separate, segregated school for children of Chinese and Korean ancestry.

Later, successive waves of Italians and Irish, Jews and Catholics, and many others were met with hostility. Every Irish-American is aware of the signs that appeared across U.S. cities: “Irish need not apply.” Every Italian-American remembers how all

were stigmatized because of the few who were Mafia criminals. And, other than African-Americans, no group has suffered from discrimination more or longer than Jews.

And yet tremendous contributions have been made to and for our country by each group. The earliest of them withstood the hostility; they got their hands on the bottom rung of the ladder of success and pulled themselves up. Their children and grandchildren stood on their shoulders and climbed even higher, in some cases to the pinnacles of success.

We know we cannot return to open immigration. There must be realistic limits on how many can enter and who they are. But we should not limit the discussion to who we want to keep out or who we should throw out. We also must focus on who we want to enter, and how we can continue to replenish our society with new people, to their benefit and ours.

Three of the most valuable and successful business enterprises in the world are Apple, Amazon and Google. Apple was created by Steve Jobs, whose father was born in Syria. Amazon was created by Jeff Bezos, whose adoptive father was born in Cuba. And a co-founder of Google was Sergey Brin, who was born in Russia.

Despite all the negative talk about our decline, nine of the 10 most valuable business brands in the world are American, as are 15 of the world's

top 20 universities.

That the strength of America lies ultimately in our ideals is a major contributor to our success. Military power and economic strength are important, even necessary. But in the United States they have been infused with the ideals that are the basis and the promise of American life.

These include the sovereignty of the people; individual liberty, our highest value; opportunity for all; an independent judiciary; and the rule of law applied equally to all and, crucially, to the government itself. Our Constitution is more than a compilation of laws and procedures. It also is a statement of ideals and a symbol of American values, especially the principles of equal justice and equal rights for all.

Americans have much to be concerned about, but much more to be thankful for. We now need the wisdom and the strength to extend education, opportunity and hope to more and more people, in our country and around the world. That is our challenge. We must make it our destiny.

Senator George J. Mitchell served as Democratic majority leader in the U.S. Senate, chairman of peace negotiations in Northern Ireland and most recently U.S. special envoy to the Middle East. His latest books are *The Negotiator: Reflections on an American Life* and *A Path to Peace*.

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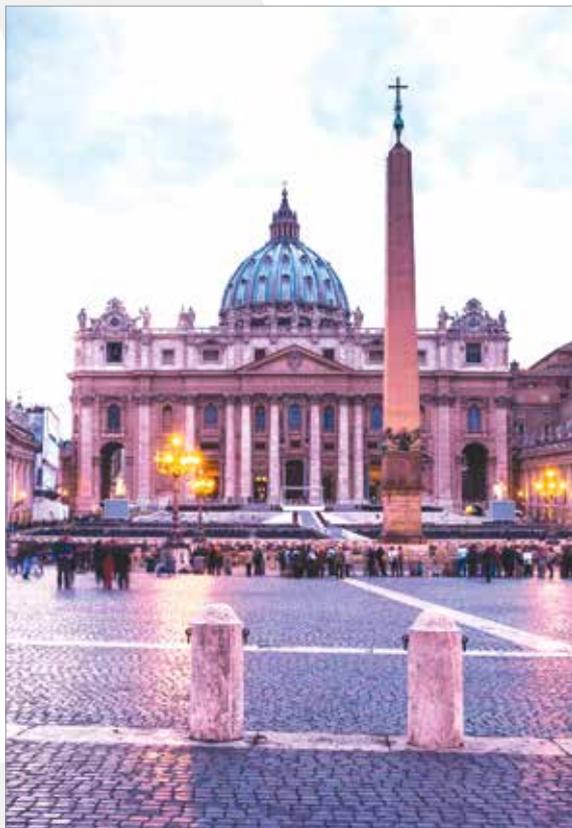
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