SPRING BOOKS

America

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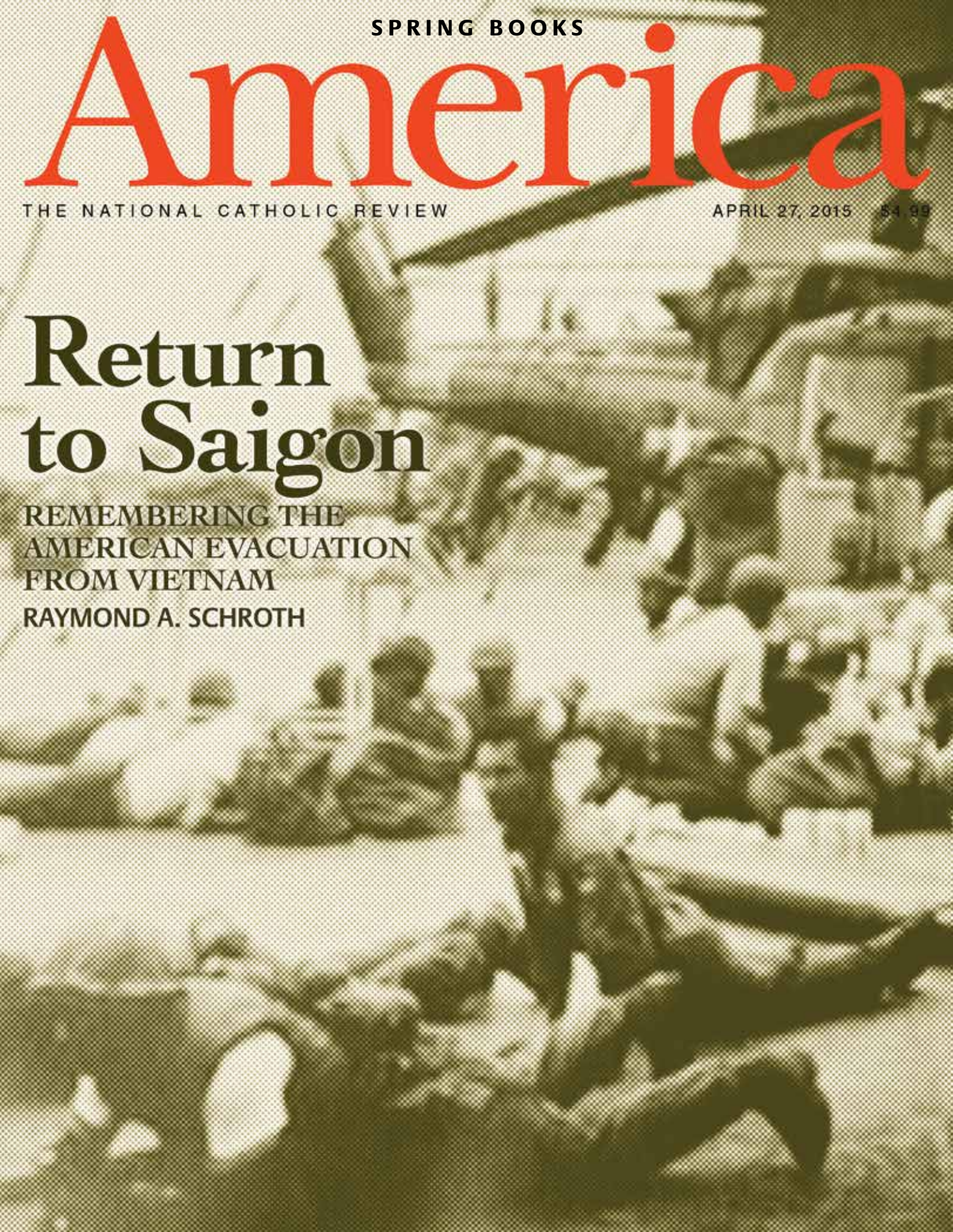

Return to Saigon

REMEMBERING THE AMERICAN EVACUATION FROM VIETNAM

RAYMOND A. SCHROTH

OF MANY THINGS

The principal approach to Buckingham Palace, which Americans will know from its occasional use for royal wedding processions, is a relatively recent addition to London's urban landscape. The Mall, pronounced "Mael" by our British cousins, is a half-mile long thoroughfare extending from Admiralty Arch, the center of 19th-century British naval power, to the vast marble memorial to Queen Victoria, situated at the center of the plaza in front of Queen Elizabeth II's official London residence. A visitor enters this open space through one of several elaborately decorated gates, each named for one of the self-governing dominions of the British Empire, including Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

The Mall is nothing less or more than a great secular cathedral, the place where the imperial liturgy was enacted in all its glorious and decadent pomp; the place where the public could join the imperial pageant in three resplendent dimensions and in ways befitting their place in the hierarchy of British society.

Funny thing is, however, that all this was built in 1910, when the empire had only 30 years left to live, its inevitable demise hastened by two catastrophic world wars and the emergence of the superpowers. In 1910, the British Empire looked to most people like something that was here to stay. Yet one wonders whether the Mall's grand boulevard and monument scheme actually reveal the Edwardians' barely conscious suspicion that all was not well. After all, it is commonplace enough in human experience to respond to an inevitable failure or decline by vainly re-doubling one's efforts, asserting even more vigorously the permanence of that which one suspects is maddeningly precarious.

Throughout the 1920s, when the empire was even more clearly entering its death throes, the British, in addition to the Grand Parade Royale in London, built more and bigger monuments to their colonial achievements in places like South Africa and India. New Delhi was meant to signal the permanence of British administration in India for a century or more; instead, its vast, bejeweled corridors were hosting the politicians and civil servants of an independent Republic of India within the lifetimes of most of the people who had built them.

In that sense, these monuments and parade grounds were little more than grand, desperate assertions of some imagined, utterly this-worldly relevance, a colossal self-assertion meant to forestall the seemingly sorrowful and inevitable reality. When the last Union Jack was furled in Hong Kong in 1997 and the sun finally set on that which was never to have darkened, the British came to see for one brief moment that they were, like their Greek and Roman forebears, mere mortals who had usurped for themselves the hegemony that rightly belongs only to God.

From the wreckage of Britain's broken dreams, the United States plucked the mantle of global leadership. We have effected much good in the world in the 70 years since. But we'd be fools to believe that the United States is any more immune to the vicissitudes of global adventuring than were our predecessors. We are not the indispensable nation, still less the last best hope for humankind. We are merely the present torchbearer, the most recent progeny of a noble, yet sullied history. One wonders, then, how future generations will regard the U.S. misadventure in Vietnam. Was Vietnam but the first and most striking example of America's hubris, that *hamartia* that is the downfall of every classic protagonist? Will the Fourth of July parade down Pennsylvania Avenue in 2050 be a testament to America's enduring leadership or a melancholy reminder of that which was and yet never really was? **MATT MALONE, S.J.**

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Cover: U.S.S. Blue Ridge personnel react to a helicopter crash during the evacuation of Saigon, 1975. Wikimedia commons/Blue Ridge cruise book for 1975

Contents

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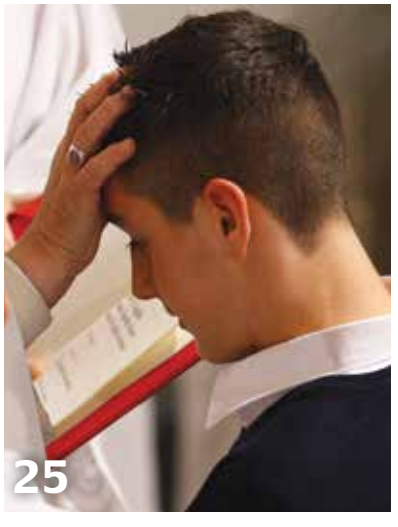
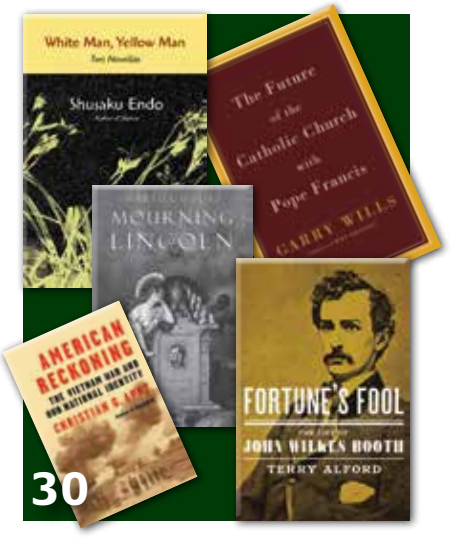




ARTICLES

14 RETURN TO SAIGON
Remembering the American evacuation from Vietnam
Raymond A. Schroth

18 THIS BLESSED PLACE
The faithful fiction of Marilynne Robinson
Angela Alaimo O'Donnell

25 CONFIRMATION BIAS
Rethinking the sequence of the sacraments
Michael H. Marchal

COLUMNS & DEPARTMENTS

4 Current Comment

5 Editorial Bridging the Divisions

6 Reply All

8 Signs of the Times

12 Column Outside the Lines *Helen Alvaré*

29 Vatican Dispatch Call Him a Saint? *Gerard O'Connell*

46 The Word Disciples I Fear *John W. Martens*

BOOKS & CULTURE

30 SPRING BOOKS *Fortune's Fool; Mourning Lincoln; The Future of the Catholic Church with Pope Francis; White Man, Yellow Man; American Reckoning* **POETRY** "There Fell a Great Star"
OF OTHER THINGS Four Questions Before College
ART Donatello at the Museum of Biblical Art

ON THE WEB

Follow the **America** team on their **pilgrimage to the Holy Land**. Plus, **Antonio Spadaro, S.J.**, on "Pope Francis and the Culture of the Internet." Digital highlights on page 39 and at americamagazine.org/webfeatures.

‘Mentoring’ Czech Catholics

As a mode of governance, Communism may have entered history’s dustbin, but as far as Eastern Europe is concerned, the mentality it fostered lingers. In an Eastertime interview with Czech radio, the retired Catholic archbishop of Prague, Cardinal Miloslav Vlk, decried what he viewed as politically motivated state interference in internal church affairs.

The controversy revolves around a law on church restitutions approved by the Czech Parliament in 2012 that grants churches “full independence” from the state by the year 2030. Over a 30-year period the Catholic Church will receive land, property and money as compensation for the confiscations that took place under Communist rule. What aggravates the cardinal is the fact that the ruling Social Democratic government of Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka (himself Catholic) is trying to “mentor” the church on how to spend its money (specifically, to build hospices and old-age homes). “The church is perfectly aware of its duty, and we will naturally fulfill our mission in caring for the ill and elderly,” said Cardinal Vlk, “but not because politicians tell us to do so.”

The Czech president, Milos Zeman (a self-described “tolerant atheist”), plans to broach the subject with Pope Francis in an audience on April 24. Cardinal Vlk believes “the pope has no intention of interfering,” but says that if the Czech president carries out his plan, it will be a “sign of ignorance” on his part about how the church works. The episode may prove an important lesson for Czech political leaders on just what an independent church really looks like.

Mothers on Hunger Strike

The women have come to the United States from Central America, many fleeing gang violence and seeking a better life for their children. What they have found here is a different sort of hardship. Many mothers who have crossed the border illegally with their children are being held at Karnes Detention Center in Texas, often in unhealthy conditions, a situation documented in a recent article in The New York Times Magazine (“The Shame of America’s Family Detention Camps,” 2/4) and in these pages (“Jailing Families,” 3/2). Yet the poor conditions continue, and 78 of the women in the detention center recently took matters into their own hands. In a letter handwritten in Spanish, the women stated that they were staging a hunger strike and would refrain from using the school and services of the center in an effort to expedite their release and improve the conditions of the center. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials have stated they have no knowledge of the strike, which is said to have coincided with Holy Week.

Lawyers and advocates for the women and children say that the response to the hunger strike has been unnecessarily harsh. They allege that at least two women, along with their children, ages 11, 10 and 2, were placed in isolation rooms in the medical unit, in which they were forced to sit in darkness except during meal times. The practice of isolation and sensory deprivation is controversial even for violent criminals. If the practice is in fact being used on mothers and children, it is a human rights violation. Many of the detained women are seeking asylum and have passed an interview that determined their flight from their home countries was based on a “credible fear” for their safety. The United States should ensure that its efforts to enforce immigration policy do not add to the trauma that these women have already experienced.

Give Them the Vote

Legislation allowing noncitizen residents the right to vote in municipal elections is currently being considered in New York City by Mayor Bill de Blasio and municipal lawmakers. The bill—which could pass as early as this month—would give legal residents who have been living in New York City for at least six months the right to vote in local elections. Supporters say the measure would provide a voice for residents who already pay taxes and are involved in their communities. According to The Guardian, it would also prevent politicians from overlooking “the needs of entire communities” that often do not receive proper local representation because of council redistricting. But the proposal has met opposition. Critics argue that it weakens the meaning and privileges of citizenship, adding that it would further deter legal residents from seeking full citizenship.

New York would not be the first municipality to grant noncitizens the right to vote in certain elections, but it would be the largest. Six small towns in Maryland currently allow noncitizens to vote, and in Chicago they are allowed to participate in school elections. Around the world, countries like New Zealand, Chile, Colombia and Ireland have similar policies in place.

While the issue of noncitizen voting in the United States is not new, additional jurisdictions should consider enacting these laws. Not only would this give a voice to often-ignored communities, but the experience of civic engagement might encourage people living here legally to continue on the path to full citizenship.

EDITORIAL

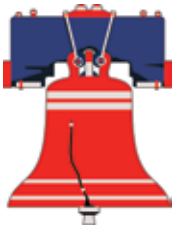
Bridging Our Divisions

It has been very discouraging to watch the acrimonious debate over religious liberty in Indiana and Arkansas. The passage of a Religious Freedom Restoration Act in these states sparked widespread protests over possible discrimination and exposed a deep divide in our nation on questions of marriage, civil rights for gay and lesbian people, and freedom of religion. One of the many unfortunate outcomes of this controversy is that these issues are now co-mingled in the public mind. Another is that the religious liberty "brand" has been damaged. As the respected Supreme Court litigator Douglas Laycock noted, "It is a disaster that religious liberty has become a partisan issue."

It should not have been this way. When Congress passed the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act, often referred to as RFRA, in 1993, the goal was to protect religious practices. The law, which passed by a large margin, states that if a person's exercise of religion is "substantially burdened," he or she must be excused from complying with the law unless the government can prove that it has a "compelling interest." In 1997 the Supreme Court ruled that the statute did not apply on the state level. This led many states to pass local RFRA laws. Twenty-one have now done so, and 16 more have proposed legislation. Yet given the recent controversy, many of these states may not follow through.

That would be unfortunate. Without guidance from legislatures, state courts may not have the resources to decide the questions that will inevitably arise regarding the protection of religious interests. The recent controversy has focused almost exclusively on Christian business owners who object to catering or photographing same-sex marriage ceremonies. Yet there are many other religious groups who need the protection of RFRA, especially minority religious groups whose practices may seem anathema to the majority of the population. A Muslim who wants to grow a beard in prison for religious reasons, for example, or a Sikh who comes to work with a small ceremonial dagger worn as a required religious practice deserves the protection of state law.

The cases of Indiana and Arkansas provide contrasting examples of how to implement RFRA on the local level. Gov. Asa Hutchinson of Arkansas wisely waited to sign his state's law until it was amended to reflect exactly the 1993 federal law. Indiana, meanwhile, made a tweak to the federal law by including businesses among those that deserve religious protection. The question of how to implement RFRA in light of the Supreme Court decision Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc., which extended religious liberty protections to closely held businesses, is a difficult one. One potential compromise, proposed by Mr. Laycock, is to protect those small-business owners who by the nature of their business would be required to actively take part in a function they find objectionable, while prohibiting larger corporations from taking advantage of these protections.



Indiana's law was amended on April 2 to prohibit discrimination against gays and lesbians in areas like housing and employment. The state's Catholic bishops have raised important concerns about the wording of these revisions, which were obviously done quickly to quell a firestorm. The new language exempts churches and religious "providers," but it is unclear where independent Catholic schools and hospitals fit in this new framework. Unfortunately, Indiana has no separate nondiscrimination law. Including this language in a bill meant to protect religious liberty only muddies the waters. A better approach would be to follow the lead of Utah, which recently passed a law to prevent discrimination against gays and lesbians. That law, which was supported by gay rights groups, was crafted in conjunction with religious leaders to ensure that their interests were protected.

Passing legislation to protect the civil rights of gay and lesbian people, while simultaneously working to adopt RFRA legislation that mirrors the federal law, may be the only way out of this thorny patch. In the current political environment, passing RFRA legislation without a commitment to nondiscrimination laws will be perceived as a partisan initiative—in some cases, correctly. RFRA should not be used for political purposes.

It is time to stop the partisan denunciations. Defenders of RFRA are correct that these laws are not initiating a new era of Jim Crow discrimination. But they should not be surprised when attempts to adopt this legislation in states that do not already have legal protections for gays and lesbians are greeted with suspicion. Meanwhile, defenders of civil rights should acknowledge that marriage is for many people much more than a civil ceremony and that it is unreasonable to expect people who hold deep religious beliefs to embrace society's quickly changing norms in all areas of public life. We are still far apart on these issues, but perhaps if we stop shouting we can find a way to take a small step forward.

REPLY ALL

A Royal Priesthood

The editors suggest all good things in "A Space for Women"(3/30), and I especially concur with Gudrun Sailer that the solution is not merely replicating secular structures. The problem of women's roles in the church is a problem of an inadequate theology of the "royal priesthood" of believers (i.e., the laity, both male and female) and of what Christian leadership means (it is not like feudal, corporate or secular political leadership), an inadequate human anthropology and a frequent failure of the church to be what it is and rather to mimic contemporary dysfunctional secular institutions of every age.

Women have the place they currently have in the church because the church throughout history has frequently modeled itself on the world—which is generally patriarchal and values power, even in our supposedly enlightened times—rather than the kingdom of God, where in Christ there is no male and female, the last shall be first and blessed are the meek. A more inclusive role for women, for all of the baptized with our varied charisms, will come from the church first being faithful itself and to Jesus.

ABIGAIL WOODS-FERREIRA
Online Comment

Love and the Law

Re Of Many Things, by Matt Malone, S.J. (3/30): The language of natural law—"We hold these truths to be self-evident"—became the lingua franca of political philosophy in American society because all the alternatives led to intractable conflict. The 20th century well demonstrated that without natural law to articulate a doctrine of human rights "the inherent obviousness of these values" was apparently not obvious. The intellectual backflips necessary to formulate a basis for trying war criminals at Nuremberg without acceding to the Soviet formula—"We won"—provide an example of the problems in governance without natural law.

Pope Benedict is correct in his assessment of natural law's lack of appeal to the modern mind, but it is hard to find much beyond "Me, me, me!" that does appeal to the modern mind. "Any law, to be genuinely intelligible, credible and livable, must be appropriated in the context of love, in the context of a living relationship with the lawgiver, who is loving creator." The founders of our nation recognized that while at the same time they proscribed any particular vision of the creator. It is the dismissal of the common good and the creator altogether that creates the problem, not natural law.

MARTIN EBLE
Online Comment

CARTOON: HARLEY SCHWADRON

"...and if you ever did catch your tail, are you sure it would make you happy?"

Word Plays

Re "Ionesco Again," by John J. Conley, S.J. (3/30): Father Conley's memory of Eugene Ionesco in the rain-soaked crowd calls to mind one of Thomas Merton's finest essays, "Rain and the Rhinoceros," where Ionesco's play figures centrally, along with Thoreau and others: "Think of it, all that speech pouring down, selling nothing, judging nobody…." For Merton, the rain falling through the forest canopy outside his hermitage makes a peaceful noise, soaking the earth in eddies of protest against "the technological Platos who think they now run the world." My students are lit up by Merton's critique of mass society, even if they need help with the references. Thank you, Father Conley, for this aptly unsettling piece.

CHRIS PRAMUK
Online Comment

Look Forward

The way of thinking presented in "'No White Man Is Innocent,'" by Nathan Schneider (3/23), is entirely wrong. It does nothing but perpetuate injustice. What does matter is how each of us—as individuals—thinks, speaks and acts. We cannot change the past. We can only treat others with the decency and courtesy that each man, woman and child deserves merely by virtue of their humanity. Only when we regard others as individuals and act toward them with kindness, justice, mercy and compassion do we move beyond labels, stereotypes and biases. While we must have knowledge of the past, we must do this in the present with an eye toward the future.

STEVEN KARL SZMUTKO
Ewing, N.J.

Catholic Racism

I coincidentally opened to "All the Angels and Saints," by Bishop Edward K. Braxton (3/16), as a news program on television was describing the leader of the racist chants in a University of Oklahoma fraternity video as the product of a Texas Jesuit high school. As the Catholic godfather of two African-American children, now grown, I'd like to believe that the news story's

student identification was an anomaly. Unfortunately, as Bishop Braxton knows, it is one of the sinful bitter realities of American Catholicism.

In a nation that has historically repudiated its poorest immigrants, how else to define oneself as estimable except by comparing oneself to the person of color, first enslaved, then legally bound and now encumbered on the lowest rung in the society! Despite their current social and economic progress, the progeny of Catholic immigrants of the past exhibit the same attitudes today, helping to perpetuate the endemic racism of the nation.

The U.S. Catholic Church has failed in its fidelity to Christ and its moral obligations to proclaim and teach the truth that all members of the human family are equal children of God. Our parish pulpits are devoid of serious teachings about the sinfulness of the various forms in which racism manifests itself. Our clergy and schools might consider providing a quarter as much pulpit time to the forms of social sins like racism as they do to human sexuality.

VINCENT GAGLIONE
Online Comment

Many Hands

Re "Helping the Poor Prosper," by Chris Herlinger (3/16): In my now nearly nine years of retirement I have been increasingly focused on helping directly an extended family (through relatives in south Florida) in the north district of Haiti. It's small potatoes for sure. But several households of one extended family have been given job tools, education for the children and capital to start small business ventures and have even managed to build three moderate homes. I am acutely aware that the big players who are "helping" have the real money. But it seems that the bare feet on the ground, the thin and sometimes ill bodies of the elderly and the persistent personal health crises faced by many go untouched for countless Haitians by the cash and expertise of the professionals. It's not a boast on my part, but it is a hope that hundreds more like me could take thousands of small initiatives to make available groundswells of development—education, enterprise and the enjoyment of health.

JACK HUNT
Online Comment

Rediscovering the Spirit

The March 16 cover would have been ideal on a pre-Vatican II issue of **America**: "Rediscovering Jesus [by saying the Rosary]." In the featured article itself, by Timothy P. Schilling, there is too much emphasis on a personal friendship with Jesus. At the Last Supper Jesus declared not that he was coming back to be our buddy but that he was going to send his Spirit to be with us, to teach us, to be in us. *Pace* good Pope Francis, it is time we rediscovered that Spirit within by the ancient practice of meditation, which is the prayer of stillness, silence and emptiness. Instructed and driven by the Spirit of Jesus, we can indeed change the church and the world.

JOSEPH G. MURRAY
Waterford, Conn.

BOSTON

Fate of Marathon Bomber, and U.S. Death Penalty, Deliberated

It was no surprise that Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was convicted on all 30 counts in the Boston Marathon bomber trial on April 8; in an opening statement, his attorneys had conceded his guilt in the April 2013 horror at the finish line. The State of Massachusetts bars the use of capital punishment, but Tsarnaev was tried in a federal court. Seventeen of the crimes he has been convicted of—which include the bomb attacks that claimed three lives and wounded 260 others, and the murder of a police officer days later in a chaotic attempt to escape the city—are eligible for capital punishment.

The jury that convicted Tsarnaev will begin deliberations on April 13 to determine whether he will face execution or life behind bars, but Massachusetts Catholic bishops have already indicated where they stand on the matter. "The Church has taught that the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity are 'rare, if not practically nonexistent.' The Church's teaching is further developing in recognition of the inherent dignity of all life as a gift from God," the state's bishops, including Boston's Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley, O.F.M.Cap., wrote in a statement released on April 6.

The statement concludes: "The defendant in this case has been neutralized and will never again have the ability to cause harm. Because of this, we… believe that society can do better than the death penalty."

The Massachusetts bishops' rejection of the use of capital punishment follows a recent line of public statements from Catholic global and national leaders moving the church further from the notion that the death penalty is ever an appropriate punishment in a free society. On March 20 Pope Francis bluntly denounced capital punishment as "unacceptable," no matter how serious the crime of the condemned. He called capital punishment "cruel, inhumane and degrading."

In a statement released on March 31, 400 Catholic and other Christian leaders denounced the use of capital punishment in the United States. "Torture and execution is always a profound evil, made even more abhorrent when sanctioned by the government in the name of justice when other means of protecting society are available," the statement read. "All who reverence the sanctity of human life, created in the image of God, must never remain silent when firing squads, lethal injections, electric chairs and other instruments of death are viewed as morally acceptable."

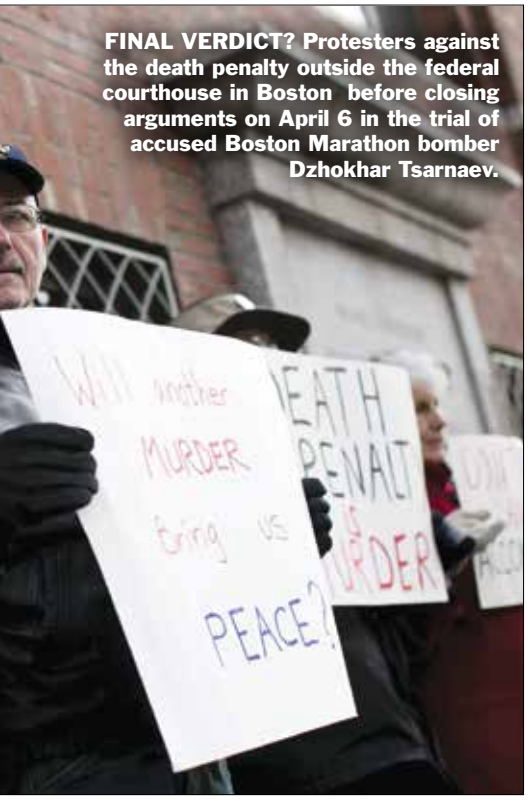
The reinstatement of firing squads in Utah was quickly condemned by that state's lone Catholic bishop. The legislators "argue that, because executions are lawful, they are then moral. This is not so," said Bishop John C. Wester of Salt Lake City in a statement on March 24 .

"No human law can trump God's law," Bishop Wester said. "Taking a human life is wrong, a slap in the face of hope and a blasphemous attempt to assume divine attributes that we humble human beings do not have."

It has been almost 70 years since the last execution took place in Massachusetts, and 18 years since its state legislature was one vote away from restoring the death penalty after public outcry over the murder of a 10-year-old Cambridge boy. Though 55 percent of Americans, according to a 2013 Pew study, say they support the death penalty—including 59 percent of white Catholics—that is a sharp decline from a high of 78 percent who supported it in 1996.

Across the United States enthusiasm for the use of the death penalty has diminished as "humane" methods of execution repeatedly fail and miscarriages of justice accumulate. If the members of the Tsarnaev jury conclude they cannot apply the death penalty—even in this heinous crime—it could be another signal that this peculiar criminal justice institution in the United States may be reaching a historic end.

KEVIN CLARKE



FINAL VERDICT? Protesters against the death penalty outside the federal courthouse in Boston before closing arguments on April 6 in the trial of accused Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev.

KENYA

A Crackdown on Al-Shabab Terror

Faced with a fierce enemy driven by Islamic extremism, the Kenyan government has cracked down on funding for al-Shabab, the Somali group that claimed responsibility for killing at least 148 mostly Christian students at Garissa University College on April 2. The leader of the Catholic Church in Kenya, Cardinal John Njue, archbishop of Nairobi, condemned the massacre and demanded that Kenyan authorities improve security, but he also urged forgiveness and reconciliation.

Despite fears of further attacks, large numbers of Christians in Garissa and Nairobi attended Easter celebrations, remembering in prayer the young students who were killed. During his homily on Easter Sunday, Cardinal Njue asked worshipers to commit themselves to praying for peace and security. The cardinal called for a global response to terrorism and for national solidarity, admonishing Kenyans not to look at the Garissa massacre through a religious lens.

"We must remain united and not give a few people the impression that this is a war between Christians and Muslims," he said.

A week after the attack, officials froze the accounts of 85 groups and individuals, including bus companies and Muslim rights organizations, allegedly linked to al-Shabab. The government has closed down one hotel in Eastleigh, a neighborhood in Nairobi commonly known as Little Mogadishu because of its large concentration of ethnic Somalis. But the freeze on Muslims for Human Rights and Haki Africa, two nongovernmental organizations, raised questions, since they are known for their work to improve the lives of Kenyans and fight for the human rights of all citizens.

"I am amazed that these human rights organizations are believed to have been supporting terror," said Sheikh Juma Ngao, the national chairman of the Kenya Muslim National Advisory Council. "I think the government needs to provide some evidence."

A statement jointly signed by the Rev. Gabriel Dolan, a Roman Catholic priest and a board member of Muslims for Human Rights, and Sheikh Khelef Khalifa, the board chairman, asks the government to "immediately reconsider" its decision, arguing, "the poor are the people who are going to suffer."

The group's board, which is about 60 percent Christian, includes members of all faiths. Hussein Khalid, executive director of Haki Africa, said he was shocked by the government's action. "We have and will always continue to work...to address matters of human rights and security with the aim of eradicating extremism and radicalization from our midst," Khalid said.

Meanwhile, the extent of al-Shabab's outreach in Kenya has raised concerns following reports that schoolchildren were being recruited. At least 40 families in Isiolo County, a strategic gateway between northern and southern Kenya, reported missing children. The families said many disappeared a year ago and may have traveled to al-Shabab's training camps in Somalia.

In 2013, security agencies identified some high schools in Nairobi whose students were later sent to Somalia or took part in plots to commit crimes in Kenya. Asked about the risk of Kenyan youths becoming radicalized, Cardinal Njue said his "prayer and hope" is that young people can be "well-accompanied" and "never allow themselves to become instruments of destruction."

The terrorists in the Garissa attack were reportedly Kenyan youth.

AFTERSHOCK. A memorial vigil in Nairobi, Kenya, on April 7 for the 148 or more people killed in an attack on Garissa University College.

One of them, Abdirahim Mohammad Abdullahi, was a recent law graduate from the University of Nairobi.

Kenya has been targeted by al-Shabab largely because of its location. It shares a long border with Somalia. In addition, Kenya is one of the biggest contributors to African Union troops in Somalia.

Remembering Armenian Suffering

In the run-up to the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide, Pope Francis decried on April 9 humanity's ability to systematically exterminate its own brothers and sisters. He asked that God's mercy "help all of us, in the love for the truth and justice, to heal every wound and expedite concrete gestures of reconciliation and peace among nations that still are unable to come to a reasonable consensus on interpreting such sad events." The pope's remarks came during a meeting at the Vatican with a group of bishops from the Armenian Catholic Synod. April 24 will mark the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide. An estimated 1.5 million Armenians—more than half the Armenian population at the time—died in a forced evacuation from their traditional territory in the Ottoman-Turkish Empire between 1915 and 1918. Turkey rejects the accusation of genocide, saying the deaths were due largely to disease and famine. Pope Francis noted "with sadness" how those who survived the forced expulsions 100 years ago fled to neighboring regions, which today are seeing their Christian presence put in danger once again.

'Humanitarian Disaster' in Blockaded Yemen

The British charity Oxfam has appealed for an end to the fighting in Yemen and the opening of borders to allow entrance to desperately needed humanitarian aid. Nuha Al-Saeedi, an Oxfam program manager in Yemen, reports that conditions are getting worse each day as basic commodities run dangerously low. She described the current humanitarian situation in Yemen as "a disaster," especially given that even before the escalation of the fighting, more than half the population—10 million Yemenis—were already going hungry every day and were dependent on food aid. Al-Saeedi said people are frightened but cannot flee the fighting because of the blockade of land, sea and air routes. "There's no exit for them, and nowhere is safe."

Suicide Prevention

Chaplains who are part of the Army's first line of defense against suicide say they need more training in how to prevent soldiers from killing themselves, according to a Rand Corporation survey published online on April 7. Nearly all the chaplains and chaplain assistants surveyed said they have dealt with suicidal soldiers. Because of confidentiality, roughly half said they would be reluctant to alert someone in the chain of command about the soldier, and roughly a third said they would not call a crisis hotline. Forty-four percent of chaplains and 57 percent of chaplain assistants said they need training in suicide prevention treatment, the survey found. "In this circumstance, where people are going to them and using [them] like a behavioral health provider, let's make sure they have a basic amount of competency," said Rajeev Ramchand, lead author of the study.

From CNS, RNS and other sources.

NEWS BRIEFS


Robert McClory

A new Kansas **law banning an abortion procedure** that results in dismemberment of an unborn child "has the power to transform the landscape of abortion policy in the United States," said Carol Tobias, president of National Right to Life, on April 8. ✦ Two notable passings in Catholic journalism: **Robert McClory**, Chicago author and educator, died on April 3 at age 82 in Illinois; **Robert Blair Kaiser**, whose coverage of the Second Vatican Council for Time magazine informed a generation of Americans, died on April 2 in Phoenix at 84. ✦ On March 31 the **Vatican defended its decision** to install Juan de La Cruz Barros as bishop of Osorno, Chile, arguing that its candidature review did not produce "objective reasons to preclude the appointment," despite allegations that Barros had been involved in a cover-up of a priest's abuse of children. ✦ Pope Francis expressed his hope on April 6 that the international community will not look on, "silent and inactive," in the face of the "unacceptable crime" of **persecution of Christians** around the world. ✦ Bread for the World, the World Bank and leaders of 30 faith groups and organizations issued a call on April 9 to **end hunger and extreme poverty by 2030.**

DISPATCH | LOS ANGELES

Magic Kingdoms

Sixty years ago this year, over 90 million people watched on television as Walt Disney opened his very first theme park, Disneyland, in Anaheim, Calif.

Ad copy to the contrary, the Magic Kingdom on that day was definitely not "the happiest place on Earth." A flood of counterfeit tickets had over 28,000 people trying to get in. Because of daytime temperatures well above 100 degrees, the just-poured asphalt on Main Street USA was still so soft in places that high heels sank in. Some rides broke down almost immediately, and a gas leak closed three "lands" by the afternoon.

These days, if Disneyland has just one such problem, it makes the national news. The Disney Company has made an art out of building welcoming spaces where families can escape the drama of ordinary life and reconnect with the wonder of childhood. From Uncle Walt to its present-day Imagineers, Disney has conceived of the parks as immersive experiences in which guests are invited to be active, creative participants in the stories of their youth.

Catholicism understands liturgy in a similar way. The Mass too is meant to be an immersive experience in which we enter into a story, the history of salvation. And Catholics are also invited to be active participants. Whether making the sign of the cross, participating in the eucharistic prayer's Last Supper/Passover re-enactment or receiving Communion, worshippers bring the story of Jesus to life and make it their own.

Obviously, Disneyland and liturgy have much that is not shared. Still, three of Disney's core ideas suggest some interesting questions for us.

With every choice, remember the story. For Walt Disney, what made an experience truly immersive and satisfying was the rich accumulation of details.

> Disney parks and liturgies are meant to be immersive experiences for active participants.

"The story" was built in a ride's twists and turns, but also in its light fixtures, in the layout of its waiting area, in the material used for its seats. In designing new attractions today, Disney Imagineers ask of every element: Does this choice help tell the story?

Our liturgical experience of the story of salvation is also built in the specifics—the translations of the readings and prayers, the preaching and music, but also the artwork in the church, the arrangement and kinds of seating, the choice of missal and songbook.

If we were to walk through our churches from time to time considering every element, what might we discover? What are the stories that our church, our worship are telling?

Embrace the humanity. As much as Walt Disney prided himself on the calm and cleanliness of Disneyland, he also wanted it to be a place where all would feel welcome.

In fact, he believed that it was only through the presence of one another that guests could fully enter into and relish the Disney experience. The fireworks are more beautiful for the glow we see them cast across the upturned faces of strangers, and the rides are more entertaining for the horrified squeals of the grandparents behind us.

Whether through the quiet spectacle of a frail elder reaching for Communion, the meeting of eyes and the touch of hands at the Sign of Peace or the buoyant embrace of the voices around us lifted in song, we too understand one another as sacramental, a source of grace.

And yet for reasons of solemnity, propriety or beauty, worship can also sometimes become inhospitable to aspects of our humanity. We might ask ourselves, does our liturgy accommodate a certain amount of human spontaneity? Are mistakes O.K. (or even potential occasions of grace)? And are there any groups not present? Have our expectations written anyone out of the story?

In our history lies our treasure. For Disney one's past was a place of forgotten gifts. And nostalgia was a positive force, the gentle gravity that could draw people back, help them rediscover that wealth. In considering changes to his parks, it was always paramount to Disney that nothing undermine guests' communion with past experiences there.

Catholicism is an incarnated faith, our experience of church deeply tied to our history of experiences in our parish. When a parish staff makes changes, does it proceed in a way that supports that history? More intriguingly, what if within each parish's traditions lie the materials for its own renewal? What if we're each capable of our own Vatican II-like *resourcement*?

JIM McDERMOTT

JIM McDERMOTT, S.J., *a screenwriter, is* ***America****'s Los Angeles correspondent. Twitter: @PopCulturPriest.*

HELEN ALVARÉ

Outside the Lines

There are huge risks to talking about women, qua women, in the church. Let me count the ways: generalizing, stereotyping, demeaning, ignoring marginalized women in favor of the privileged, putting women up on a pedestal in order to get them out of the way, ignoring history, shortchanging men and, let's not forget, plain old getting it wrong.

So forgive me for veering in any of these directions while trying mightily to avoid them in a mere 700 words. Otherwise I would spend most of this column issuing caveats.

Pope Francis has opened a door to new thoughts about women's roles in the church. Since then, there have been scattered responses. This isn't a criticism. It's a huge topic and there is plenty of room for varied responses addressing different needs, shortcomings and opportunities.

Here's my contribution. A possible "theme" for considering the question of women's roles in the church is women's ability to maneuver for the common good from outside of bureaucracies. The reasons for this modus are plentiful, no doubt: culture, sexism, nature, necessity, the immediacy of women's relation to life and women's caretaking prowess, to name a few. I am most interested, however, in what wisdom and consequences are associated with it and what it might portend for a church that is both grappling with bureaucracy and more open to women's experiences.

It's pretty easy (that's my point) to think of Catholic women over the centuries who operated outside the system: Mary, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Jeanne d'Arc, Mother Teresa. Then there's Catholic women's perennial dedication to human services work—Catholic sisters in particular. Not to oversimplify, but there is a historical record of Catholic women perceiving an unmet need and tangling mightily with the bureaucracies of church and state to address it. Think women's leadership in health care, education, capital punishment, abortion, hospice care, human trafficking, crisis pregnancy and peace. It's even easier to think of Catholic women in our communities, dioceses and families who move us with their quiet but dogged attention to the needy.

What might this experience offer the church today, at a moment in time when reforming the bureaucracy is front and center for Pope Francis?

There are a few lessons. First: when it comes to reforming the bureaucracy, Pope Francis and his "gang of nine" should turn to women for a grasp of its shortcomings and their human cost. They can also turn to the women who are today running large church organizations—e.g., charitable, educational, health care—for examples of how they are doing things differently. The church should also ponder that human beings are most moved by personal, loving witness of the kind given in one-on-one relationships and small groups, of the kind with which women spend a great deal of time. How often people testify that their lives were changed by the example of a single person or small group! They are moved to a better place by people who are plausible to them because they have shown their love in concrete ways.

One of the lessons here must certainly involve tone. The church is struggling with how to speak to those facing family breakdowns or disconnections between sex, marriage and parenting. Within their personal spheres of influence, women learn that tone matters as much as substance. The Extraordinary Synod on the Family's *relatio* gestures toward the importance of tone. Pope Francis directly affirms it.

> Women learn that tone matters as much as substance.

Women are also particularly skilled at confronting big odds and big organizations beyond their control on behalf of the weak. Think of the woman who founded Mothers Against Drunk Driving; think Sister Helen Prejean, C.S.J., Norma Ray, Rosa Parks, Jeanne d'Arc and Mother Teresa. Think of the hundreds of thousands of women who started and staffed crisis pregnancy centers and marched on Washington in order to make pro-life the living, breathing force it is today.

There is much more to be said about what women can bring to the church. Considering their extensive experience with more "outsider," small-community work, however, women should at least be tapped to help figure out how the church can operate without the shortcomings bureaucracies entail.

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Return to Saigon

Remembering the American evacuation from Vietnam

BY RAYMOND A. SCHROTH

It is 5:30 a.m., June 1995, as the rising sun breaks into my little backstreet hotel room in Hanoi, and the light trampling of hundreds of feet padding past my window shakes me out of bed and into my shorts and sneakers to join the multitude of morning runners. The mass is heading toward West Lake, the largest of the city's more than 16 bodies of water, a park where elders do their morning t'ai chi in unison. Just across the road is the tiny Truc Bach Lake, into which the wounded Lt. Cmdr. John McCain parachuted on Oct. 26, 1967. Not far off is the prison known as the Hanoi Hilton, where he was imprisoned, which is now being converted by foreign investors into apartments and shops. Four smiling students stop me to talk. What was I doing here? I had come to see them.

Hanoi, bustling to rebuild itself, is a beautiful little city, with tree-lined streets, more bicycles than cars and few traffic lights. Its spiritual center is Hoan Liern Lake, where in the 15th century the Golden Turtle God is said to have taken back the magic sword that was given to the emperor to drive the Chinese from Vietnam. Nearby hundreds line up to view the corpse of Ho Chi Minh laid out in his mausoleum, a small air-conditioned house, for 20 seconds of admiration. He had asked that his ashes be planted throughout the country in quiet tree groves where a traveler could find peace.

Vietnam 1975: Enemy at the Gates

The Paris Peace Accords, signed on Jan. 27, 1973, required the United States to withdraw their combat troops from South Vietnam within 60 days. The reunification of Vietnam was to be carried out by peaceful means. Only the U.S. Marine Corps security guards at the Saigon Embassy and some consulates in provincial capitals were allowed to remain. In late 1974 the North Vietnamese broke the truce and under Gen. Van Tien Dung began to push south. Meeting little resistance, they took Hue and Da Nang, a coastal town where American soldiers had once enjoyed the beach. Thousands of South Vietnamese soldiers surrendered or deserted and joined the mass exodus of 300,000 refugees fleeing toward Saigon. The Central Intelligence Agency had predicted that the Southern forces could hold out through 1976, but they were very wrong. The North was determined to hit Saigon in time to celebrate the birthday of the late Ho Chi Minh, born on May 19, 1890.

REBUILDING HANOI. June 1995

PHOTO: RAYMOND A. SCHROTH

Meanwhile, in Saigon, the embassy staff was haunted by memories of the Tet offensive in 1968, which demonstrated the unreadiness of the Saigon military establishment, including those stationed at the embassy. In the early morning of Jan. 30, 1968, a 19-man Vietcong team blew a hole in the wall near the embassy and charged through. For six hours the Marine guards held them off until Marines landed from helicopters on the roof and killed or captured the invaders. Maj. James Kean, 33, commander of the last Marine contingent stationed at the embassy in 1975, was determined that lack of preparation would never allow anything like this

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again. But he would soon face the most challenging situation of his military career.

Up to the final weeks, U.S. Ambassador Graham A. Martin believed that because the North would need American financial aid to reconstruct Vietnamese society, the United States could negotiate a new settlement that might preserve some autonomy for Saigon and the Mekong

> At the signal—Bing Crosby singing "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas" on the U.S. radio station—Americans knew they must leave immediately.

Delta. To pull this off, he supported a quick coup: Gen. Duong Van Minh was made president of South Vietnam, pushing aside President Nguyen Van Thieu, who, in the opinion of some Americans, had taken kleptocracy to new heights and should have been removed long before. In a tearful televised resignation on April 21, the deposed President Thieu denounced the United States for betraying the South. By April 27 Gen. Dung moved 100,000 troops around the city. Its fate was sealed.

The official evacuation, which should have been planned and executed months before, took place on the two last days; but in various ways, some secret, the exodus had been in process for several weeks. The moral and legal aspects of the daily decisions concerned who must go and when; to whom the United States owed protection; and among them, who had priority. Troops, of course. Civilian employees? Friends of troops and business associates? Wives, of course. Girlfriends? Children, yes. Both those with married parents and the offspring of G.I. nighttime excursions? Orphans?

Many American organizations closed shop and left without their Vietnamese employees. Some, like Northrop Grumman, offered to save local workers—but not their families. Some branches of American banks sent their records and American employees home, leaving thousands of Vietnamese depositors unpaid. A select few had access to a semisecret airlift. Several escape plans were considered hypothetically: boats on the Saigon River could make their way out to the ocean, where the American fleet was waiting; commercial airlines could fly them out; truck convoys, etc. But in the end there was only one hope—a fleet of helicopters to lift them up from the embassy property and fly them to aircraft carriers off shore.

Malcolm Browne, a reporter for The New York Times, wrote that there were also secret heroes who stayed. One was a Vietnamese reporter and photographer for The Times, Nguyen Ngoc Luong. Mr. Browne spoke with another who explained, "In the end the color of the skin counts for more than politics. Anyone who has lived in either the United States or Vietnam knows this, and I have done both. The Vietcong, like me, are yellow." Mr. Browne compared the Vietnamese-American relationship to a "failed marriage." And he concludes that "for millions of Vietnamese and not a few Americans the dominant memory will be sorrow and betrayal and guilt."

Saigon 1995: A 'New' Vietnam

In Ho Chi Minh City, which during my visit I still insist on calling Saigon, Vietnam is poised on the threshold of becoming something very different. Its identity had been in the land, rural hamlets, rice paddies where peasants and water buffalos seemed to work as co-equals. Amid Southeast Asia's economic boom, Communist Vietnam had decided to fight its way out of poverty by imitating Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, opening itself to foreign investment.

The "new" embassy, which had been opened in 1967, wasstill a government building encased in a concrete shield. Reunification Hall, once known as Independence Hall or the Presidential Palace, stands at the end of a long boulevard. Tourists wandered its halls, decorated with modern art, and visited the Dragon's Head presidential receiving room, where the chair facing the president's desk has ornate dragons carved in the arms; in the basement were the

bomb-shelter rooms where the leadership could cower. On the day the city fell, the tank leading the attacking army crashed through the iron gates and a soldier ran up the steps to unfurl the Vietcong flag from the fourth-floor balcony. That same tank guards the front gate today.

I stay at the Caravelle Hotel, a hangout where in years past American journalists—Walter Cronkite, Peter Kalisher, Eric Sevareid, Dan Rather and others—would meet at the ninth-floor bar while thumps and booms from distant mortar firing punctuated their analyses of the day's fighting. A few blocks away are the twin spires of Notre Dame Cathedral, where during my visit the body of Paul Nguyen Van Binh, the 84-year-old archbishop, lies for five days of mourning. A disfigured woman, a leper, cowers at the cathedral door. A local priest explains to me that for the good of the country, the church cooperates with the government, and the churches are filled, even for weekday Masses.

The Last Days: April 29-30, 1975

While General Dung had decided to take the city with its buildings intact and, as far as possible, without killing civilians, opinion at the embassy was divided. Ambassador Martin and his young staff were convinced that they could negotiate more time with the Vietcong; others shared Major Kean's conviction that Martin was delusional. The ambassador had never recovered fully from his bout with pneumonia and old injuries from a car accident. Once a lively conversationalist, he had become surly; tall, he became stooped, a cigarette perpetually dangling from his lips. Did he cling to the possibility of a negotiated peace because he had lost a nephew in this war? Though he had arranged the early escape of his wife, he would cling to his office until President Gerald Ford personally ordered him to leave.

As if to express distant confidence in the mission, Marine headquarters had recently ordered two new young troops to duty in Saigon: Lance Cpl. Darwin Judge, 18, and Cpl. Charles McMahon, 21, fresh from Quantico, Va. Major Kean added the "newbies" to his battalion with paternal affection but wondered why inexperienced men had been sent to die for a lost cause. This was, in his mind, no longer America's war but a civil war the South was doomed to lose. At a meeting a visiting C.I.A. officer had informed the men that Saigon would fall soon. When the guest left the room Major Kean looked his men in the face and told them, he did not know what or when it was "coming over those walls," but "we will not only fight like Marines; if we have to, we will die like Marines."

In the last week of April the smooth-faced McMahon, the Massachusetts Boys Club Boy of the Year, and the Iowa Eagle Scout Judge were assigned to a guard post on the airport road. In the early hour of April 29, rockets crashed into the compound, knocking a sergeant out of bed. He ran out into the smoke, checking for damage, and found a smoldering hole where the young men's post had been. A torso without arms lay in the road; another rocket knocked the sergeant into a ditch near flaming motorbikes piled up over the body of Lance Cpl. Judge. The siege had killed its first victims.

Sgt. Mike Sullivan tried everything to avoid being drafted into the Army until, after two years in a community college, he was rescued from the draft by a Marine recruiter. In 1967 he landed in Da Nang, with specialty communications, which meant laying wire lines. But he cherished his intellectual independence and, much to the displeasure of his superiors, read The New York Times, which his mother mailed him. In Vietnam he did not like what he saw. Why were we still here?

On the fatal day he stood on the embassy roof and looked across town to where the Newport Bridge crossed the Saigon River, where the National Liberation Front had planted its flag, just a half-hour drive to the Presidential Palace. Five weeks earlier, he had flown his new wife, Camy Mohegri, to his family in Tacoma, Wash., having been warned by a trusted friend to get her out of the country, fast.

In Washington, D.C., Col. Douglas Dillard, a much-decorated hero from World War II and Korea, had recently returned from a mission to Vietnam to undo some of the harm Operation Phoenix had caused. He knew that the United States had tragically underestimated the broad support for General Dung's advancing army. He had many friends in Saigon, especially in the intelligence community, so he sponsored three Vietnamese families, one with 11 children. Two families made it to the United States and, with his help, got homes and jobs; the third family all committed suicide in Saigon. Today he sees the Vietnam story played out again in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria: America loses its credibility when it fails to give our allies the support they need.

At the signal—Bing Crosby singing "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas" on the U.S. radio station—Americans knew they must leave immediately. The Chicago Daily

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Documentary film "Last Days in Vietnam"; interview by Raymond A. Schroth, S.J., with Col. Douglas Dillard, April 15, 2015

News correspondent Bob Tamarkin, writing from the U.S.S. Okinawa, pulled together an hour-by-hour diary of April 29, beginning with the tearful, shirtless Capt. Stuart Harrington, who could not accept that hundreds of Vietnamese in the embassy compound and thousands of others who had been promised evacuation had been left behind. A wild wave of thousands swarmed around the compound, trying to scale the wall. Some, helped up by a soldier or friend, succeeded; others were beaten down. One official pointed his pistol in the face of a boy and shouted, "Get down, you bastard, or I'll blow your head off. Get down!" Marines smashed the fingers of climbers with their rifle butts. Most of those to be evacuated legitimately were ignored as Marines randomly pulled people up. That is how Bob Tamarkin got in at 5:39 p.m.

At 6 p.m., in a rampage of looting, hundreds stormed the storerooms, food lockers and embassy restaurant for soft drinks, frozen foods, canned goods and cigarettes. Some Marines fought them; some stuffed cartons into their own knapsacks.

At 9:40 p.m. the grim-faced Ambassador Martin examined the pillage, returned to his office and burned documents preserved since the embassy opened in 1954.

At 11:30 p.m., 12 hours after the evacuation began, the Marines rounded up the remaining Americans and got them to the landing pad. Helicopters that normally hold 50 were packed with 80 or 90. With 80 helicopters flying 495 sorties, 70,000 people had been saved.

At midnight helicopters began leaving from both the roof and courtyard as security people went through the rooms destroying anything that might help the invaders. Meanwhile Ambassador Martin, in shirtsleeves in his office, calmly went over details with his staff. At 4:30 a.m. they took off, on their way to the U.S.S. Blue Ridge, flagship of the Seventh Fleet, ending U.S. official presence in Vietnam. At 5:15 a.m. the order came from President Ford to stop all evacuations immediately. At 5:30 a.m. the last scheduled helicopter took off with the remaining Marines and the press, while hundreds of Vietnamese looked up, concludes Mr. Tamarkin's account, waiting for the next one—that never came.

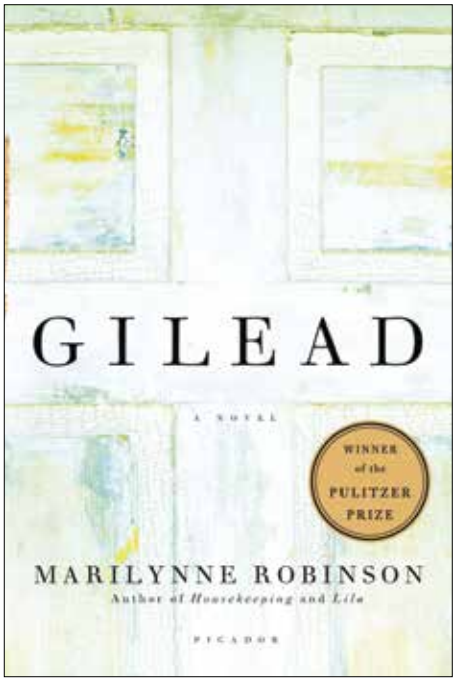
But something was wrong. Major Kean and his 11 most dedicated men, including Sergeant Sullivan, stood alone on the roof in the silent dawn. Was it possible that they had been forgotten? "It is possible," Major Kean replied. Then at 7:38 a.m., 23 hours after Major Kean learned that his wife was pregnant, a slender white contrail appeared in the sky far to the southeast. A CH-46 transport helicopter, escorted by four Cobra gunships, was coming for them. Minutes later, as they flew out over the city, they looked down the boulevard to see a half dozen Russian-made tanks lumbering over the Newport Bridge, heading toward the big iron gates of the Presidential Palace. A

This Blessed Place

The faithful fiction of Marilynne Robinson

BY ANGELA ALAIMO O'DONNELL

Reading a Marilynne Robinson novel is like going to church. Her books put us into conversation with the Bible, "a great ancient literature" (her words) whose powerful stories reveal their meanings gradually in multiple and ongoing ways. They posit a community of people who take their faith seriously and strive to live by it; they depict a fallen world, full of common sinners in need of redemption and in whose lives the operation of grace is evident at every turn; and they reveal the luminous beauty of that world, shot through with the goodness of the God who loved it into being and continues to care for it, in ways both large and small.



Marilynne Robinson herself equates the writing and the reading of fiction with churchgoing. In an interview in which she describes the Congregational United Church of Christ she attends, she compares a church to a village: "If you go to a church and stay there over time, you see babies baptized, and children confirmed, the middle-aged becoming the elders, becoming the much lamented. It configures your sense of things around the defined arc of human life." This is the uncanny effect of reading Robinson's trilogy of acclaimed novels, *Gilead* (2004), *Home* (2008) and *Lila* (2014), all of which are set in the small town of Gilead, Iowa, and feature the same small cast of characters who abide there—the aged Rev. John Ames, his young wife, Lila, and their son.

At the center of the community is Ames, who as a minister has a circle of acquaintance that encompasses all the members of his flock; however, the focus remains on him, widening only slightly to include his lifelong friend and neighbor, Robert Boughton, the old man's daughter, Glory, and his ne'er-do-well son, Jack. This intensity of focus is also evident in the plots of the three books, each of which explores the same set of events but from differing perspectives. Robinson's trilogy is a marvel of economy and expressiveness, as we become intimately acquainted with each of these characters, invited to see the events of their lives through their eyes and to hear their stories told in their own singular voices.

At one point in *Gilead*, John Ames sounds the keynote that echoes through all three books: "We are such secrets from one another." Robinson invites us to explore the hidden life and the private consciousness of the men and women she creates, to see ourselves in them and to come to love them, for all of their flaws. In her essay "Community and Imagination," she describes this experience as a primary function of fiction:

> Community, at least community larger than the immediate family, consists very largely of imaginative love for people we do not know or whom we know very slightly. I have spent literal years of my life lovingly absorbed in the thoughts and perceptions of people who do not exist. And, just as writers are engrossed in the making of them, readers are profoundly moved and also influenced by the nonexistent, that great clan whose numbers increase prodigiously with every publishing season. I think fiction may be, whatever else, an exercise in the capacity for imaginative love, or sympathy, or identification.

Much like the faithful practice of a religious tradition grounded in love, the reading of excellent fiction can enlarge our sensibility, create in us a tolerance for human error and remind us of our need for forgiveness, mercy and redemption.

This is especially true of Marilynne Robinson's unabashedly Christian novels. In an era when religion is often maligned, lampooned by satirical magazines and blamed for outrages around the world, her novels are bestsellers—even among so-called nones and atheists. Mark O'Connell confesses in The New Yorker, "I have read and loved a lot of lit-

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erature about religion and religious experience—Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Flannery O'Connor, the Bible—but it's only with Robinson that I have actually felt what it must be like to live with a sense of the divine." There is a wisdom and beauty in her depiction of the faithfully lived life. Robinson thoroughly inhabits the world and the consciousness of her characters because she knows them, in a deep and intense way. As a committed Christian—and a Calvinist of no ordinary stamp—this is her world and these are her people. Through the process of imagination, and her finely honed skill as a writer, she is able to invent an idiom that captures each person's speech and conveys the heart of his or her mystery. She states her purpose clearly and without apology as a novelist and as a Christian humanist: "There is nothing more valuable to be done than to make people understand that religion is beautiful and it is large."

Marilynne Robinson

PHOTO COURTESY OF FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX/ KELLY RUTH WINTER

The Miraculous John Ames

The beauty and breadth of religion (despite her small canvas) comes through most clearly in the character and voice of John Ames. We first meet Ames in *Gilead*, the 76-year-old father to a 7-year-old son destined to die before his child can properly know him. The reverend's failing health and impending mortality move him to write a long letter to the boy, describing his own extraordinary family (his grandfather a firebrand abolitionist, his father a peace-loving preacher), the loss of his first wife and newborn daughter as a young man, the joy of his late-in-life marriage to the boy's mother, Lila, and the near-miraculous birth of the son that has redeemed his life of long loneliness.

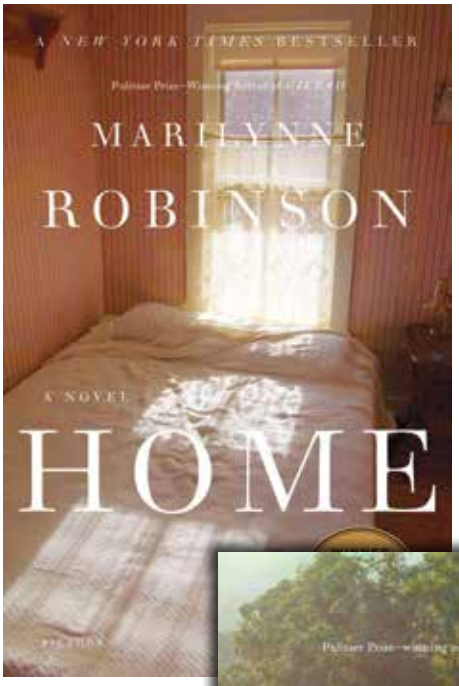
The poignant circumstances of the letter give Ames (and Robinson) ample space within which to address issues of ultimate concern. Ames wants to tell his story, but he also aims to teach the boy how to live a good life. The author describes the novel as a book "about a man interpreting the Ten Commandments for his son"—a description that is accurate enough, as the book includes generous amounts of theology and fatherly advice. Ames offers a series of small sermons, parables and didactic stories in keeping with the sensibility of a lifelong preacher. But this description does not take into account the real strength of the novel—the extraordinary tenderness of Ames's voice and vision. The old man's stories are powerful meditations on the beauty of being human. Even his most ordinary observations bespeak his wisdom and love.

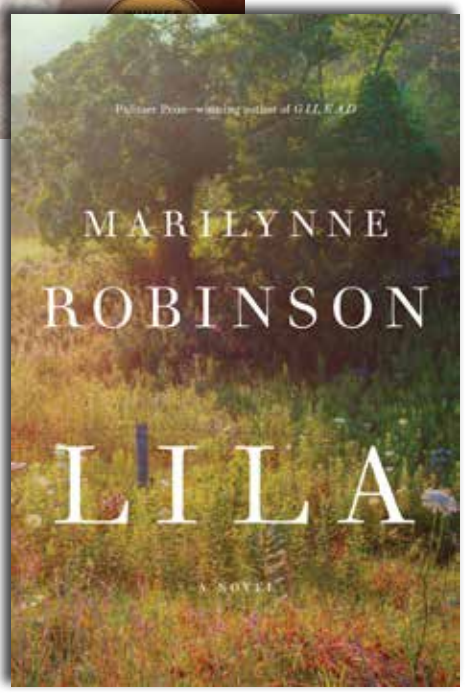
In one poignant passage, in which he describes holding his infant daughter just after her birth and seeing her face for the first and last time, he says:

> [T]here is nothing more astonishing than a human

face.... It has something to do with incarnation. You feel your obligation to a child when you have seen it and held it. Any human face is a claim on you, because you can't help but understand the singularity of it, the courage and loneliness of it. But this is truest of the face of an infant. I consider that to be one kind of vision, as mystical as any.

Ames's faith might be described as the practice of everyday mysticism. He believes, in the words of fellow mystic Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J., that "the world is charged with the grandeur of God" and bodies forth its Creator, betraying an analogical (and remarkably Catholic) vision. He tells his young son: "Wherever you turn your eyes the world can shine like transfiguration. You don't have to bring a thing to it except a little willingness to see." Ames's abiding affection for the world is enhanced, perhaps, by the fact that he is looking through posthumous eyes, but his unwavering devotion to this one place, this one flock, this one small life suggests he has long seen it for the miracle that it is. It is the life of the local, of particularity, that John Ames loves. He instinctively knows (as does Robinson) that everything one needs to know of the human predicament—its glories, its pleasures, its grand achievements, as well as its weaknesses, sorrows and failures—one can find in Gilead.





The Return of the Prodigal

The second novel in the trilogy, *Home*, returns us to Gilead, only we are no longer inside of Ames's house or head. Instead, the narrative focuses on the story of Robert Boughton, fellow-preacher and friend to Ames, and his wayward son, Jack. Like Ames, Boughton is ancient, facing his final days, and desperate to clarify his relationship with his son before leaving this life. Jack, however, is a mystery—to his father, to Ames (his godfather), to his sister, Glory, who serves as the novel's center of consciousness, and to himself. Even in the author's generous economy of salvation, Jack seems beyond God's grace. Unwilling to own the considerable gifts he has been given, unable to return the love of his large and affectionate family, he betrays himself and everyone else over and over again. Amazingly, despite all of his sins against his father (or perhaps on account of them), Jack has long been Boughton's favorite of his eight children. Now, as his father is dying, Jack returns home, presumably to make amends, and Glory tries to serve as peacemaker.

Home, like *Gilead*, is rooted in the Bible, offering an extended meditation on the story of the prodigal son. We see the limitlessness of a father's (and of the Father's) love as old Boughton practically runs to greet the boy upon his return. The first words of the novel capture his joy, "Home to stay, Glory! Yes!" even as his daughter's heart sinks, knowing that Jack is not likely to stay. Their differing responses remind us that we don't know what happens to the original prodigal son after his much vaunted return. We like to believe he spent the remainder of his life by his father's side—but, given human nature, we assume too much. This possibility of relapse or abandonment, however, does nothing to dampen the love of either the prodigal father or of Jack.

'There is nothing more valuable to be done than to make people understand that religion is beautiful and it is large.'

Home conveys the same generous theology as *Gilead*, highlighting the need for forgiveness (70 times seven, and more), the abundance of God's mercy (the door of one's home is always open) and the many forms of penance hu-

man beings practice. (Jack's self-imposed exile from Gilead demonstrates his sense of his own unworthiness.) What is missing from the novel, to my mind, is a compelling voice. The third-person narrator tells the story from Glory's perspective, but the novel does not immerse the reader in her consciousness. After the rich intensity of *Gilead*, the spiritual insights seem less keenly felt, and we are kept at a distance from the events that unfold. Nonetheless, Glory's story gives us the opportunity to see the characters from a new vantage point, a perspective that yields some surprises. Seen through her eyes, instead of Ames's, Jack appears more vulnerable, as much a victim as a perpetrator of his sins. More notably, John Ames seems less kindly and saintly than he does in *Gilead*. Motivated by his affection for his old friend and his distrust of Jack (for he is not blinded by a father's prodigal love), Ames is suspicious, impatient and judgmental. Like a painter, circling her subject in order to see him from all angles, Marilynne Robinson offers us in these two books a three-dimensional depiction of her central character. *Home* enables us to see Ames from the outside, with all his flaws and limitations, providing a complement and corrective to the book-long soliloquy that is *Gilead*.

Lila's Pilgrimage

Marilynne Robinson's most recent novel, *Lila*, offers a masterful conclusion to the Gilead trilogy. Combining the perspectives of *Gilead* and *Home*—the intimacy of a first-person narrator with the enlarged vision accorded by a third-person narrator—the book tells the story of Ames's wife, a hushful woman who, up until now, has seemed entirely without a history. And what a history she has had. Lila's first memory is of being rescued one cold, rainy night from a cabin stoop, having been set outside as a punishment by the shadowy adults who mind her. (Whether Lila was being raised by her parents is never clear.) Doll, the woman who kidnaps her, removes the 4-year-old from her abusive household and begins an itinerant life with the child, moving from place to place, sleeping outdoors, getting work when and where they can, trying to keep body and soul together. Though theirs is a life of material poverty, it is rich in love. For a while they fall in with a community of itinerants, headed by a man named Doane, who insists, "We ain't tramps, we ain't Gypsies, we ain't wild Indians." "What are we then?" asks young Lila. "We're just folks," Doll answers. In contrast to the settled people of Gilead, Lila's life has been rootless and nomadic. Wandering through the dust-bowl desert of America, she is on a pilgrimage with no destination.

When Lila arrives, by accident, in Gilead, she finds the home she never knew she wanted. Traveling alone, having lost Doll along the journey, she wanders into John Ames's church one day, and when he sees her face—her astonishing, mystical, human face—he falls in thunderstruck love. But

this is no storybook romance: though still in her mid-30s, Lila is neither youthful nor beautiful. Her hard life has taken its toll. It is difficult to say why Ames falls in love with her, or why she returns the old man's affection—there is some mystery in this. Perhaps the best explanation is offered by Ames in *Gilead*: "When she first came to church she would sit in the corner at the back of the sanctuary, and still I would feel as if she were the only real listener." Lila is unchurched, a person who knows nothing of religion, who has never even heard the vocabulary Christians take for granted ("immortal soul," "baptism," "grace"), and she arrives at Ames's church hungry for the language and saving vision he has to offer.

Lila is set in the present, telling the story of the unlikely relationship that develops between the two, but embedded in her present is her past—involuntary flashbacks to events that are revelatory, disturbing and, at times, violent. The novel proceeds by degrees, through incremental revelations, peeling back the protective layers that have kept Lila from knowing who she is. Ames proves to be the instrument of her self-knowledge, leading her, gently, toward living an examined life. Yet Lila keeps all these memories to herself, pondering them in her heart. Ames doesn't get to hear the details that he craves—only we do. Thus, we become Lila's intimates, her consciousness an open book to us, even as it awakens to itself.

Lila is a triumph, in part, because it succeeds in the same way *Gilead* does. Embedded in the third-person narrative is a distinctive voice, an idiom that is genuine, compelling and entirely her own. The author mingles Lila's interior monologue with dialogue—often between herself and Ames—enabling us to hear Lila's voice and also to take the measure of the distance separating her from the genteel world of Gilead and her bookish, godly husband. We are constantly reminded, through these dueling perspectives, that Lila is in Gilead but not of it. Her bald speech, vaguely Southern accent and unconventional grammar mark her as not belonging. Fiercely individualistic, at home in the natural world (she would rather bathe in a river than in a bathtub), Lila is not quite tame, a descendent of other powerfully evoked outsiders in American literature, including Mark Twain's Huck Finn and Toni Morrison's Sethe, who chafe against the strictures of society. Like Nathaniel Hawthorne's iconic Hester Prynne, she is a woman with a past who is unashamed of having lived outside the bounds of proper feminine behavior. Finding herself mired in one place for an extended period of time, ensconced in the reverend's comfortable house, Lila feels trapped and has to suppress the urge towards flight, for it is the oldest thing she knows.

In many ways, Lila's story is one of accepting the unexpected grace that has been offered her—a husband, a child, a home—and learning how to live within its constraints. At least for a while. For as in *Gilead*, we are constantly aware of Ames's mortality, of his imminent departure from this earth, and of the fact that Lila and her child will be left without a house or an income. For better or for worse, Lila will likely leave Gilead behind, as we all must, eventually—even its creator.

With *Lila*, Marilynne Robinson completes her mythic cycle, this intimate portrait of an imaginary town filled with very real people. Like her forebears James Joyce, William Faulkner and William Kennedy, among others, Robinson has created a world unto itself, as cleanly evoked as Dublin, Yoknapatawpha County or Albany; only in Robinson's case, her alternate universe is one of the blessed places of the earth. At the end of his letter to his son, Ames says of Gilead, "It seems rather Christlike to be as unadorned as this place is, as little regarded.... I love this town. I think sometimes of going into the ground here as a last wild gesture of love—I too will smolder away the time until the great and general incandescence."

Ames bequeaths his body to the forsaken little prairie town that has given him life. But there is nothing new in this—it is what people do all the time. What Marilynne Robinson enables us to see is how beautiful, how large and how generous this gesture is—for every place is blessed, in her profoundly Christian vision. All lives "can shine like transfiguration," she assures us, if only we bring to them "a little willingness to see."

Confirmation Bias

Rethinking the sequence of the sacraments

BY MICHAEL H. MARCHAL

What is the appropriate age for Catholic children baptized in infancy to celebrate confirmation? It might seem a relatively minor issue. Yet I believe the great efforts the U.S. Catholic Church has put into the new evangelization, its mission to "invite each Catholic to renew their relationship with Jesus Christ and his church," are unlikely to produce the desired fruit unless we have an open discussion about this question.

Data from a report in 2008 by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate on sacramental practice reveals that between the Second Vatican Council and post-Vatican II generations there was a 12 percent drop (to 72 percent from 91 percent) in the number of self-identified Catholics who were confirmed. In the millennial generation the dropoff has been even greater; nearly one-third of young Catholics have not been confirmed—and in a significant number of instances, my experience suggests, they have explicitly chosen not to be.

MICHAEL H. MARCHAL *recently retired from teaching. His two latest books on the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults are the award-winning* The Spirit at Work *and* Toward the Table.

The sequence of sacraments familiar to many brought up in the Catholic faith—baptism, Eucharist, confirmation—dates back to the early 20th century and has been in a state of flux since the Second Vatican Council. The reforms of the council introduced the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, which stated that child converts who have reached the age of discretion (7 years) are to be confirmed in the same way as adults in the threefold celebration of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter vigil. Further, as the presence of Hispanic Catholics in the United States grew, more pastors and religious educators came into contact with children from Latin America who had been confirmed by a priest at baptism.

The question of the appropriate age for celebrating confirmation has been a source of serious discussion and disagreement among American Catholic religious educators and liturgists since the early 1980s. Some want to follow the universal canonical norm and administer the sacrament before first Communion, an approach that has been implemented in some dioceses for years.

Yet there are many others who advocate raising the age of celebration to 16, 18 or even older because they wish to make the renewal of baptismal vows by those being confirmed into

A HOLY FATHER'S BLESSING. Pope Francis administers confirmation during Mass at the Parish of San Cirillo Alessandrino in Rome on Dec. 1.

CNS PHOTO/PAUL HARING

a more authentic commitment. I believe that this well-intentioned approach to the sacrament has been a major contributing factor in the decision by many Catholic teenagers to postpone confirmation because they do not feel ready to make that sort of commitment.

This debate must be resolved if our efforts to evangelize the next generation of Catholics are to succeed. The discussion has been clouded for some time by cultural inertia; a genuine fear on the part of religious educators that the church will lose teens if we do not celebrate confirmation with them; and the desire of bishops to stay connected to what is going on in the parishes. These are serious concerns, and the meaning that a religious ritual like confirmation has for us is only partially shaped by theology and catechesis. Peoples' cultural background, family history and personal experience are crucial information when we enter into discussion about any topic as complicated as this one.

How can confirmation complete a process whose goal is the Eucharist if the participants have been fully sharing in that sacrament for years?

The Faith of My Family

I have become a committed advocate of two simultaneous changes. First, we need to move confirmation back to age 7, before first Eucharist—its original position. Second, we need to create an alternative, nonsacramental rite for personal reaffirmation of baptismal vows later in life. I would like to make clear from the outset where I personally am coming from—and therefore where I believe that we should go.

My religious roots lie in the German and French Catholicism brought to the American Midwest by the immigrants of the 19th century. The culture and religion that they brought with them to the New World grew and flourished but kept in touch with its roots. Most of my ancestors brought with them a deeply liturgical piety. They worshipped with their bodies. To pray at Mass was not to kneel and say a rosary; it was to stand and sing to organ accompaniment in a room filled with light, color and fragrance. The stages of my adolescence were marked by sacramental celebrations; the cycle of family baptisms, first Communions, weddings and funerals taught me the flow of life.

I especially remember my own first Communion. Although there never has been an official Roman Catholic service for the occasion, there was a traditional ritual used throughout the region. Boys and girls were both dressed in white, and we carried our baptismal candles. Twice we entered the sanctuary (all in neat rows, of course)—first after the sermon to renew our baptismal promises and again to receive Communion not at the rail but on the top step of the altar. (The preparatory catechesis had been just as baptismal in its orientation.)

Both ritual entries into the sanctuary were significant to me—and interconnected. Renewing baptismal promises while clothed in and carrying baptismal symbols helped me to appropriate inwardly a new level of relationship with Jesus, a transformation reinforced by sharing his body. I suspect my ancestors brought this ritual with them from Europe; the family photos of my aunts and uncles clothed in white and carrying their candles show that its observance was at least two generations old. My first Communion taught me that a conscious recommitment to baptismal faith in the context of a community can be a significant experience. Even if we are aware that the Eucharist is the goal of baptism and the repeatable sacrament of initiation, "reliving" and reaffirming baptism can make the experience of the Eucharist stronger.

On the other hand, confirmation as a teen was much less significant for me. Although meeting my first bishop was cool, the ritual by comparison was dull and its purpose unfocused and vague. There are only two memories that I have of the occasion.

First, I was confirming nothing; rather, the bishop was confirming me. As the Latin formula that he recited clearly said, "I confirm you with the chrism of salvation…." Second, the tap on the cheek was the only indication of what I was being confirmed for. Historically the gesture was imported into the rite from the ritual for blessing a knight; I was catechized to see it as the sign that I was being strengthened to face the challenges that I would encounter as I stood on the brink of maturity. Confirmation was thus framed in terms of my physical, psychological and moral development and had no connection to my baptism or my sharing in the Eucharist.

I later learned that mine was only the second generation to follow this overall pattern for celebrating the sacraments of initiation. My grandparents' generation had still known the classic medieval and Tridentine pattern of infant baptism, confirmation sometime between the ages of 7 and 12 and first Communion some years later. Although not the oldest Western tradition, which knew a unified threefold rite even for infants, this centuries-old pattern of separated sacramental celebrations reaching their climax in a full share in the Eucharist did have a power to it because it linked moments of personal and social maturing with rituals intended to facilitate and celebrate a parallel faith development.

That link seems in general to have worked in a world where only a minority of children even finished grade school. My

paternal grandmother's life was probably typical: baptism in infancy, confirmation at age 12, first Communion at 14, marriage a year later and motherhood soon after that. This pattern would not have been any different if my family had been Lutheran or Episcopalian rather than Roman Catholic. All three churches had inherited the same medieval pattern that connected sharing in Communion not primarily with baptism but with later, usually adolescent confirmation.

Graduating From Religion

But then things started to change for everyone. Pope Pius X broke the pattern in 1905 by moving the age of first Communion back to 7—leaving confirmation at the end of a process. This change is the probable explanation of why some people, including those who catechized me, have called confirmation the "completion" of initiation. But how can confirmation complete a process whose goal is the Eucharist if the participants have been fully sharing in that sacrament for years?

With the introduction of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults came the reunification of the threefold celebration not only for adults but also for older children. The updated 1983 *Code of Canon Law* (No. 890) and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Nos. 1306-8) maintained the default time for confirmation at age 7, unless a national conference agrees on a different age. (The catechism even quotes Aquinas: "Age of body does not determine age of soul.")

The American bishops, however, have been unable to agree on a common alternative, leaving confirmation for those Catholics baptized in infancy in the same ambiguous status that I experienced, though now celebrated with more baptismal references. Yet at least 10 American dioceses around the country have implemented the canonical option and moved the celebration of confirmation back to age 7, reuniting it with first Communion.

Given my personal experience, I am in favor of that move. First, I believe my first Communion would have been more spiritually empowering if I had been confirmed at that same time—and the more passive experience of being confirmed would have made sense even at that age as the welcoming transition to the table. I was ready to "receive the gift," not just of the Eucharist but of the Holy Spirit.

Second, since I do not live in a diocese that has restored the traditional sequence, every two or three years my somewhat smaller parish must try to explain to a group of adolescents what their upcoming confirmation is all about. The temptation, supported by so many of the preparation programs available from Catholic publishers, is to transform the celebration of the sacrament into the "graduation" from a catechetical program—often including mandatory service hours—based upon their greater maturity. Which raises the question: Are we creating the impression that grace must be earned? That is not the traditional Catholic approach to the sacrament that celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Ritual Reaffirmation

Further complicating this problematic approach is the very different social milieu in which Americans now live. In my grandmother's day, adolescence was very much about socialization into the structures of society. Today, especially for those whose education continues not just through high school but into college and beyond, adolescence and young adulthood are much more about differentiation from society and finding one's own path in life. Young people today have many groups and clubs at their disposal, and so I suspect that taking a catechetical and mature-commitment approach to confirmation seems to legitimately scare many adolescents away and to pretty much guarantee that a significant segment those being confirmed will regard the ceremony as their liberation from religious education classes and even religious practice while they continue to explore their other options.

That said, I have personally known young people for whom adolescent confirmation really was a transformative experience and 20-somethings who had somehow "missed it" in adolescence for whom celebrating confirmation was a powerful and freely chosen event. Grace happens when it happens; God is still in control, and people respond to the call to conversion on their own timetable. But the question remains: should confirmation be the default ritual for people

who experience spiritual growth and transformation in adolescence and beyond?

After all, grace builds on nature, and becoming a mature Christian is a growth process with many phases. That is why I have come to see the importance and psychological good sense for the Catholic Church to develop some nonsacramental ritual to celebrate and reaffirm our Christian initiation later in life. The other mainline Christian churches have in general taken just that approach. During their own liturgical reform during the 1960s and '70s, the Episcopalians, Anglicans and some Lutherans, Methodists and Presbyterians in this country and in Canada disconnected Communion from confirmation and moved it back to infancy—just as the Eastern churches have always done.

Yet they kept their "nonsacramental" service named confirmation. The purpose of this "pastoral office" is perhaps most clearly defined in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church:

> In the course of their Christian development, those baptized at an early age are expected, when they are ready and have been duly prepared, to make a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism and to receive the laying on of hands by the bishop.

It is important to notice that this pastoral office is repeatable: confirmation is simply the name given to the first time that an individual celebrates such a personal, public reaffirmation. The subsequent celebrations in that person's lifetime are simply called reaffirmations.

This approach respects the most traditional understanding of the sequence of the initiation sacraments, whose high point is the Eucharist, the sacrament of initiation that is repeated every Sunday. Yet it also respects the reality of Christian development and the need to ritually mark significant life stages.

More important, in my view, it respects personal freedom. It allows for an adolescent program of catechetical and psychological development (and service hours) ending in a public ritual of commitment. Yet if a young person does not feel ready to make that sort of commitment, there will be more chances to do so later. Moreover, it gives anyone the opportunity to mark publicly the further stages of their development as well. It is a truly open-ended approach.

What sort of catechesis should be developed for those who desire to make a public reaffirmation? What shape should such a ritual of reaffirmation take? These are good questions that need to be addressed in any future discussion, since the answers would seriously influence the efforts of the new evangelization. The first step, though, is to rethink seriously the role that confirmation can play in the faith development of our young people. A

Call Him a Saint?

The news, though groundbreaking, went largely unnoticed. The Vatican has given its clearance to open the cause on May 3 for the canonization of Dom Hélder Câmara, the "bishop of the poor" and one of the most influential Latin American church leaders of the 20th century.

Cardinal Angelo Amato, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, transmitted the Vatican's *nihil obstat* (clearance) to Archbishop Antonio Fernando Saburido, O.S.B., of Olinda and Recife, Brazil, the diocese where Dom Hélder was archbishop from 1964 to 1985 and where he died in 1999.

The formal request to open the cause was submitted to the Vatican in May 2014 by Archbishop Saburido with the unanimous support of the Brazilian Bishops' Conference, who had already taken that stance in 2009, the centenary of Dom Hélder's birth. He cited "the pastoral work of 'the bishop of the poor'" and his untiring activity in favor of human dignity, social justice, peace and the rights of those suffering from poverty and misery.

Born in Fortaleza on Feb. 7, 1909, one of 13 children, Hélder Câmara was ordained a priest in 1931 and quickly became involved with the plight of the poor, social justice and the question of education in Brazil's northeast. He soon saw the need for the country's bishops to be united and work together in a national conference and personally presented the case for this to Msgr. Giovanni Battista Montini at the Vatican's Secretariat of State in December 1950. Montini liked Dom Hélder's simple, direct style and concern for the poor and gave his approval. The two became friends.

The Brazilian Bishops' Conference was set up in 1952, and Dom Hélder became its first general secretary (1952–64). That same year Pius XII appointed him auxiliary bishop of Rio de Janeiro. Soon other bishops' conferences were set up across Latin America, and in 1955 the Council of Latin American Bishops' Conferences (CELAM) was established (again with Montini's approval), the first of its kind in the world.

Dom Hélder attended all four sessions of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and played a significant role. He promoted the concept of collegiality, strongly advocated a "church for the poor" and was influential in drafting the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World."

> Dom Hélder strongly advocated a 'church for the poor.'

Montini was elected pope (as Paul VI) in June 1963, and nine months later he appointed Dom Hélder as archbishop of Olinda and Recife, in Brazil's poverty-stricken northeast. That same year the military took power and ruled the country until 1985, the year he resigned. The joyful, humble, diminutive and fearless pastor lived in that diocese for the rest of his life in simplicity and poverty, showing great love for the poor, who considered him their brother.

From there, he challenged Brazil's military rulers for their denial of civil liberties and ill-treatment of political prisoners. He stood up for democracy despite threats to his life and at the expense of an ecclesiastical career. The military ostracized and denounced him as "the red bishop," and in this context he famously remarked: "When I feed the poor they call me a saint. When I ask why so many people are poor they call me a Communist." He became a nonperson in Brazil; the media could not even mention his name.

Renowned at home and abroad for his defense of the poor, advocacy for nonviolence and promotion of human rights and development, he participated in the general assemblies of CELAM at Rio de Janeiro (1955), Medellín (1968), Puebla (1979) and Santo Domingo (1992). Responding to invitations, he traveled the world promoting justice, peace, nonviolence and a new economic order. A great communicator, author of 22 books, he inspired many to work for these causes.

In 1985, on reaching the age of 75, he handed in his resignation. John Paul II quickly replaced him with a very "conservative" bishop, Dom José Cardoso Sobrinho, who set about undoing his predecessor's work. Dom Hélder watched, suffered, but remained silent.

He died on Aug. 27, 1999, but his memory lives on. Pope Francis remembers him; they have much in common. Addressing the Brazilian bishops in Rio de Janeiro in July 2013, Francis recalled "all those names and faces which have indelibly marked the journey of the church in Brazil" and listed Dom Hélder among them. That was significant.

GERARD O'CONNELL

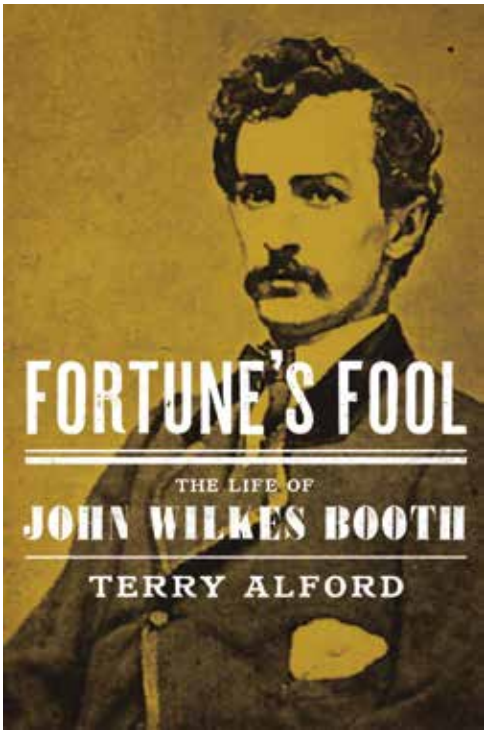
GERARD O'CONNELL *is* ***America****'s Rome correspondent.* ***America****'s Vatican coverage is sponsored in part by the Jesuit communities of the United States. Twitter: @gerryorome.*

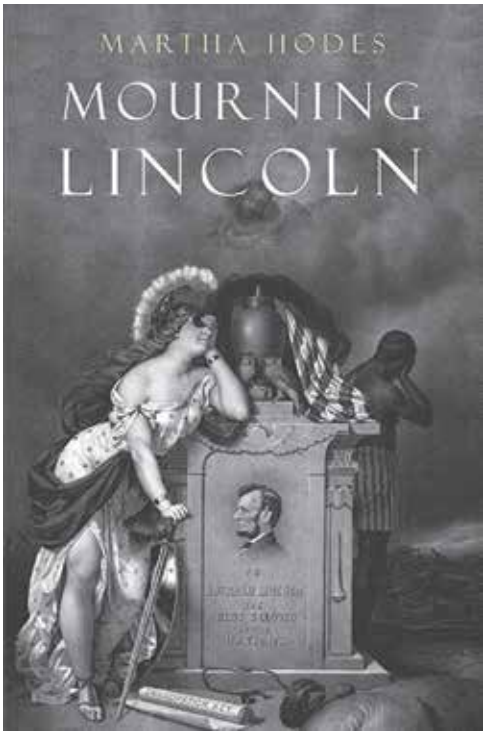
SPRING BOOKS | JOHN MATTESON

A MORTAL WOUND

FORTUNE'S FOOL
The Life of John Wilkes Booth
By Terry Alford
Oxford University Press. 464p $29.95

MOURNING LINCOLN
By Martha Hodes
Yale University Press. 408p $30





With the coming of April 2015, the sesquicentennial of the Civil War draws to a close, giving ample cause to look back on one of the most cataclysmic months in the nation's history. It is now hard to imagine the surge of contrasting emotions that Americans felt, first on April 9, 1865, when General Lee surrendered at Appomattox, and then only six days later, when the news came that President Lincoln had been murdered at Ford's Theater. Two admirably researched books strive, in very different ways, to bring us closer to the latter moment: *Fortune's Fool: The Life of John Wilkes Booth*, by Terry Alford; and *Mourning Lincoln*, by Martha Hodes. How one judges their relative success depends greatly on what one deems to be the goals and purposes of historical writing.

John Wilkes Booth, the murderer of Abraham Lincoln, died at the age of 26. Terry Alford, the assassin's latest biographer, researched his subject for approximately as long. *Fortune's Fool* is the result of his more than a quarter century of effort, and it epitomizes both the blessings and the curses that are likely to arise when an author spends so much time immersed in a single subject. Both Alford's dedication and his fine research are made the more remarkable by the fact that he teaches at a community college. Perhaps only those who have toiled at such a position can fully appreciate the impediments that Alford almost certainly confronted as he strove to write his biography. His perseverance is to be admired.

Admirable as well are the many things that *Fortune's Fool* does right. In telling a story like Booth's, in which so much of the significance is compressed into the final weeks, one risks having the entire narrative dominated by its climactic episodes. Alford avoids the trap. While one is not surprised to find Booth's plotting against Lincoln taking up approximately half the volume, one still has the satisfied sense of having been shown a full, if foreshortened, life. The assassin's youth is rendered in fascinating detail, and Alford's treatment of life in the mid-19-century theater is a treat. To his further credit, Alford does not present the entire life as a prologue to a foreordained conclusion. Booth had no designs to kidnap Lincoln until the late summer of 1864 and no clear, focused intent to kill him until March 1865. Resisting the temptation to foreshadow, Alford lets his subject's intentions evolve as they evidently did: gradually pursuing their own peculiar logic, with few alarm bells or signposts.

The less happy outcome of Alford's long pursuit of Booth is that he has fallen victim to his subject's fateful, manipulative charisma. In researching his book, Alford has determined, not too surprisingly, that his subject was not a thoroughly damnable character all the time. Booth, we discover, was fond of children (he once warmly greeted Tad Lincoln backstage) and won many loyal friends with his magnetic charm. Fair enough, but Alford takes a further perilous step. In his evident admiration of the actor, Alford

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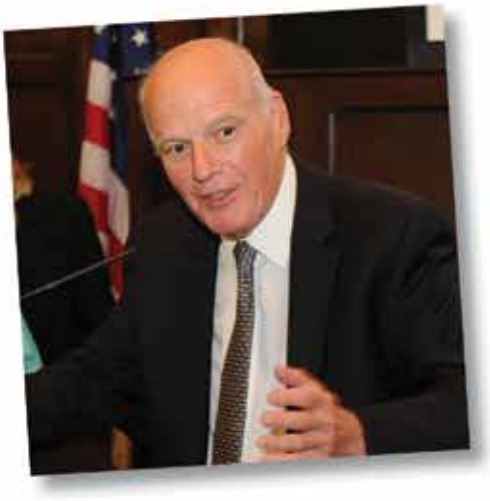

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‘There Fell a Great Star’

Their shadows flickered and stretched to the west.
The future fixed its lidless eye
On concrete switchgrass, furrows of asphalt.
Telescopes, searchlights aimed on high
Shot the flare of the mind at darkness.
We stood on the moon but failed to scry
The star called wormwood.

The signal changed, but the curbs stayed full
Though seconds before the world was spinning.
Why shouldn’t a light announce the end
When light alone pronounced the beginning?
Men in nooses of patterned satin
Welcomed this end to wanting and winning,
This star called wormwood.

The women who stood on pencil heels,
The cubicle drones of the moneycomb
Were tired of sugar, tired of gold.
They looked to the blaze as a blessed home.
This star was a mercy, this stella maris
That sheltered them in its fusion dome,
This star called wormwood.

We raise our arms against the rain
And find the lines on our palms erased.
The dew is puddle-gray and bitter,
But we learn to love the aftertaste
Here where loosestrife meadows the square
And flash-blind featherless sparrows praise
The star called wormwood.

AMIT MAJMUDAR

Amit Majmudar, *a diagnostic nuclear radiologist, lives in Columbus, Ohio. His poetry and prose have appeared in The New Yorker, The Atlantic Monthly and The Best American Poetry 1988-2012.*

struggles to gainsay criticisms of Booth that seem beyond serious argument. The stretches become too great, and, instead of vindicating Booth, Alford’s portrait crumbles into incoherence. Alford submits, for instance, that Booth “was not unduly egotistical.” He later asserts, however, that Booth’s murder of Lincoln resulted in part from “a longing for renown.” Alford is staunch in his surprising claim that “whatever his faults, [Booth] was no coward.” A definition of cowardice that excludes a man who shoots a defenseless victim in the back of the head, in the presence of the latter’s wife, must be a very careful one. But Alford’s specific resistance to the idea of Booth as coward concerns his subject’s decision not to join the Confederate army, whose objectives he passionately supported. Alford elaborately explains that Booth eschewed military service so as not to deprive his emotionally fragile mother of his care and company. Three pages later, though, Booth is off to St. Louis for an acting engagement, and Mrs. Booth does not follow.

Admittedly, human nature is inconsistent, and any worthy biographer must deal with contradictions. But biography at its best synthesizes those contradictions into believable, albeit complex portraits. Alford’s Booth finally does not cohere. Indeed, after hearing Alford’s expatiations on Booth’s general kindness, fun-loving nature and “heroic impulses,” one nearly forgets that the charming fellow drank prodigiously, consorted with teenage prostitutes and, oh yes, killed the president.

The last three words of Alford’s book are “embraced and forgiven.” Many have written on Booth. Alford is the first to suggest that he needs a hug. *Fortune’s Fool* shows eloquently that history is more than the recovery of facts. Good history understands the impact of events as they were felt at the time. To urge forgiveness for John Wilkes Booth is not to engage in history but to demand a willful forgetting of history and of the harm and horror created by an unrepentant criminal. For all its superb research, *Fortune’s Fool* is finally as misguided and creepy as its subject.

To understand what Lincoln’s murder meant to those living at the time, one need go no farther than Martha Hodes’s superb *Mourning Lincoln*. Interestingly, *Mourning Lincoln* is in a sense a 9/11 book. Hodes, a New York University professor who saw the second plane hit the towers, was prompted by that tragedy’s aftermath to wonder how Americans reacted to another communally experienced moment of dread. Looking beyond the daily papers, Hodes consulted thousands of letters and diaries to unearth a dazzling array of responses—from the shock of proper New Englanders to the glee of a Florida lawyer who blamed “Lincon,” as he intentionally misspelled the name, for his personal impoverishment and for the death

of his beloved slaveholding culture.

A wiser book than *Fortune's Fool*, Hodes's volume is also immeasurably sadder. It explores not only the devastating grief that swept over Lincoln's supporters but also the fear of reprisal among Southerners still reeling from Lee's surrender—Southerners who decked their homes in mourning not from sorrow but from fear lest they be seen as disloyal to the president's memory. In Hodes's account, one also feels vividly the fearful uncertainty of newly freed blacks. Would the death of Father Abraham signal a return to slavery? One sees with equal clarity the devastation of the southern landscape as diarists across the defeated Confederacy survey their ruined lives and blankly try to envision a future under Reconstruction.

An elegant feature of *Mourning Lincoln*'s structure is Hodes's inclusion of short intercalary vignettes between chapters, treating subjects as varied as children's responses, the taking of relics of the assassination and diarists' thoughts about the woman then universally known as "poor Mrs. Lincoln." Perhaps the finest touch of Hodes's volume is its awareness of how life went on in the midst of sorrow. Although some felt as if the assassin's bullet had stopped time, others knew their daily work simply must continue. One Massachusetts diarist wrote, "Funeral of president Lincoln—put out fire in the woods," and never mentioned the president again.

JOHN MATTESON, *an English professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, is the author of* Margaret Fuller, *which won the Sperber Award for journalism biography.*

JAY P. DOLAN

A CHURCH THAT CAN CHANGE

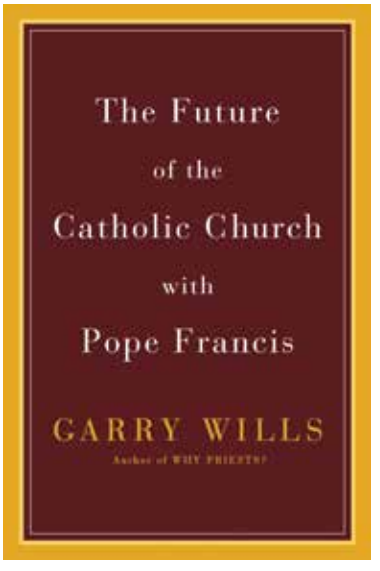
THE FUTURE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH WITH POPE FRANCIS

By Garry Wills
Viking. 288p $27.95

In 1972 the book *Bare Ruined Choirs: Doubt, Prophecy, and Radical Religion* appeared. Written by Garry Wills, it was a provocative analysis of what happened to the church in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. The punch line of the book was Wills's claim that the council "let out the dirty little secret...that the church changes."

More than 40 years later Wills, who still prays the rosary and regularly attends Mass, is at it once again. In this book he wants to trace "how change—far from being the enemy of Catholicism—is its means of respiration, its way of breathing in and breathing out." For him, change is the lifeblood of the church that he describes, taking a cue from Vatican II, as "the people of God."

A prizewinning historian and distinguished Catholic intellectual, Wills has mellowed over time. Though he is still very critical of the institutional church, the issue he examines, change in the church, is not as radical an idea today as it was in 1972. In addition, Wills, a former Jesuit seminarian, has found a soul mate in the Jesuit pope, Francis, whose writings he cites most favorably in this book. This is quite a contrast from his blistering attack on the papacy in his book *Papal Sins: Structures of Deceit*, published in 2000.



Wills traces five major changes that have taken place throughout the history of the church: the coming and going of Latin; monarchy, or what he labels the church-state relationship; anti-Semitism; natural law; and confession.

His argument about the rise and fall of Latin over the course of the church's history is very relevant for those who grew up Catholic in the 1940s and 50s. We were told that Latin was the universal language of the church. It had always been that way; so wherever you travelled, to Rome or Paris, the Mass was celebrated in Latin. This was a special feature of Catholicism that gave the Latin liturgy an aura of sacred mystery. Latin also became the official language of church documents as well as the Bible. But since it was an arcane, unintelligible language, it kept the laity from reading the Bible and church documents. As Wills puts it, "the tyranny of Latin" was broken only in 1943 when Pius XII encouraged biblical scholarship and translation from the Bible's original languages, Hebrew and Greek. Some 20 years later the battle to keep the Mass in Latin ended at Vatican II.

Wills ends his discussion of the coming and going of Latin with an account of Pentecost, when the Gospel was "spoken or heard in various languages, none of which would have been Latin." The lesson of Pentecost, he argues, "is that the word of God should be embodied in many languages and cultures...uniting not by an imposed uniformity, but by a mutually heartening diversity." To reinforce his point, he quotes Pope Francis in "The Joy of the Gospel," where the pope reminds us that the content of the Gospel is transcultural, not limited

to any one language or culture.

The next change he discusses is what he calls the coming and going of monarchy, i.e., the transition from the ideal of a state church to an acceptance of religious pluralism. Comprising more than one-third of the entire book, it is the longest section. It is also the least satisfying, since the issue of change too often disappears during the historical tour that Wills narrates.

He guides the reader through 2,000 years of history, citing Eusebius, Augustine, Ignatius of Antioch, John Henry Newman and John Courtney Murray, S.J., to name just a few of his advocates. The journey begins in the days of early Christianity, when Christians were persecuted. Then, in the fourth century during the reign of Constantine, Christianity "went from a socially suspect religion to a socially favored religion." In the high Middle Ages, during the reign of Boniface VIII, the church, in the person of Pope Boniface, took over the state, leading crusades, inquisitions and interdictions. This political and religious supremacy eventually became formalized in theological language as the thesis and hypothesis theory of church and state in which Catholicism would be the state's established church.

This would be true not just in Italy or Spain but throughout the world. Theologians labeled this ideal state of affairs the thesis. The hypothesis was a situation where the ideal had to be compromised because of an inconvenient situation, at least for a while. This meant that in the United States religious pluralism had to be tolerated as second best until Catholicism could prevail as the state church. As fanciful as that appears, this was the prevailing teaching of the church regarding church-state relations until the Second Vatican Council.

At the council, "the church-state monarchy which had been constructed over centuries" was "discredited with amazing rapidity." After 2,000 years, religious freedom had finally become a trademark of Catholicism. As the council put it, "the human person has a right to religious freedom."

The third change that Wills examines is the rise and fall of anti-Semitism. He traces the roots of anti-Semitism within the Christian tradition from the patristic period to the dark days of the Holocaust. At Vatican II the thinking of the church finally changed, at the insistence of Pope John XXIII. He commissioned the German Jesuit scholar, Cardinal Augustin Bea, "to shepherd the Jewish question through the council's deliberations." The result was the "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions." The heart of the document was the fourth chapter, which rejects the charge of deicide against the Jews. Furthermore, "the church," as the document put it, "deplores the hatred, persecutions and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source." Wills concludes this section of the book by reminding the reader that "the church can live because it can learn, correct, and change under God's direction."

The coming and going of "natural law" is the next issue discussed in the book. This is clearly the most controversial, since it focuses on three issues related to sexuality. The first is contraception and the issue of birth control; second is male superiority, as articulated throughout Catholic history, and the question of women priests; the third is the right to life and abortion. On each of these subjects Wills is at odds with the official teaching of the church. Coming from Wills that is not surprising. Nonetheless, his discussion of these contentious issues is worth reading.

The last change treated is the disappearance of confession. This is the briefest section in the book, since it is a development that has taken place only

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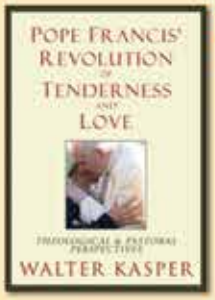

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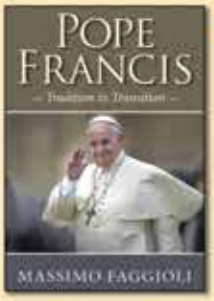

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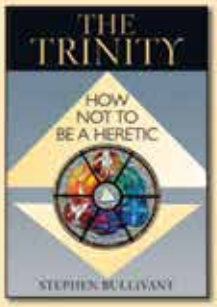

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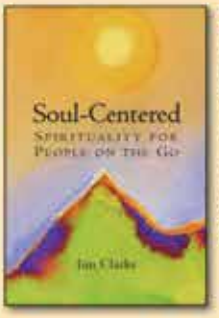

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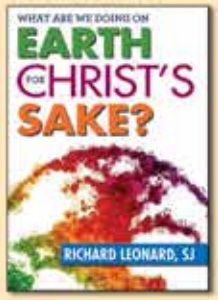

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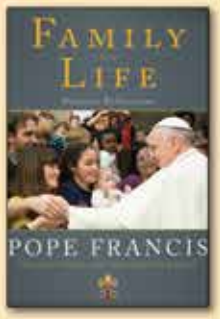

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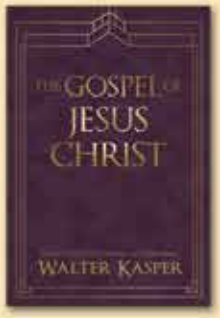

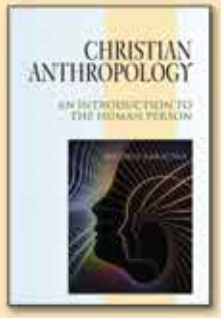

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CELEBRATING 150 YEARS

during the last half century. Once Pope Paul VI in 1973 introduced the idea of absolution from one's sins as a community ritual, with individual confession afterward if one felt a need for it, the conventional way of confession has become increasingly less common. For Wills the people of God have moved on, abandoning the dark box of the confessional.

The book concludes with a brief epilogue that celebrates Pope Francis as a pope who "does not see the church as changeless, as permanent, as predictable, but as a thing of surprises." Wills, a historian, ends by reminding the reader that "welcoming change does not mean dismissing the past, as if it does not exist. It means reinhabiting it with love, a *sensus fidei*, a reliance on the People of God."

JAY P. DOLAN, *professor emeritus at the University of Notre Dame, is the author of* In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension.

DENNIS LEDER

GOD HIDES

WHITE MAN, YELLOW MAN
Two Novellas

By Shusaku Endo
Paulist Press. 160p $14.95

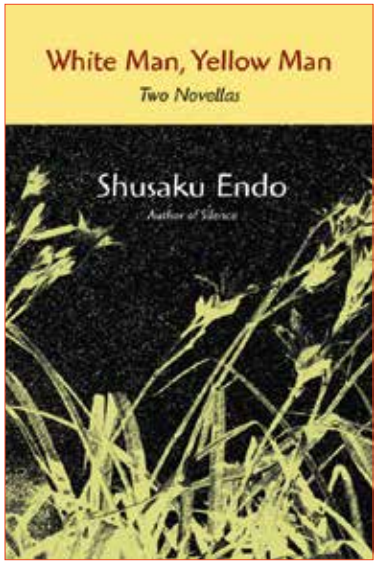
It takes courage to read one's life in psychological, social and spiritual terms. Oftentimes the venture requires metaphor, and metaphor is the substance of art. Style gives form to content, and creative content acts as a catalyst for understanding.

The stories of the Japanese Catholic writer Shusaku Endo are filled with the content of his life. He wrote: "I have forged intimate familial ties with these characters, who are reflections of a portion of myself."

During the first 10 years of his life, Endo lived in Manchuria. When his parents divorced, his mother returned to her native city of Kobe, converted to Roman Catholicism and baptized her young son. Both events marked the young boy as an outsider.

Japanese nationalism during the Second World War and a Catholic morality that smoldered with pre-Vatican II austerity added ambivalence to Endo's Western faith in an Eastern culture. Nevertheless, Christianity and Catholicism become predominant themes in the author's writings.

Illness and hospitalization would be constants in Endo's life, as well as frequent themes in his writing. He spent the war years as a worker in a munitions factory. During that time he began writing for literary journals, and in 1950 he traveled to the University of Lyon to study French Catholic authors.



In 1955, soon after completing his studies in France, Endo was awarded a prize for his short novel *White Man*. Soon after, a second novella appeared with the title *Yellow Man*. Both works are a tangle of moral and spiritual dilemmas. Both include diaries. In both stories we feel the heavy weight of evil counteracted precariously by gratuitous redemption. Readers familiar with Graham Greene and Flannery O'Connor will find in Shusaku Endo a kindred spirit.

White Man is set in occupied Lyon in the year 1942. The nameless narrator, a young Frenchman collaborating with the Nazis, writes to make a record of his actions. "I must live," he writes at the beginning of the diary, "history can never annihilate me." Like a character in a medieval morality play, evil takes on a physical form.

But even at the darkest moments of betrayal and cruelty, the narrator cannot escape the possibility of redemption. After achieving his initial goal of deceit, he comments, "Something like desolation tugged at my heart." He admits experiencing "rage and shame" before the Catholic seminarian whose principles he detests. He is unnerved by the image of Christ in the church where he goes to spy on his adversaries: "It was as if he meant to seduce me, preying on my most vulnerable points." When the seminarian is arrested and tortured by the Gestapo for his part in the French Resistance, the narrator is an accomplice but holds the torturers in contempt and surprises himself by praying for the seminarian's endurance. While the narrator's overall intent is to prove that "evil is eternal" and to unmask the artifices of those "intoxicated with belief" and martyrdom, the end result is a "profound fatigue" and "a storm over a gray sea of sorrow."

Yellow Man is told through a letter written to a French missionary in a Japanese prison camp during the Second World War. Chiba-san, a Japanese student, writes to his former mentor in the Catholic faith, Father Breau, and includes the diary of the recently deceased Pierre Durand. Mr. Durand was also a French missionary until a liaison with a Japanese woman resulted in his expulsion from the church.

The student writes of his aban-

donment of a white, foreign God. He prefers a pagan tranquility in place of Catholicism's internal battles with sin and death. Mr. Durand, on the other hand, can never escape the God from whom he expects eternal damnation. Fear prompts him to betray Father Breau, his only friend and source of solace. Meanwhile, the student, with incipient signs of tuberculosis, opts for indifference as he betrays the fiancée of his childhood friend and leaves unspoken a word of warning to his former mentor.

When the confessional diary is entrusted to the Japanese student, the broken man, Durand, walks off to certain death "a few seconds before the bombs fell."

These are hard stories from which to extract a glimmer of redemption, but as Shusaku Endo once wrote, "Christ did not die for the good and beautiful."

DENNIS LEDER, S.J., *a sculptor, is director of the Central American Institute of Spirituality in Guatemala.*

MARK J. DAVIS

A FORGOTTEN FAILURE?

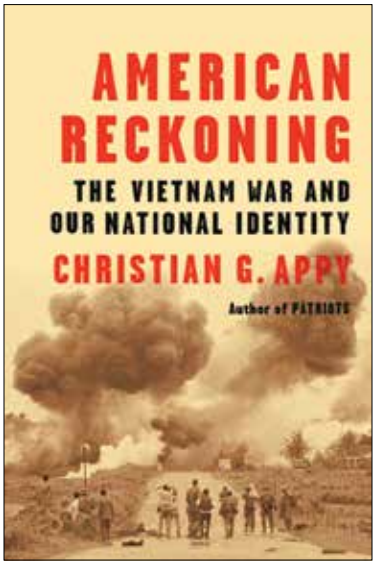
AMERICAN RECKONING
The Vietnam War and Our National Identity

By Christian G. Appy
Viking. 416p $28.95

Fifty years after President Lyndon Johnson ordered a massive escalation of American forces in Vietnam, U.S. policymakers continue to be haunted by the ghosts of that disastrous intervention. Like the French Bourbon kings, who learned nothing and forgot nothing, successive American presidents have repeated the same mistakes that largely destroyed that small rural country and severely damaged the United States for generations.

The culprit, according to Christian Appy, a professor of history at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, is our nation's refusal to account honestly for its role in the world that the Vietnam War awakened. In *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity*, Appy demolishes the myth of American exceptionalism, the idea that American military force is used only with the best intentions for the greatest good. In showing "a profound disconnect" between the ideals of the public and "the reality of the American war machine," Appy has written a compulsively readable and highly original account of the influence of Vietnam on Americans' view of themselves and their foreign policy over the last 50 years.

The first half of the book is a brisk history of the war that highlights the national mood and the colossal errors of the presidents responsible for Indochina policy. Inspired by an intense religious reawakening after World War II, Americans in the 1950s believed their country was a force for good in the world whose ideals could be fulfilled by overseas humanitarian commitments secured by military power. These ideals were tested in Vietnam, where an anti-colonial insurgency ousted the French in 1954 despite massive U.S. military aid. Although the Geneva accords required free elections, President Eisenhower refused to allow them because, as he admitted in his memoirs, Ho Chi Minh would have easily won. Instead, the United States installed an unpopular puppet government and spread false rumors of Communist atrocities to encourage Catholic migration to the south. By the 1960s, in the face of a relentless American bombing campaign in the south that doubled the tonnage the United States dropped in World War II, one-third of the population of South Vietnam fled their rural homes to the cities or were forcibly relocated into armed camps. This strategy proved deeply unpopular and ineffective because, as Appy explains, "military power could not persuade; it could only destroy." Or as one U.S. military official infamously remarked: "It became necessary to destroy the town in order to save it."



Although President Johnson's white and male Ivy-league advisers never really believed they could win the war, they wanted to avoid being perceived as a "paper tiger." It was essential to show "steely resolve" to forestall the inevitable defeat. Relying on the so-called domino theory, U.S. policymakers believed defeat in Vietnam would lead to the Communist conquest of Southeast Asia. Johnson recalled that Republicans blamed President Truman for the loss of China and feared similar repercussions if he lost Vietnam.

By 1968, however, it was apparent to the American public that the war could not be won. After the Tet offensive exposed the vulnerability of South Vietnam's urban areas to attack, Walter Cronkite announced on national television that no end to the war was in sight. The

administration's assurances of success, demonstrated by high enemy body counts, could no longer be believed. The antiwar movement and the news media highlighted the immorality of using napalm, condoning torture and massacring civilians at My Lai and the unfairness of the draft, whereby white middle-class college students received exemptions and the working class and minorities did the fighting. Nation-building was a failure. In other words, writes Appy, the war challenged America's belief in its innate goodness and invincibility.

American Reckoning excels in showing how the public mood drifted to the right after the war ended. President Reagan perpetuated the myth that the U.S. military was forced to fight the war with one hand tied behind its back. The real victims of the war were, according to American conservatives, not the Vietnamese, who lost 3.5 million people, but American soldiers who were still prisoners of war, though few P.O.W.'s were actually being held. Ignoring the suffering of the Vietnamese, the mainstream culture of the 1980s embraced the idea that the war's deepest shame was the nation's failure to honor its veterans. By the end of the decade, through movies like "Top Gun," Americans learned once again to celebrate aggressive masculinity and the military. By contrast, the peace movement was depicted as a group of elitist, cowardly draft-dodgers.

Because the public once again embraced the military, policymakers dispelled the "Vietnam syndrome," their reluctance to use military force. Appy's fast-paced descriptions of American military interventions in Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan and numerous other countries leave the reader somewhat breathless. But his larger point is that the military no longer felt constrained by the memory of Vietnam. In fact, by ending the draft and censoring the media, policymakers discouraged more significant protests against the two Iraq wars, suggesting that they had learned at least some lessons from Vietnam.

Still, eerie parallels between then and now suggest the need for the reckoning Appy demands. The second Bush administration's nation-building and counterinsurgency program in Iraq recalls similar unsuccessful efforts in Vietnam. President Obama's reliance on drone strikes in Yemen and Pakistan and bombing against ISIS ignores the failure of the air campaign in Vietnam. American officials, like former Secretary of State Madeline Albright, continue to insist that "we are the indispensable nation." But as Appy reminds us, this inflated sense of American goodness and failure to learn from the past will only to lead to more disasters.

MARK J. DAVIS *is a retired attorney who lives in Santa Fe, N.M.*

FOUR QUESTIONS BEFORE COLLEGE

Do you bear the scars? Anyone dealing with the anxiety of senior year in high school—either directly as a student or vicariously as a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, teacher or simply as the local letter carrier—knows what I'm referring to. The last year of high school has become a battleground.

Whether it's questions about a student's future schooling and career or simply pushing boundaries at home, senior year is a time of transition for many family relationships. In the words of one youth minister speaking to a colleague recently, "Senior year exists so that parents aren't sad when their kids leave for college." She was only partially joking.

For the better part of a decade, my own experience with this phenomenon has been through researching and writing *The Freshman Survival Guide: Soulful Advice for Studying, Socializing, and Everything In Between*. This book, co-authored with Nora Bradbury-Haehl, is meant to help high school seniors successfully transition into first year college students.

From the beginning of senior year, students are asked two questions until they're exhausted:

Where are you going to school?

What are you going to study?

Now that the pressure surrounding the annual springtime rites of acceptance/rejection has subsided, it's time to ask a different set of questions. These four questions—developed with my co-author—speak to the core meaning of a student's education and development far more than where he or she was accepted. Ideally, it should be done as an exercise between a student and a parent, mentor or teacher, with each answering the questions separately and then sharing the responses. If the situation is delicate, try exchanging the written responses first before discussing them. Honest responses, shared respectfully, are the goal for all concerned.

Question 1: What do you hope happens to you/for you in college?

Both student and mentor should go beyond the obvious (a good education, new friends, etc.) and focus on how each would like the student to grow over the next four years. What qualities as a person do both of you hope the college experience will develop in the student? A broader worldview? Greater self-understanding? A job? This should spark an interesting conversation about values and goals.

Question 2: What are you most afraid of?

It's helpful for the student to name the fear in order to better understand his or her vulnerabilities. It can also be a good reality check. Is this a reasonable fear or just one of those floating anxieties that can be addressed with a little logic and life experience? For the parents/mentors this is a helpful way to communicate real world concerns and their own deepest fears. "One father talked to me about his answer to his son's question 'Why don't you trust me?'" said Nora Bradbury-Haehl. "It's not that I don't trust you" he said. "I'm afraid that I haven't properly prepared you to face the world and the consequences of that can be the worst of all. I could lose you."

Question 3: What are your biggest weaknesses/strengths?

Often students already know their Achilles' heel; this needn't be the time to visit old failures except to talk about the important lessons learned from falling down and getting back up. Talk about the gifts and skills, the successes and strengths that will help them meet the challenges ahead.

Nobody at college knows what is 'normal' for you.

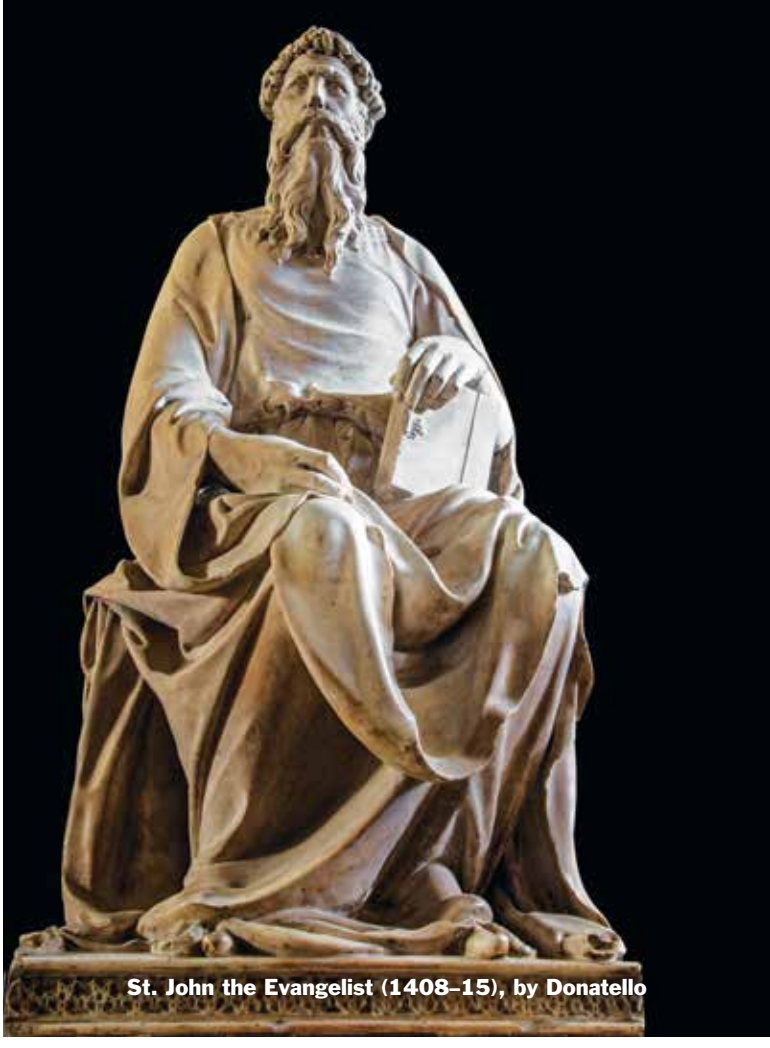
Question 4: Whom will you call with problems/big life questions?

Students will inevitably encounter challenges; some might seem overwhelming. Keep in mind that nobody at college knows what is "normal" for you. Don't go it alone. Whom do you call when you're in trouble or have big life questions? Students should write down the name of the person(s) they will contact. Parents, don't be offended if you're not on the list. Write down names of people you hope your child will contact. Agree that whoever they decide to reach out to should also be in touch with the parent in case of an emergency.

No doubt this exercise might provoke some very difficult conversations during an already turbulent year. I don't suggest it be taken lightly. But given all that has led up to this point, one more battle now is certainly preferable to seeing a student crash and burn as a freshman. Ultimately, so much more is at stake than where they've been accepted.

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

A prophet (possibly Habbakuk), known as the Zuccone (1435–36), by Donatello



St. John the Evangelist (1408–15), by Donatello

PHOTOS ON PAGES 43 AND 44. © OPERA DI SANTA MARIA DEL FIORE / ANTONIO QUATTRONE

ART | LEO J. O'DONOVAN

RENAISSANCE DREAMS

Donatello crosses the Atlantic

"Sculpture from the Age of Donatello" is like a dream from the dawn of the Renaissance now realized at the Museum of Biblical Art in New York City. While the Museo del Duomo in Florence undergoes a renovation that will amount to a recreation, MoBIA is the blessed recipient of 23 loaned pieces from the years 1390 to 1440 that thrill equally through their artistic quality and the insight they yield into how sculpture led the way into the reborn humanism of the age. The installation is magical, the sculpture, as it moves from the style of International Gothic to the threshold of the Renaissance, all but miraculous.

The story of MoBIA's exhibition begins in the 1390s, a century after the construction of the Duomo began and while Giovanni d'Ambrogio was the *capomaestro,* or lead architect. The first two pieces we see are attributed to him, an almost life-size version of the Annunciation that enchants and instructs at the same time. Wearing a small crown and looking quite awed, Gabriel has been modeled on Hellenistic sculpture portraits, while Mary, with a gamin haircut and holding a small prayer book, derives (startlingly) from a Roman model for a boy. (One sees it especially in profile.) Meant for the tympanum of the Porta della Mandorla on the northeast side of the Duomo, the pair were actually placed inside that door on the altar of the Trinity, next to a famous "Double Intercession" in which Mary intercedes with her son and Jesus intercedes with God the Father.

Also created for the Porta della Mandorla are two reliefs meant for the vaulting of the door and two small statues of boy-like prophets. The reliefs, one a muscular Hercules, the other an expressive "Man of Sorrows" figure, are attributed to either Nanni di Banco or Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi, known as Donatello. The two rivals are also credited with the child-like "Profetinos" created for the pinnacles of the door. Nanni's, holding a scroll that identifies him as a prophet, strides confidently forward, while Donatello's, equally adorable, with a quizzical look on his face gathers his robe artfully about him but seems to be tripping on its hem.

And then suddenly, in scale and as-

surance, both artists bound forward with two immense figures for the main portal of the cathedral's facade. Nanni's "St. Luke the Evangelist" looks down to his left from the left side of the door, a noble Roman if ever there was one, with tightly curled hair, his Gospel book in his left hand and a grandly unfolding robe. Donatello's "St. John the Evangelist" is more dynamic, his grave and majestic frowning face turned slightly upward to his right as if seeing a vision. His hands are enormous but would have appeared natural when viewed in their site high in the doorway. The classicizing "St. Luke" is memorable. But the newly interior, mysterious "St. John" is mesmerizing.

They would be reason enough to visit the exhibition. But two still greater works await, both by Donatello. The first is "Abraham and Isaac (the Sacrifice of Isaac)" on which Nanni di Bartolo assisted the master (though not, it is thought, significantly). The scene is familiar, but Donatello's psychological urgency is utterly original. Slightly larger than life-size and clothed in a handsomely rendered garment, Abraham's left hand has pulled back his son's hair to bare the nape of his neck, and he holds his knife in his right hand. But that hand, you notice, has gone slack, and the knife is slipping down the shoulder of the boy. Filippo Brunelleschi had portrayed the scene with an angel staying the hand of Abraham, and Lorenzo Ghiberti had an angel delivering the message not to sacrifice the boy. Donatello shows just father and son in the moment immediately after the father has heard the divine reprieve. The meaning of the scene becomes more universal while remaining a revelatory symbol of the death and resurrection of Christ. (And the beautifully sculpted Isaac, it should also be noted, becomes the first life-size nude of the Renaissance.)

Donatello's still greater masterpiece, ranking with the wooden crucifix in Santa Croce, the "St. George" in Orsanmichele, the "David" and the grand equestrian statue "Gattamelata" in Padua, is the over six-foot tall "Prophet," identified often as Habakkuk and sometimes as Elisha but generally known as "Zuccone," Pumpkin Head, because of his ovoid head. This lean, muscular figure with his bald head tilted slightly to the left, searching eyes and slightly parted lips, his right shoulder drawn down and back, a strong long right arm bare and thrust into his pocket, embodies, Msgr. Timothy Verdon tells us, Florentine prophetic self-identity. (Monsignor Verdon, director of the Florence Cathedral's museum, organized the exhibition together with Daniel M. Zolli.) It embodies as well a perpetually searching, questioning humanity, and it is quite plausible, as Giorgio Vasari wrote in his *Lives of the Artists*, that Donatello, finishing the statue, ordered it to speak to him.

Figures from the Annunciation (late 14th century), attributed to Giovanni d'Ambrogio

Like a slow musical movement following something tumultuous, Luca della Robbia's marble reliefs on three of the liberal arts—rhetoric, dialectic and music—are well sited in the next bay of the show. They do not tax, but they surely delight, introducing us to a master teacher and his well-garbed students, two philosophers in debate (possibly Plato and Aristotle) and an indolent Orpheus (probably) strumming his lyre. Della Robbia had also made graceful reliefs for the Cantoria (or Singing Gallery) of the cathedral, but at MoBIA the works representing the Cantoria are a processional cross for which he provided the corpus and two large Hellenistic heads from Donatello and his workshop that would have looked down from the Cantoria (suggesting perhaps amazement) to the high altar below.

Three stone reliefs by a 15th-century artist known as the Master di Castel di Sangro, though lesser in quality, are nevertheless valuable additions to the exhibition, since they show the influence of Ghiberti, being based on three of his remarkable panels for the Baptistery on the themes of the Adoration of the Magi, the Flagellation and the Crucifixion. And for anyone who loves architectural models, what compares to the models here of the cathedral's dome and its lantern, attributed to Brunelleschi himself?

There is a pathos to this thrilling exhibition celebrating MoBIA's 10th anniversary. It will be on view through June 14, but in that month the museum will close, looking for new quarters. The American Bible Society, which has housed it until now, has sold its building and will move to Philadelphia. But "Sculpture in the Age of Donatello" will never be forgotten by the visitors it is now transporting to a time when a whole new view of humanity was being born. You can be there.

LEO J. O'DONOVAN, S.J., *is president emeritus of Georgetown University.*

CLASSIFIED

Positions

VICE PRESIDENT FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS. The Vice President for External Affairs is a full time employee of SACRED HEART SEMINARY AND SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY (S.H.S.S.T.) responsible for the promotion of the institution, recruitment of seminarians/students and coordination of the admission process of the applicants. This position reports directly to the President-Rector and supervises the director of communications, the assistant to the director of communications and recruitment, and the administrative assistant for admissions. Excellent organization, communication and planning skills are required. A master's degree level in communications or equivalent with experience in Catholic Church ministry, or a master's degree level in theology or equivalent with experience in communications is required. Ability to communicate in Spanish is preferable. Applicant must be a practicing Roman Catholic in good standing. Please submit letter of application and curriculum vitae to Human Resources, Annemarie Probst, at aprobst@shsst.edu or Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology, P.O. Box 429, Hales Corners, WI 53130-0429. Submission deadline is May 15, 2015, although applications will continue to be reviewed until the position is filled.

DIRECTOR OF SACRAMENTAL LIFE AND YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY. Position Summary: CHURCH OF ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA, a Roman Catholic Church administered by the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), is seeking a Director of Sacramental Life and the Young Adult Ministry. Responsibilities include: • Baptism preparation, scheduling and presence at communal baptisms. • Wedding preparation, scheduling and assisting with special circumstances. • Training and coordinating Liturgical Ministers (lectors, Eucharistic ministers, hospitality ministers, altar servers). • Coordinating the Ignatian Young Adult Ministry (socials, Advent/Lent discussion groups, retreats, service opportunities).

A degree from a Jesuit institution and knowledge of/experience with Ignatian spirituality is a plus. Compensation package includes salary and benefits commensurate with experience. Send résumé with related work experience and salary history by May 1 to Ms. Diane Boyle, Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, 980 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10028; boyled@stignatiusloyola.org.

ST. JOHN VIANNEY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, Denver, Colo. Applications are invited for full-time faculty positions in SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, PASTORAL THEOLOGY OR SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY to begin in the fall of 2015. Applicants must have earned a doctoral degree in sacred theology; an ecclesiastical degree is the preference. Applicants must be prepared to teach core and elective courses. Applicants must also be willing to make a profession of the Catholic faith, to take the Oath of Fidelity and work collegially. Verifiable, successful teaching experience of graduate level theology is preferred. Dedication to the intellectual formation of seminarians is required. Rank and salary will be commensurate with other similar institutions and will be specifically negotiated at the time of hiring. S.J.V. does not have tenure.

Applications must be received no later than June 15, 2015. Please submit a letter of application, curriculum vitae, sample publications and three letters of recommendation to: Rev. Andreas Hoeck, Academic Dean, St. John Vianney Theological Seminary, father.hoeck@archden.org, 1300 S. Steele Street, Denver, CO 80210; Ph.: (303) 282 3448. For more information about St. John Vianney Theological Seminary, visit www.sjvdenver.edu.

CAMPUS MINISTRY. St. Thomas More Chapel and Center at Yale University, a vibrant community serving students, faculty, staff and alumni, has an opening for a Catholic priest to serve as an ASSISTANT CHAPLAIN. Expectations include excellence in preaching, a deep spirituality that expresses itself in contemplation and action, the ability to work collaboratively with a large team of 18 and an openness to respond to the needs of the community. Candidates should be conversant with multicultural ministry, passionate about social justice, able to make a dynamic contribution to the continuing expansion of Catholic life on campus and committed to developing future leaders for the church and world. Visit the website at www.stm.yale.edu for a full description of the ministry. Cover letter expressing interest and résumé may be sent to the chaplain at robert.beloin@yale.edu before April 30. Interviews will take place May 4-8.

Sabbatical

FALL SABBATICAL AT SAT. A time for rest, theological renewal and spiritual transformation. The School of Applied Theology has several spaces still available for its Fall Sabbatical Program beginning Aug. 24. Presenters include Michael Fish, Gerald Coleman, Carolyn Foster, Jim Zullo, Joann Heinritz and Michael Crosby. Come to our San Francisco Bay location to relax with God and minister to yourself. For more information go to www.satgtu.org, or contact Celeste Crine, O.S.F., Associate Director, at (510) 652-1651. Scholarships available.

Summer Institute

OBLATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY 2015 Summer Institute: "Is Anyone Ever Really Single? The Call to Authentic Sexuality," with keynote speakers Richard Gaillardetz, Ph.D., Donna Freitas, Ph,D., and Rev. Ron Rolheiser, O.M.I., June 15-17, 2015. Whitley Theological Center, San Antonio, TX 78216. Information: Brenda at (210) 341-1366 ext. 212; www.ost.edu.

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Disciples I Fear

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (B), MAY 3, 2015

Readings: Acts 9:26–31; Ps 22: 26–32; 1 Jn 3:18–24; Jn 15:1–8

"They were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple" (Acts 9:26)

We might not say it outright, although unfortunately many of us do, but we are often not convinced that so-and-so is a true Christian. We might know the person well, by public reputation or just by name, or we might not know the name of the person at all who bothers us, or worse, with their words and behavior. From a friend's Facebook post came this comment about a Catholic politician: "You can't be Catholic if.... And this is one of those if's." Thank goodness we can now determine the state of a person's soul on Facebook.

Yet the 2015 social media response is similar to the one Paul evoked when the Christians "were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple." Now it is true that when Paul was creating fear in the hearts of the Christians of Damascus and Antioch, they had good reasons to fear him. Paul was a persecutor of the church who had officially aided in the killing of Stephen. How could they be sure Paul was not intending to trap them?

There are, frankly, reasons to mistrust certain people because of their behavior and beliefs; and even forgiveness, the heart of the church's mission, does not mean someone should be restored to positions of authority or trust in the church or society. But we do need to ask ourselves how we are judging people within the church, our brothers and sisters, or those outside the church, called to be one family with us, and whether it is the product of true discernment or simply gossip, fear and bias.

In many and various ways, we question the reality or sincerity of our brothers' and sisters' beliefs and actions, sometimes because of actual bad behavior, sometimes because of incomplete information and sometimes just because we do not like that person.

Our judgment, in fact, is often about God's grace and its ability to transform and convert even the most hardened soul. Or we are judging on partial information or just a human propensity to prefer certain people over other people. Some people just bug us for no real reason.

Barnabas defended Paul, reporting that Paul had an encounter with the risen Lord, "who had spoken to him," and that in Damascus "he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus." Paul had been transformed by God's grace from a man willing to kill to impose his view of God, to one willing to be killed in order to evangelize.

Are we allowing that God can work in peoples' hearts and souls? Paul was worthy of trust because he acted out the Gospel "not in word or speech, but in truth and action." We are asked by God to "obey his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us." When we judge our brothers and sisters as not measuring up to the commandments, are we loving them? Do we judge ourselves with the same sharp eye for mistakes that we have for those of others? Are we praying for the conversion of others and ourselves?

There is indeed judgment. There can be no truth or justice without it, but we often set ourselves as the true arbiters of judgment, even if it is in the quietness of our hearts where we whisper condemnation of the "others," however we may categorize and group them. But this is not our personal task. Jesus is "the true vine" and God "is the vinegrower." It is God who "removes every branch that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit." We have no need to condemn, for we do not know how God is pruning others or ourselves, preparing us to flourish in growth and fruitfulness.

God looks at us, whoever we are, at whatever point we are in our lives, however far we have strayed, and asks that we "bear much fruit and become my disciples." Do not fear the other disciples; just attempt to become one more firmly rooted in the soil that nourishes us all, entwined with the vine and pruned by the loving hands of the vine grower.

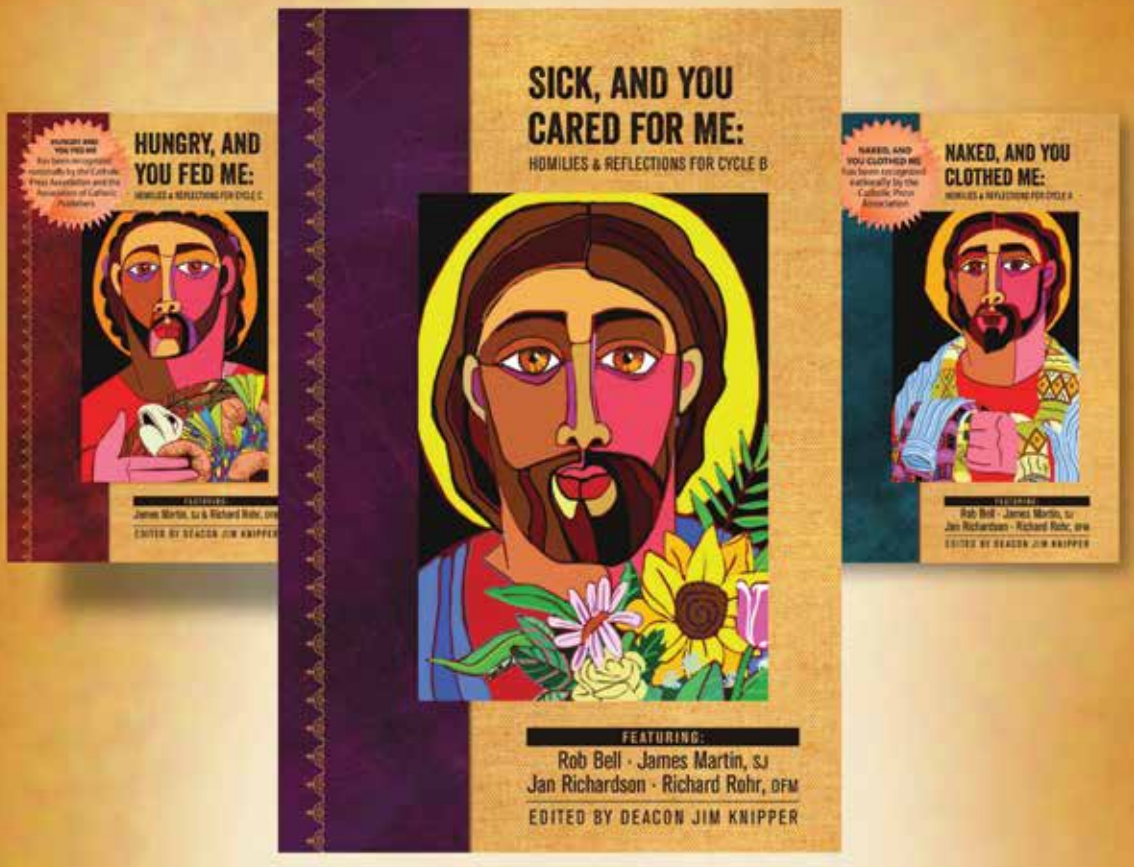
JOHN W. MARTENS

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Think of a disciple whom you fear. How can you learn to love this brother or sister?

ART: TAD A. DUNNE

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



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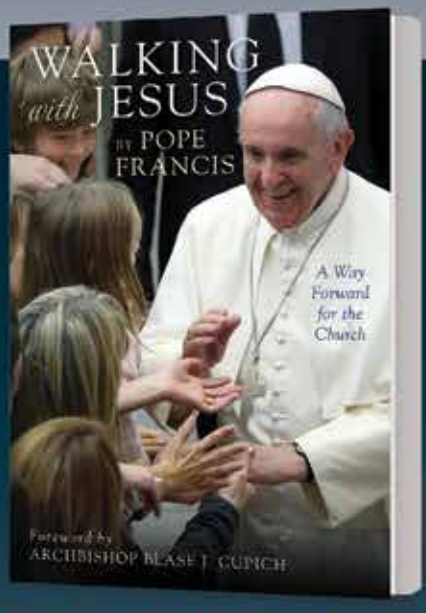

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