America
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The Scottish Question

DAVID STEWART ON THE INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM

THE REIGN OF VLADIMIR PUTIN

VLADIMIR SHLAPENTOKH

OF MANY THINGS

Across the street from the otherwise thoroughly middle-class Havana home of Che Guevara, about an eighth of a mile from the enshrined debris of a downed American U-2 flight, stands the Cristo de La Habana, a 66-foot-high statue of Jesus Christ carved out of 320 tons of marble. Bruised and pockmarked by multiple lightning strikes—the first, ironically enough, on the day Fidel Castro triumphantly entered the capital city—the statue depicts Jesus with one hand near his heart, as if he is about to deliver a New World Sermon on the Mount, which makes sense given the statue's location. From its base, on the highest point in the city, one enjoys a panoramic view of the capital beyond.

Dedicated on Christmas Day 1959 by the Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista, the work was meant to confirm the position of Catholicism in Cuba's national imagination. A mere nine days later, however, Che led his victorious column into the capital that Batista had briskly abandoned. Che's khaki-clad, rifle-bearing band then paid a visit to the new statute and even snapped a few selfies. If the thought ever occurred to them, the largely atheistic rebels knew better than to tear it down: that would have alienated the religious sensibilities of a huge swath of Cubans. So the statue remains where it was unveiled some 55 years ago.

The statue also overlooks the entrance to the port of Havana, one of the busiest intersections in Cuban military history, the site of several clashes between the Old World and the new and eventually the New World and the new. I stood on this bluff for the second time in my life last month during a brief visit to Cuba to attend events surrounding the 50th anniversary of the priestly ordination of the Archbishop of Havana, Cardinal Jaime Ortega y Alamino. Cardinal Ortega's long life at the dangerous intersection of the church and Cuban politics is aptly described by the title of his best known pastoral letter: "El Amor Todo Lo Espera" ("Love Endures All Things").

My presence at what amounted to a three-day celebration of the Cuban Church made a lot of sense. **America** is committed to providing opinion and analysis about news and events at the intersection of the church and the world, the kinds of places in which Cardinal Ortega and his people have labored so courageously. The church and the world, of course, mean much more than the United States, especially for Catholics, who count ourselves in the company of one billion people on five continents. To that end **America** is making a major investment in our international coverage at a time when the pace of global change has picked up considerably. Take a look at the cover of this issue: a shrinking world and a changing Scotland will proffer more images like that one. That kind of barrier breaking is welcome and vitally needed, of course—even if, in my judgment, Scottish independence is ultimately a fool's errand.

In the end, we know, there is only one path to the true peace we seek; and it is not an ideology or nationalism of any kind, but rather a person for whom love, forgiveness and justice are the only standards of human action. Cardinal Ortega made a similar point in his homily at the closing liturgy. He reminded his people that the day was not about him, nor even about them, but that the day belonged to the Lord. They got it. At the end of the liturgy, as we recessed into the fierce August sun, I caught a quick glimpse of the Cristo de la Habana just as the music of a German-born British subject, G. F. Handel, rose from a thousand Latin voices, a powerful reminder to the church and the world that the alabaster figure overlooking their city represents the true "Lord of lords" and "King of kings. And he shall reign forever and ever."

MATT MALONE, S.J.

America

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Cover: Manpreet Sing Makkar, originally from Punjab in India, moved to Scotland in 2001 and is active in the Yes campaign. Photo: Reuters/Paul Hackett

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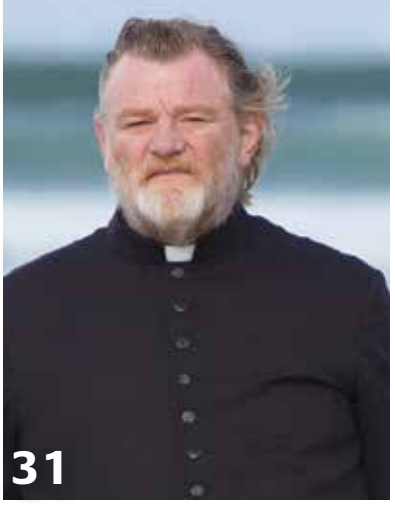

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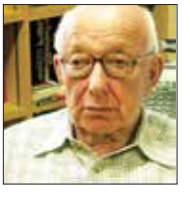
BOOKS & CULTURE

ON THE WEB

Vladimir Shlapentokh, right, answers questions about Vladimir Putin and the future of Ukraine. Plus, a closer look at the debate on **Scottish independence,** and a podcast discussion of the new film **"Calvary."**
All at americamagazine.org.



From the Plains of Nineveh

The status of Iraq's ancient Christian communities has grown progressively worse since the U.S. invasion in 2003 unleashed the nation's sectarian demons. Their situation reached a new low in July with the expulsion of the Christian remnant from Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, and the destruction and desecration of Christian holy sites. Militants from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria advised Mosul's Christians to convert, flee or "face the sword."

Many of the Christians who remain in Iraq have found a tenuous refuge in northern Iraq's Kurdistan. What will become of these people, and who has the responsibility to protect and restore them? Iraq's fractured and fractious central government, dominated by Shiites, has not shown the will or capacity to protect religious minorities, and resettlement in Kurdistan does not appear to be an acceptable long-term option.

While members of the international community express regrets, France has taken practical steps to assist Iraq's Christians and has offered them asylum. The Obama administration has been largely silent on the plight of Iraq's minorities.

Having broken Iraq, the United States "owns" much of this crisis and must step up to its obligations. It should take an active part in delivering humanitarian assistance and should join France in opening its doors to Christians and other minorities fleeing Iraq. The United States is obliged to devise a long-term strategy for the resettlement and restoration of this ancient community within U.S. borders if it is incapable of doing so within Iraq's increasingly tenuous boundaries.

Assisted Suicide Split

Just months after Belgium passed an assisted suicide bill, the British Parliament is now considering a similar measure. Even more controversial than the bill itself is the support it has received from an unlikely source. Lord George Carey, the former Anglican archbishop of Canterbury who is a member of the British Parliament's House of Lords, has spoken in favor of the assisted suicide bill, saying, "The old philosophical certainties have collapsed in the face of the reality of needless suffering."

Lord Carey previously opposed assisted suicide but stated his reversal was not "anti-Christian," reasoning that "in strictly observing the sanctity of life, the Church could now actually be promoting anguish and pain, the very opposite of a Christian message of hope." The current archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, however, has called the measure "mistaken and dangerous." In The Guardian newspaper, Giles Fraser, an Anglican priest and journalist, offered an impassioned defense of the pro-life view, arguing that in Christianity "human life has to be outside of oneself to be meaningful," and that to assist in someone's suicide is not an act of love.

Father Fraser is correct. It is regrettable that a split has occurred among prominent members of the clergy over profound issues of life and death. Nevertheless, since the days of Sts. Peter and Paul, disagreements, even about fundamental issues, have been part of Christian life. It is important that we approach this tension in a spirit of fraternal love. The mark of Christian communities has always been generosity. May it remain so.

Corrected Sentences

An estimated 46,000 nonviolent drug offenders—nearly half of all federal drug inmates—could benefit from reduced sentencing guidelines recently approved by the U.S. Sentencing Commission. The change comes amid a growing bipartisan turn away from the tough-on-crime penalties enacted at the height of the war on drugs that have overcrowded federal prisons, eaten up law enforcement budgets and disproportionately affected racial minorities.

In July the commission voted unanimously to apply retroactively a change to sentencing guidelines passed earlier this year that reduces prison time for most drug crimes; eligible inmates could see their sentences shortened by an average of about two years. While the commission's decision is a welcome and prudent check on unjust and excessive incarceration in this country, its recommendations do not address the primary cause of the prison population explosion: mandatory minimum sentences.

It is now up to Congress to pass the Smarter Sentencing Act, which remains stuck in the Senate. The bipartisan bill would drastically reduce many drug-related mandatory minimums and give judges greater flexibility in sentencing low-level offenders. A second measure, the Recidivism Reduction and Public Safety Act, also stalled in the Senate, would expand job training, academic opportunities and drug treatment to ease inmates' reintegration into society.

In a recent letter to international criminal law experts, Pope Francis wrote, "In our society, we tend to think that crimes are solved when the offender is captured and sentenced." But for many offenders, the end of their sentence is just the beginning of a long, lonely journey on the other side. As people of faith, it is incumbent upon us to walk with them.

EDITORIAL

Death in a Small Place

Gaza is being reduced to rubble while the world watches on YouTube and CNN. It has been as dispiriting a display of inhumanity and failure as one can imagine, yet it has not been enough to compel either side to accept a halt to the carnage. Each night new images of what Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described as "telegenically dead Palestinians" are paraded across television and computer screens.

The prime minister accuses Hamas of deploying the people of Gaza as human shields, "forcing" Israel to kill Gaza's men, women and children in a cynical, ruthless campaign. If so, he has enthusiastically partnered with Hamas leadership in the effort.

The Israeli Defense Forces' incursion each day drives up the Palestinian casualty figures while offering Hamas fighters the opportunity to restore what had been the organization's diminishing esteem through combat that has taken 64 I.D.F. lives. The I.D.F. has managed to kill 200 or so of Hamas's 10,000 fighters, but this most recent assault has claimed more than 1,800 lives. The U.N. estimates that 69 percent of the victims of the increasingly indiscriminate shelling have been noncombatants.

Gaza, one of the most densely peopled places on earth, has been further diminished during this minor apocalypse. The incursion has demolished more than 4,000 homes and inhabitable area of the territory by 44 percent. With its electric grid destroyed and water and sewage capacity compromised, Gaza is on the verge of becoming essentially uninhabitable.

In response to the crisis, the U.S. Congress declared unanimous support for the Israeli war effort and called on Hamas to disarm itself and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to terminate the unity government with Hamas. The Obama administration offered pro forma expressions of concern as the civilian death toll went higher, but did little else to stay the Netanyahu government's hand. A more pointed gesture, and one that might have restored U.S. status as a credible broker for peace, would have been to decline Israel's request for munitions to restock supplies exhausted over the skies of Gaza.

This latest conflict will eventually end with or without a negotiated cease-fire. It seems likely that its only "victors" will be located at the extremes of Palestinian and Israeli societies. What comes next? When the fighting stops, finding ways to encourage the beleaguered forces of moderation will be the primary obligation of all people of good will. (See Signs of the Times, pg. 8.)

As in past conflicts in Gaza, the United Nations has described Hamas and I.D.F. actions, including indiscriminate rocket attacks and the shelling of U.N. refuges, as possible war crimes. Perhaps this time the United Nations should pursue such serious accusations to their logical and just conclusion. Acts of terror by Gaza militants should be prosecuted, and decisive action against violations of both international law and human dignity should not be construed as efforts to demonize Israel.

America's editors have repeatedly addressed the Israel-Palestinian problem, urging restraint, dialogue and even a reassessment of a U.S. policy of unblinking diplomatic and military support for the State of Israel and pressing for the two-state solution both sides claimed to be seeking. Now, judging by comments made by Prime Minister Netanyahu during the crisis, the current Israeli leadership is no longer interested in that option. But a one-state solution will surely mean either further segregation of Palestinians in an apartheid state or a criminal policy of mass expulsion. Neither is an outcome that the United States should be willing to accept.

The Obama administration was stoned from all sides as it fruitlessly pursued the usual suspects in negotiating a ceasefire during this current crisis. Now it should just as energetically locate and support new actors in Palestinian and Israeli civil society who offer some hope of breaking through the calcified positions of the current political establishment. Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders of the Holy Land should revisit the commitments they made in Alexandria, Egypt, in 2002 to "seek to live together as neighbors, respecting the integrity of each other's historical and religious inheritance" and decide what a practical expression of that pledge means today.

At the Vatican's invocation for peace in Israel and Palestine in June, Pope Francis said: "Peacemaking calls for courage, much more so than warfare. It calls for the courage to say yes to encounter and no to conflict: yes to dialogue and no to violence…yes to sincerity and no to duplicity." But beyond courage, the pope said peacemaking "takes strength and tenacity."

All of the strength and tenacity of the peacemakers will soon be put to the test—again—but how much harder will be their work once this senseless slaughter in Gaza ends.

REPLY ALL

Rus' and Russia

In "The West Knows Best?" (5/19), Margot Patterson writes that in the 13th century "Russia's western neighbors took advantage of her weakness to seize portions of Russia and the western half of Ukraine and to annex these to Western Christendom." This statement is incorrect and highly misleading.

Ms. Patterson is likely conflating Russia with Kievan Rus'—a common American mistake. Ninth-century Rus' was made up of several Slavic principalities. Present-day Russia was not differentiated from the various domains until the 14th-century appearance of the Grand Duchy of Moscow, which before 1654 did not encompass any portion of today's Ukraine. Western and southern Rus' principalities made up a Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Commonwealth. In 1648 Bohdan Khmelnytsky led a Cossack uprising against the Commonwealth and in 1654 forged an alliance with Moscow, after which eastern Ukraine gradually fell under Russian domination. Western Ukraine remained under either Polish or Austrian administration and was not governed by Russia until 1939 (not 1945), when it was invaded by the Soviets as part of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

Ms. Patterson should not try to rewrite history as Mr. Putin's apologist.

ROBERT E. ULANOWICZ
Gainesville, Fla.

Sacred Music

In "Jack, Bobby, Ted" (5/26), John F. Baldovin, S.J., presents an overview of the liturgical changes and the increased accessibility of worship promoted by the Second Vatican Council. Discussing "Musicam Sacram," the 1967 instruction on sacred music, he states, "Here the most significant change was approval to substitute hymns and other songs not contained in the liturgical texts.... to encourage Catholics to sing Protestant hymns and other new compositions as part of the liturgy itself."

As a historian analyzing the reception of "Musicam Sacram," his evaluation of this "most significant change" may be correct. I would hope, however, that Father Baldovin, and **America**, might also want to encourage readers to read the document for themselves. An objective reading would place the use of vernacular hymns in a perspective that would likely surprise most Catholics. The document addresses the chanted dialogue of celebrant with congregation, highlights the musical roles of the psalmist, schola and assembly and says much about how sacred music contributes to full participation—before its brief reaffirmation of the use of vernacular hymns at the Entrance, Offertory and Communion. There is a great disparity between what "Musicam Sacram" prescribes and what is actually done in the majority of American Catholic communities.

STEPHEN CONCORDIA, O.S.B.
Latrobe, Pa.

Racism Lives

Re "Of Many Things," by Matt Malone, S.J. (7/7): Thank you for this honestly written article. I was 15 years old when Martin Luther King Jr. led the March on Washington in 1963. I was not raised to actively hate, but my Catholic church, located in Georgia, did not have black members in 1963. They all belonged to a different church, which still exists. Of course, no one today attempts to say that black Catholics should only go to that church, but the fact is that Catholicism in this city is still largely segregated 50 years later, as are many other churches in the deep South. Racism is not dead, and the effects of Jim Crow are still very much visible, if you look.

Jacqueline McGee
Online Comment

Taking Sides

In "A Vote for Peace" (Current Comment, 7/7), the editors note that in Colombia "violent conflict between the government and several factions—leftist rebels, right-wing paramilitary groups and criminal gangs—has dragged on since 1964." While it doesn't have to be understood this way, the sentence suggests that the Colombian government is engaged in fighting on several fronts. But a number of human rights groups, including The Center for Research and Popular Education/Peace Program, a Colombian Jesuit think tank, have documented the role of both the Colombian and U.S. governments in supporting and training paramilitaries who terrorize civilians and peasants, primarily to drive them from land considered desirable for multinational investment (minerals, mining, water, forests, etc.).

I am concerned that **America** appears to be playing a neutral role rather than taking a stand with the indigenous and the poor who have borne the brunt of the terrible war in Colombia and whose suffering has been aggravated by all elements in the war, but in larger part by government sponsored paramilitaries.

DAVID KAST
Wausau, Wis.

Politics, Not Race

In "Freedom Bound" (7/7), Vincent D. Rougeau forcefully and fairly accurately addresses the issue of race in the United States. But I was appalled and take strong exception to the inference that must be drawn from the following statement: "Discrimination and racism still rear their heads on a regular basis. The president has been the victim of a stunning effort by the Republican Party to make it almost impossible for him to govern."

The Republican Party is not standing strong against President Obama because he is black. The party is opposed to Mr. Obama's presidency

because he is grossly incompetent, because of what he has done or failed to do: from the Benghazi cover-up, the V.A. and I.R.S. scandals and the dozens of czars appointed to avoid congressional approval, to the skyrocketing annual federal deficit, the embarrassing mishandling of Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, his usurping of congressional powers and much more.

One final item and a follow-up question for Mr. Rougeau: The rising star in today's Grand Old Party, universally admired by all Republicans, is a retired neurosurgeon by the name of Ben Carson. What color is Dr. Carson's skin?

JAMES J. CLEARY
East Northport, N.Y.

No Excuses

I am a faithful and grateful reader of **America** and hope to be for yet a few more years, but I was quite disappointed with "Jesuits and Slaveholding," by Thomas Murphy, S.J., a sidebar to "Saved by Grace," by Cora Marie Billings, R.S.M. (7/7). To me, his comments sound much more like an apologia for Jesuit slaveholding rather than an apology. A simple "mea culpa" might have been more appropriate.

One wonders how Pope Francis might have responded if Sister Billings had said that her great-grandfather worked as a slave for a pope, as some people did.

AL F. O'DELL
Columbus Grove, Ohio

How We Serve

"Unfinished Houses," by John J. McLaughlin (7/21), resonated with me. We Americans place so much emphasis on accomplishment, and when it comes to working with the poor, we are often doing for rather than doing with.

Some years ago, working in a small village in Mexico, my fellow volunteers and I had a meeting with villagers to talk about what we all could do as a group to improve life in the village. We, the volunteers, saw huge problems: poor education, poor health, unemployment, alcoholism, domestic abuse and others. As we talked, the villagers said that what they needed was a roof for their church. We did not see this as important; it rarely rained in the desert climate.

But when we talked about this with our adviser, we were told that we were not seeing this correctly. Those other problems had existed for decades and could not easily be solved. Putting a roof on their church was something that they could work together to accomplish, and as they succeeded in this, they might be empowered to tackle other problems. This was a true learning experience for us.

LUCY FUCHS
Brandon, Fla.

STATUS UPDATE

Readers respond to "Unfinished Houses," by John J. McLaughlin (7/21):

This article provides a really helpful perspective. Sometimes physical labor really matters, but often it's the experience of learning about other people and another place that is even more important, since that learning can help to remove stereotypes and ignorance. I've been in the position both of providing "service" (doing much less "work" than learning) and of living in a region, Appalachia, that is a common destination for "service" participants. ("You're from Appalachia? Oh, my youth group went on their mission trip there. It was so interesting to see all the poverty there and all that weird Pentecostal stuff.") "Mission" and "service" work are practices to be scrutinized and critiqued to make them more about changing the economic and social structures that cause people to be poor.

RACHEL JENNINGS

I found some unresolved contradictions within this article. The author puts us on the defensive immediately by implying such trips may represent "cultural paternalism." Yet the rest of the article states quite the opposite: namely, that "accompaniment" (which eats up huge amounts of costly airfare for the American do-gooders, cash that could be spent on locally sourced and built latrines, etc.) is the name of the game. And even this concept of "accompaniment" is problematic, since the Americans "accompany" oh-so-briefly and then go home, leaving their new "friends" behind. These trips are clearly a good thing—our parish is even now returning from one of many ambitious trips to a sister parish in Kenya—but they are limited human responses to massive structural inequities, and perhaps we struggle too hard to process what they "mean." I salute the author for having raised some profound issues, but he seemed to leave them far from settled or even clarified.

BRENDA BECKER

WHAT YOU'RE READING at americamagazine.org

1 **"It Takes Time": On the Future Shape of the Anglican Church,** by James Hanvey, S.J. (In All Things, 7/15)
2 **Unfinished Houses,** by John J. McLaughlin (7/21)
3 **Pope and Late Evangelical Bishop Were Like "Father and Son,"** by Sean Salai, S.J. (In All Things, 7/22)
4 **Saved by Grace,** by Cora Marie Billings, R.S.M. (7/7)
5 **"America" Announces First Round of New Correspondents in Miami, Chicago, Los Angeles and Beijing,** by The Editors (In All Things, 7/22)

WEST AFRICA

C.R.S. Fights Fear and Ebola As Crisis Worsens in Sierra Leone

As people in Sierra Leone lose hope and worldwide fear grows over the worst Ebola outbreak on record, "Our situation is desperate," says the Rev. Peter Konteh, executive director of Caritas in the Archdiocese of Freetown.

On July 30 Father Konteh described the mood of the West African country as bleak following the death the day before of Dr. Sheik Umar Khan, the physician who had been leading the country's fight against the highly contagious disease. The loss of Khan, who worked at the Kenema Government Hospital in eastern Sierra Leone until he also fell victim to Ebola, "has left us feeling defenseless," Father Konteh said. He added that the hospital center Khan ran is the only place in the country equipped to deal with the disease. "Our health system is not strong enough to cope with this," he said.

Father Konteh said Ebola has had "ripple effects on all interactions." Many people's livelihoods depend on trading at big marketplaces, "but they are staying away now." In eastern Sierra Leone, some schools closed and postponed examinations indefinitely.

Sierra Leone declared a state of emergency on July 31 and called in troops to quarantine Ebola patients as the death toll hit 729 in the West African countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Symptoms of the disease, which has no known cure, include vomiting, diarrhea and internal and external bleeding. The fatality rate of the current outbreak is around 60 percent. Two American medical workers who had become infected in Liberia were airlifted to Atlanta for treatment.

Michael Stulman, regional infor-

GAZA STRIP

Searching for a Way Ahead As Israeli 'Redeployment' Begins

Israeli forces began withdrawing from parts of the Gaza Strip on Aug. 3, after a quick collapse of a humanitarian ceasefire on Aug. 1 and a ferocious bombardment of the border community of Rafah in its aftermath. As what he described as a redeployment of Israeli forces began, Prime Minister Benjamin Netenyahu said the Israeli Defense Forces would continue operations in Gaza, taking "as much time as necessary" and exerting "as much force as needed."

The overall death toll by Aug. 4 included more than 1,800 Palestinians. At least 69 percent of the dead in Gaza are civilians, according to U.N. sources, including more than 350 children. On the Israeli side, 64 Israeli soldiers and three civilians have been killed in the conflict.

Looking beyond the current violence with any degree of hope seems at best naïve. The images of the wounded and dying emerging from the conflict "are horrific," says Atalia Omer, an associate professor at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Ind. Still, "we can't give in to despair," Omer says. "We can never reach that point."

For long-term peace to be achieved, "the solution is not military," she says simply. "The solution is diplomatic and political."

Despite political and media fixation on "terror tunnels," Israel's right to self-defense and even the immediate flashpoint of the most recent violence, the murder of three Israeli teens on the West Bank, the ultimate source of tension, Omer says, "remains the occupation."

She explains, "If you crush Hamas, something else will only emerge because Palestinian people are still living under occupation."

As an Israeli viewing the carnage from the United States, Omer notes

LESSONS LEARNED? Schools were closed in Monrovia, Liberia. Schools were closed in an attempt to halt the spread of the Ebola virus.

mation officer for the U.S. bishops' Catholic Relief Services, said cultural traditions, including the washing of a body by family members before it is buried, are contributing to the spread of Ebola. The disease is at its most contagious in its advanced stages.

Speaking by phone from Freetown on July 31, Stulman said dispelling myths that are contributing to the crisis forms a large part of the work that C.R.S. is doing. Staffers are training elders and traditional leaders to spread information on how to avoid contracting the virus and what to do if they feel sick, said Stulman. C.R.S. has been working closely with Sierra Leone's National Ebola Task Force on awareness-raising campaigns, using radio and other media to disseminate critical messages about prevention, transmission and treatment of the disease.

Father Konteh represents the Catholic Church on the task force. He said some local people fear that if they go to a hospital "they won't come out again." He explained that the bodies of people who die of Ebola in hospitals "are put into bags and buried, and their loved ones don't see them again; there is no burial ceremony."

Father Konteh said that an interreligious forum issued a statement to counter disinformation "spread by religious fanatics saying it's a plague and calling on people to come to prayer centers they've set up instead of health care facilities." C.R.S. also had to clarify the nature of Ebola to people who believe that the hospital deaths are the result of a political plot by antigovernment forces, according to Stulman.

While many international organizations are leaving Sierra Leone because of the outbreak and the U.S. Peace Corps is evacuating hundreds of its volunteers from affected countries, C.R.S. has no plans to pull out. "We're sticking around," Stulman said, noting that C.R.S. has been working "on the frontlines" in Sierra Leone for more than 50 years and has built strong partnerships with local organizations.

the emerging voices for peace and social justice in Israel, especially among its young people. The resilience of Israeli civil society's actors for peace has been impressive, she suggests, as tolerance for dissent and cultural critique within Israel has diminished in recent years and fallen especially rapidly since the beginning of I.D.F. operations in Gaza on July 8.

She admits that pessimists are probably justified in thinking there is little reason to expect a change in the political "narrative of inevitability" in Israel any time soon. That narrative compels an inverted reality, she suggests, where the dominant, occupying force pronounces its own victimhood while simultaneously defining Palestinians as terrorists who "have a culture of death," and use the deaths of their babies to win public relations points. Such intense and widely held beliefs dehumanize Palestinians, she says, and enable Israelis to distance themselves from the suffering.

"Most of Israeli society accepts this inevitability," Omer says. "'They'll say, 'It's sad; we don't want to kill babies, but we have no choice.'"

Important global pressure for change, she says, comes from civil society agents like, in the United States, the Jewish Voice for Peace. Within the political establishment in Israel, the Meretz Party remains committed to peacemaking. What a political earthquake, she muses, if the tireless U.S.

THE ANGUISH CONTINUES: Viewing the aftermath of Israeli shelling and airstrikes in Khan Younis, on the Gaza Strip on Aug.1.

Secretary of State John Kerry were to consult with Meretz leaders the next time he lands in Israel instead of dutifully visiting with Likud leaders. "That would be a very bold, creative move, but I don't know if [the Obama administration has] the courage or the political capital to do that."

Omer insists that the existence of Meretz and other persistent actors for peace in Israeli civil society—Breaking the Silence, an organization of I.D.F. veterans who testify to the reality of the occupation; Combatants for Peace, a joint campaign by Palestinians and Israelis; and the Coalition of Women for Peace, a feminist organization against the occupation of Palestine and for a just peace—should be a source of hope that a peaceful resolution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians remains possible.

"It is often said that Israel has a right to defend itself," she says, "but Gaza is not a sovereign state; it is occupied." She adds, "Israel controls everything, so most of the responsibility for changing the course of events will have to reside with Israel. But Hamas will have to demonstrate political will [for a ceasefire]; it will have to stop firing rockets; it will have to demonstrate it is in control of its people."

KEVIN CLARKE

Mercy at the Border

Across the country a number of U.S. bishops have urged a merciful response to the crisis of unaccompanied minors at the U.S. border, and their parishioners have stepped up in response to the call. Dozens of parishioners in the small community of Oracle, Ariz., 30 miles north of Tucson, are one example. They are donating their time, talent and treasure to make sure children fleeing danger in their home countries are welcomed and supported in the United States. The initiative, known as the Have a Heart Campaign, hopes to convey the message that Oracle as a community "has a heart" when it comes to immigrants seeking a better life. "We [want] to express our view that we should be a welcoming, supportive community, not a rejecting one," one resident said. The effort counters a string of protests that began in Murrieta, Calif., where hundreds carrying American flags and protest signs blocked the path of buses carrying immigrant children and families.

Carbon Call

In a letter read during an Environmental Protection Agency hearing in Washington on July 30, the chairmen of two committees of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops offered their support for national standards to reduce carbon pollution from existing power plants in an effort to limit climate change. Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski of Miami, chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace, and Bishop Richard E. Pates of Des Moines, Iowa, chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development added that standards to reduce power plant pollution should protect the health and welfare of people, especially children, the elderly, the poor and the vulnerable. The bishops explained that their interest in the adoption of strong standards stems from their concern for the effect of climate change on poor people, who often live near power plants. "Too frequently we observe the damaging impacts from climate-related events in the United States and across the globe, particularly on poor and vulnerable communities," they wrote.

From CNS, RNS and other sources.

NEWS BRIEFS


Sign of Peace

On July 26, **nine men were ordained** at the Cathedral of the Incarnation in Nashville, Tenn., the largest group ordained together in the diocese's 177-year history. ✦ Pope Francis celebrated the feast of St. Ignatius Loyola in Rome on July 31 by meeting the family of **Paolo Dall'Oglio**, an Italian Jesuit priest missing in northern Syria since July 2013. ✦ After nine years of study, the Congregation for Divine Worship has decided that the **sign of peace** will stay where it is in the Mass, but that it must be conducted with dignity and awareness that it is not a liturgical version of "good morning." ✦ The Rev. Andrew White, an Anglican canon at St. George's Church in Baghdad, said that while the world's attention was diverted to the Gaza Strip in late July, more than **1,500 people were killed** by Islamic extremists in Iraq. ✦ In his column in the July 30 issue of The Catholic Spirit, Archbishop John C. Nienstedt of St. Paul-Minneapolis **rejected demands that he resign** because of past mishandling of sexual abuse claims. ✦ At the conclusion of his official visit on Aug. 1, U.N. Special Rapporteur Heiner Bielefeldt reported that "serious **violations of freedom of religion** or belief are a reality in Vietnam."

Obsession Disorders

Last October in **America**, Pope Francis warned the church against being "obsessed" with abortion, gay marriage and the use of contraceptive methods. Washington, especially the religious right and secular left, shares this obsession.

July brought contradictory actions on these obsessions and religious liberty. The Supreme Court recognized the religious objections of Hobby Lobby to some forms of contraception. The Obama administration rejected pleas for conscience protection for religious groups in its executive order protecting gay and lesbian workers in federal grants. These decisions unleashed outrage and celebration, exaggeration and distortion, political fundraising and posturing.

Religious groups carefully pointed out that Hobby Lobby objects to only four means of contraception while supporting lawsuits to protect groups that oppose all contraception. The administration will not exempt religious groups that uphold the traditional definition of marriage, though this was the president's position less than two years ago.

Leaders on the political right and left seem "obsessed" with these matters. Where are progressives who clearly defend children fleeing violence in Central America or decry the court's rejection of mandates for states to expand Medicaid to provide health care for lower income Americans? Many on the right are narrowly focused on the culture war, using scare tactics to raise money and seek votes, but they get less attention from media obsessed with sexual freedom. None of this advances the difficult dialogue on how to reconcile religious freedom with the assertion of other rights in a pluralistic nation.

Washington is full of Democrats decrying a phony war on women and conservatives predicting a war on Christians. Half a world away, there is a real war on women and direct attacks on Christians as Iraq falls apart and ISIS advances with horrific violence against Christians and brutal suppression of the rights of women.

> Half a world away, there is a real war on women and Christians.

Washington plays the blame game. Former Vice President Dick Cheney, who claimed we would be greeted as liberators in a short war in Iraq, blames President Obama, who wisely opposed the war and now is dealing with a decade of failed policies. Hillary Clinton says in her recent book *Hard Choices* that she and leading Democrats made the "wrong choice" in authorizing war.

There were other voices. Pope John Paul II did all he could to stop the race to war. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops said the war could not be morally justified. I worked for the bishops at that time, and I was with the pope's emissary, Cardinal Pio Laghi, when he returned, deeply discouraged and angry, from a meeting with President George W. Bush on Ash Wednesday in 2003. The president had set aside unopened the pope's personal letter and dismissed the warnings the cardinal offered.

Those warnings were well founded. The war turned out to be not short and decisive but long and horribly costly in human, financial and moral terms. Iraq is now not a democracy but a failed state torn apart by violent sectarian conflict. Relations between Christians and Muslims are worse and extremists have been empowered. The Christian community is being destroyed. The patriarch in Iraq called this the "darkest, most difficult period" for Christians, who are forced to convert, flee, pay a punitive fee or die. For the first time in 1,600 years, there are virtually no Christians in Mosul.

Also missing in the blame game are those who paid for these unwise decisions. My son-in-law, who served in Iraq, told me: "Seeing Iraq crumble is disheartening as a veteran and an American. We didn't feel 'we were protecting our freedom' or 'making Iraq a better place.' Most people just wanted to do their time, keep from getting killed or wounded, protect each other. We knew the war was not going to be worth it. We lost 4,500 troops, and 32,000 were physically wounded, plus many psychological casualties and high rates of PTSD."

Imagine how different our nation and our world would be if our leaders had listened to John Paul II and the U.S. bishops. We should also listen and learn from those who are paying for disastrous decisions. Maybe we could even turn away for a moment from our "obsessions" to notice those who are losing their lives and fundamental rights because of our nation's bad choices and failed policies.

JOHN CARR *is director of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.*

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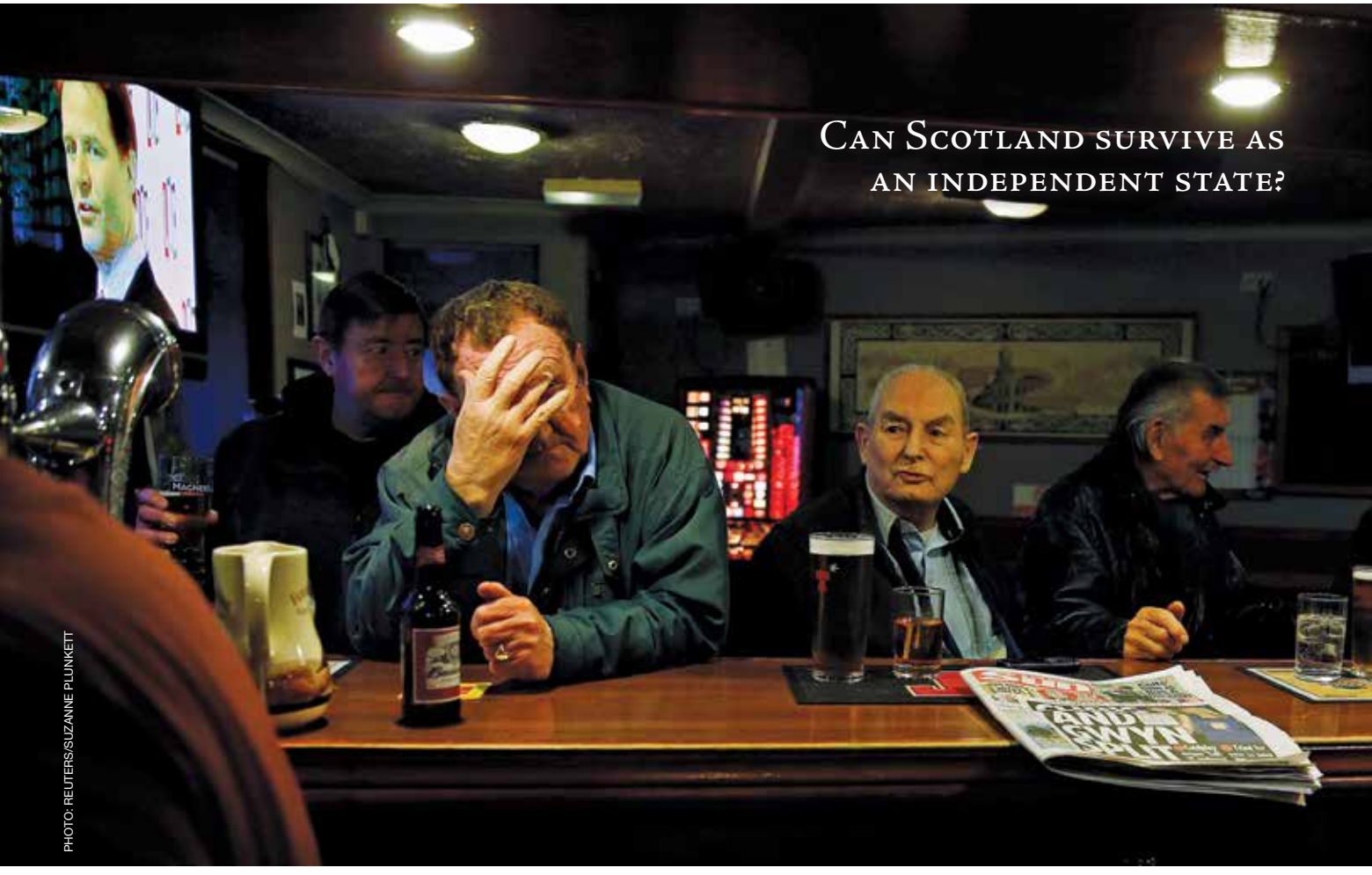


PHOTO: REUTERS/SUZANNE PLUNKETT

A Country in Question

BY DAVID STEWART

SCOTLAND THE BRAVE? Britain's Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg appears on a television screen in a pub in Kilmarnock, Scotland.

On Sept. 18, an electorate of 4.1 million people living in Scotland will participate in a referendum on the question: Should Scotland be an independent country?

Behind that concise and apparently simple question lies a complex array of political, economic, social and emotive issues, many of which are still being disentangled. The pro-union Better Together campaign maintains a single-figure lead in polling and has attracted significant donations, while the pro-independence Yes Scotland campaign appears to have the momentum. The result of the September vote is really anyone's guess right now, as the campaigns move into top gear.

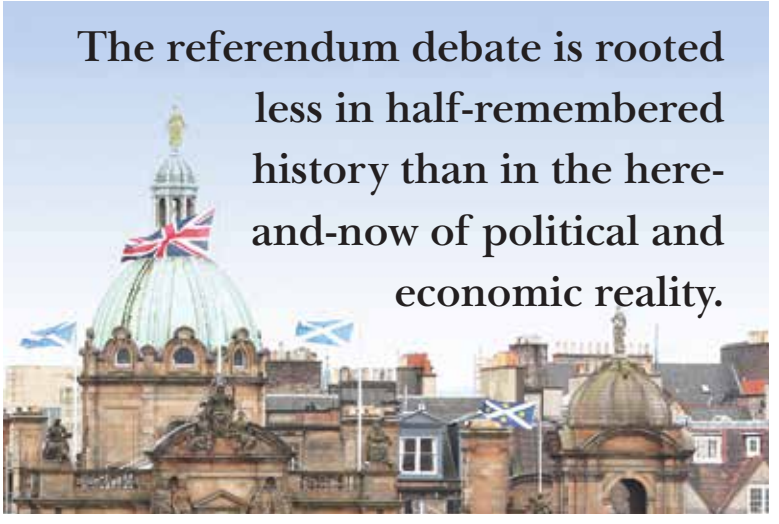
Politically what is at stake is the continuation of a 300-year-old union. In 1707 Scotland and England united; the United Kingdom was formed. There had been a recognizable

DAVID STEWART, S.J., *a native of Scotland, lives and works in various Jesuit ministries in South London.*

Scottish sovereign state for over eight centuries. The crowns of England and Scotland had already been united, under James, since 1603. Political and economic union came about largely for economic reasons as the emerging Scottish bourgeoisie faced ruin after a disastrous colonial venture in Panama—the "Darien Scheme"—that left the nation close to bankruptcy. Money already was supplanting religion as a driving force. The Scots Parliament, prodded by a merchant class running scared, sought financial support from England. Aid arrived in the shape of the union.

This was no colonial, still less military conquest by England but a hastily arranged economic solution. Yet for many Scots at that time and today it felt like a humiliation. As the Yes campaign often points out, the people of Scotland were never asked about this union; indeed, the majority of the people would not have known about it until it was signed and sealed. The national poet Robert Burns caught the sentiment: W*e're bought and sold/ for English gold/ sic a parcel o' rogues in a nation*. We risk forgetting that this was a time of bitterness and strife anyway; the first 50 years of the new United Kingdom saw two major Jacobite rebellions against the Hanoverian/English monarchy, ending with the routing of the Scottish forces at Culloden in 1746 and the subsequent ethnic cleansing of the Highland Clearances, as hundreds of thousands of Scots went into exile, many to the Americas.

Potent though these and many more historical factors may be, the referendum debate is rooted less in half-remembered history than in the here-and-now of political and economic reality. The pro-independence Yes camp has, for the most part, suppressed any instinct to frame their pitch as an anti-English protest, while the unionists have noticeably tried to engage the language and imagery of Britishness. This is a risky strategy, since the whole of the current United Kingdom is in a period of great uncertainty about what Britishness even means. There is an extensive and angry debate in England about the place of Islam in school education and therefore, by extension, about the role Muslims should accept in society. Results of local and European elections earlier this year mirrored the mood-shift across the continent as voters swung to the right, protesting against the stuttering European project and revealing an ugly hostility to immigration.



In Britain, the United Kingdom Independence Party, a policy-light, unsophisticated, anti-European grouping, made some gains, although not as much as the rather breathless media reportage suggested. There is a striking contrast between that kind of narrow ethnic nationalism and the Yes camp's civic nationalist view, shared by many Scots, of Scotland as a modern, progressive and independent European state. Envious glances are cast across the North Sea to the small, successful Scandinavian states, independent yet working closely together in many ways.

Even now, the momentum, creativity and vitality are with the Yes campaign, but this has yet to appear fully in the polls. Its strength is particularly demonstrated in the online arena, whereas the mainstream media show a marked bias for a pro-union stance. The No campaign, sponsored by an unlikely ad hoc coalition of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal parties, has been characterized by negativity and scare tactics: "Project Fear," according to some. The campaign has issued grim warnings about the apparent dangers of independence, ranging from issues of national debt (as if all other nations are free of sovereign debt) to whether or not an independent Scotland would be allowed to use the pound sterling (as if the currency belonged to London, rather than to the whole of the current United Kingdom). The London government recently was caught out when it predicted a huge cost to a putative independent government for setting up new political institutions, inflating the figure by a factor of 10 and earning a rebuke from the London School of Economics scholar on whose work the predictions were based. Even that venerable British institution the BBC—knowing that if the Yes camp prevails, it faces losing viewers to a new Scottish Broadcasting Service—frequently could pass for the media office of the No campaign.

Energy and Equality

Oil reserves and revenues always have been central to the campaigning of the separatist Scottish National Party. In the 1970s, a prominent slogan was "It's Scotland's oil." The claim has been that the nation has not received sufficient benefits from the vast reserves off Britain's coast and that the London government has squandered the bonanza. Reliable figures on the extent of the remaining reserves are hard to come by (production fluctuates according to market condi-

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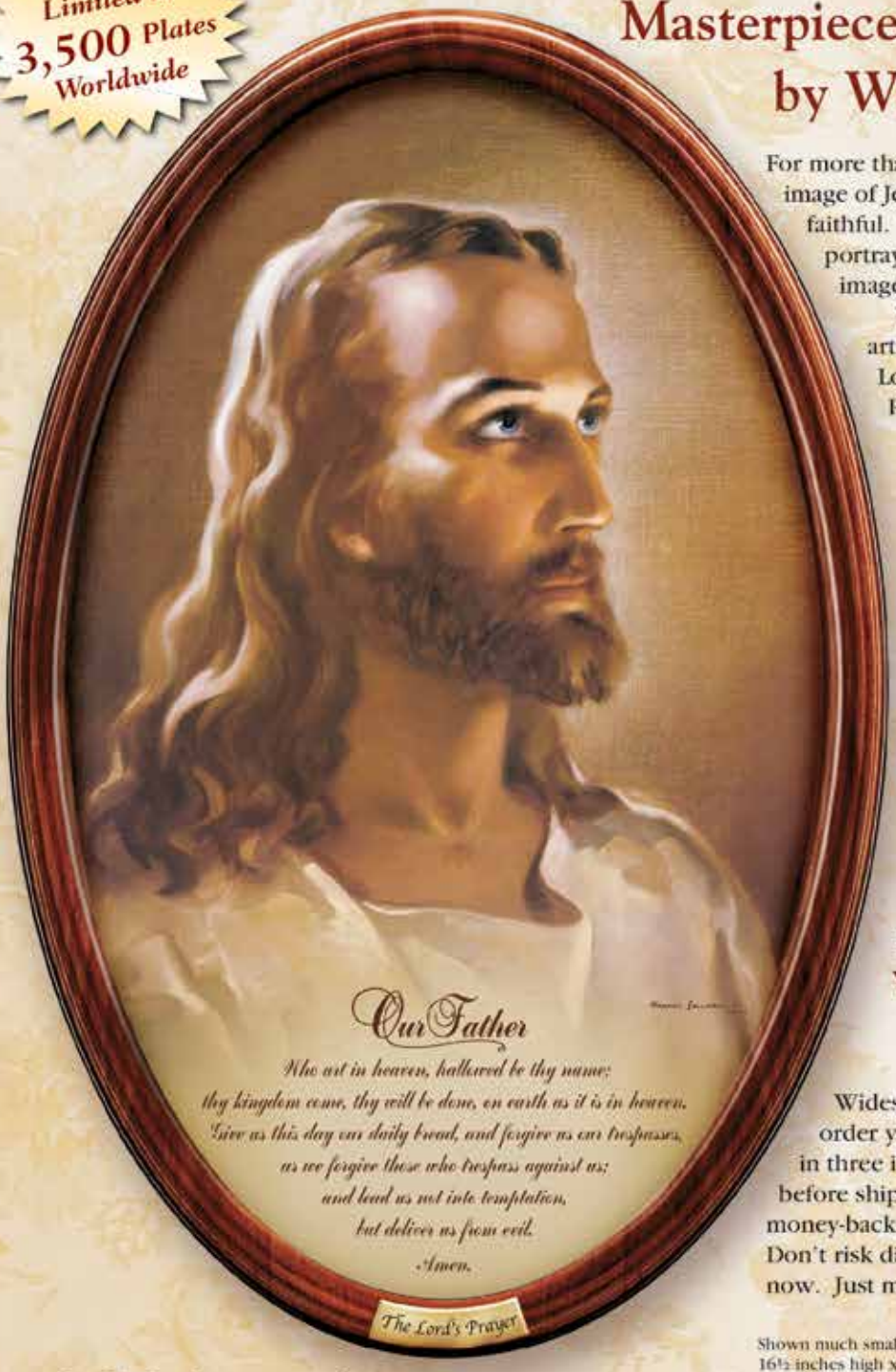

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tions); but there does appear to be plenty left, and there are rich new fields yet to be explored to the west. The Yes camp makes much of the Oil Fund established by Norway, contrasted with the failure of successive London governments to use the windfall wisely. Yet sustainable forms of energy production will become ever more significant. Renewables may become more important than oil production and might contribute much more to the economy. Scotland is blessed with significant wave and wind power, and a post-independence government must be ready to develop these plentiful natural resources.

ON THE WEB
The case for Scotland's union with the United Kingdom.
americamagazine.org/webonly

The No camp, quite accurately accused of negativity and scaremongering, talks about the dangers of the break up of what they call the most successful union the world has ever seen, without quite ever explaining what constitutes that success. Many voters feel that success has not been equitably shared across the Union; child poverty and adult life-expectancy rates remain unacceptably worse in Scotland than in the rest of Great Britain. There is resentment, shared in other parts of the current United Kingdom, about the economic dominance of London and the southeast. A massive, multibillion-pound high speed rail project is proposed, linking London to mid-England but with no economic relevance to Scotland other than the proportion of Scottish taxes that will help pay for it. Scots resent being ruled by London governments they did not elect; this goes back at least to the time of Margaret Thatcher, despite a limited devolution of political control since the restored Edinburgh Parliament in 1999.

Yet there is still one key factor, which may yet emerge as decisive, that links the Scottish sense of distinctiveness with the economic story, and that is the proposed renewal of the British Trident nuclear system, at a cost estimated by Greenpeace to be more than 34 billion pounds. The four nuclear-armed British submarines, powered by Trident, are based at Faslane on the River Clyde, less than 30 miles from Scotland's most populous city, Glasgow. Polling has consistently shown that the enormous majority of Scots oppose both the continuing siting of these vessels there and the huge cost of the upgrade. Many point to the unlikeliness of the so-called deterrent ever being used, at least independently of Washington. Others are appalled by the cost, especially when compared to what the social tax money could provide by way of health and education services. And it should be obvious to every Scottish resident that in the event of either an enemy strike to the base (by whom?) or an accident, the resulting collateral death and destruction would be deemed acceptable by London, but would be unthinkable were the base to be relocated, for example, 30 miles from the center of London on the Thames. Trident's continuing presence in Scottish waters and its costly replacement might yet be a decisive factor in the run-up to referendum day.

No one really knows if a new spirit will blow through Scottish, and British, politics in September. The debate is becoming increasingly high-pitched, even shrill. Alex Salmond, the canny leader of the Scottish National Party and current Scottish first minister in the Edinburgh Parliament, was among the first to notice that this year marks the 700th anniversary of a fabled Scottish victory over the much larger English forces of Edward II at the Battle of Bannockburn. Needing to keep the focus on the economy, and believing that he can thereby win, Salmond probably will not make too much of the emotive charge of that anniversary, but he is not likely to ignore it either. The former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, also a Scot, recently suggested that the British state has not handled secessionist movements well over the years, beginning in Boston Harbor. If Scots are to regain independence after 307 years, much will depend on who makes the better economic argument rather than on the historical memories. In this we will be little different from most other independent, self-determining and adult democratic states, among whom we hope to be counted.

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Power Player

The reign of Vladimir Putin

BY VLADIMIR SHLAPENTOKH

From the beginning of his rule, Vladimir V. Putin has assumed that his ability to govern Russia was highly dependent on the strength of the ideological justification of his power. Indeed, he was never elected according to even elementary democratic standards. For this reason, the state's ideology was of primary importance in the decision-making process for President Putin's regime—even higher than for the Soviet leaders of the past. Thus, many domestic and foreign policy decisions have been decided upon in order to cultivate Mr. Putin as a national leader and savior of the nation. His obsession with his personal power makes him indifferent to the long-term national interests of his own country, like the diversity of the Russian economy, the state of science, the flight of talented people from the country and, certainly, the development of democratic traditions that the Russians so badly need.

President Putin's hostile attitude toward the West is determined by his belief that Western leaders and the media do not see him as a democratically legitimate leader of Russia and, as a result, systematically plot to remove him from power. For the same reason, his attitude toward the former Soviet republics has depended on the character of their regime. If they were authoritarian, the relations between Russia and the post-Soviet republics were more or less good, but if these republics happened to make movements toward democracy, which could set an example for the Russian people, then they became fierce enemies. This inferiority complex explains why Mr. Putin is so afraid that the revolution in Kiev will usher Ukraine into an era of national prosperity. He needs chaos in Ukraine in order to convince his own people that democracy and an alliance with the West can only lead to disaster.

In the first half of his rule, the main ideological argument in President Putin's favor was the stability of society, together with some increase in the standard of living; in comparison with the 1990s, this was seen as one of the regime's great achievements. By the beginning of his third term, however, it became evident to the country, and to Mr. Putin himself, that "stability" had worn itself out as the basis of an ideological construction. The prospect of economic stagnation, as predicted by his own advisers, makes the future appear quite gloomy for Mr. Putin. The protest demonstrations in 2011-12, which scared him immensely, made it necessary for the Kremlin to "reset" the regime's ideology. In the geopolitical realm, a public goal of partially restoring the Soviet empire as a way of restoring the unity of the Russian people, combined with anti-Americanism, was chosen as the new major ideological instrument for the legitimization of the regime.

In Mr. Putin's address to the state Duma in the aftermath of the invasion of Crimea, he proclaimed that the West has always, or at least since the 18th century, conducted a policy of "containment" because "we have an independent position and are not hypocritical." In addition, he hardened the official attitudes toward the West, accusing it of moral decadence and disrespect for Russian civilization and its Orthodox religion. Hatred of the United States in particular was a leading ingredient in the president's third-term ideology, not only because it was easy to foment the xenophobic sentiments of Russians but also because the United States was seen by him as a sponsor of democratic processes inside Russia, as well as in the former Soviet republics. Mr. Putin was also encouraged by his vision of the United States as a declining power and by the meekness of the American president.

A Kremlin Master

At first glance, it looks as though providence has once again helped President Putin with the revolution in Kiev. The events in Ukraine in autumn 2013 frightened him because they offered Russians an example of how to fight a corrupt system. At the same time, the unrest offered opportunities for the Kremlin master to recharge the country's ideology. Indeed, the events that destabilized Ukraine allowed him to play his geopolitical card, which, as seen by his war against Georgia in 2008, he had used rather cautiously in the past. This time, Mr. Putin has seemingly decided that entering into a risky game of confrontation with the West can give him the fuel he needs to maintain, and even increase, his personal cult; in his mind, this promises to secure his power for many years despite the deterioration of the economic situation in the country.

Indeed, President Putin's annexation of Crimea in March looked like a grandiose geopolitical victory for the Russian

VLADIMIR SHLAPENTOKH, *a professor of sociology at Michigan State University, was a founder of Soviet sociology. Since coming to the United States in 1979, he has published two dozen books on Russian and American society.*

SEEING TSARS. President Vladimir Putin on Victory Day, in Sevastopol, May 9, 2014.

ruler. It was definitely perceived this way by the majority of Russians, who celebrated the "return" of Crimea to the motherland. In March, 80 percent of Russians enthusiastically greeted "the restoration of historical justice," since Crimea was indeed a part of Russia for two and a half centuries. Many liberals, including Mikhail Gorbachev, joined the jubilant Russians, praising the brave move by the government. It is true that 40,000 to 50,000 educated Muscovites came out on March 16 to protest the Kremlin's foreign policy—there were practically no other serious protest actions in other cities—but they clearly did not spoil the country's euphoria. The Kremlin immediately labeled the protesters a "fifth column" and a gathering of paid foreign agents. "National traitors" is a new entry in Mr. Putin's lexicon. More than ever, the impact of the brave critique of the Kremlin by a few famous cultural figures, like the writer Boris Akunin, has been neutralized by the mobilization of numerous members of the intelligentsia, like the famous theater director Oleg Tabakov, who offered their full support and admiration for the president.

The fact that the mass support of the military invasion into Ukraine was bolstered by the official media does not undermine the political meaning of Russian public opinion. The impact of the blatant lies about Ukraine that were interspersed in President Putin's public statements in February and March 2014, and the influence on the Russian public of such abominable figures of Russian TV as Dmitry Kisilev, would be impossible if the masses were not traditionally receptive to xenophobia and anti-Americanism. Most Russians, including the most educated, believe the wildest absurdities about the developments in Ukraine, like the supposed mass harassment of the Russians there, the alleged U.S. State Department's direction of the revolution in Kiev and the claim that there were no Russian troops in Crimea during the referendum on March 16. From the beginning of the Soviet system until now, the Kremlin has never been concerned about the internal motivations of those who obeyed its orders, whether through fear or by a "genuine" belief in the official ideology. It is simply delighted with the support, whatever the motivation.

Ideological Strategy

Among the devotees of the authoritarian regime are the enthusiasts, who are more royalist than the king, and who will call for the further expansion of governmental policies on key issues. On March 17, the participants in a talk show on a leading television channel almost unanimously demanded that President Putin not stop with the annexation of Crimea but also seize eastern and southern Ukraine, justifying their aggressive ardor with both the need to protect Russians and their language, and the dubious security of the nuclear power stations and chemical industry under the current chaotic conditions in Ukraine. Half of Russians support this position. In the atmosphere of patriotic paranoia, several Russians are going even further. A Moscow newspaper reported that a member of the Volgograd legislature demanded on March 13 that President Obama return Alaska. Judging by the response on the Internet, the idea of Alaska

PHOTO:REUTERS/MAXIM SHEMETOV

being returned does not seem absurd to many Russians, who look at Mr. Putin as a leader able to undertake practically any imaginable geopolitical action. So far, of course, the slogan, "Alaska back," or even a call for the return of the other former Soviet republics to the imperial fold, does not play a serious role in the Russian political climate. It does, however, reveal the real potential of the president's ideological strategy.

The Kremlin hawks were restrained in their imperialist demagoguery up until now. They seem to have been given a green light for the most arrogant statements, even to the point of threatening the United States for its alleged involvement in pro-democratic movements in Ukraine and elsewhere. They remind the world that Russia can turn the United States into "radioactive dust" with Russian missiles if, as they have insinuated, the United States continues to hinder Russia's path to glory and supremacy in the territory of the former Soviet empire. Even during the gloomiest years of the Cold War, including Stalin's times, it would have been impossible for a Soviet propagandist to resort to such language. With this statement, the Kremlin has clearly decided to follow the example of the North Korean leaders, who regularly scare the world with threats of a nuclear attack to secure their personal power.

The Kremlin hawks remind the world that Russia can turn the United States into 'radioactive dust.'

Traitors and Patriots

Operation Crimea also helped President Putin accelerate the eradication of opposition to his regime. The events in Ukraine put accusations of anti-patriotism into circulation, with a frequency similar to the way the term was used during Stalin's fight against cosmopolitism in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Previously standard denunciations, like extremism or denigration of authority, clearly retreated before this charge. Many journalists and academics have lost their jobs, mostly under the pretext of anti-patriotism. What is more important, the campaign for the elimination of the "fifth column" has raised the fear of persecution—so far mostly of losing jobs or normal business conditions—to a level not seen in the country since 1985. Professor Andrei Zubov was fired from the Institute of International Relations for his "anti-patriotic article" in the newspaper Vedomosti. This was only the beginning of a mass campaign against "national traitors."

The success of the Russian campaign in Crimea, which was accepted with such elation by the majority of Russians, also misled many analysts in the West and in Russia into believing this was a great victory for Mr. Putin's geopolitical program. In fact, an elementary cost-benefit analysis shows that this is not so. The sudden decision to invade Crimea—it was abrupt not only for American intelligence services but for members of the Russian ruling elite as well—actually had nothing to do with a long-term strategy for "gathering Russian lands and Russians living in the near abroad."

The geopolitical goals and the desire to help Russians living in the "near abroad" are only a cover for the single passion of the Russian president—to keep his status as the Russian leader "forever." His foreign policy is virtually always an instrument for his personal goal, a fact that is mostly ignored by observers, who assume that Mr. Putin is actually pursuing the national interests of his country, and that the seizure of Crimea is a reaction to the humiliation of Russia by Western countries (see David Herszenhorn's article "In Crimea, Russia Moved to Throw off the Cloak of Defeat," The New York Times, 3/25). This is not only true in the West but also in Russia, where too many analysts, like Fedor Lukianov, the leading Moscow political scientist, have advanced theories that try, with their various incursions into history and philosophy, to obfuscate the crucial impact the current developments around Ukraine will have on Mr. Putin's personal interests. In contrast, nobody tries to explain the policy of Kim Jong-un as a desire to pursue his country's national interests because it is so evidently directed by his desire to keep power by any means.

An Emperor's Tactics

The theory about President Putin's neo-imperialist goals is fully refuted by the facts. It is well known that any leader concerned with building and maintaining an empire tries to gain the support, almost the love, of all of the nations that are (or could make up) its parts. Indeed, Franz-Joseph of the Austro-Hungarian empire, as well as Lenin and Stalin, sought to cultivate "the friendship of the people" (to use one of the most important Soviet slogans). Mr. Putin's policy is the absolute opposite. Instead of improving his relations with other countries—candidates for a variety of alliances in which Moscow might play a leading role—he has scared them all. Only Armenia expressed full endorsement for the annexation of Crimea. President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus and President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, two major actors in forging allies with President Putin, were very evasive about supporting the annexation of part of the territory of an independent country; tiny Kirgizia and

Moldova even dared to protest. More important, however, is that Ukraine will be an implacable foe of Moscow for a long time into the future. Meanwhile, the Baltic republics and all the former Russian satellites in eastern Europe, particularly Poland, have increased their desire for even closer military cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Besides Armenia and Belarus, only Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba, North Korea, Nicaragua, Sudan, Syria and Zimbabwe supported the annexation of the peninsula in the vote in the U.N. General Assembly. The Crimea operation also helped revive NATO, which had almost lost its raison d'etre. In the last several years, Russian foreign policy considered preventing the building of an American antimissile defense system in eastern Europe to be its main task. Now, the issue of Russian discontent has lost any meaning in the international debate, and the United States is largely free to create this defense system anyplace it chooses.

Meanwhile, the actions in Crimea can only help the separatist activities inside Russia in the future. For now, it has revived the idea of the referendum, which President Putin had outlawed, refusing to recognize it as a legal way of expressing the people's will inside Russia. Indeed, the country is full of territories where many people now nurture the idea of separation from Russia. In addition to the Muslim republics in North Caucasus and Tatarstan, we can mention the Far East, Kaliningrad and even some Ural regions. Russia may find itself paying for the Crimean operation with insurrection in some regions, where the people will resort to their own referendum to proclaim their autonomy or even full independence.

The deterioration of relations with the West, however far it goes, can hardly help to raise the international status of Russia, which President Putin sought to enhance by means of the extremely expensive Olympic Games in Sochi. Instead, Russia was being ousted from the elite G-8 club. In the West, Russia now looks like a veritable monster to many ordinary people. Whatever the reluctance of Western Europe to join American economic sanctions against Russia, and however limited the American sanctions themselves are, they will all hurt the Russian economy in various ways and bring unpredictable consequences for Mr. Putin. This will be true even if his special forces are able to quash protest actions in the near future.

If looked at from another perspective, the Crimean operation is fraught with serious dangers for President Putin's long-term chances of staying in power. The opportunities for this new geopolitical adventure to maintain the current blazing levels of patriotism are limited. He is generally a cautious politician, even if he is confident of the West's reluctance to engage in a "hot war"—the fear the West has of a new war is, in fact, his major weapon—he is still afraid to go further.

The Russian Elite

President Putin has also pitted himself against a considerable part of the ruling political and economic elites. Almost all those who were included in the blacklists formed by the United States and the European Union, like Vladimir Yakunin, the president of state-run Russian Railways and one of the richest people in Russia, publicly mock their new "no travel" position (in the Soviet Union, this status was enjoyed by all people suspected, as I was, of not being loyal to the system, as well as by most non-party members). The fact is, however, that restricting their freedom to travel, even aside from the potential loss of their property and money kept in the West, has hurt them a great deal. One can suppose that these people, who are utterly cynical, are hardly admirers of Mr. Putin's patriotism, and are very much indifferent toward the reunification of Crimea with the motherland. It is also highly probable that with only a few exceptions, the members of the elite, along with their families, are cursing their national leader for his anti-Western policy.

Even those privileged people in Russia who, so far, have not been targeted by the West nurture a growing animosity toward their benefactor. Of course, in the climate of total fear of the president, the members of the elite show complete public loyalty to their chief. What is more, many of them are aware that the fall of this regime does not promise them a nice future. Nonetheless, the discontent of the elite is a time bomb that will contribute, in one form or another, to the end of President Putin's rule. Private property is a new factor in Russian politics, one that will have a notable impact on Putin's future.

There are those who try to prove that Mr. Putin's geopolitical triumph is evident, and that the world is trembling as it tries to guess the next move of the new Russian tsar. His propagandists pointed with great schadenfreude to the critique of President Obama in the United States—ignoring, of course, that it was mostly because of his weak response to Russia's aggression—and said that Americans see Mr. Putin as a much more energetic leader than Mr. Obama. Politicians and the media mocked the American and European sanctions against Moscow.

Whether President Putin will continue to play the geopolitical card in order to sustain the patriotic hysteria in Russia, or will see the cost of his activities as too high in the post-Soviet sphere is something that even Putin himself probably cannot answer yet. Meanwhile, the only policy of the West seems to be to increase this cost if there is a new act of aggression. The naïve idea floated by some that Mr. Putin will become a peaceful member of the world community now that Russia has swallowed Crimea without serious reaction from the West is wrong. Those who share this view do not understand that Vladimir Putin's major preoccupation is to stay in power as long as possible. A

It Takes Time

On the future shape of the Anglican Church

BY JAMES HANVEY

Almost 27 years ago I attended a debate between Rowan Williams and Graham Leonard in Christ Church College at Oxford University. The debate was on the possibility of ordaining women to the priesthood. Pope John Paul II had ruled that the Catholic Church was not competent to change the tradition and had forbidden any further discussion of the question, at least in the Catholic Church. But sometimes questions cannot be settled prematurely, even by papal or episcopal fiat. There is a sense in which the community itself comes to a decision about "ripeness" and takes its time to arrive at a deeper understanding and peace. This, too, can be the work of the Holy Spirit.

As was to be expected, the debate in Christ Church was polite. At no time did I feel there was any danger to my blood pressure. It was a very Anglican debate. I do not recall either side developing an irrefutable argument, but I do remember it dawning on me, perhaps a little late, that whatever the theological issues, it was a debate about the identity of Anglicanism itself: Was it a Reformed church or was it a Catholic church? Could it be both?

Several years later, in 1992, an Anglican friend and priest rang me to tell me that, at last, the synod had voted in favor of women's ordination. He observed that although it had been a painful process, the decision had been arrived at in a very legitimate, Anglican way—through the houses of bishops, clergy and laity. It had not been unanimous, but the process of discernment had involved the whole body of the church. I was glad that it was a decision that obviously brought him consolation, and especially glad for his wife and my other friends who then went on to be ordained. Although on this occasion I did not share their theological position, I never doubted their integrity and desire to serve the church, the sacrifices they had made and continue to make and the power and grace of their ministry. They have kept before me the deep and consoling challenge of the priesthood of Christ, which ultimately must transcend gender, as it belongs to the whole people of God. Of course, having accepted both theologically and culturally the ordination of women to the priesthood, it would have been incoherent not to accept that women could become bishops—which the General Synod eventually did just last month (July 14).

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PHOTO: REUTERS/TOBY MELVILLE

CLERGY PERSONS. The enthronement ceremony for the new archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, March 21, 2013.

I do not know if there is one theology of priesthood in the Anglican tradition. In any dealings I have had with Anglicans—whether "high" or "low"—I have been impressed by their cultural and evangelical commitment, but I have been conscious of the wide variation in their understanding of what their priesthood is and entails. So Anglicans have a church that is in the process of redefining itself, and part of that seems to be the search for a functional ecclesiology of tolerance, a recognized theology of plurality within the one body that is allowed to express itself in different forms and disciplines. It seems to be a neat line to walk here between plurality and what some would see as a tolerated structural schism.

I wonder if the desire to accommodate different theologies in expressly different forms of office achieves a real ecclesial communion, or whether it represents a strained compromise in which people, at their best, have deep charitable dispositions towards each other, but live with a sort of quiet desolation at a divided body. Structural accommodations do not necessarily mean reconciliations, as we Roman Catholics know from our own ecclesial experience.

Anglicans have a church that is redefining itself; part of that seems to be the search for a functional ecclesiology of tolerance.

I also wonder what it would be like to be a bishop in such circumstances. How does one have a real sense of being a focus of ecclesial unity and exercise a deep pastoral solicitude for the whole body of Christ when a significant proportion of that body rejects one's ministry? The metaphor most used in the post-decision conversation is that of family—a family in which there can be differences of commitments and lifestyles but one that still wants to remain a family with obligations to each other. Is that metaphor now a nostalgic memory from an earlier settlement, or is it the beginning of a genuinely renewed ecclesiology that Anglicanism needs if it is to avoid a series of ad hoc arrangements that ultimately entrench division rather than resolve it?

ON THE WEB
Video reports from Catholic News Service.
americamagazine.org/video

The Church of England is undergoing a profound transformation—culturally as well as theologically and spiritually. Around its theological questions are also national and cultural ones. Can it remain an established church? Does that really serve the nation and the other Christian communities, as is often claimed? Does it allow the church real freedom, or does it subtly force it into accommodations with the spirit of the secular state? Whose head is really on the coin?

There is no doubt that the failure of the Anglican Church to agree upon women bishops last year drew considerable pressure from the government and parliament to change. Indeed, the risk of assimilationism can emerge from unexpected quarters: the question of women bishops was almost overshadowed by the support expressed by Lord Carey, former archbishop of Canterbury, for legalizing assisted dying. It raised a deep but unaddressed question about the witness of a "national" church. Although the question of women bishops and the church's defense of life can seem far apart in the public mind, they are theologically related to the very nature of the church's fidelity to Christ in history: not only how it lives that fidelity but how it comes to discern it in each age.

Of course, our own church cannot simply be a member of the audience as the Anglican drama unfolds. The Catholic Church has by its very nature a deep effective and affective solicitude for the whole body of Christ. Over the years I have felt privileged to watch the Anglican Church develop and evolve not just in response to the pressures of demographics and cultural change but with a profound and costly search for ways of embodying the Gospel. For all of us there is a sense that what emerges includes both a lasting truth and the contingency with which that truth must be given shape in history. This can be confusing, containing both grief and hope and the struggle between the siren voices of integrism and assimilationism, together with the different sorts of secular politics these represent.

But I have been conscious also of Karl Barth's teaching on the patience of God, who not only waits for us but accompanies us and, in every sense, makes time for us. This is far from a political process of change; it is about how we live and give shape to our salvation history so as to make Christ visible and available in our age. Patience is more than pragmatism or even a virtue, it is a grace born out of our trust in Christ's faithfulness to us. Every Christian community, especially our own, needs this patience as an ecclesial gift.

Since the day I listened to the debate in Christ Church all those years ago, the words of Rowan Williams remained with me. If I remember them correctly, he said that as a church we needed to remove all that impedes our living and witnessing to the Gospel of Christ. Yes! That surely is the primary task of a bishop, whatever the gender or whatever the confession. It is the hard work of love for the great church about which none of us can be complacent. A

An Itinerant Preacher

Following the poor Jesus

BY PETER J. VAGHI

Concern for the poor is a major focus for Pope Francis, and it should be for each of us. The psalmist reminds us, "The Lord takes delight in his people, honors the poor with victory" (Ps 149:4). How many times have we heard Pope Francis say that he wants a church "that is poor and that is for the poor"? In his apostolic exhortation "The Joy of the Gospel," he quotes an address by Pope Benedict XVI to the bishops of Brazil: "Today and always, 'the poor are the privileged recipients of the Gospel.'" Even more directly, Francis goes on to explain: "We have to state, without mincing words, that there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor. May we never abandon them."

The focus on charity and the poor not only is fundamental to the Gospel; it has been a consistent feature of Catholic social teaching from its modern advent. For example, in "Rerum Novarum" (1891) Pope Leo XIII wrote that the church "intervenes directly on behalf of the poor, by setting on foot and maintaining many associations which she knows to be efficient for the relief of poverty." More recently, in "God Is Love" (2005), Pope Benedict wrote, "The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word" and pointed out that these duties "presuppose each other and are inseparable." He went so far as to write: "A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented."

Each pope builds upon the teaching and example of those who preceded him. That is the way our church lives, breathes and grows.

Jesus Chooses Poverty

When we speak of the poor and vulnerable in Catholic social teaching, unavoidably we look to Jesus himself. It begins and ends with him. St. Paul writes that for our sake, and out of love for us, Jesus "became poor" (2 Cor 8:9).

How can we forget, for example, the refrain in the Christmas story that there was no room for them in the inn? St. Paul writes that in his incarnation Jesus "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (Phil 2:7). He could have been born in a palace fit for a king, but he was a different kind of king. Salvation history reveals that reality in the daily details of Jesus' life and in others involved in his salvific enterprise, like the lowly maiden who said, "May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

In a recent conversation, a man living on the streets asked me whether I thought Jesus had been homeless. I said that Jesus was certainly a man without an address. To a would-be follower, Jesus explained, "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head" (Lk 9:58).

During his years of public ministry, Jesus was an itinerant preacher. As he journeyed from one town to another, his mission was supported by a group of followers. The Gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus was accompanied by the Twelve, some women (Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna) and "many others who provided for them out of their resources" (8:3). We have no address for Jesus. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Jesus "shares the life of the poor, from the cradle to the cross; he experiences hunger, thirst and privation" (No. 544). He had no home and died with no possessions.

Jesus Identifies With the Poor

In the same paragraph, the catechism continues: "Jesus identifies himself with the poor of every kind and makes active love toward them the condition for entering his kingdom." In the Beatitudes, Jesus called the poor "blessed" and promised them entry into the kingdom of God.

The parable of the Last Judgment describes how Jesus, the king on a glorious throne, will judge people at the end of time (Mt 25:31-46). The yardstick for this judgment, of course, is how we treated the poor—those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, ill or in prison. Jesus identifies himself with the "least" of these brothers and sisters. There is no gap between Jesus, our king, and the poor and those in need. He fully identifies with them. He makes this crystal clear when he says, "I was hungry.... I was thirsty.... I was a stranger" and so on. And lest we fail to grasp Jesus' appropriation of the pronoun "I" to refer to himself, he gets even more specific: "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25:40).

To underscore his identification with the poor and his

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challenge to us to do the same, he says at the final judgment to those who fail the test: "Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.... What you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me" (Mt 25:41, 45). Thus there can be no greater solidarity and identification with the poor than that of Jesus.

The Challenge to Serve the Poor

As Jesus was born poor and thereafter identified himself with the poor, he also challenges each of us, as his followers and after his example, to serve the poor.

Truly to serve the poor is to heed the challenge of St. James, who insists: "If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (2:15-17).

In recent decades, the church's commitment to the poor is often referred to as our "preferential option for the poor." In fact, it can be called a divine preference, for in the words of St. John Paul II, God shows the poor "his first mercy." That is also our challenge as followers of Jesus. In "The Joy of the Gospel," Francis again quotes Benedict XVI, who writes that the option for the poor "is implicit in our Christian faith in a God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty."

Pope Francis also challenges Catholics to see this preferential option for the poor as one mainly of "privileged and preferential religious care," for he writes that "the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care." To walk with those who are poor, and accompany them both spiritually and materially, is integral to Christian discipleship. Not one of us is exempt.

And the work bears fruit; our faith is deepened and our spiritual journey enriched. As anyone who has been involved in any kind of outreach to the poor understands, the giver "receives" much more than what one "gives." It is, after all, the work of God.

Though this truth is often ignored, it is essential to understand that the poor "have much to teach us," Francis writes. "Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power [of God] at work in their lives and to put them at the center of the Church's pilgrim way." In and through our experiences with the poor, God shares his mysterious wisdom with us. It requires that we be close to the poor and to make them feel at home with us, especially in our parishes.

TABLE FELLOWSHIP. A free dinner provided by Catholic Charities in Chicago.

PHOTO: CNS PHOTO/JIM YOUNG, REUTERS

In a particular way, Pope Francis continually challenges us to walk with the poor in faith and charity. This means coming to know and serve the poor in our world and in our individual lives and to seek them out as "preferential." It transforms love into action. In his first letter St. John writes, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" (4:20).

In the end, we will assuredly see in the faces of the poor the face of the suffering Christ and ultimately the light of the risen Lord, his abiding love for them and each of us. To be a Christian thus means to be like Christ and his church—a church that is poor and that is for the poor. It means following and imitating Jesus, who actively sought out the poor.

ON THE WEB

Video reflections on Scripture from "The Living Word."
americamagazine.org/living-word

Praying With Laurie

On grief, growth and letting go

BY RICHARD WILE

I was introduced to centering prayer after Laurie, my 18-year-old daughter, died from cancer. In the 24 years since then, centering prayer's embodiment of *kenosis*, or self-emptying, has helped me in many ways to live with grief, especially by bringing to light one of grief's most insidious manifestations: the creation of a false self caught up in a false drama.

In his book *Invitation to Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation*, Thomas Keating, O.C.S.O., defined the false self as "the self-image developed to cope with the emotional trauma of early childhood, which seeks happiness in satisfying the instinctual needs of survival/security, affection/esteem, and power/control." As adults, we continue to create false selves, especially in times of turmoil. After an emotional trauma, like the loss of a child, grieving parents struggle to live with pain, often asking, "Will I survive?" Out of our need for survival, we can create these self-images, which allow us to pick up the pieces of our lives and go on. This false self, however, winds up exacerbating the pain—at least it did in my case.

Trying to make sense of Laurie's death, I created an image of myself as sinner. I concocted a drama about a man who sells his child's life to the devil in order to satisfy his own lustful desires, splitting his family, pulling his daughter in two directions, causing cancer cells to develop and metastasize. I embellished the narrative, convincing myself that I had murdered my daughter. However, there was a part of

me that kept saying: "Don't be foolish. Millions of fathers are divorced from the mother of their children and the children grow up perfectly fine."

When I first began to practice centering prayer, I tried to let go of this self-image as sinner. Then, after three years of spending 20 to 40 minutes a day trying to let go of my thoughts, I suddenly stopped censoring myself. I still remember the night I found myself saying, "O.K., I will always feel that at some level, I killed my child." It was as if a 200-pound rock had been lifted from my shoulders. That same week, I dreamed that I was looking through my journal, in which I had written (as I actually had) about the depth of my guilt. As I turned the pages in my dream, spaced throughout—sometimes right in the middle of my own writing—were sentences written in Laurie's tiny, circular handwriting. I finally turned a page and read her words, "I love you," as if she, or God, had said, "O.K., you're guilty. So what? I love you." And in this way, I had been shown that love, not guilt, is the way my daughter continues to live.

After letting go of my sense of self as sinner, however, I began to encounter the second false self, one harder to destroy: that of bereaved parent. What makes this self-image so difficult to let go of is that parents who have lost children become completely absorbed in grief, isolated from colleagues, friends, even other family members. My wife's two sons, for example, struggled with their stepsister's death, not to mention their mother's divorce and remarriage. Whenever my wife would become concerned about them, I would find a way to say, "Yes, but they're still alive." We become comfortable with this self-image, clinging to it and seeing it as a link to our children. We make friends with our suffering, allowing it to define who we think we are. We start becoming caught up in our own drama.

I need to distinguish here between drama and story. While a story is designed to interest, amuse or instruct the hearer or reader, drama carries with it connotations of strong emotions and the intent to act them out. In other words, a story focuses on the audience, on making my story our story, while drama, at least the way I have experienced it, focuses on the emotions of the actor or false self. Our story becomes my story, and my story becomes sadder than your story.

After Laurie died, I joined a group of bereaved parents for counseling sessions. One night I was talking about

ART: SUSAN OGILVIE

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how hard Halloween had been that year, because it brought back memories of the year before in the hospital, when Laurie was sad because she could not carve a pumpkin for Halloween. "How the hell could she carve a pumpkin in the hospital, doped up on morphine?" I asked. "What are you complaining about?" the young mother beside me, who had lost a child to sudden infant death syndrome, said: "You had 18 years with your daughter. I never had 18 days!"

Later, thinking about what she had said, I realized that her words echoed my thoughts any number of times during these sessions: "My pain is worse than yours."

I battled this attitude for years afterward. Eight years later, for example, at a Lenten retreat, when my wife shared a poem she had written the night before on Mary's grief as she holds her son's body after it had been taken down from the cross, I sat, enraged that she had written about my story.

During this time my centering prayer practice became like sitting at the edge of a black abyss. I think now that I was contending with what John of the Cross called "the dark night of the spirit," and which Father Keating calls necessary if we are to slough off our false self:

> When the night of spirit begins, all "felt" mystical experiences of God subside and disappear, leaving persons who have been led by the path of exuberant mysticism in a state of intense longing to have them back.... [W]ithout that purification, the consequences of the false self are not completely erased, and there is danger of falling into the spiritual archetypes that may arise out of the unconscious...prophet, wonderworker, enlightened teacher, martyr, victim, charismatic leader.

Like many grieving parents, I had fallen into seeing myself as the "martyr/victim."

My dark night lasted through the six weeks of Lent. On Easter Sunday, I listened to a sermon focusing on the women at the empty tomb in Mark's Gospel: "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (16:8). The priest focused on the fear that keeps us from entering into the joy of Easter, the fear of what the Resurrection means to our understanding of the way the world works, to our security, even if it is the security of our own suffering. Had I become secure, I wondered, possibly even happy in my vision of myself as a grieving parent? I realized that if I were serious about my Christian faith, I needed to stop dwelling on old memories of my daughter, and trust that she was with God.

The first step was to practice *kenosis*, letting go of those fears and questions about the Resurrection, and then trying to let go of the image of myself as grieving parent. The hardest part was letting go of my fear that to do so would mean I was letting go of my relationship with my daughter. I began a "fake it 'til I make it" routine, using my prayer periods to visualize my daughter's spirit, send out my love to her and trust that she would receive it. One day, during my meditation, I felt Laurie's arm around my shoulder. I knew that she was with me.

Whether or not my sense of Laurie was "real," I believe it came from God. Since then, my relationship with Laurie is stronger than it was when I was mired in the false drama of myself as grieving parent. Which is what *kenosis*—at least as I understand it—is all about, what Jesus was trying to teach us. As Paul says to the Philippians: Jesus "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave...humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death upon the cross"(2:7–8). Jesus teaches us that pain, grief and suffering need not define who we are. God does not disappear in the presence of death or other tragedies, and neither does our True Self: our self as the image of God.

I still find it hard to consent to God, to trust in a God whose world is full of unpleasant surprises, but I have learned that while death may end a life, it does not end a relationship, a relationship that, paradoxically, grows by letting go. A

FILM | RONAN McCOY

ACTS OF CONTRITION

A good priest walks a dangerous road in 'Calvary.'

Stark reality meets gentle whimsy. I'd like to think this is a characterization of the Irish temperament and the arts that flow from it; but whether or not that idea has any wider validity, it fits **Calvary** perfectly.

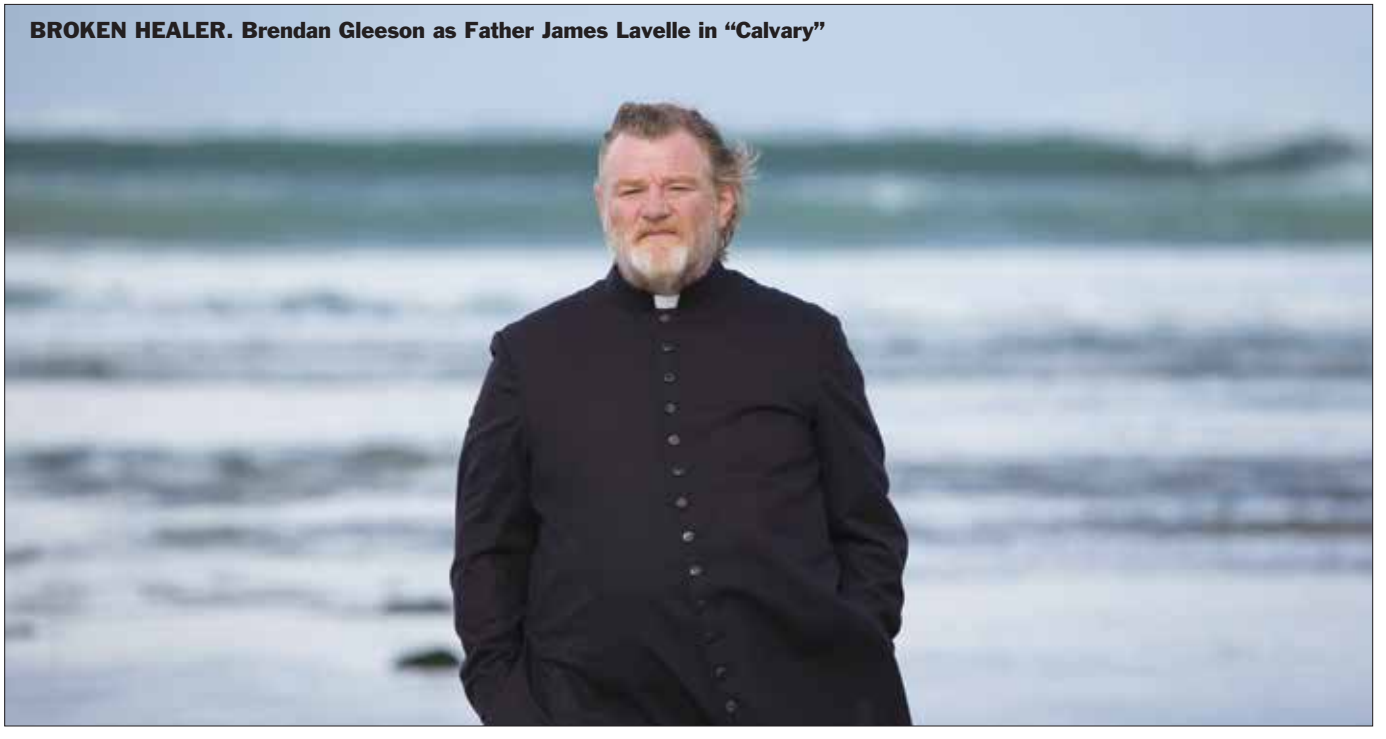
Another offering from John Michael McDonagh, the writer-director who brought us "The Guard" in 2011, "Calvary" is an intense whodunit set in the kiln of small village life in the west of Ireland. In its opening scene, the hero, Father James Lavelle (Brendan Gleeson) is told in confession he'll be killed in seven days. The penitent explains to Lavelle that as a young boy he was sexually abused by a priest, who has since died. It's time for some kind of justice. But, the hauntingly thoughtful voice continues through the grill, "there's no point in killing a bad priest, but killing a good one—that'd be a shock. I'm going to kill you, Father, because you've done nothing wrong."

Just as he did with the lead character in "The Guard" (also played by Gleeson), McDonagh's approach to scriptwriting is to build stories around well-developed heroes. Father Lavelle is not perfect, but he clearly is a good priest. This is emphasized by contrast with his strange and sinister parishioners—a brooding publican, a callously masochistic doctor, a homicidal 20-something, a posturing adulterer, a desolate millionaire, a brow-beaten butcher, a deranged male prostitute, a despairing writer and a psychotic serial killer.

The film documents Lavelle's week after the initial threat. He doesn't run. He doesn't call the police. He continues to serve his parish as best he can, attempting to offer his parishioners meaning beyond their struggles.

But this is 21st-century Ireland, wounded and angry after years of church abuses. It quickly becomes clear that the threat of holding this good priest responsible for the sins of his church is nothing new. His parishioners take every opportunity to remind him that he is no longer in charge, that Ireland has changed, that he is seen as a symbol of a broken past, not a hopeful future. What emerges is an image of today's church struggling to act as wounded healer in a deeply wounded community.

Father Lavelle's assistant is quite another sort of priest. Where Lavelle, the pastor, is an empathetic widower with a profound spirituality and a commitment to authentic pastoral encounter, his assistant is a caricature career cu-



BROKEN HEALER. Brendan Gleeson as Father James Lavelle in "Calvary"

PHOTOJONATHON HESSION. © 2014 TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

rate, given over to prayer-card piety and trapped in an ideal of detached semidivinity. What begins as an intriguing juxtaposition quickly becomes a satirical look at two competing ecclesiologies.

And so our whodunit fades into insignificance as the complexity of Lavelle's everyday vocation comes into focus. The parishioners taunt him, as retribution for generations of the church's abuse of power, with his social demotion. Dialogue after dialogue ends with admonitions like "Run along now, Father, your sermon is finished"; "Your time is gone; you don't even realize it." They feign moments of vulnerability and spiritual inquisitiveness before reminding him of their certain doubt and the futility of his hope. In one moment of respite, walking along a country road, he makes friendly small talk with an adolescent girl he comes upon. A car screeches to a stop alongside them, and Lavelle is battered with shouts of abuse from the girl's father, the way one might chase away a wild animal. At times, this sort of behavior nearly breaks him. This is no super-priest. Father Lavelle is a good priest because he is so ordinary in his vulnerability.

It's easy to see why a priest in that situation would build walls to hide behind, why he might prefer isolated security over the anxiety of a field hospital (to use Pope Francis' term for the church), but this is never an option for Lavelle. A priest with a hard-won spirituality built on personal relationships, Lavelle lambasts his curate: "It's just that you have no integrity. That's the worst thing I could say about anybody."

This speaks volumes about McDonagh's good priest and McDonagh's good church. As much as they may try to remain impervious, Lavelle's authenticity (he gets upset and angry when tears and rage are warranted) and unobtrusive care for the people determined to break him speaks truth to them.

An abusive relationship, suicidal depression, financial insecurity, detachment, isolation, doubt, fear—in the midst of all this chaos Lavelle's parishioners reach out to him. Cracks appear in the facade of absolute self-sufficiency and consumption. A young man, convicted of murder and struggling with psychosis, claws desperately for hope: "But God made me, didn't he? So he must understand me, don't you think?" In the second confession scene in the film, Lavelle responds to all this brokenness: "God is great. The limits of his mercy have not been set."

In a graced moment early in the film, a new widow laments "Many people don't live good lives. They don't love. I feel sorry for them."

The penultimate scene shows Lavelle awaiting his fate on the day he was assured would be his last. Even then the parish's supercilious millionaire, Michael Fitzgerald, recognizes enough in Lavelle to share his vulnerability: "I had a wife and kids. They meant nothing to me. I have money. It means nothing to me. I have life. It means nothing to me." As much as they protest, this is a parish hungry for something more and responding to Father Lavelle's gentle invitation to search for it with him. In their engagement, even in their cruelty, is a sign of hope, where apathy would be more cause for despair.

Bookended by confession scenes, the film itself acts as a sort of confession. It faces the stark realities of life for a person of faith in a post-Christian society, set against a backdrop of abuse, doubt and despair. Yet all this uncovers a depth of hope, born from the longing the characters have for more than their desolation would allow them to believe is possible. The gently whimsical moments point to that hope throughout. In a way characteristic of a culture well accustomed to facing harsh realities, this Irish film explores the richness of struggle alongside the lightness necessary to weather it.

I've seen this film twice now, once in a packed cinema in Ireland and once at a preview screening in New York City. I can imagine that as they watched the film, both audiences were filled with very different considerations, bringing very different experiences to bear on what they saw. But when the idyllic Sligo countryside on the screen faded to darkness, both audiences responded with awed silence as they attempted to steady themselves after the traumatic experience of raw honesty.

This is a truly beautiful film; intense, rich and not for the faint-hearted, but a potential experience of grace for a viewer open to it.

ON THE WEB
A discussion of "Calvary" and Ireland today.
americamagazine.org/podcast

RONAN McCOY, *a recent graduate of the National University of Ireland, is a summer intern at* ***America.***

THE BELLS OF ST. JOHN'S

It's 7 a.m., and I miss the bells.

I've just returned from a week's writing residency at the Collegeville Institute, located on the campus of St. John's University in rural Minnesota. The apartment I lived and wrote in, set on a lake beneath a canopy of trees, is just down the hill from St. John's Abbey Church, one of the most strangely beautiful churches I have ever seen. Each morning during my residency, the bells on the monumental abbey bell banner would begin ringing at 6:50 calling the monks—and all in earshot—to prayer.

On some of those mornings, not quite fully awake and barely fit for human company, I could not resist their insistent beckoning. They would pull me away from my books, away from my cup of steaming coffee, away from my flagstone porch where I would perch, watching the mist rise up off the lake, listening to the loons carry on their wild and raucous talk in the merry air.

On some of those mornings, I would pull on my jeans, strap on my sandals, and walk the half mile, briskly, to take my place in the dark stalls among the monks. It was a little pilgrimage—climbing that steep hill, the abbey church towering at the top, the highest point in the landscape, the bells enormous magnets drawing me upward on their waves of powerful sound.

I'd arrive at the church, push open the heavy planked door and make my way to the altar, a grand, sparse space that looks for all the world like a dais for human sacrifice. The first time my mind made this association, I was troubled, but then, as I recalled the nature of the Eucharist, the violent events it conjures and redeems, it seemed the perfect place to consecrate the body and blood of Christ and celebrate the Christian sacrifice.

St. John's belongs to the Benedictines. They have been living, teaching and praying the divine office here every day, on the edge of Lake Sagatagan, for over 150 years. Before that, they prayed in nearby St. Cloud along the Mississippi River, in Latrobe, Pa., and in the countryside of Bavaria. They brought their zeal for God to the people who lived here—teaching the students who came to them, conducting their ministry in the surrounding communities and performing the miraculous act, in this world of surge and urgent change, of staying still. The first vow the Benedictine takes is that of stability. Here he lives his whole life. And when he dies, his brothers bury him in the hillside, just as he has buried his brothers before him.

The monks welcome the stranger, as do those morning bells.

The monks welcome the stranger, as do those morning bells. This is their charism, and they practice it with grace and ease. When I arrive at the choir stall, an elderly brother, assigned to the task of acclimating visitors, makes his way toward me. He is bright-eyed, vigorous, kindly as he locates the psalms we'll be chanting, flips though Scripture, thumbs the well-worn pages of prayers, an expert. Soon the prayer begins—"Lord, open my lips"—and I am pulled along by the tide of voices as surely as I was pulled by the bells, out of my apartment, out of my books, out of my own solitary writings and into communal recitation of some of the oldest words we humans know. "And my mouth shall proclaim your praise."

After morning prayer, the remainder of my day seemed sanctified. I'd return to my writing desk to work on my current project, a biography of Flannery O'Connor. She too began each day with Prime. She too labored over language, trying to find the right words to tell stories that needed to be told. She, too, knew the pull of the bells, the ways one is called out of daily-ness, the concerns of the body (feeding it, resting it, dressing it) and the concerns of the mind (stretching it, focusing it, disciplining it) to attend to the needs of the soul. It felt as if we had walked to the abbey together—that she had braved the hill, even on crutches—that the elderly monk had welcomed two strangers that morning, and that we had all prayed together, in the company of the saints, both living and dead.

Today I am back home in New York, a thousand miles from St. John's Abbey. Today I'll return to my office to catch up on work I neglected during my writing residency. Far away as I am from that place, I carry it within me today, and will do so as long as I can.

It's 7 a.m., and I hear the bells.

ANGELA ALAIMO O'DONNELL

ANGELA ALAIMO O'DONNELL *is a writer, professor of English and associate director of the Curran Center for American Catholic Studies at Fordham University in New York.*

HOW THE RICH GET RICHER

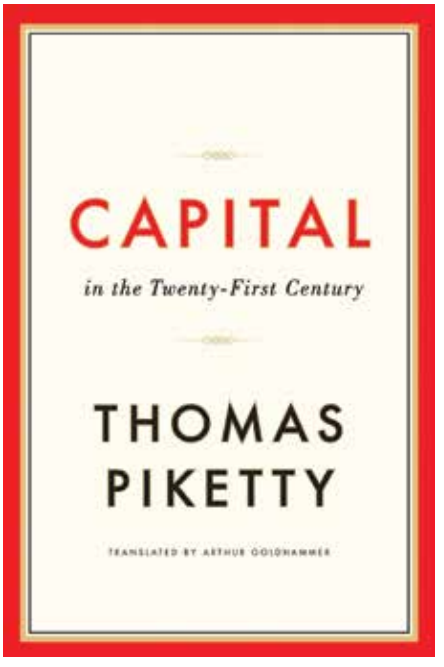
CAPITAL IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

By Thomas Piketty
Translated by Arthur Goldhammer
Belknap Press. 696p $39.95

One of the hallmarks of the young papacy of Pope Francis has been his repeated critique of what he calls the contemporary "economy of inequality and exclusion." Some commentators have seen this as an indictment of the present moment, but the pope's stance would be misinterpreted if it is seen as only a punctual concern rather than as a perennial one. His experience of inequality and its pernicious effects was formed in the crucible of decades accompanying his fellow Argentine citizens in the *villas miserias* around Buenos Aires. His understanding of inequality is of an entrenched reality, deep-rooted and self-reproducing over the long haul of centuries, and knottingly difficult to overcome.

It is a similar, long-run concern about inequality that motivates Thomas Piketty in *Capital*. Despite the book's title, his focus is not so much on capital accumulation and inequality today as it is on inequality across the long span of recorded human history (at least as recorded in business ledgers and government tax data, which extends from approximately 1700 to the present). In this monumental, vitally important work, he forces us to reconsider what we think we know about the baseline functioning of capitalist economies over the long haul, and to grapple with the implications for ourselves and our times.

Piketty's approach is data-driven. In detective-like fashion, he has collected the most complete historical series on distributions of income and wealth ever assembled, and this data allows him to articulate a penetrating and highly accessible account of the long evolution of inequality within advanced industrial nations. France and the United States receive the most extensive treatment, but he also presents data for several other developed nations, and offers suggestive evidence based on limited data for patterns of inequality in developing countries. The findings are numerous and sobering, and nearly every page of the book rewards a careful reading with new insights and intriguing questions.



First, Piketty convincingly shows that inequality among citizens—and even gross inequality—is anything but a new phenomenon; it is, and has been, perennial. He documents this wide disparity in both incomes (current earnings) and wealth (accumulated capital), noting how both have always remained high, but have ebbed and flowed since 1700, and highlighting how they peaked in the Belle Epoque prior to the world wars and Great Depression.

In doing this, he offers us a baseline for thinking about inequality of wealth in terms of three social groups or classes. With meticulously presented data, he shows how "in all known societies, at all times, the least wealthy half of the population own virtually nothing (generally little more than 5 percent of total wealth); the top decile of the wealth hierarchy own a clear majority of what there is to own (generally more than 60 percent of total wealth and sometimes as much as 90 percent), and the remainder of the population… own from 5 to 35 percent of all wealth." This is a useful short summary, like many he provides throughout the text, to keep in mind when thinking about inequality over the long run.

Next, Piketty provides an explanation for why this concentration has occurred: accumulated wealth has allowed holders of capital to invest in their own families and productive ventures, as well as to pass down their wealth through inheritance, allowing them to outpace the advances from non-capital holding peers. He summarizes this finding by stating that the return on capital (which he labels r) exceeds the growth rate of the economy (g); or more elegantly, $r>g$. He emphasizes that this is "a historical fact, and not a logical necessity." Over much of the period he studies, returns on capital have approximated 5 percent, while overall economic growth has ranged from about 1 to 3 percent. These numbers have varied greatly through time, but the long-run averages mean that holders of capital see their total worth increase more quickly than those whose earnings come only through their labor.

However, two significant changes occurred in the 20th century that temporarily disturbed, and noticeably improved, this equilibrium. Counterintuitively, the first was the monumental devastation of the world wars and Great Depression. This caused a massive drop in inequality, driven by the loss of wealth by those

at the top of the distribution as they lost land and factories in Europe and savings in the United States. The rich thus fell from their heights, and consequently the period from roughly 1950 to 1990 displayed much lower concentrations of wealth than at any other time in recent centuries. In fact, the widespread devastation gave rise to a period of rebuilding and innovation in which, briefly, some countries saw overall economic growth exceed the rate of return on capital.

The second trend built on the first. The process of reconstruction, industrial growth and increased education created opportunities for the emergence of what Piketty terms a "patrimonial middle class." This group is made up of the roughly 40 percent of citizens who are "distinctly wealthier than the poorer half of the population." They are the upwardly mobile citizens who for the first time in history began to own homes, property and significant productive assets and to especially benefit from higher education and employment in managerial positions.

Nevertheless, the era of reduced inequality was extremely short-lived, and the long term trend of $r>g$ reasserted itself well before the end of the 20th century. A vast trickle-down of wealth did not occur, and social mobility rapidly diminished. What Piketty challenges us to recognize, then, is that in the long view, the middle portion of the 20th century was remarkably anomalous. It featured an unprecedented destruction of wealth in the richest economies, lowering inequality to levels that were far from the historical average, and it then experienced atypical growth, far surpassing long-term trends. Alarmingly, he then argues that the 21st century is likely to look more like the 19th century, and he presents considerable evidence that the concentration of wealth today is now approaching (and in some countries surpassing) the levels of the Belle Epoque. In other words, based on the historical record, wealth inequality within countries is at an all-time high and is only likely to increase.

Notice, though, that Piketty's indictment of capitalism's tendency toward inequality is not axiomatic. It does not claim that capitalism inexorably produces inequality. Rather, his critique is empirical, and for this reason it is perhaps even more disturbing. It shows that for nearly all countries and nearly all periods over the past three centuries for which we have data, capitalism has produced highly unequal concentrations of wealth. This has been true despite variation in levels of state intervention and regulation, differences in leaders and partisan politics and even levels of corruption. Generous European welfare states like Sweden and market-driven countries like the United States, in spite of significant differences on the margin, all follow the same general pattern of high concentrations of wealth until the Belle Epoque, a decline of wealth and inequality following the world wars and the Great Depression and rising concentrations of wealth in recent years.

Piketty offers an antidote to this trend, but it is one that he admits is a political non-starter: a "global tax on capital" that would slow down ongoing capital concentration and transfer resources to the least wealthy citizens of the planet. In doing so, he echoes calls offered by both Pope Benedict and Pope Francis for a "world political authority" to "manage the global economy" ("Charity in Truth"). But recognizing that such a utopian proposal would be practically unenforceable, Piketty chooses to devote less than 10 percent of his text to it, and indeed the book should probably not be judged on the basis of it.

Rather, his analysis of the dimensions of the long-run trends of capital concentration are his chief contribution, and these deserve a careful and repeated reading. Indeed, in the best tradition of academic transparency, Piketty has made all his data accessible on the Internet. This guarantees the

ON THE WEB

The Catholic Book Club discusses a book on the *Summa Theologiae*.
americamagazine.org/cbc

opportunity for critiques, re-analyses and expansions of his work by other scholars, and these will only increase our understanding of both long-term and recent implications of inequality in our world (especially as his efforts are replicated for countries beyond those he has studied, especially among developing economies).

In the end, Piketty challenges us to learn from the "imperfect lessons of history," hard-earned in the last century, and suggests that we must do so with the "interests of the least well-off" in mind. His book does precisely this, providing us with a compelling new long-term view on income, wealth and inequality, and challenging us to consider how we will use our moment in history to address this crucial issue of our age and every age.

MATTHEW CARNES, S.J., *is assistant professor of government at Georgetown University.*

GERALD O'COLLINS

SHARING THE VISION

FAITH AND UNBELIEF

By Stephen Bullivant
Paulist Press. 176p $16.95

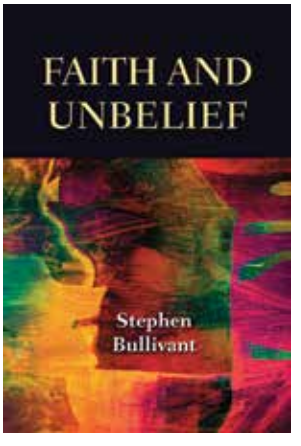
REKINDLING THE CHRISTIC IMAGINATION

Theological Meditations for the New Evangelization

By Robert P. Imbelli
Liturgical Press. 152p $19.95

These two books come from cultured and urbane Catholic professors of theology, one at Boston College (Imbelli) and the other at St. Mary's University, Twickenham, London (Bullivant). Neither needs to raise his voice to make his case effectively. Both are concerned, albeit in different ways, to contribute to the new evangelization of post-Christians or "resting" Christians in the North Atlantic world. Their writing draws energy from the radiant vision of the Second Vatican Council and the perennial newness of the Gospel.

As the co-editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism* (2013) and author of various works on contemporary atheism, Stephen Bullivant is well equipped to explore the culture of unbelief and do so from the standpoint of "faith," by which he unequivocally means Christian faith in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God who died a hideous death on a cross and rose gloriously from the dead. Recognizing that "atheism can be, and very often is, compatible with living a rational, meaningful and morally virtuous life," Bullivant aims to understand rather than directly refute modern atheists, who have become a major feature of historically Christian countries. He acknowledges the permanent role of Christian apologetics. But he presses the need for dialogue with the sizable and now longstanding numbers of nonbelievers in the Western world and not merely with such strident exponents of the "New Atheism" as Richard Dawkins, who simply does not speak for many agnostic atheists.



Bullivant admits that "there may even be atheist saints." But even so, he adds, "if Christianity is true, then atheists—along with all other non-Christians—must surely, at the very minimum, be missing out on something of supreme significance."

Christians themselves can promote the culture of unbelief by failing to live, explain and share their faith. Bullivant, while highlighting this failure, dedicates eloquent pages to examining three specific triggers of contemporary unbelief: (a) the strange and even bizarre nature of the Christian message, (b) the problem of evil and (c) the sense that science explains everything and so makes faith in God redundant.

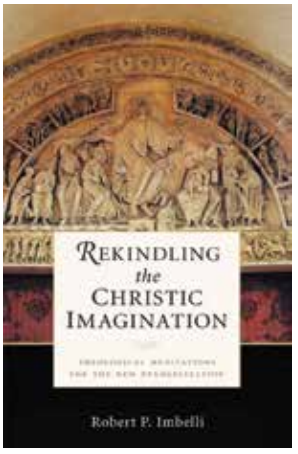
Bullivant does an excellent job showing "the outrageous character" of the Christian claims. "Irrespective of whether they are true or not, these are surely among the wildest and most monstrous claims ever proposed in human history." Many Christians have become so used to the narratives of the nativity and the crucifixion that they forget the scandalous nature of those narratives.

Bullivant does not pretend to "dissolve away the problem of evil," but shows rather how the killing of the incarnate Son of God makes the challenge "deeper and darker still." Beyond question, we may not sell short the challenge of horrendous evils. But a hope in Jesus that protests against crucified suffering enjoys a huge advantage over agnostic atheism. While not alleging that they can here and now come up with a satisfying explanation, Christians trust that one day God will reverse the situation between perpetrators and victims and let us see what evil and pain were "all about." Those who deny a personal life beyond death cannot look forward to any such final account. I would have liked some reflections from Bullivant on the strength and value of Christian hope.

In a few pages Bullivant dispatches the common but often weakly argued case that science and religious faith simply cannot co-exist. That view has even led some atheists to assert that

"eminent scientists who claim to hold theological beliefs cannot *really* do so" (emphasis original). This ploy could obviously be turned against its authors. Those, like Dawkins, who claim to hold atheistic beliefs, cannot *really* mean what they say.

But rather than spend time engaging in an apologetic rebuttal of non-believers, Bullivant proposes ways for entering into a new age of dialogue with atheists of every stripe. His clear, accessible and witty language serves to enhance his proposals notably.



Where Bullivant admires Fyodor Dostoevsky and draws on the stellar novelist's wrestling with the issues of evil and unbelief, Imbelli relishes the achievement of Dante, who turned Thomas Aquinas's prose into poetry. The greatest of Christian poets continues to serve as a treasured dialogue partner with agnostic outsiders like Clive James. Now old and sick, James published last year, as the culminating achievement of his career, a monumental translation into English verse of *The Divine Comedy*.

Robert Imbelli aims at nothing less than restoring the vision of the glory of God on the face of Jesus Christ—an aim that the Second Vatican Council notably expressed through two daily customs. The proceedings of the "plenary" or general sessions opened each day with the celebration of the Eucharist and the solemn enthronement of the Book of the Gospels. Christ and the Trinity presided over and permeated the entire work of the Second Vatican Council, with its aggiornamento (updating) of the church's life that frequently took the form of *ressourcement* (retrieval) of treasures from the past.

Rekindling the poetry of a life-changing faith in Christ as truly divine and fully human will be the only basis for an effective new evangelization. Imbelli places that faith in the context of the Trinity, the Eucharist and the church. The reflections he offers aim to revitalize a full Catholic commitment. Although not everyone may be as sanguine about what Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI has contributed to the church's liturgical life, Imbelli repeatedly offers insights that serve Catholic life, liturgy and proclamation.

His book features four well chosen and beautifully reproduced illustrations: a classical image of Christ from Vézelay, Rublev's icon of the Holy Trinity, Caravaggio's "Supper at Emmaus" (the version now in Milan) and the "Cross as the Tree of Life" (San Clemente, Rome). Imbelli is guided by the conviction that the beauty of great works of art can communicate more vividly and effectively than much theology. He comments incisively on the four illustrations and weaves their messages into his own text.

Imbelli, who was in Rome for the last papal election, outlines the encouragement Pope Francis has been giving to the new evangelization. Imbelli has even managed to insert a postscript on the November 2013 exhortation "The Joy of the Gospel," which spells out the challenging and hopeful program for Christian living and preaching that the pope has set before the whole church.

These books by Bullivant and Imbelli have somewhat different aims, but they converge in encouraging and promoting an active, Christ-centered existence in the church that engages generously with the wider world. Both authors enhance the value of their books by providing well-selected guides to further reading. Both share a life-giving commitment to Christ and his body, the church. Their pastorally relevant and historically insightful books will play a part in radically renewing the church and its members.

GERALD O'COLLINS, S.J., *emeritus professor at the Gregorian University in Rome, is the author or co-author of 62 published books, the latest being* The Spirituality of the Second Vatican Council *(Paulist Press).*

Rock-Solid Authority

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), AUG. 24, 2014

Readings: Is 22:19-23; Ps 138:1-8; Rom 11:33-36; Mt 16:13-20

"You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" (Mt 16:18)

One of the most shocking, but welcome, aspects of the Bible is how often power is challenged. It occurs so often in the biblical tradition that we might take it for granted, but the practice of saying uncomfortable things to those who have authority, to speak from a position of weakness to those who have power to harm one's life or position, is a rarity in antiquity and today. Implicit in this is that those who have power, even those with rightly-ordered authority, need, like the rest of us, to hear the truth about their own behavior and practices. In the Old Testament it is most often the prophets who are called upon to carry out this uncomfortable task, emboldened by the word of God to call wrongdoers back to the path of the covenant and its demands.

Isaiah speaks in this way to "Shebna, master of the palace" during the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah, at a time when the southern kingdom was under siege by the Assyrian king Sennacherib. We know a fair bit about this time, as the history concerning these figures appears in Isaiah 36-39 and 1 Kgs 18-20. Shebna is promised by Isaiah that he will lose his position to Eliakim, who appears in the later narratives as the master of the palace, with Shebna now the secretary to the king. Shebna loses his position, according to Isaiah, because he built himself a grand tomb and became a "disgrace to his master's house." God speaks through the prophet saying, "I will thrust you from your office and you will be pulled down from your post."

The following passage has significance both for its historical context and subsequent Christian interpretation. Eliakim is given Shebna's "authority" to "be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and no one shall shut; he shall shut, and no one shall open. I will fasten him like a peg in a secure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his ancestral house." He remains a secure peg and a throne of honor until Eliakim himself will be cut down and fall (as the next verses suggest, according to many commentators).

Echoes of this passage and its implications for human leadership in the *ekklēsia*, or church, resonate in the narrative of Jesus naming Simon *petros*, "rock," at Caesarea Philippi. According to Matthew, Jesus says: "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." While numerous scholars have challenged the authenticity of this scene as a whole, the naming of Simon by Jesus as *petros*, found in all four Gospels, is beyond question.

What did Jesus mean by it? Oscar Cullmann wrote (in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*): "Since Peter, the rock of the Church, is thus given by Christ himself, the master of the house (Is 22:22; Rev 3:7), the keys of the kingdom of heaven, he is the human mediator of the resurrection, and he has the task of admitting the people of God into the kingdom of the resurrection. Jesus Himself has given him power to open entry to the coming kingdom of God, or to close it." The authority Shebna and then Eliakim were given to serve the master of the house Hezekiah is now seen as Peter's authority to serve the Messiah's house. The task of admitting the people of God into the kingdom—this is authority.

But the authority does not belong to the human office-holder; it belongs to the office and more profoundly to God. Immediately after Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah, he is chastened for his unwillingness to hear or understand God's way. The giving of rightly ordered authority is not the same as having rightly ordered servants. This is why, even today, while recognizing and accepting the authority of the leaders of the church, it is always incumbent upon the householders to call the masters of the house to live as they have been called to do—because the final authority is God.

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Think of Jesus' naming of Peter. How must we support and call to account the leaders of the church?

ART: TAD A. DUNNE

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

Like Fire Burning in My Heart

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), AUG. 31, 2014

Readings: Jer 20:7-9; Ps 63:2-9; Rom 12:1-2; Mt 16:21-27

"So that you may discern what is the will of God" (Rom 12:2)

Much modern talk about God tends to reduce the creator to a living doll, who wants to give us a divine cuddle. There is no doubt that the essence of God's being is love, but the experience of that love and of God's being is not always an experience of comfort and ease. God can disturb the relaxed meditations of the satisfied and push believers to the breaking point. The awful power of God can overwhelm.

The language of the prophet Jeremiah reflects this experience of the might of God in language that can trouble people even today. The words of Jeremiah, "You duped me, O Lord, and I let myself be duped; you were too strong for me, and you triumphed," can also be translated, "O Lord, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed." Commentators note that the Hebrew verb *pātā,* translated "duped" or "enticed," carries overtones of sexual seduction as well as deception. The second verb, chāzaq, translated "too strong" or "overpowered" is an even stronger image; it can refer to sexual assault or rape and not just seduction. Jeremiah uses these images to describe his experience as a persecuted prophet called to preach an unpopular message—not just called but, he boldly says, "duped," "enticed" and "overpowered." He did not stand a chance.

The reason Jeremiah is mocked and is "all the day...an object of laughter" is that the message he has been sent to speak initially is "violence and destruction!" The "word of the Lord has brought me derision and reproach all the day," Jeremiah says, like the punch in the face from the priest Pashhur and a day in the public stocks (Jer 20:2). But not only did Jeremiah not stand a chance, he also had no choice: "I say to myself, I will not mention him, I will speak in his name no more. But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it." The word of God, the word of truth, overpowers Jeremiah, like fire burning in his heart, and he must speak. It might be this image of fire that correlates so well with the soothing picture of the psalmist, who speaks of seeking God because his "soul thirsts for you," his "flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water." God, whose word creates this burning fire of conviction and truth, is also the only one who can quench the flame and the thirst.

We find both of these elements of the search for God and God's overwhelming and consuming nature in the New Testament. After Peter has correctly identified Jesus as the Messiah, he has on his mind the triumphant establishment of God's kingdom, with himself, Peter the Rock, as the happy viceroy of the Messiah. Jesus tells them of a different way in which he will "suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised." Peter objects to God's way and begins to rebuke Jesus: "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." The problem, Jesus says, is that Peter is "thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." Jesus, submissive to God's will, not his own desires, finds God's way irresistible. He has no choice but to follow.

The way of fire seems designed only to consume us, but when we enter this path, what seemed like a way of destruction is quenched by the life-giving waters of God. This is why Paul urges the church in Rome: "Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect." The will of God is not always the easy path, as Jeremiah and Jesus show, but the soul that thirsts for God will be satisfied only by the water that gives life, that allows us to transform our minds and souls and so to discern the will of God.

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Spend some time on these passages. Are you resisting the call of God to follow a path that seems too difficult?

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