America
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Poetry in the Digital Age

THE INAUGURAL HUNT PRIZE LECTURE: PHILIP METRES

OF MANY THINGS

As a Jesuit scholastic, I spent one year at **America**. In the summer of 1994, I returned to the United States from a two-year stint with the Jesuit Refugee Service in East Africa, and my provincial superior told me I needed another year of regency before applying for admission to study theology. At the time I saw it as a punishment.

Now I see it as a grace. For I was missioned to the place that I returned to after ordination and that has been my home for the past 16 years. That "punishment" led to the ministry that I so enjoy: working at America Media.

None of this would have been possible without the extraordinarily kind welcome of George W. Hunt, S.J., who served as editor in chief here from 1984 to 1998. Since my first incarnation, I've worked under four editors, all fine Jesuits, all very different. When I refer to our current editor, Matt Malone, S.J., sometimes I like to paraphrase the speaker of the Robert Browning poem and say, "That's my fourth editor."

George was my first editor, and what an editor! First, he was a brilliant writer, a former literary editor of **America**, whose sparkling prose never disappointed. He could dash off one of these Of Many Things columns in record time, in longhand, and have it fit perfectly to the space constraints. Second, he was immensely well read, with a doctorate in English, and had written widely on John Cheever and John Updike. It was a rare treat to be at America House in 1997, when we presented the latter with the Campion Award, and see George so at home with the master.

Charming, erudite, articulate, polite and always a gentleman, George was also unflappable. He presided serenely over even the most contentious editorial meetings, with his half glasses perched on a patrician nose (he reminded me of Franklin D. Roosevelt), saying calmly, "Oh yes, very good. Let's go with that."

But he was no pushover. A Jesuit once wrote to ask me if we'd consider a possible article. I gave him some guidelines, but cautioned him (as we do) that this was no guarantee of acceptance. A few weeks later, Father Hunt called me into his office and said, "What's this?" holding out a piece of paper like smelly cheese.

The article had been rejected, and the author had written George an intemperate letter saying, in essence: How dare you reject my piece? I explained that I had given him advice but cautioned him not to presume acceptance of his article. George raised his eyebrows, crumpled the paper and tossed it into the trash can. "Nor any future articles."

George was also exceedingly kind to me. One Friday he asked if I'd like to visit the old Jesuit novitiate and the philosophy school, both north of New York. Very much, I said. The next day we piled into the community car and drove to Poughkeepsie. At the novitiate of St. Andrew-on-Hudson, which had become the Culinary Institute of America, George delighted in telling me how he used candlewax to polish the old linoleum floor in the entranceway, where the seal "AMDG" still shines. At Shrub Oak, the former philosophate, then a halfway house for recovering addicts, George approached the front desk, said he used to live there and was asked, "Were you a patient?" He threw his head back and laughed (not unlike F.D.R.).

The day was all the more impressive because George was essentially an introvert. It made this Jesuit feel very welcome at **America** and in New York.

It's entirely appropriate that we now have a literary award named after Father Hunt. It has been given to Philip Metres, a professor at John Carroll University, whose lecture at the awards ceremony we welcome into our pages (p. 16). I can easily imagine George reading Mr. Metres's poetry, peering down through his half glasses and saying, "Oh yes, very good, *very* good."

JAMES MARTIN, S.J.

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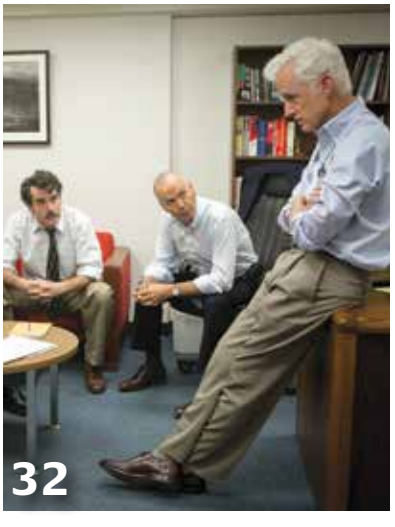

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BOOKS & CULTURE

ON THE WEB

Francis X. Clooney, S.J., examines the legacy of **"Nostra Aetate,"** and America Films profiles the poet **Philip Metres,** right. Full digital highlights on page 15 and at americamagazine.org/webfeatures.

Contributing to Extremism

Thanks to the Internet, it is easier than ever to give a few bucks to a favorite candidate, and presidential contenders from Senator Bernie Sanders to Dr. Ben Carson are raising most of their funds in donations of less than $200 each. More widespread participation in politics is welcome, but an unintended consequence may be a rise in polarization.

The political scientist Michael Barber, of Brigham Young University, recently analyzed contributions to state legislative candidates across the country and discovered that grassroots donors were more inclined to support candidates who toed the party line on almost every issue. In contrast, Mr. Barber wrote in The Washington Post on Oct. 23, "interest groups tend to worry less about a candidate's ideology.… They donate so they can talk with lawmakers as they're writing bills and passing laws." Political action committees, often seen as a corrupting influence, are also more supportive of moderate candidates who keep government running.

Individual voters may simply be responding to candidates who shout the loudest on cable news programs and social media. These days, we may be less likely to pick candidates based on conversations with co-workers, neighbors or fellow churchgoers—or to seek information from sources like labor unions and business organizations, which are more interested in responsive government than in brinkmanship politics. Whatever the reason, voters themselves may be contributing to the gridlock and dysfunction they routinely complain about. The election process might be improved by more careful deliberation before clicking "contribute" on a campaign website.

Maritime Mediation

The United States sent a clear message on Oct. 26 when it sailed a Navy warship within 12 nautical miles of the Subi Reef, an artificial island in the South China Sea: The laws of the sea will not be rewritten in sand. In recent years China has gone on a maritime dredging spree, turning previously submerged reefs into man-made landmasses in order to stake its territorial claims in the resource-rich and highly contested waters.

While the United States has refrained from formally taking sides in the South China Sea disputes, this "freedom of navigation operation" signaled to China and its Southeast Asian neighbors that the Obama administration will not abide by claims that violate international law regarding open sea lanes. There are legitimate reasons for this pointed show of force. Nations the world over, including China, have benefited from the passage of goods and persons in the Asian Pacific. With six countries, including the Philippines and Vietnam, jockeying for maritime rights, the historic role of the United States as a protector of free and safe navigation in the region remains important.

It is also essential, however, that the United States demonstrate its commitment to de-escalation and a preference for peaceful mediation. A good way to start is by ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea—166 countries have already signed on—that Republican senators have repeatedly blocked. Now, more than ever, it is vital that the United States throw its weight behind this comprehensive mechanism for multilateral dispute resolution.

Rollback for Working People

Wisconsin introduced the nation's first workers' compensation program in 1911. Now its Republican legislators propose a "reform" of the state's system that threatens to significantly trim benefits for working people injured on the job and reduce the statute of limitations for "traumatic injuries" from 12 years to two. Workers seeking compensation would still be barred from suing employers.

Worse, the plan, among other measures, allows employers to pick the doctors who evaluate injuries for workers without insurance. Workers would have to argue about their own culpability for the injury to determine how much compensation they will receive. This "reform" moves the system from a straightforward no-fault process that quickly delivered compensation for injuries and lost wages into an appeal that is front-loaded against injured workers. The move expands a nationwide assault on workers' compensation that has deeply diminished or eliminated compensation in 33 states, according to an NPR and ProPublica investigation in March. Employers are now paying the lowest rates for workers' compensation insurance than at any time in the past 25 years.

Various state-level changes to compensation programs have transferred the responsibility for supporting injured workers from employers to taxpayers by way of the Social Security Disability, food stamp and Medicaid programs. Too many state governments, accepting legislation promoted or even written by corporate lobbyists, have been complicit in denying their own citizens just compensation. Since the federal government is often left holding the bag, it should revisit its oversight responsibilities for state compensation programs and consider appropriate legislation to restore workers' rights when they are injured on the job.

EDITORIAL

Seize the Moment!

Our church has attracted many headlines in recent months. In May we had the publication of Pope Francis' encyclical "Laudato Si'," which studied the environment and oftentimes adverse impact of human activity on it. In September we welcomed Francis to the United States, with his addresses to Congress and to the United Nations, many prayer services and parades and visits to prisoners, the homeless, religious women and hundreds of thousands at Philadelphia's World Meeting of Families. Millions watched and cheered these events. In October Francis presided over the meeting of the Synod of Bishops on marriage and the family.

All of this is in addition to constant stories about Pope Francis going about his daily mission with simplicity and humanity. The man has broken down old barriers, opened new doors, given the papacy a refreshing new image. Some cringe. Others complain. Most applaud.

"Laudato Si'" raised hackles in some quarters and in others became a rallying point. Who is the pope to be writing about science? What does he know? This contrasts, of course, with feelings of relief and support—thank heavens someone of the pope's stature is speaking up. God made us stewards of his creation, not owners and exploiters. Twenty-eight protesters arrested last August as they tried to stop construction of a natural gas storage faciliity in Seneca Lake, N.Y., carried a huge mockup of the encyclical and proclaimed, "Pope Francis, we hear you."

"The meeting of the Synod of Bishops in October also stirred up strong reactions. The pope's openness, desire for discussion and drive to hear opposing viewpoints have revealed some rifts usually hidden from public view. The commentary was varied, sometimes contentious. Earlier this year, the commentators were asking, Who is the pope to talk about the environment? What does he know about the economy? Now the questions were, Is he trying to change marriage law? Is he trying to change doctrine? Others thought the pope was not going far enough; they asked whether the pope's "revolution" is more than a series of inventive gestures. Most commentators, however, were ready for a thorough examination of what is essential and what might be longstanding but negotiable.

It was Pope Francis' six days in Washington, New York and Philadelphia that drew particularly heavy attention throughout the United States, almost all positive. His smile was contagious. People on the streets acted more friendly. Televisions in bars followed the papal parade through Central Park. TV news celebrities confessed their onetime religion. The Catholic Church was in.

What can we do with this energy and interest? Discussions and disagreements will continue, though perhaps not with the intensity of the reactions to the synod. But what about the good will and optimism that the pope's U.S. visit generated? Where can it take us?

One area we all have to work on is civility in discourse and disagreement. Around the time of the synod, Pope Francis spoke much about listening, speaking and allowing others to speak. That meeting generated some heated talk, angry words, suspicion and discord. Bishops disagreed with each other in public. That is not bad if it is done with respect and desire for truth. Any one of us can reach out to someone we disagree with, sit down over a cup of coffee and find what core values we share. Not a bad start.

We can reach out to Catholics who have not found life in the church and have drifted away. How can we accompany them? Do they have something to say that we need to hear? Let them speak! Let us listen!

We cannot wait for church officials to move before we do. Bishops, pastors and parish staffs already have their hands full. Individuals and small groups within parishes need to take the initiative to find new projects or structures that will help build on what we have in order to proclaim the Gospel in new ways to our very new world. They must support their parishes as they also rightly challenge them.

One powerful image from the pope's visit is a video on **America**'s website that shows some of the Jesuit high school students who traveled to Philadelphia to see the pope—about 400 of them from 40 schools. What more can our schools do?

We must not fail to recognize and lift up what we do accomplish—in everyday parish life, of course, but also in a rich variety of ministries. At the annual Ignatian Family Teach-In, students from Jesuit schools raise awareness of important issues. Catholic Extension gives essential support to the church in rural America.

And in the end, let us be thankful. For the challenges we face. For the faces and the words on our websites. For the students in our schools. For our leaders. For communities gathered in our local churches. For families that come home each day to love and support one another. For Pope Francis. And for all the good things we do.

REPLY ALL

Place of Privilege

Re "Breathing Space," by Alex Mikulich (10/26): Thank you for this very powerful article. As an African-American woman who has taught in Jesuit schools for 14 years, I appreciate Mr. Mikulich's acknowledgment of white privilege in Jesuit institutions. Many Jesuit schools offer wonderful opportunities to students of color, but often the students' ability to cope with the level of racism they face in these institutions can be daunting. In the words of St. Ignatius, "Love is seen more readily in deeds than in words."

BORETA SINGLETON
Online Comment

Healing the Sick

Re "A New Subordinationism," by John J. Conley (10/19): While I find many reasons to agree with Father Conley in his concern over the state's increasing subordination of religion in the United States, I would find such concern more ingenuous if it did not so often coincide with increasing financial burden on the poor and middle class. Sadly, this iteration of subordinationism has raised its head in reaction to the Affordable Care Act, which provides medical coverage for so many of our citizens. Religious liberty is not a Gospel value; care for the sick most certainly is. Jesus healed the sick but did not enjoy religious liberty under the government of Rome, nor did his disciples.

Understandable as is conscientious objection to the birth control provisions of the A.C.A., I believe we would have provided a more powerful witness to our faith had we been equally vocal in our support for this first valiant plan to provide affordable health care, quietly working out the birth control issues on the side. As it has turned out, the church's support for health care has been drowned out by our loud objections to infringements on our liberty. Let us instead use our religious liberty to speak out and address issues of violence and injustice, the sacredness of life and family, knowing full well that like Jesus, we may not always find sympathetic ears.

FRANCES ROSSI
Denver, Colo.

Emmaus Moment

"Bringing New Life," by Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I. (10/5), shares exceptional insights about the passion and death of Jesus. The author's comments about "the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two" were especially arresting and, for me, gave rise to something akin to what our brothers on the road to Emmaus felt. Despite church language that might be understood otherwise, I do not think we are called to believe that God our loving Father demanded Jesus' crucifixion as a needed counterweight for a sinful human balance sheet. I am grateful for Father Rolheiser's careful reflection encouraging us to persevere in believing what is beyond our human understanding: that despite our sin, even the unspeakable way in which we killed the son God sent us, the person behind "the veil" has unchangeably offered each of us unconditional love. Father Rolheiser has identified a field worth digging continuously as we endeavor to discover the treasure against which all else pales.

ROBERT B. MURRAY
Braintree, Mass.

Bursting the College Bubble

Re "Why Educate?" (Editorial, 9/28): The cost of college is soaring, growing at double the cost of health care and four times the cost of housing. At the same time, the rigor of the education is going in the opposite direction. This is clearly an economic bubble situation,

STATUS UPDATE

In "What the Synod Did" (In All Things, 10/25), James Martin, S.J., points to five important accomplishments that came out of the bishops' deliberations on issues related to the family. Readers offer their own takeaways.

I give Francis great credit and hope he will continue his efforts to open the church to mercy. That said, here are five things the synod did not do: 1) Allow women attending to vote; 2) Have theologians present to provide context; 3) Have a real discussion on sexuality (the church in America has no moral standing when it comes to sexuality after "Humane Vitae" and the sexual abuse scandal); 4) Discuss in a deep and serious way the role of women in the church (only one bishop had the courage to talk about women as deacons); 5) Recognize that the church's teaching on sexuality divides the body and the spirit and therefore is a theology that simply is ignored.

KEVIN SULLIVAN

Five more things the synod did: 6) Created unrealistic expectations tailor-made for "thought leaders" to blow out of all proportion; 7) Aired the hierarchy's dirty laundry; 8) Deepened the cultural divisions among the laity; 9) Distracted the church from the tried and true methods of spreading the Gospel through preaching and the sacraments and handing on the faith through priestly formation and rearing children; 10) Set back the cause of ecumenism and further weakened the moral voice of the church in the world (not an easy task these days, to say the least). Bravo!

ROGER L. ESTES

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

and bubbles are unsustainable. Most colleges are so ideologically constrained that they may be mainly miseducating their students, ethically and factually, so that students must re-educate themselves when they get a job in the real world. Senator Bernie Sanders has a plan that will only increase that cost further and delay the market correction that is sorely needed.

The increasing sophistication of online courses and other electronic resources will likely burst the college bubble. A combination of online education and a part-time college presence could provide an excellent liberal education for most in half the time and at a fifth or tenth the present cost. This will be fiercely resisted by academics (less money and less time to indoctrinate the students in their pet ideologies) and their political allies, but it is likely to succeed all the same. Other colleges and universities can then focus on technical education and the professions.

TIM O'LEARY
Online Comment

'Extend the Sphere'

Both the Of Many Things column by Matt Malone, S.J., and Robert David Sullivan's "TV Comes of Age" (9/28), are poignant reminders that "those who forget history are doomed to repeat it." The business model of cable news channels and online news sites, which build mass markets for advertisers by "severing from one another" different demographic groups, Father Malone says, "enfeebles public discourse" and is "deeply complicit in the political polarization of the electorate." "The result," writes Mr. Sullivan, "is sensationalism and appeals to partisan prejudice."

This is not the first time in our history that the negative effect of splinter groups on the well-being of the nation has been an issue. In formulating the U.S. government, the founders were most sensitive to the threat of factionalism. In Federalist Paper No. 10, James Madison argued that liberty would be better protected if the constituent units of government were not too small: "Extend the sphere, and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens."

GEORGE E. WARD
Canton, Mich.

Labor's Catholic Roots

"Worked Over" (Editorial, 9/14) diagnoses some of the problems in the American culture and economy today but does not address the central issue, which is that 93 percent of private sector workers are not organized for collective bargaining with employers on income, working conditions and benefits. The editors refer to Archbishop Wenski's Labor Day statement in 2015, which damns workers' organizations with faint praise by noting their imperfection and indicates there is very little institutional memory about the robust and constructive contributions of the Catholic Church in America to the gains made by labor in first half of the 20th century.

The U.S. bishops have expended incredible energy in their fight against abortion, contraception and gay marriage. When have they taken a militant stand for increasing the minimum wage? The statement speaks of reflection, which is a lot easier than proposing a course of action, like extolling the rights of people to organize into unions and negotiate for their just due. With so little union activity in the private sector, we live in an era of food stamps, Medicaid and welfare. The bishops need to smell like the sheep, and they should extol the working class and unions, celebrating neither Democrat or Republican policies and politics but leading us as a society even beyond the message of charity to a message of human justice.

ERNEST C. RASKAUSKAS SR.
Potomac, Md.

A Ways to Go

Re "Not a Maverick Pope," by Gerard O'Connell (9/14): I love Pope Francis, but it is factually incorrect to assert that he "never puts himself above anybody." He does. He puts himself and all Catholic males above women. I love him in spite of his shortcomings. I am grateful for what he has begun to do in the church, and I pray for him to be able to ordain women as priests and to do much more to address the horrendous conditions imposed upon women worldwide. He could be a powerful voice but must start with the misogyny in his own house.

SUSAN McGREAVY
Online Comment

"To be honest, Noah, you're a little overqualified for the job."

CARTOON: BILL THOMAS

INDONESIA

Wildfires Cause Local Misery And Global Environmental Offense

PHOTO: REUTERS/NORJANI/ANTARA FOTO

FIRE HAZARD. Authorities evacuate a 19-year-old female orangutan from a burning forest near Sampit, Central Kalimantan, on Oct. 28.

Rainfall in late October helped disperse the choking haze overhanging several regions of Indonesia severely affected by forest and peat fires. But much more rain is needed to help put out the massive fires, Luhut Panjaitan, coordinating minister of Politics, Law and Security, told reporters. "If we have intensive rain for four days consecutively and our water bombings continue, I hope next week we'd back to normal," he said.

For weeks, the fire haze has upset the lives of ordinary people in various parts of the country. Transportation has been disrupted and schools have been closed. In some provinces, the pollution level is 10 times the acceptable limit. According to Indonesia's Health Ministry, at least 425,700 people have suffered respiratory problems because of the smoke. Over 22,000 police and military personnel have been deployed to combat more than 1,600 fires spread across six provinces.

Indonesian authorities launched the country's biggest operation to combat the fires in late October with few tangible results. They are deploying civilian and military vessels to evacuate people endangered directly or those most vulnerable to the smoke. Passenger terminals, warehouses and harbor facilities will be used to shelter smoke-haze refugees.

Indonesian Catholic leaders joined indigenous people and social groups to protest a lack of government action. The church had distributed more than 25,000 donated face masks to help local residents breathe.

The nation's Catholic bishops have for weeks been urging stronger action from authorities to deal with the crisis. In October, after the meeting of the Synod of Bishops in Rome on the family, they joined Catholic bishops around in the world in a demand for practical action from the U.N. sponsored conference on climate change in Paris in December.

At that conference Indonesian leaders will have to submit their plan for containing greenhouse gas emissions. The daily emissions from the peat fires in Borneo and Sumatra alone are currently exceeding the emissions generated by the entire U.S. economy, putting Indonesia on track to be one of the world's largest carbon polluters this year, according to data published by a researcher at the University of Amsterdam.

The weeks of smoldering wildfires have claimed the lives of Indonesian children and adults vulnerable to respiratory distress, but they have perhaps been hardest on the vast archipelago-nation's wildlife. According to the Jakarta Globe, endangered orangutans are falling victim to the fires and smoke. If they are not trapped by the flames and burned to death, the constant smoke inhalation has left them sick and malnourished.

According to NASA, which has been tracking the extent of the crisis as the smoke drifts across the region, peat fires in Indonesia are not like most other wildfires. They are extremely difficult to extinguish and may smolder under the surface for long periods, often for months. Usually, firefighters can put them out only with the help of downpours during the rainy season. NASA reports Indonesia's peat fires release far more smoke and air pollution than most other types of fire.

The fires start to burn in Indonesia every year because farmers engage in

"slash and burn agriculture," a technique that involves burning rainforest to clear the ground for crops or grazing animals. The fire starters are attempting to make room for new plantings of oil palm and acacia pulp. Indonesia has come under heavy pressure from its neighbors and environmental groups to crack down on the annual practice. Though the annual fires are illegal, the government has done little in the past to prevent them, and many in Indonesian civil society complain of government complicity with plantation owners, small landholders or pulp companies.

MIDDLE EAST

Bishops Hope for Peace in Syria

Syriac Catholic bishops, meeting in Lebanon during their annual synod, called for a diplomatic solution to achieve peace in Syria and Iraq. In a statement released at the conclusion of the assembly, the bishops pleaded for an end to the civil war in Syria, now in its fifth year, and urged countries—particularly those directly involved in the conflict—to follow a path of "negotiation to find a peaceful political solution."

With Syriac Catholic Patriarch Ignace Joseph III Younan presiding during the Oct. 26-29 gathering at the convent of Our Lady of Deliverance in Harissa, Lebanon, the bishops denounced the "barbaric acts" carried out by the Islamic State, pointing to the destruction of archaeological and cultural cites integral to the history of Syria and Iraq in places like Palmyra, Syria, and the ancient monasteries of Mar Behnam in Iraq and Mar Elias in Syria.

The bishops demanded the liberation of all hostages and renewed their call for the release of two Syrian bishops—Syriac Orthodox Metropolitan Gregorios Yohanna of Aleppo and Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Paul of Aleppo—kidnapped in April 2013. They lamented the tragedy of displacement and the resulting immigration facing Syriac Catholics. In Iraq, citizens of Mosul and the Nineveh Plain were uprooted in summer 2014 by Islamic State militants, resulting in the exodus of more than 100,000 Christians to the Kurdistan region in the north. Thousands have since emigrated to other countries.

AFTERMATH. Survivors sift through the rubble of a destroyed field hospital in the rebel-held area of Douma on the outskirts of Damascus, on Oct. 29.

The bishops appealed to key countries concerned with Iraq to support its army "to speed up the liberation of Mosul and Nineveh Plain so that people can come back to their homes and live in peace and security." They also demanded "international guarantees from the United Nations, the central government and the Kurdistan region, to ensure the common security of living between Christians and other components after the return, and compensation for the property they lost."

As the bishops issued their statement, there were indications of a possible Syrian breakthrough as negotiators from 19 states, including the United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Iran, gathered in Vienna. "Four and a half years of war in Syria we all believe has been far too long," U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry told reporters. "The consequences of that war for so many people, innocent people, is beyond description…And so we came here…with the conviction that the fighting and the killing absolutely has to end."

The secretary said it will take pressure "from many different directions to reverse the escalation of conflict and to lay a credible groundwork for peace."

He said, using another name for the Islamic State, "Daesh and other terrorist organizations, we all believe, can never be allowed to unite or govern Syria. The United States position regarding Syria, I emphasize, has not changed.... There is no way that President Assad can unite and govern Syria. And we believe that Syrians deserve a different choice, and our goal is to work with Syrians from many factions to develop that choice."

Secretary Kerry acknowledged that the U.S. position was diametrically opposed to that of the Russian Federation. "But," he said, "we can't allow that difference to get in the way of the possibility of diplomacy to end the killing and to find the solution."

As if to remind all parties of the difficult task ahead, as the ministers began what could become dialogue to an eventual ceasefire, a missile barrage slammed into a suburb of Damascus, killing at least 40 people and wounding many others in the latest government attack on the rebel-held area.

The Syrian National Council, the main Western-backed opposition

group in exile, blamed Russian airstrikes for the "massacre" in Douma. It said it was the second deadly attack in the past 24 hours after Russian air strikes bombed the main hospital in Douma a day earlier.

Bishops in Climate Call

Catholic bishops from five continents issued a challenge to U.N. delegates who will meet in Paris in December to discuss the international framework on climate change, calling for "a just and legally binding climate agreement" to emerge from the negotiations. The bishops and cardinals issued a 10-point policy proposal "linking climate change to social injustice and the social exclusion of the poorest and most vulnerable of our citizens." They urged leaders to be courageous and creative but insisted on "enforceable agreements." Cardinal Oswald Gracias of Mumbai, India, president of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, signed the appeal on Oct. 26 at the beginning of a joint news conference at the Vatican. The appeal, Cardinal Gracias said, was a response to Pope Francis' letter on the environment and an expression of "the anxiety of all the people, all the churches all over the world" regarding how, "unless we are careful and prudent, we are heading for disaster."

Romero 'Defamed'

Pope Francis had strong words on Oct. 30 for Catholic priests and bishops who "defamed" the assassinated archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Romero. Going off script during a meeting with 500 pilgrims from El Salvador, Pope Francis said, "The martyrdom of Archbishop Romero was not fulfilled at the moment of his death—it was a martyrdom of witness, of prior suffering and prior persecution, up to his death. But even afterward, following his death—I was a young priest and a witness to this—he was defamed, slandered, his memory despoiled and his martyrdom continued also by his brethren in the priesthood and in the episcopate." The pope added: "Perhaps it is best to see it like this: a man who continues to be a martyr. After having given his life, he continues to give it by allowing himself to be assailed by all this misunderstanding and slander." Pope Francis added: "'This gives me strength. Only God knows the stories of those people who have given their lives, who have died, and continue to be stoned with the hardest stone that exists in the world: language."

One-Child No More

China's government, after enforcing a one-child policy since 1980 to combat a population that appeared to be growing out of control, announced on Oct. 29 that it will now allow families to have a total of two children. The policy has caused significant demographic issues—there are 116 to 118 men for every 100 women—and social problems and created a generation of only children with two aging parents to care for. The policy has been under quiet review for years. But headlines that state "China abandons one-child policy" are inaccurate. Families are still limited to two children and must still apply for permission to have them, as they did for their single child. There has been no indication yet whether family planning authorities in China will continue to use forced abortions and other coercive methods against couples who choose to have three or more children.

From CNS, RNS and other sources.

NEWS BRIEFS

Earthquake victims

Sarah Torre, an analyst for the Heritage Foundation, reported at a discussion in Washington on Oct. 30 that the number of cancer screenings conducted at **Planned Parenthood affiliates** had declined by half over the last 10 years, while the number of abortions climbed from 250,000 to 327,000. ✦ On Oct. 26 officials from Catholic Relief Services were planning the agency's response to a **7.5 magnitude earthquake** that shook Pakistan and Afghanistan on Oct. 26, leaving 380 people dead. ✦ As dusk fell over Jerusalem's Old City on Oct. 29, a group of **60 Christians and Jews and one Muslim** gathered at the Jaffa Gate for what they hope will become a monthly interreligious prayer service for peace. ✦ U.S. bishops will consider a revision of their statement **on political responsibility** and vote on a statement on pornography, among other issues, during their Nov. 16-19 fall general assembly in Baltimore. ✦ As refugee misery piles higher on Greek islands near Turkey, **Antonio Guterres, the U.N. high Commissioner for Refugees**, told a panel in Washington on Oct. 30 that he would like a more reasoned discussion about the crisis, especially in Europe, where the debate has been "hijacked" by anxieties and xenophobia.

DISPATCH | MIAMI

Overdue Alliance in Florida Straits

It was one of the more absurd moments of America's Cuba policy.

In 2011, as the Communist island began drilling for what may be billions of barrels of oil off its northern coast, a legitimate fear gripped the United States. That was the specter of an oil spill, a BP-style disaster choking the Florida Straits and destroying some of the world's most precious coral reefs and marine wildlife.

It was in the interest of the United States—not least Florida's $60 billion tourism industry—to loosen its diplomatic isolation of Cuba and let the two enemy governments cooperate in order to avoid a petro-apocalypse. Washington could relax the trade embargo and give Cuba and its foreign drilling partners access to U.S. anti-spill technology. It could let U.S. and Cuban agencies share environmental information.

But hardline anti-Communists in Congress would not hear of it. Even bilateral spill-prevention collaboration was deemed a form of aid to Cuba's drilling efforts—and therefore a lifeline to the repressive Castro regime, whose threadbare, fuel-starved economy desperately needed the crude.

Since U.S. politicians still trembled at Florida's Cuban-American vote in those days, the hardliners held sway.

Environmentalists were alarmed to see politics trump prudence, so they took the initiative U.S. officials could not. They and private-sector drilling experts began making visits to Cuba. There they met with officials to discuss spill safeguards and, just as important, details of the most vital but vulnerable U.S. and Cuban maritime territories—including the U.S.'s 350-mile-long Florida Reef Tract and Cuba's Guanahacabibes National Park.

"We were building bridges," says Dan Whittle, senior Cuba program director for the New York-based Environmental Defense Fund. "The oil-drilling issue helped us share knowledge about our respective marine resources for the first time."

Environmentalists were alarmed to see politics trump prudence, so they took the initiative.

That effort received a huge boost last December when President Obama announced the United States and Cuba were re-establishing diplomatic relations. Suddenly, U.S. federal agencies like the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration could talk directly with their counterparts in Havana. And that conversation has been all the easier because of the groundwork Whittle and company laid years before.

So there was little surprise in early October when the two countries, at the international Our Oceans conference in Chile, announced a historic environmental cooperation pact that focuses on marine protection. Its most prominent feature is a sister-sanctuaries arrangement that pairs U.S. reserves like the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and Cuba's Guanahacabibes.

The accord's timing is critical. Global warming and ocean acidification are threatening vital coral reef habitats in the waters that connect Florida and Cuba, and a better understanding of those connections could rescue marine life on both sides of the Florida Straits.

Take, for example, parrotfish. Their insatiable nibbling keeps corrosive algae off coral, but they are increasingly endangered in those waters. Improved knowledge of the migratory patterns of parrotfish between Florida and Cuba, which had been hampered before the recent diplomatic rapprochement, could do a lot to help revive their population. So could more coordinated bilateral efforts to prevent overfishing them.

But perhaps the most important potential benefit lies off Cuba's shores.

Cuba's own $2.5 billion tourism sector relies on the pristine image of its beaches and diving sites. The Catch-22, however, is that tourism growth brings heavy environmental pressures—especially as more American visitors pour in. As a result, the Castro government's declared goal is to set aside a quarter of its coastal waters as natural preserves. But to undertake such a daunting project, Cuba needs the assistance of U.S. government agencies like the NOAA and nongovernmental organizations like the E.D.F. Enviro-activists like Whittle hope the sister sanctuaries plan is just a first step in that process.

But this mission has to please the Vatican, too. Pope Francis, after all, was a key broker in the deal to normalize U.S.-Cuba ties, and the announcement in Chile comes on the heels of his enviro-economic encyclical, "Laudato Si.'" It urges countries to take more seriously the same climate-change hazards Washington and Havana are now joining to confront.

TIM PADGETT

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

JAMES T. KEANE

Defenders of the Faith

The English journalist Auberon Waugh is usually credited with coining the term "the chattering classes," his sneering moniker for the mostly educated, mostly informed portion of the population that often confuses gossip for fact and prides itself on insider status as it makes decisions for the unheard majority. The Catholic Church has been blessed and cursed by such a class since at least the days of the Medici, though for tech-savvy American Catholics the past two months have brought it newfound prominence through an unlikely conduit: social media.

Our usual fare of videos of dyspeptic cats and lurid updates on the clan Kardashian took a back seat for many chattering Catholics (I am one) to the pope's visit to the United States in September and the gathering of the Synod of Bishops in Rome in October. Anyone with a Twitter account and passing familiarity with Catholicism (sometimes not even that) could put out a virtual shingle as a church expert. Few of these arrivistes logged on without a rather large ideological axe to grind, so much of the time everyone was incensed at everyone else. We officially jumped the shark at the close of the synod with a previously inconceivable moment in the history of American journalism, when a columnist for The New York Times took to Twitter to call a noted Catholic ecclesiologist a heretic. (Yes, you read that sentence correctly.) How did a three-week meeting that almost every participant described as a positive experience of collegiality and group discernment result in such vitriol?

JAMES T. KEANE *is an editor at Orbis Books in Ossining, N.Y., and a former associate editor of* ***America****. Twitter: @jamestkeane.*

Rather than focus on those staunch *defensores fidei* at The New York Times, we would do better to remember that the Second Vatican Council featured much the same hubbub and division. For all that Catholic traditionalists like to think that reformers in the church made off with everything but the sacristy sink at Vatican II, it is worth noting that many reform-minded Catholics at the time found the second half of the council a crushing disappointment. Writing in Commonweal during the council's final days in 1965, the Rev. Hans Küng, a council *peritus*, complained that "the accomplishments of the council to date obviously fall short of what was generally expected." The title of a Commonweal essay by the Rev. Gregory Baum a few months later is even more telling: "The Council Ends: Was It a Failure?"

Anyone with a Twitter account could put out a virtual shingle as a church expert.

After the council's close, many of its newly famous *periti* gave lecture tours in the United States, including Father Küng and Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P. When he got home, the latter reported that he found the American church deeply divided. "The discontent among American priests and even hatred for bishops," Father Schillebeeckx told a Dutch newspaper in 1968, "is indescribable." The editors of **America,** never shy when offered a chance to be outraged on the hierarchy's behalf, responded: "We suggest that Father Schillebeeckx was hotly pursued here in America by that terribly vocal minority of unhappy priests and laymen who pour their troubles into every new and available ear."

A year before the council ended, John Cogley had declared in Commonweal that *Romanità*, the ancient ecclesiastical art of intramural politics, "has had its day" and that "many good men will weep for it during the hours of its final agony." He added, "I will not be among them." Contrarian respondents to his eulogy included the novelist (and Auberon's father) Evelyn Waugh and a young priest named Andrew Greeley. A month later, **America** published an editorial entitled "Angry Young Men," among whom they included "some of the more talented products of Catholic education. Others, if not the most intelligent, are at least the most vocal.... These young men would have a better chance of being taken seriously if they would avoid making themselves more obnoxious than they have to be."

Also in those waning days of Vatican II, Bishop Mark McGrath, C.S.C., noted in **America** that he was "amused by some of the Pollyanna optimists of the First Session, many of whom are visibly lagging as we go into the fourth lap." Writing decades later, Peter Steinfels similarly recalled the displeasure present on all sides: "Not only was there a Catholic right that had yet to come to terms with the Council's reforms; there was a Catholic left that seemed determined to push them over a precipice."

In other words, the council of 50 years ago, now lauded as a defining moment in the history of the church, was viewed even before it closed as a disappointment to almost everyone. How's that for a precedent?

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Homing In

The place of poetry in the global digital age

BY PHILIP METRES

My wife and I went shopping for smartphones recently, beholding these modern votives with equal parts wonder and worry. We, digital immigrants and introverts who tote a decade-old "flip" phone only for emergencies, see the benefits of these magical devices. They have the fairy-tale power of a digital genie, released with the mere swipe of a screen. But what genie will we unleash when we bring this technology into our lives? Doesn't the servant, in the end, always change the master?

Despite the fact that digital technologies offer global connectedness, they also appear to isolate us further into our own self-created reality and dislocate us from the nondigital world. And the greater our privilege, the more we can cordon off the real, the stronger our myopia. Amiri Baraka once wrote: "Luxury, then, is a way of/ being ignorant, comfortably." Yet privilege does more than damage our vision; it starves the heart. In the biblical parable of Lazarus and the rich man, the rich man's flaw is not merely being unable to see Lazarus in pain right outside his gate; after his death, when the rich man looks up from Hades, he clearly recognizes Lazarus next to Abraham in heaven and begs Abraham to ask Lazarus for a bit of water to cool his torment. The rich man knows Lazarus by name but even in hell does not see fit to address him directly.

In our global digital age—with its information flood, its attenuation of attention, its transmogrification of subjectivity, its obscuring of our connectedness—what can poetry and the arts do? The artist's challenge is not merely to chronicle the hectic present but to develop an understanding of how we find ourselves at this time and place, to explore what binds us to each other and to ask Leo Tolstoy's question: "How, then, shall we live?"

Poetry's oldest and least-marketable power, paradoxically, offers us a secret vitality. Poetry's slowness, its ruminativity, enables us to step back from the distracted and distracting present, to ground ourselves again through language in the realities of our bodies and spirits and their connections to the ecosystems in which we find ourselves. The form of a poem is one that forms us, holding us in its thrall. To dwell with singular lines or phrases, lines that puzzle or clarify, carries us back to the ancient practices of ritual chant and shamanic trance, fundamental to the ecstatic possibilities of communion and healing. In the words of C. D. Wright, *pace* Horace: "Some of us do not read or write particularly for pleasure or instruction, but to be changed, healed, charged."

Poetry, at its root, is a "making" (*poesis*). This making is often akin to prayer, or parallel to prayer—a reaching for or an appeal to the great mystery of the Beloved, the Great Maker. One of things I love about Ignatian spirituality is its fundamental emphasis on an active imagination, what St. Ignatius calls *composición*—often translated as "seeing in imagination" or "mental representation." *Composición* comes from the Latin *compositio*, meaning "putting together, connecting," but the word's roots suggest that imaginative visualization involves placing oneself with ("com" plus "position").

The imagination can locate us in our own lives (what Ignatius calls the daily examen), as well as bring us to far-flung places, to stand with others. Ignatius asks the exercitant, for example, in contemplating the Nativity, to "see in imagination the way from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Consider its length, its breadth; whether level, or through valleys and over hills. Observe the place where Christ is born; whether big or little; whether high or low; and how it is arranged." Such grounded visionary practice is both exercise and meditation. The work of the imagination invites us to slow down, pay close attention, to visualize, to wonder. Poetry tunes us to ultimate things.

Poetry is not a mere throwback, some atavistic practice for the vestigial few. On the contrary, poetry's discipline of entering us into our minds and bodies—our restless bodies, our roiled souls—is an ancient practice that invites grace to enter our brokenness, to hold us together, to waken us again. The Sufi poet Rumi wrote,"the wound is the place where Light enters you," 700 years before Leonard Cohen sang:, "There's a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in"—thus proving Thomas Merton's thesis that "that which is oldest is most new."

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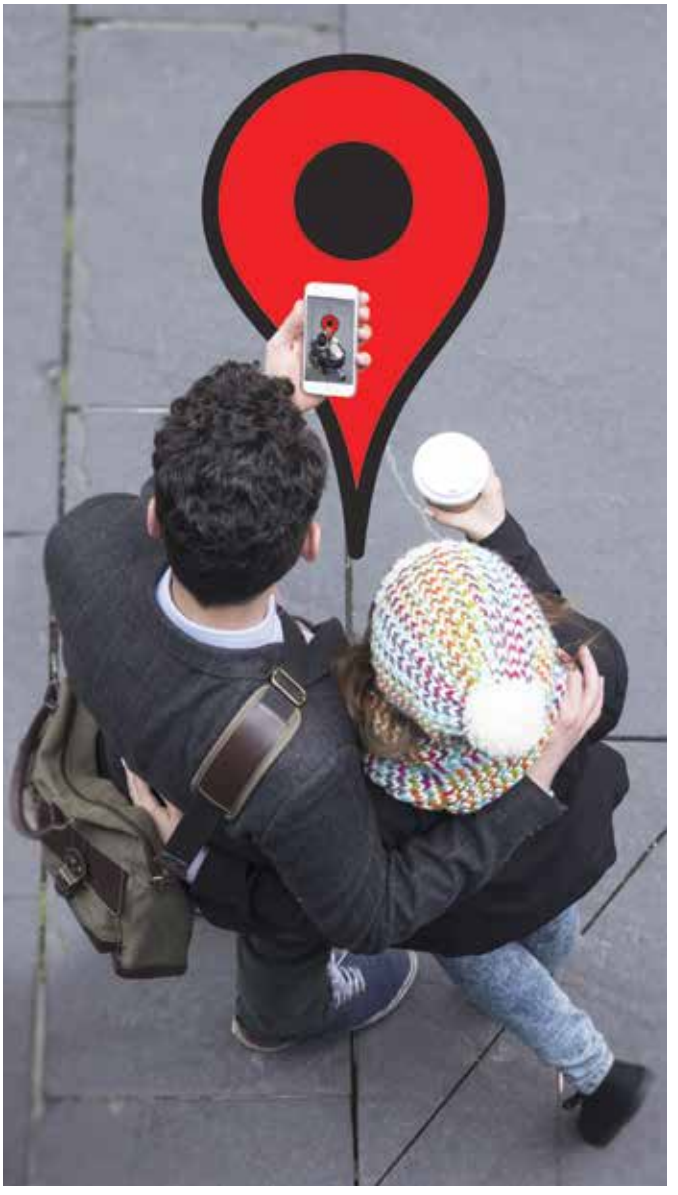
An Essential Human Endeavor

Poetry is also a technology of embodied inquiry, a way of locating ourselves and others within contexts heretofore outside of our understanding, yet which include us within their operations. Michael Davidson has proposed that "perhaps poetry, in its proximity to affective states, is the dreamwork of globalization." Poetry and the arts indeed can help us perform what Fredric Jameson calls cognitive mapping, "enabl[ing] a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole." I love this strange quote; Jameson, a postmodern Marxist theorist, has in mind a materialist totality, and that we are subjects (and objects) in the system of late capitalism. Yet Jameon's phrasing is mystical, inviting us to consider not only human structures, but also planetary, cosmic structures. Perhaps, even, the unrepresentable Divine.



Cosmopoetics is a good way to describe art that performs cognitive mapping. It suggests both cosmopolitanism—the philosophy of global human solidarity—and also something cosmic, where the universe offers us traces of a great Totality. When I look at my own writing—which began only as a blind reaching-out into the epistemological dark—a cosmopoetics, a geographical imagination, seems to have taken shape. Like many poets, I began writing to make sense of what was happening to me and around me; as my interests have orbited further outward, I was challenged—and the language challenged me—to reach beyond comfortable frames of understanding. Each place became a portal to new worlds. Traveling to my grandparents' houses in Brooklyn or Rhode Island, or climbing inside the ancient step pyramid at Chichén Itzá, or after college, living in Russia for a year, were quantum leaps where my language flailed to reach for some sort of handhold.

The questions of travel, as Elizabeth Bishop called them, have often been at the center of my writing. Travel exposes us to otherness (other cultures, other histories, other people) and exposes us as other to ourselves. Yet, as Mary Louise Pratt argues in *Imperial Eyes*, the trope of "anti-conquest" in Western travel writing—in which an innocent Westerner encounters other places and culture—becomes a strategy of representation that enables one to "seek to secure their innocence at the same moment as they assert European hegemony." So many writers have exploited their travel experience as yet another subject to plunder, the imagination as a marauding imperial Columbus. That is why in one poem in *To See the Earth*, I cite my Russian mentor, Dimitri Psurtsev, who once remarked after reading some of my poems, "This is your version of Russia, not Russia."

When I speak of "cognitive mapping," of cosmopoetics, I am talking about an essential human endeavor—to connect our apperceptive physicality to our surroundings. It is a dirty little secret, but I love getting lost, because getting lost also entails a new kind of knowing. Just when you think you know where you are going, you are lost. When you see you are lost, you are going to find something larger than the self.

Yet cartography and its abstractions are deeply political and often have extended exploitative power arrangements, carved people and peoples apart for the aims of empires. That is why I am wary of broad claims about the representativity of my representations. *To See the Earth* is "my" creation story, *Pictures at an Exhibition* is "my" Russia, *A Concordance of Leaves* is "my" Palestine, *Sand Opera* is "my" Iraq. Or rather, this is where "I" come from, this is the Russia in which I lost and found myself, the Palestine that absorbed me, the Iraq that carries me.

COMPOSITE PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/STUART JENNER/AMERICA

A Meditation in the Desert

Sand Opera began as a daily Lenten meditation, working with the testimonies of the tortured at Abu Ghraib, to witness to their suffering; it became an attempt to find a language that would sight (to render visible) and site (to locate in the geographical imagination) the war itself, constantly off-screen. War is so distanced that the closest most Americans get to it is when they encounter a veteran or refugee. That it was illegal for 18 years—from Operation Desert Storm in 1991 until 2009—to take photos of flag-draped coffins of U.S. military personnel suggests the level of censorship during war. This policy is designed not only to make the enemy abstract but also to render the cost of war invisible and suppress domestic questioning. More recently, our contemporary program of "targeted assassination" by drones has yet to be made fully apparent to the American people.

My desire in *Sand Opera* is to make the Iraq War and the wider war on terror visible, to make a visible and audible map of it, a map that we would carry in our eyes and ears, in our bodies and hearts, to replace the maps of pundits and demogogues. As a poet, I wanted to do this mostly through language—often through language which renders the ruptures of violence, through the black bars of redaction and fractured syntax—but I also found myself drawn to the strange images that point toward the operations of war.

Throughout the book, for example, unexplained drawings of rooms appear, with language floating on a vellum page above them. These are renderings by Mohamad Bashmilah, a former prisoner from Yemen, of what have come to be known as black sites—secret prisons where the United States and its allies would illegally hold and interrogate detainees. These drawings are the renderings of one who has been "rendered," sundered from everything he knew. To witness them is to enter the mind of a person utterly dislocated, yet rigorously, obsessively, trying to locate himself.

Sand Opera also contains a diagram of a proper "Muslim burial" from the *Standard Operation Procedures* manual for the Guantanamo Bay prison. The S.O.P. notes the importance of the treatment of the body—the enshrouding process, the prayers that should be uttered—and how the body should point toward Mecca. Alongside the testimonies of prisoners who saw the Quran thrown into the toilet, we are struck again by the gap between our measure of cultural sensitivity and our manipulation of that knowledge for cruel and degrading acts.

A poem is a momentary home, a way to home in. Their architectures, their forms, inform how we perceive and feel insides and outsides. In *Sand Opera*, we stumble among the broken syntax of the tortured in Abu Ghraib prison; stare at the thick walls of the vellum-paged "Black Site (Exhibit I)," trying to read the words on the next page seeping around the prison cell; we confront the words of a bereaved widow of a soldier who has the chance to enter the military tank where her husband died, in "Home Sweet Home," nested inside another poem, based on a letter of a marine lamenting his own entrapment in a war where he cannot fight the evil he faces. War always comes home, not just in the bodies and minds of military veterans but also in the militarization of prisons and police; the distance between Ferguson and Baghdad is closer than some would like to think.

Cosmopoetics is ultimately not just about mapping, or even seeing. It is also about listening, about a radical vulnerability to the other. As Isaiah writes, "Morning after morning/ He opens my ear that I may hear." *Sand Opera* is the sound of my listening. These poems carry forth voices that have opened me—the Iraqi curator Donny George Youkhanna, sharing slides of lost art from his cherished museum, abused Iraqi prisoners and U.S. military personnel at Abu Ghraib prison, a recipe in Nawal Nasrallah's Iraqi cookbook, the detained Mohamad Bashmilah, a drone operator who isn't sure who he's killing, an Arab-American living through the paranoid days after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and my daughter's coming to consciousness in a world where war leaks through the radio and television. The words of my daughter at the end of the poem "Hung Lyres" embody what I hope I can continue to open myself into:

> *What does it mean, I say. She says, it means*
> *to be quiet, just by yourself. She says, there's*
>
> *a treasure chest inside. You get to dig it out.*
> *Somehow, it's spring. Says, will it always*
>
> *rain? In some countries, I say, they are*
> *praying for rain. She asks, why do birds sing?*
>
> *In the dream, my notebook dipped in water,*
> *all the writing lost. Says, read the story again.*
>
> *But which one? That which diverts the mind*
> *is poetry. Says, you know those planes*
>
> *that hit those buildings? Asks, why do birds sing?*
> *When the storm ends, she stops, holds her hands*
>
> *together, closes her eyes. What are you doing?*
> *I'm praying for the dead worms. Says, listen:*

Mapping Connections

How can we map these connections and distances without losing our focus on what is directly in front of us—this tendency toward hyperopia, that longsightedness that is another kind of myopia? I have thought a lot about all the ways that my obsessions with distant wars and places and people have

frayed me to loose ends, distracting me from intimate joys and domestic peace. At times, I have wondered if I have engaged in the poetic equivalent of the father scrolling through his phone while his child finally balances on her bike and glides down the sidewalk, in perfect rhythm with herself and her conveyance. How to hold the sight of my daughters' faces, dearer to me than any other faces on this dear earth, alongside the sight of someone else's daughter's face—first seen on Facebook—pulling schoolbooks out of a bombed house in Gaza, to continue studying another day? How to hold and be held by my beloved wife, and also teach my classes, catch up on emails and messages, mow the lawn, take out the garbage, and also find time to click a microloan to a Gazan farmer named Ahmad, who needs to buy some hens for his egg business? How do we carry our others and ourselves on this fragile planet?

Antonio Gramsci once asked himself so poignantly:

> [Is] it really possible to forge links with a mass of people when one has never had strong feelings for anyone, not even one's own parents, if it is possible to have a collectivity when one has not been deeply loved oneself by individual human creatures. Hasn't [this]...tended to make me sterile and reduce my quality as a revolutionary by making everything a matter of pure intellect, of pure mathematical calculation?"

Gramsci's question is an old theme, as old as Diogenes's idea of cosmopolitanism. The cosmopolitan idea that we are all connected and that a person on a distant part of the globe is as dear as our neighbor has always engendered the profoundest critique of the cosmopolite—that he is one who loves everyone in the abstract but hates (or ignores) all particular people. It is a real danger I have occasionally blundered into, blinkered by vanity or distracted by novelty.

Poetry is one of the ways we might try to home in—to claim our own ground—not on our digital platforms but on the raw earthiness of our own bodies, our beloveds, our kin, our distant next-door (human and sentient) neighbors of the communities in which we live and ones to which we are tied. Like any other technology, poetry contains powers that both distract and focus us; it is a danger like any power. Yet it is one of the ways I answer the question—how to ground myself in my own body, my breath, exercising something I have no other word for but love, that radical opening of self to the other. "For we are put on this earth a little space," William Blake writes, "that we may learn to bear the beams of love."

I would like to circle back to the smartphone for a moment. It is strange to think that the very smartphone that enables you to Google Map your way in any strange city in the world does not advertise the often deplorable conditions for workers assembling these phones. Nor does it divulge that the rare earths that go into its construction (exotic elements like tantalum, tungsten, tin and gold) may have come from—and fueled conflict in—places like the Congo. And once a new model emerges and we have worn out the phone, where does this material go when we have thrown it out? Whose child will be paid pennies to pull out its innards? Who will inherit its poisons?

I trace my awakening to this question from my early days at Loyola Academy in Wilmette, Ill., where, in a freshman religious studies class taught by the improbably ancient George Steenken, S.J., we watched "The Wrath of Grapes"—a documentary exposé on pesticide exposure among migrant workers—and the filmic adaptation of Ambrose Bierce's "Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." Ignatian spirituality—from social justice conscientization to existential exploration of a condemned man's longing for freedom—lit my imagination and dilated my empathy. What I long to write and to encounter is art that can help us make a quantum leap in our moral imagination. As a poet, I long for Isaiah's fire, for a "well-trained tongue,/ That I might know how to speak to the weary/ A word that will rouse them." To make poems that will open not only our eyes, but awaken us, pry open our hearts and souls, induce *metanoia*—transforming how we spend our breath on this earth.

I'd like to end with a poem, called "Compline," that is also a prayer:

That we await a blessed hope, & that we will be struck
With great fear, like a baby taken into the night, that every boot,

Every improvised explosive, Talon & Hornet, Molotov
& rubber-coated bullet, every unexploded cluster bomblet,

Every Kevlar & suicide vest & unpiloted drone raining fire
On wedding parties will be burned as fuel in the dark season.

That we will learn the awful hunger of God, the nerve-fraying
Cry of God, the curdy vomit of God, the soiled swaddle of God,

The constant wakefulness of God, alongside the sweet scalp
Of God, the contented murmur of God, the limb-twitched dream-

Reaching of God. We're dizzy in every departure, limb-lost.
We cannot sleep in the wake of God, & God will not sleep

The infant dream for long. We lift the blinds, look out into ink
For light. My God, my God, open the spine binding our sight. A

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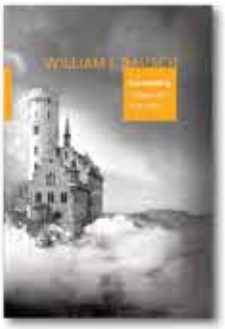

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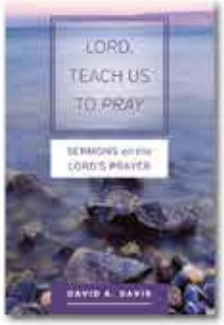

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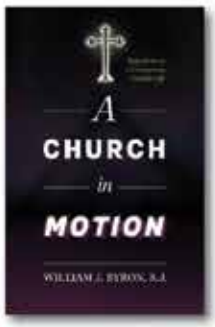

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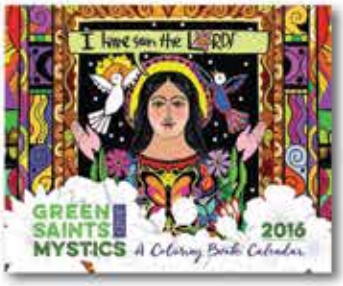

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Graham Greene's Pope

Finding God in battered places

BY HEATHER MORELAND McHALE

Graham Greene, one of the most outspoken Catholic writers of the past century, had one consistent belief about the church, no matter how much his depictions of it might vary in other respects: When the church does its job, it serves the poor, the sick, the underprivileged, the disenfranchised, the despairing. Greene was intensely populist and self-consciously radical. His political views were very simple: support the underdog. Through his Catholic characters and his depictions of the church, Greene advocated for a more socially and economically engaged Catholic practice. Though he did not live to see it, the election of Pope Francis gives the church a public face that more closely resembles Greene's vision.

Greene—a convert—is often described as a "Catholic writer," possibly because his most enduring and popular books center on specifically Catholic characters and ideas (*Brighton Rock*, *The Power and the Glory*, *The Heart of the Matter*, *The End of the Affair*). Most of his other novels tackle similar themes, if not from an explicitly Catholic perspective. Almost all his major characters grapple with spiritual uncertainty, ethical dilemmas or existential crises. His faith evolved over time, leading him to describe himself in a variety of ways, including as a "Catholic atheist," but he remains one of the best-known and most respected Catholic writers of the 20th century.

This is not to say, however, that Greene and the church always—or even often—agreed. Indeed, the Holy Office urged Greene to revise *The Power and the Glory*, which they argued was "a danger to the virtue of the majority" because of to its "odd and paradoxical" views. Greene, in his apologetic, heartfelt reply, affirmed his personal sense of attachment to the pope and wrote, "The aim of the book was to oppose the power of the sacraments and the indestructibility of the church on the one hand with, on the other, the merely temporal power of an essentially Communist state." *The Power and the Glory*, which describes the travels of a nameless alcoholic priest in the Mexican state of Tabasco under an oppressive government that was attempting to stamp out Catholicism, drew heavily on Greene's observations during a five-month trip to Tabasco in 1938. The debauched atmosphere of the novel conflicts with the whisky priest's heroic self-sacrifice as he values the needs of the church's people above his own safety. Despite its grimness, the novel affirms both the value and the resilience of the church, as some of the representatives of the Vatican acknowledged. Although the Holy Office censured the novel, Pope Paul VI himself told Greene, "Some aspects of your books are certain to offend some Catholics, but you should pay no attention to that."

The connection between religion and politics anchors Greene's works. In novels like *The Comedians* and *Monsignor Quixote*, he explores the connection between Catholicism and Communism—less as a serious consideration of Communism than as a way of examining inequity and social injustice. Humanity, he concludes, whether expressed as a religious obligation or a political one, requires that the wealthy and powerful share with the less fortunate. Moral people devote their attention to the poor and the oppressed instead of ignoring the needy or the downtrodden. As the character Dr. Magiot writes in a letter in *The Comedians*, "Catholics and communists have committed great crimes, but at least they have not stood aside, like an established society, and been indifferent." Greene's books explicitly connect religious thought with political and social reality.

Similarly, Pope Francis acknowledges the bond between these two spheres, using political language in his homilies and writings. In a homily on June 17, 2013, he exhorted his listeners, "In this day and age, unless Christians are revolutionaries they are not Christians." He urged the faithful to bear witness not only in words but in acts, instructing them to go toward "the outskirts of existence. All the outskirts, from physical and real poverty to intellectual poverty, which is also real." In a homily delivered on Sept. 16, 2013, the pope encouraged his listeners to pray for their leaders and to engage with politics, arguing that "politics, according to the social doctrine of the church, is one of the highest forms of charity, because it serves the common good.... A good Catholic meddles in politics." This language suggests a sharp lack of connection between Pope Francis and his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, who wrote, "Wherever politics tries to be redemptive, it is promising too much."

A Church to Change the World

Pope Francis is the pope that Greene was waiting for—a pope who has already brought the church closer to Greene's

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GREENELAND. Blue plaque outside Graham Greene's birthplace, St. John's boarding house (part of Berkhamsted School) in Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, United Kingdom. Inset: Graham Greene

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/WIKIDWITCH

ideal. Greene and Pope Francis share a conviction that the face of God is visible in the lowest places, the most battered corners of the world (or, to use the pontiff's word, "the outskirts"). The pope shows no fear of shaking up the public image of the Catholic Church. His statements on topics as disparate as homosexuality, the environment and capitalism, and the weapons industry have echoed all over the globe, reaching non-Catholics as well as Catholics. He is a decidedly public figure, attracting analysis and commentary—complimentary and not—from mainstream publications. The Atlantic asks, "Will Pope Francis Break the Church?" In the subtitle of an essay for The New Yorker by James Carroll, the pope is called "a radical pope." In other words, this new pope has made serious changes, even if some of those changes are more about tone and image than about policy.

Pope Francis uses the church as a medium for making change in the world; he has natural political savvy and awareness of the immense influence held by the Catholic Church. He frequently uses that influence to foster tolerance and nonjudgment. Although he has certainly made some hard-and-fast moral assertions, his most famous statements are those that show acceptance of different points of view. Asked about his position on homosexuality, he replied, "Who am I to judge them if they are seeking the Lord in good faith?"

The answer, historically, has been, "You are the pope—the human voice of God among men, the representative of one of the most culturally influential institutions in human history." Francis, in rejecting his own right to judge, makes a powerful statement about the role he envisions for the Vatican. Like Greene, he rejects any suggestion that a person's appearance, actions or words adequately reveal the contents of that person's heart. Greene's 1938 novel *Brighton Rock* traces the conflict and possible salvation of a ruthless young gangster, Pinkie. Near the end of the novel, a priest tells Pinkie's wife, Rose, "The church does not demand that we believe any soul is cut off from mercy."

This, of course, is standard doctrine: No one is beyond salvation. Pope Francis, though, emphasizes—like Greene—that not only does every human being have the possibility of salvation but also that God exists in every life in ways that we may not easily see. In an interview published in **America** ("A Big Heart Open to God," 9/30/13) the pope explains:

> Even if the life of a person has been a disaster, even if it is destroyed by vices, drugs or anything else—God is in this person's life. You can, you must try to seek God in every human life. Although the life of a person is a land full of thorns and weeds, there is always a space in which the good seed can grow.

As Greene's novels suggest, grace is not always visible.

In a Small Boat Tossed About

In a related vein, Greene and Pope Francis agree that doubt can be salutary. In his novel *Monsignor Quixote* (1982), Greene describes the friendship between the protagonist, Monsignor Quixote, and his traveling companion, the mayor

(nicknamed Sancho). They spend a great deal of their time discussing religion and politics, for Quixote is a Catholic and Sancho is a Communist. The details of their agreement and disagreement, however, are swept aside in favor of the shared experience of questioning their most important beliefs. They agree that "it's human to doubt." As Quixote thinks to himself, "It's odd...how sharing a sense of doubt can bring men together perhaps even more than sharing a faith." The shared experience of questioning and examining their different faiths allows Quixote and Sancho to understand, respect and love one another.

In *On Heaven and Earth*, a dialogue with the Argentine Rabbi Abraham Skorka, Pope Francis (then still Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Buenos Aires) says:

> The great leaders of the people of God were men that left room for doubt.... He that wants to be a leader of the people of God has to give God His space; therefore to shrink, to recede into oneself with doubt, the interior experiences of darkness, of not knowing what to do, all of that ultimately is very purifying. The bad leader is the one who is self-assured, and stubborn. One of the characteristics of a bad leader is to be excessively normative because of his self-assurance.

The radicalism of this statement is easily overlooked, partly because the first half expresses a common religious belief. But the second half—that doubt is useful even in a leader—is a much more revolutionary idea. By contrast, Pope Benedict XVI spoke energetically against what he called "relativism," arguing that "we are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires." He described the thoughts of many Christians as a small boat, "tossed about" by the "waves" of ideas "from Marxism to liberalism, even to libertinism; from collectivism to radical individualism; from atheism to a vague religious mysticism; from agnosticism to syncretism and so forth." While Pope Francis can hardly be called a relativist, his public speeches and writings incorporate ideas and language from many different places. Instead of considering different doctrines or worldviews to be threats to Catholic belief, he takes the useful parts of those theories and uses them to support his faith, drawing connections instead of establishing boundaries.

Politics aside, Pope Francis embodies the sort of faith Greene describes in his novels by focusing on the poor and afflicted. In November 2013, the pope was photographed embracing and kissing a man with neurofibromatosis, a disorder that caused disfiguring (though benign) tumors on his face. The photographs show the pope's hands on each side of the man's face, his eyes closed in prayer as he confers a blessing. Irresistibly, I am reminded of Greene's character Sarah Miles, kissing Richard Smythe's cheek in *The End of the Affair*. She records it later in her diary, remembering, "I shut my eyes and put my mouth against the cheek. I felt sick for a moment because I fear deformity, and I thought I am kissing pain and pain belongs to You as happiness never does." While Greene tends to romanticize pain, seeing it as a source of meaning, the pontiff seeks out pain and powerlessness to attempt to remedy them. In practice, however, Greene and Francis agree that the job of the church—and of the clergy—is to serve the people who need it most: those who suffer. On March 19, 2013, the pope tweeted, "True power is service. The Pope must serve all people, especially the poor, the weak, the vulnerable." The message resonated with his followers: as of this writing, his assertion has been retweeted 24,222 times.

Although Greene took more extreme positions on some issues, Pope Francis embodies the kind of religious and spiritual conduct that Greene imagined in his novels. The presence in the Vatican of a pope who supports liberation theology's focus on the poor suggests that the church is approaching Greene's vision of what it ought rightfully to be: not a police force or a moralizing agent, nor an isolated city where the pontiff lives in lonely grandeur, but an instrument of outreach for those who would help the poor, stand up for the oppressed and provide for the needy.

On Being and Becoming

The God of second chances

BY WILLIAM J. O'MALLEY

Every theology course I have endured seemed like logicians parsing a love letter. I cannot remember even one professor introducing God as a personal friend, a pal he had had a few beers with, attended wakes with, wrestled with using anything but his formidable mind. None cited times he had to forgive God or beg God to leave him alone. Like Job's comforters, they knew so much about God but never persuaded me they knew God as Jacob did, who went at it with God *mano a mano*.

On the way to becoming who I am now, I think I discovered some insights into God that Aquinas and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* likely found too down-to-earth. One constant is tenacity, God's almost Sisyphean refusal to quit. Tenacity might be too humanized for experts, since it connotes endurance, which in turn requires a yielding no perfect being "could" muster. Less heady Hebrews, however, accepted a God so fed up he said (I am paraphrasing here), "T'hell with the whole mess," flooded it out and started over.

Tenacity is patience, whose root is *passio*: sufferance. How could a God beyond superlatives be a submissive victim? A crucifix answers that question, and Paul clarifies it: "He emptied himself" (Phil 2:7). But evidence suggests submission has been a characteristic of God, since "the beginning." God programs the rules into the natures of things, then pretty much yields to his own chosen commitments (excepting the rare miracle).

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was waste and void" (Gn 1:1-2). The author of Genesis was not proofed by Stephen Hawking, yet he also seemed unable to wrap his mind around "nothing." Before God's first workday, there had to be some there there. He postulated a primeval swamp—not bad for 3,400 years

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COSMIC TIME. The South Pole Telescope and the Background Imaging of Cosmic Extragalactic Polarization experiment at the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station.

CNS PHOTO/KEITH VANDERLINDE/NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION VIA REUTERS

ago. Similarly, later evidence for an expanding universe led Georges Lemaître, a Belgian priest-physicist, in 1927 to propose what became known as the Big Bang theory. For a swamp, he substituted an equally fecund "primeval atom." Today this is called a "singularity," a point smaller than a period but of infinite density containing within it all the matter in the present fathomless universe. But, as important, embedded in that mass were also four invisibly real, regulatory and immutable cosmic laws: gravity, electromagnetism, strong and weak relativity. God's will, embodied.

After that, God could pretty much sit back and enjoy it working out its own kinks.

The Opposite of Nothing

Another attribute never mentioned is that God is—in himself—the utter, total, complete opposite of nothing: utter contagious aliveness. God is I AM, the well of existence out of which anything with "is" draws its "is." Therefore, beware thinking of the Genesis "void" as barren like a vacuum. Nothing gets very close to God without coming alive, as the dryness in wood welcomes the fire. The void—like science's singularity—was alive, fertile, teeming with potential, like a womb awaiting impregnation. "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." The intentions of God—life, growth, animation, feeling, intelligence—were implanted in creation, like the oak in an acorn, attraction/repulsion in mass, Beethoven's power in a fertilized ovum.

Creationism and evolution agree that gestation and fruition was gradual. Seven days or five billion years, why not all at once, if God is irresistible? Another unlisted divine quality: delight, an inevitable spinoff of his creativity. We forget that, unlike ourselves, time left God untouched. Except in Jesus, God has never "matured" and is younger than we, much smarter but less sophisticated, content with an ingenious pattern of snow crystals yet tirelessly inventive enough to make each flake at both poles unique. How dull if God were fussy as a logician, with every tree a perfect cylinder, every apple a perfect sphere, every forester Brad Pitt.

That ignites another insight: God's penchant for imperfection, a reality nonexistent until God created. Nothing created has perfect shape. Even the earth is an approximate sphere. One could conclude God's reason was that everything he created should have room to grow. Perhaps that is why God eventually invented people, because he loves stories, impossible without defects, fallibility, mistakes.

Most agree all began with the least tidy method conceivable: an explosion. Yet buried within that awesome combustion was seeded the most elegant honeycomb ever devised: the periodic table. Order and surprise. Cosmos infused into the chaos. Nor after 14 billion years, does God seem tired of doing it again, each time better. Fanciful routine.

Far, far away, galactic clouds remain from stars that gobbled themselves up, exhausting their internal fuel, then bursting in imitation of the Big One. But their ashes are no more inert than the remains of a phoenix. Within them, infinitesimal hydrogen atoms restlessly jostle, bump, batter one another, heating themselves to the point where they fuse together into a gravitational field pulling in incautious neighbors, absorbing. After a few million years, the star burns through its dusty womb. Then, like a maturing child, it slowly achieves adult equilibrium.

After about 10 billion years, the star begins running out of combustibles, fuses into a supercondensed white dwarf, or a neutron star or a black hole. But the interactions just keep dancing, wrestling, recycling, ever changing, ever new, always the same. Is it blasphemous to say God seems addicted to rebirth?

Neither Created Nor Destroyed

Another divine attribute not usually suggested is thrift. The law of conservation of energy states that total energy of a system remains constant—energy neither created nor destroyed but transferred from one form to another or one source to another. For instance, hydrogen, gravity and time in a galactic cloud convert into a fiery star, which in turn provides its funerary remains for a grandchild galaxy. Water—rushing or boiling—can produce electricity, which in turn generates all kinds of magic. Horsehair bows drawn across sheep intestine strings make music. Hidden energy in chemicals changes to kinetic energy in an engine and moves a vehicle. Vegetation devours energy from our local star and converts it to food, which animals in turn convert to flesh and we in turn alchemize into bodies—unique because they in turn ignite a totally unparalleled form of life in minds that convert sense impulses into abstract ideas. Einstein's $E=mc^2$ states that energy and mass are different sides of the same coin.

So we are pulsing with recycled stardust.

James Weldon Johnson captures this truth better than any formula:

> *This Great God,*
> *Like a mammy bending over her baby,*
> *Kneeled down in the dust*
> *Toiling over a lump of clay*
> *Till He shaped it in His own image;*
> *Then into it He blew the breath of life,*
> *And man became a living soul.*
> *Amen. Amen!*

The rest of that relationship begun in that muddy moment introduced a totally new element into the closed system: the breath of God. For the first time this side of heaven, a new potential reality emerged: friendship, then love—person-to-Person connection. Thunder thinkers render those

qualities down to chilly divine essentials—like agape, charity, providence, beneficence. All clear and cold as geometry.

The story of that person-to-person connection—in all cultures but most notably for us in Judaeo-Christian history—emboldens me to believe another unsung aspect of God's personality is affection. Nothing purified about it, like agape, unless we realize mature affection bubbles up from a crucible fired by conflict, anger, frustration, mutual betrayal and forgiveness. This is a fondness fashioned like a star's atoms—jostling, bumping, battering—in the classroom, the pub, the intensive care unit, the funeral home, locker room, sanctuary.

Edging further into the forbidden quicksand of anthropomorphism, dare we suppose that like any parent or lover God is smitten, paradoxically a "victim" of his own generosity? As a needed concession to sharing his own inner love, God (foolishly?) made freedom a constituent of the human difference. No other creature can truly share love with God except creatures free to withhold it. Thus, God freely made himself helpless before his own devotion.

The Hebrew and Christian experience with God makes that insight unavoidable. God's love is stubborn, relentless, staunch, resolute, despite his insubordinate human progeny.

In contrast, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* grimly asserts: "Scripture portrays the tragic consequences of this first disobedience. Adam and Eve immediately lose the grace of original holiness. They become afraid of the God of whom they have conceived a distorted image—that of a God jealous of his prerogatives" (No. 399). An army of theologians brighter than I defend the idea that God got so mad at humans over a single act of disobedience that he apparently could not restore them to blessedness after that infinite insult. Not until Jesus came and died in ransom to assuage that debt. Even then, they claim, even after a sincere admission of foolishness and priestly absolution, the guilt (*reatus culpae*) is dismissed, but the need to make recompense (*reatus poenae*) cannot be removed except by suffering in purgatory (No. 1473). That strikes some as double jeopardy inconsistent with other unarguable divine attributes.

After the Eden experiment, what could have impelled an infinitely ingenious God to begin over again with the same pair of dolts who messed it up? Then the entire Hebrew Scripture is a millennial cavalcade of ingrates missing the same point. But Yahweh keeps coming back! He makes "seventy times seven times" look mean-spirited! That just does not square with a vindictive father but more with Cecil B. DeMille's reworking of the biblical Moses into Charleton Heston scowling as he fractures all Ten Commandments at once.

A Dramatic Liberation

The innermost core of Judaism, perpetually remembered, is the Passover, a dramatic liberation from slavery into new life—albeit only after the weathering of the journey toward

it. Before and after the Exodus, Yahweh sent prophets after prophets to threaten, cajole, woo, intrigue them back. Later came the lesson of exile, and again liberation and return.

Yahweh intervenes in the life of Israel to effect not annihilation but rescue, deliverance, emancipation. Death and rebirth. Isaiah prophesied a suffering messiah to "bear our sins." Jeremiah wore himself into depression pleading; Ezekiel promised restoration: "On the day I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt" (36:33).

The core experiences of Israel were Yahweh's tireless pursuit of their return from Egypt and their marriage covenant at Sinai. More typical than the angry God, Hosea describes a love-sick Yahweh pleading outside Israel's chosen brothel among the pagan gods: "And I will take you for my wife forever...and you shall know the Lord." Page through the "Song of Solomon" and discover a sexually fervid relationship between Yahweh and Israel, which rational theology tends to avoid, because its rarefied kind of knowing lacks wherewithal to deal with it, no better than empirical science can dissect altruism or integrity or the human need for purpose.

Christian experience betrays the same, consistent divine habits. Dealing one-on-one with sinners like the public sinner, the adulterous woman, the prodigal son, the Samaritan woman, Jesus never required listed sins or exacted compensatory penance. Some judgmental Catholics overlook the fact the first pope apostatized within hours of the Last Supper, denied Christ not to torturers but to a waitress. And his restoration consisted only in responding three times to "Simon, do you really love me?" No penance. Instead, he became pope. "And this is the Father's will for me: that I should lose nothing of all he has given me, but should raise it up again at the last day" (Jn 6:39).

There are other consistent personality habits God reveals: little regard for efficiency and less for punctuality, preference for paradox and ambiguity that confounds schematics. And surely more. He invites endless exploration but defies conquest.

One consistent divine quality this reverie jeopardizes is God's immutability. He seems not only the God of being but of becoming. When we dare speak of "the greater glory" of God, we imply God can be "improved": infinity plus one. However, those with flexible minds that accept the Confucian Tao and the quantum principle of complementarity yield to a God clearly prone to paradox and into improving. If such a God sets his mind to it, he ought to be able to accommodate both being and becoming.

Do these unofficial insights into God's personality belie the classical insights, bolstered with forests of footnotes? I hope not. There was some "nonrational reason" Jesus told us to surrender sophistication for the resilience, creativity and exuberance of children, a "proof-proof" motive for believing hearty, bumptious, fallible Simon Peter "got it" better than Judas did.

A Book for José

Hiding from the gangs of El Salvador

BY RICK DIXON

In the fall of 2013, two ninth graders from the local junior high school here were killed, one in October and one in November. I didn't know the two boys, but one of my students from the community center in La Esperanza, José, who went to the same school as the murdered ninth graders, was also threatened by a gang—possibly the same one that killed the ninth graders. José knew if he refused to collaborate with the gang, as they demanded, he would meet the same fate as his classmates. And like the snip of scissor blades on a string, José's life was cut in two. He dropped out of school and disappeared.

He fled so abruptly I didn't get a chance to say goodbye. I would have liked to give him a gift, or at least to have had the chance to say something, perhaps even a prayer, anything that might have made him feel less lonely in this violent world of troubled youth.

I have been working as a literacy teacher in a squatter settlement known as La Esperanza, near the town of Cojutepeque, El Salvador, since 2012. I remember the day José arrived at the community center. He was wearing a white tank top undershirt and basketball shorts and a worn out pair of sneakers. I was impressed with his manner; it was mature for a 13-year-old. "I'd like to learn English," he said. His voice was sincere, and there was a sense of hope in it. I offered to work with him on what he'd need to know to pass the English exam to enter high school, but I told him we'd also need to work on his literacy skills in Spanish. He accepted, and I can't remember him missing a day of class until he vanished.

Once we were doing a writing activity of which the first step consisted in drawing our names. José drew his first name graffiti style with big splash letters; but he didn't include his father's last name or his mother's. "Hey, where's your other names?" the kids asked (in Salvadoran culture a name without last names is unheard of). José flushed, his face a wash of red. A moment passed and he still didn't say anything.

"Well, that's his business," I said and asked the group to write a story about their names. Later José told me his mother abandoned him at birth, and his father had gone to the United States and had another family now. "How do you use last names when nobody's behind them?" he asked. I didn't know how to answer that.

I learned his paternal grandmother, who is in her late 80s, was raising José. She brought him up in the only way she knew: with the fear of God. José respected her for trying, but he filled the hole in his heart doing what most teenagers do: he fell in love.

He would walk Blanca home after classes. He told me she liked this because she needed his protection. "José, she has a boyfriend," I reminded him. But he was convinced she really didn't

ART: MICHAEL KRAIGER

RICK DIXON, *a Maryknoll lay missioner, has served since 2012 in El Salvador, where he works in a family literacy program.*

love that boyfriend. "She likes me," he would say. Blanca would play it down, saying, "We're only friends." Her older brother, a friend of the boy who claimed Blanca, got wind of José's interest and told him to stay away from his sister or he'd be hurt.

José started hanging out with a rough crowd, mostly playing soccer with them; he's an excellent athlete. Perhaps he felt they'd give him protection. In the end, their protection wasn't necessary because Blanca became pregnant and went to live with her boyfriend and his family. José continued playing soccer, and then one day certain men on the team told him he had to join their gang. His grandmother told me this, but she also said she believed José would do the right thing, which meant fleeing north to his father or going into hiding.

José's Return

I didn't see him again until August of this year. Walking to work, I approached José's grandmother's house and looked through the crack of the slightly opened door. In the shadows, there was a boy standing. A hopeful force ripped through me. José? My blood flowed with an intolerable mix of excitement and caution.

I walked up and knocked on the door, careful to identify myself. "Come in," the grandmother called. After my eyes adjusted to the dim light, I saw it was José. Not knowing what to say I asked if he remembered any English from our classes. "No one to study with," he said and explained he'd been hiding in a hardware store. His voice was so weak I could barely hear it; only fear punched through the nervous words. He was much too thin, and around his neck he wore a white rosary that hung outside his black tank-top shirt, a style gang members often use. He remained distant. It was obvious he didn't want to talk, so I simply asked if I could leave him a book. He cracked a smile and said, "Thanks, leave it with my grandmother. I'll pick it up the next time I visit." He then apologized for not knowing when that would be.

"I understand," I told him.

As I left the house, two phrases from *The Diary of Anne Frank* went through my mind: "Never can a free person conceive of what a book means to a person in hiding," and "in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart." And I knew what book I would leave for José.

Last Things

November is the month of the Holy Souls. With dramatic flair, the church urges us to pray for the dead as nature undergoes its annual decline. The darkening skies, the crumpled leaves and the denuded boughs become the stage to face our own mortality in the light of faith.

Through the centuries the church has developed its own rich *ars moriendi*: the requiem Mass, the sacrament of the sick, the deathbed viaticum, the prayers for the dead, the wake service with its rosary, the prayers at the graveside, the annual memorial Masses and pious visits to the tomb.

Church doctrine undergirded the practices. The paschal mystery of Christ, especially the glory of the Resurrection, fortified the Christian facing the prospect of the particular and final judgments, of heaven, purgatory and hell. Intercessory prayer reached a crescendo as the churches militant, suffering and triumphant joined in solidarity to aid the pilgrim soul in arriving at the beatific vision. Even philosophical arguments for the immortality of the rational soul, once a staple of Catholic education, deepened the sober hope of the dying and the bereaved as they confronted the enigma of death.

In recent decades our capacity to mourn and to pray for the dead has palpably declined. It has something to do with the longstanding American denial of death, skewered decades ago by Evelyn Waugh, and our new "selfie" culture, where every ritual descends into bloated autobiography. But the church must also face its own internal difficulties in helping its members to face death in a properly Christian manner.

The first step is simply to acknowledge that someone has actually died. As an adolescent, I was taught to say, "I am so sorry for your grief," to the bereaved during a wake service. Several years ago, however, a new euphemism for death slipped into the American language: "X is in a better place." It's as if you arrived at the downtown Marriott and instead of being given the budget-economy room you paid for, you were given the honeymoon suite gratis. The old Christian Scientist euphemism "X passed away" has morphed into "X passed," as if death were the LSATS and God an easy grader.

Our capacity to mourn and to pray for the dead has palpably declined.

With the disappearance of the wake and the rise of "life celebrations" (often featuring the deceased's favorite hobbies), the church has an even greater imperative to proclaim the truth about death and the afterlife and to provide a space for the heartfelt mourning needed in the aftermath of a loved one's death.

The second step is to look carefully at our celebration of funerals. Any pastor will admit that this is an emotional battlefield; one wants to console, not fight with a bereaved family. But the current distorted shape of our funeral Masses indicates our unease facing the mystery of death in the light of faith.

The rubrics for the Mass of Christian Burial clearly indicate that the sermon is not to be a eulogy of the deceased. The priest is to focus on Christian hope in the light of the Resurrection and prayer for the deceased as the deceased faces God's judgment. But in many funeral Masses, the sermon—echoed by endless post-Communion "reflections"—has become nothing but a eulogy of the deceased's virtues and achievements.

In some liturgies, a virtual canonization occurs. Occasionally accompanied by the strains of "Danny Boy" and Frank Sinatra's "My Way," the memorial service, a creation of Victorian agnostics, has overwhelmed the Christian prayer for the departed. At times it is unclear just why we have gathered to pray for and not only to remember the deceased.

Spiritual writers have long argued that the Christian should face death by shunning the extremes of presumption ("God is all-merciful; there's no need to repent") and despair ("God is all-just; a sinner, I cannot be saved"). The merciful God we face in the mystery of death is none other than the God who respects our freedom and the choices we have made. And we stand before God as members of the church interceding at our side in the long drama of our salvation.

This season of prayer for the holy souls is an invitation to seek again the grace of a good death, rooted in the truth of the Gospel, which simultaneously proclaims both divine judgment and divine mercy. It is the glory of the cross, not an embellished curriculum vitae, that guides us toward the mystery.

JOHN J. CONLEY

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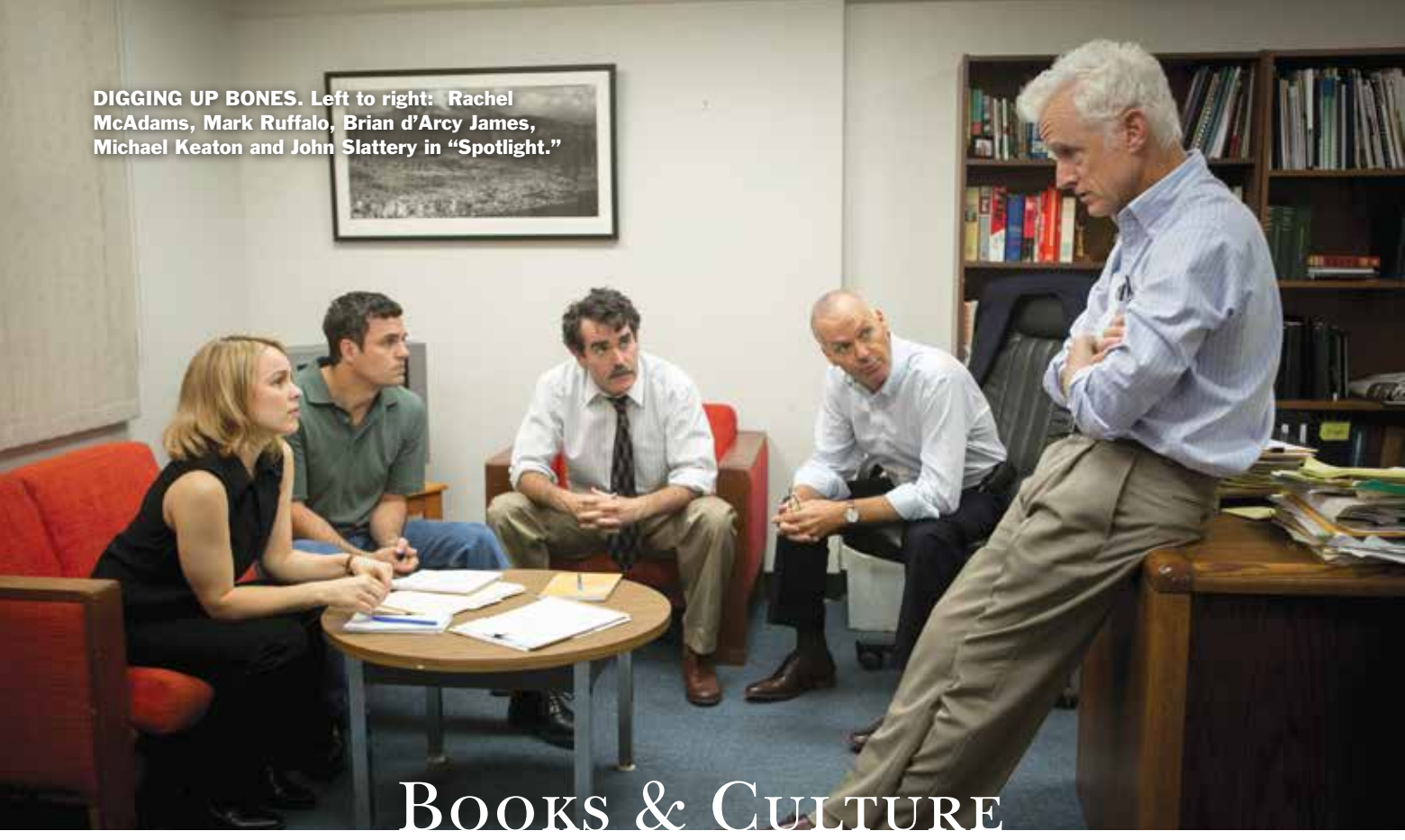


DIGGING UP BONES. Left to right: Rachel McAdams, Mark Ruffalo, Brian d'Arcy James, Michael Keaton and John Slattery in "Spotlight."

FILM | MAURICE TIMOTHY REIDY

THE BIG DIG

'Spotlight' revisits the investigation of sexual abuse.

In a revealing moment in **Spotlight,** the expertly crafted new film about the Boston Globe's investigation into the clerical sexual abuse scandal, the lawyer Mitchell Garabedian (Stanley Tucci) offers a damning analysis of the unfolding crisis. "Mark my words, Mr. Rezendes," he tells Globe reporter Mike Rezendes (Mark Ruffalo). "If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to abuse one."

Much will be written about "Spotlight" in the months to come. It is already being talked about as a formidable contender for Best Picture of the year. It is also sure to start new debates about what policies led to the widespread abuse of children by priests in Boston and around the world. Some people may feel Tom McCarthy, the writer and director, does not capture every nuance of this tragic and complicated story. But these questions should not distract from his great achievement: "Spotlight" is, at once, a detective story, a love letter to journalism and a sensitive exploration of the ravages of sexual abuse upon an entire community. Catholics who have lived with this scandal for decades will again be scalded by its horrors. And this Catholic, at least, emerged from the film wondering why it took so long to do something about it.

The village at the heart of "Spotlight" is, of course, Boston, the big city that still feels like a small town, ruled for decades by Irish Catholics. McCarthy immerses the viewer in the heart of Catholic Boston, from the palatial residence of Cardinal Bernard Law to the Catholic Charities dinners that sustain the church's many charitable works. The Globe lives in the shadow of this world, with many editors and writers who still call themselves Catholic in one way or another.

Walter "Robby" Robinson (Michael Keaton) is a graduate of Boston College High School who has made good at the Globe, rising to lead the paper's famed Spotlight investigative team. His reporters are poking around a story about police misconduct when a new editor-in-chief rides into town looking for a way to make the paper relevant at the dawn of the digital age. Robinson and editor Ben Bradlee Jr. (John Slattery, a long way from the sartorial splendor of "Mad Men") are suspicious of Marty Baron, an outsider with big ideas who has little to say. The fact he is Jewish and not from Boston is pointed out by more than one of the paper's critics. When Baron (Liev Schreiber) suggests taking legal action against the church, in an effort to unseal classified documents related to the case of John Geoghan, the publisher

wonders whether it is a good idea to upset the paper's Catholic readership.

The Globe's leadership may be reluctant to alienate a powerful constituency, but they follow Baron's lead, and thanks to some dogged reporting, they slowly begin to find their story. One of the pleasures of "Spotlight" is watching the Globe's editorial team employ their skills to coax reluctant sources and navigate the byzantine rituals of searching public records. No computer assisted reporting for these journos. They have to rely on the Globe's "morgue" of archived clips and the state's hard-to-access legal records. Their great find is an archive of Catholic directories they use to compile a list of priests who were reassigned under questionable circumstances. Never has a Catholic directory been lavished with such cinematic attentions.

One of the arguments of "Spotlight" is that investigative journalism matters, and that it takes time and resources to be done well. McCarthy, who played a reporter on the final season of "The Wire," may indulge in some newsroom nostalgia at times, but it is hard to disagree with this larger point. Solid investigative journalism can still be found in national newspapers, but many cities across the country do not have a strong independent press to serve as a check on local corruption. The year 2001 may not be that long ago, but in "Spotlight" it seems very far away.

Ruffalo, playing Rezendes, captures a classic journalistic type: a disorganized yet feisty reporter who kicks into high gear when facing a deadline or catching the scent of a good story. Ruffalo's performance may be the best of a superb cast, which also includes Rachel McAdams, Brian d'Arcy James and Billy Crudup. McCarthy is unusually sensitive to the challenges faced by Catholic reporters reporting on a great Catholic scandal. Sacha Pfeiffer (McAdams) attends church with her grandmother, but stops going after she starts interviewing sexual abuse victims. In one of the film's most poignant moments, Rezendes admits that he loved going to church while he was young and hoped some day to go back. But then he read letters from family members to church leaders detailing the abuse of their children, all of which fell on deaf ears.

Making the stories of victims new again is perhaps the film's greatest accomplishment. In years after the Globe's report, representatives from Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests and other victim groups became go-to media sources, and sometimes the unique tragedy of their experiences was lost in the media din. McCarthy wisely chooses to highlight just a few victims, and allows them to tell their stories plainly, but in painful detail. A young boy is abused by the first person, a priest, who tells him it is OK to be gay. A boy who recently lost his father is preyed upon by a priest precisely because he is emotionally vulnerable. The sadness of these scenes is fathomless.

For a film that profiles an investigation into the church, it is surprising how few clerics make an appearance in "Spotlight." There is a portrayal of Cardinal Law, of course, and a quick shot of Geoghan, but that's about it. McCarthy is more interested in examining the lives of the other Catholics in Boston and how the scandal affected them. One important relationship centers on Robby Robinson and Jim Sullivan, a lawyer and old friend from Boston College High School, who, Robinson gradually learns, helped the archdiocese settle several sexual abuse cases. McCarthy, a Boston College grad, takes a keen interest in how these Catholic schoolboys come to terms with the abuse that went on in their city.

In choosing to focus on this relationship, McCarthy suggests both that the church is larger than the clerics who lead it and that the weight of the sexual abuse scandal rested heavily on all of the Catholics of Boston. "We all knew something was going on. Where were you?" Sullivan asks Robinson when he is finally confronted with the full list of accused priests. "I don't know, Jim," he replies ruefully. In a later scene, Robinson and his team struggle with guilt for failing to report the story years earlier, when victims first started coming forward.

"Spotlight" does not offer any easy answers to what caused the sexual abuse scandal, though it does suggest some theories. Rezendes keeps up a

Lamech Inventing The Oud

O unnamed & only
son too soon
slipped from tender clutch
of unripe body

from cursed branch
I will hang
what's left of you
until you bloom into bone

unnamed & only
aviary of ribcage
I will play what is
reft from me

& cradle the hole
what is singing

PHILIP METRES

PHILIP METRES, *professor of English at John Carroll University in Cleveland, is the first winner of the George W. Hunt, S.J., Prize.*

running correspondence with A.W. Richard Sipe, the former priest and psychologist who recognizes priestly abuse as a "recognizable psychiatric phenomenon." He proposes that a secretive culture within the priesthood, where some men were sexually immature, allowed the abuse to occur. But ultimately the film resists placing blame on any one person or policy. Marty Baron is eager to indict "the system" at the heart of the scandal, and McCarthy leaves viewers with multiple screens full of names of dioceses that experienced major problems with abuse. But the question of why these scandals happened and how they should be avoided is left largely open. This viewer was left with the nagging thought that the abuse scandal is something that all Catholics have to reckon with in some fashion. In its own way, "Spotlight" calls on all Catholics to take responsibility for the church, because when it falters, we all pay a price.

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

BOOKS | PATRICK WHELAN

HUMANITARIAN QUESTS

JONAS SALK
A Life

By Charlotte DeCroes Jacobs
Oxford University Press. 559p $34.95

DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS
Humanitarian Quests, Impossible Dreams of Médecins Sans Frontières

By Renée C. Fox
Johns Hopkins University Press. 328p $29.95

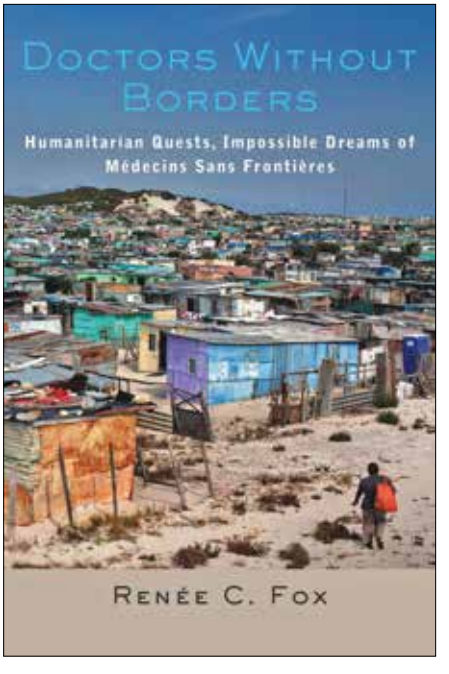
A century ago, horror descended on cities across the United States. Paralytic polio and pandemic influenza, ancient scourges with poorly understood transmission, began claiming the lives of young, otherwise healthy people. In New York 72,000 cats were killed in the summer of 1916 for fear they were spreading the first major polio epidemic in the United States. Within three years, 850,000 Americans died of influenza. Nearly 40 years passed before an effective vaccine was found for influenza or polio. Now, nearly 30 years after the first (unsuccessful) H.I.V. vaccine trial and following the world's worst Ebola epidemic, there is new respect for the power of infectious diseases.

Two new biographies address almost saintly efforts to overcome deadly diseases, one of Jonas Salk, M.D., the other a biography of the international medical relief organization often identified by its French name, Médecins Sans Frontières. Each is a tale of success against seemingly insurmountable odds, the widespread admiration that followed and the subsequent envy and even ridicule by their competitors. This history is still being written, and not necessarily by the victors.

Professor Renée Fox is a richly decorated social scientist and author of many books dealing with the intersection of sociology and medicine. She overcame polio as a teenager in New York, graduated summa cum laude from Smith College and completed a Ph.D. at Harvard/Radcliffe in the 1950s. Her book, *Doctors Without Borders*, resulted from a 20-year involvement with this quixotic organization. She attended assemblies, got to know leaders and interviewed physicians and patients to better understand the growing pains that took M.S.F. from a fledging reaction against the cataclysmic Nigerian Civil War in 1967 to a mammoth effort today that involves 27,000 people in 60 countries.

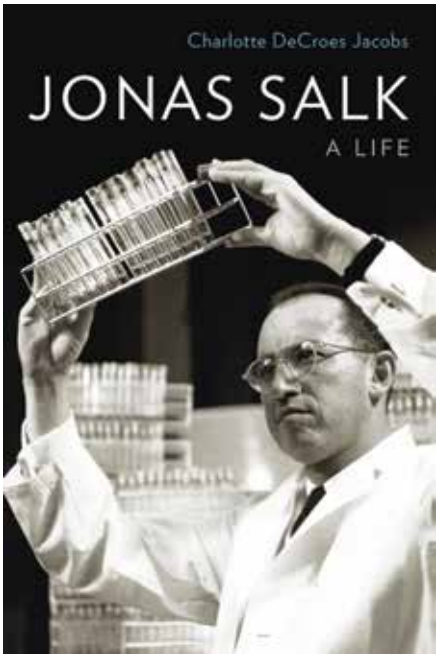
Fox had made a name for herself studying health care in the Democratic Republic of Congo and its roots in Belgian colonialism. After bumping into M.S.F. over a period of years, she makes no secret of her deep admiration for the organization. She ultimately immersed herself in M.S.F. to understand their motivations and methods. Chronicling travels to at least 11 countries, she plods through 120 pages of blog postings detailing the daily struggles of M.S.F. workers and a collection of internal spats and larger conflicts, like the expulsion of M.S.F. Greece for its rogue approach to Kosovo.

But when she turns to the catastrophe of AIDS in South Africa, the story finally comes alive. After winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999, M.S.F. embraced the idea of bringing antiretrovirals to devastated populations. They collaborated with the Nelson Mandela Foundation to initiate a treatment project near his birthplace. By 2005, M.S.F. was treating more than 40,000 infected people in 27 countries. The story takes on a sense of urgency as M.S.F. leaders overcame their own fear of the problem's immensity and confronted local politics and prejudice to



bring therapies to people who previously had no access to health care.

The capstone of the book is an exploration of efforts to address homelessness and tuberculosis in Russia, from which Fox's own grandparents had emigrated in the early 20th century. If she is to be faulted in her narrative, it would be for giving short shrift to oth-



er organizations that do overlapping work. There are only brief mentions of Dr. Paul Farmer's Partners in Health, Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. She shares a mountain of detail about an organization that has been built on the "anti-heroic heroism" of dedicated providers, fieldworkers and philanthropists. Ultimately M.S.F. distinguished itself from organizations like the Red Cross through *témoignage*—"bearing witness"—against the injustices underlying so much suffering around the world.

Dr. Charlotte Jacobs's new biography of Jonas Salk tells a similar tale of heroism that unfolds with a dramatic intensity that makes it seem like a much shorter book. She recreates the sense of fear at the beginning of the last century as parents watched their lives unwind with the seemingly random victimization of young people by the polio and influenza viruses. Salk was a child when the two first great epidemics of these diseases went tearing through New York during the First World War. "Early childhood images of amputees, crippled children, and coffins…settled in Salk's soul," she writes. Raised in Russian immigrant Jewish society (his mother was from Belarus and his father's parents were from Lithuania), Salk grew up with a deeply internalized commitment to *ma'asim tovim* (good deeds) and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world)—so much so that his two brothers teasingly called him "Little Jesus."

Jacobs takes the reader through a history of both Salk's personal exertions and the fight against poliomyelitis in the 20th century. She tells the story of Franklin Roosevelt contracting polio, falling in the lobby of his New York office building and being helped to his feet by Basil O'Connor—who became his law partner and later founder of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis (the March of Dimes). Meanwhile a young Salk stumbled into a partnership with Dr. Thomas Francis that led to the creation of the first vaccine against influenza, a disease long thought to be due to the "influence" of the heavens on humanity.

Enlisted by N.F.I.P. to apply his influenza expertise to the puzzle of polio, Salk demonstrated a single-mindedness and endurance that endeared him to O'Connor, whose own daughter had by then contracted polio. With operatic flare, Jacobs describes the announcement in April 1955 of the national Salk vaccine trial results—"the largest medical experiment in human history." Suddenly Salk was a national hero. He was besieged with honors and offers and tens of thousands of letters, including one to his wife Donna (another summa cum laude graduate of Smith College) that recognized how little time he had spent with his family: "All the world is thinking of your husband as a saint," wrote a physician's wife, "but I know that you are the one who had to be a saint."

To escape the craven jealousy of his rivals, he moved to the shores of La Jolla, Calif., where O'Connor helped him build an "institute of man," ded-

Prayer

Then the Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth…

Jer 1:9

render me
null & voice
may I not be
fallen noise

listener up there
tune your air
& liquid tongue
let your unsung

devouring mouth
give birth
to these words
lavish & ludicrous

an unwalled museum
a windowed mausoleum

PHILIP METRES

PHILIP METRES, *professor of English at John Carroll University in Cleveland, is the first winner of the George W. Hunt, S.J., Prize.*

icated to wedding two emerging cultures of science and humanism. With an architectural vision that "recalled the peaceful cloisters he had seen at the Convent of St. Francis in Assisi," Salk hired the idiosyncratic Louis Kahn to design the structure and began assembling a stable of Nobel Prize-winning scholars like the world had never seen in one place.

When I met him at the end of his life, he had weathered mixed success in treating cancer and multiple sclerosis but was full of energy and enthusiasm for an unconventional approach to AIDS. Testing a therapeutic H.I.V. vaccine over the previous eight years, Salk had shown the personal touch of a physician. "The patients in our study adored him," said his collaborator Dr. Alexandra Levine at the University of Southern California, "and he, in turn, knew each of them, knew their stories and genuinely cared for them and for their families....They were numbers in our study, but they were people to Jonas." The number of AIDS cases in the United States had topped 400,000, and he felt a sense of urgency about launching a national campaign among H.I.V.-infected people, telling another colleague, "We've got to do this before I die."

His wife, Françoise Gilot, the great French artist, was in New York when he checked into the hospital in June 1995. Suddenly the doctor became the patient. A heart blockage was cleared as he watched a monitor with amazement. Afterward, he held my hand in the I.C.U. and said, "You just won't believe the sensation that I had when they opened up that blood vessel. It was as if a tide of well-being washed over me. It was supernatural!" But the man who had sacrificed so much for others was dead two days later.

Charlotte Jacobs's narrative creates a rich appreciation of the highs and lows suffered by an individual crusader and his family, striving to find *tikkun olam*—healing for a broken world. Renée Fox's portrayal of Médecins San Frontières paints a picture of similar persistence by its thousands of staff members worldwide. These two books build the case that the very human "anti-heroic heroism" that conquered polio and influenza may eventually overcome the fearsome plagues of H.I.V. and Ebola. Visiting the United States in 1999, Nelson Mandela said, "I've made many mistakes in my life and I am not a saint, unless you think of a saint as a sinner who keeps on trying."

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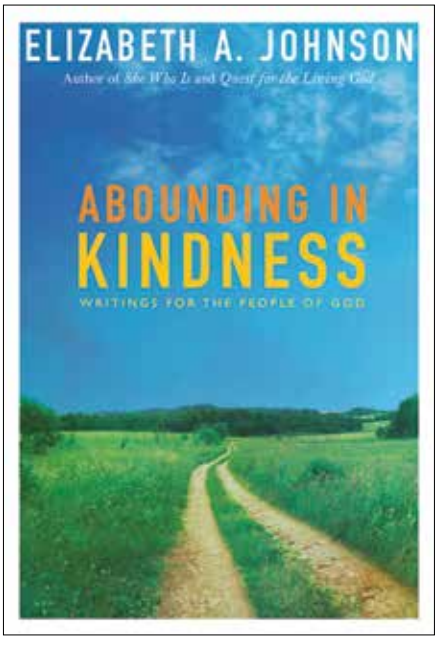
DANIEL R. DiLEO

ENTERING THE DIALOGUE

ABOUNDING IN KINDNESS
Writings for the People of God

By Elizabeth A. Johnson
Orbis. 240p $24



In *Abounding in Kindness: Writings for the People of God*, Elizabeth A. Johnson, C.S.J., weaves together a rich tapestry of theological and ministerial reflections that probe some of the church's most pressing contemporary questions. Throughout this collection of lectures and other short essays, Johnson addresses a myriad of topics that display the breadth of both her interests and evangelization, atheism, feminism, scripture, liberation theology, ecology, hospice, Christology, torture, pneumatology, ecclesiology, the communion of saints and Mariology.

Although Johnson addresses these many topics with a level of understanding that is immediately clear to the reader, she always does so in a humble, often poetic style that makes complex theological concepts accessible to a general audience. In so doing, she invites Christians to individual and institutional self-examination, and makes the reader feel that she/he is entering into a genuine dialogue with someone who clearly has her own ideas but is charitably open to the experience of others.

Given the breadth of topics covered in this book, it would not be possible to sufficiently cover each here. In the midst of the church's current focus on ecology, inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical on the topic, it thus seems appropriate to focus on Johnson's chapters about creation. These essays offer valuable reflections that enrich current faith-based environmental conversations, but they also provide a foundation upon which to touch on some of the other topics that Johnson treats in this work.

In the first chapter, "Passing on the Faith: The Banquet of the Creed," Johnson invites readers to pause and contemplate. In particular, she proposes that these reflections can help the faithful appreciate God's creation

and in turn become inspired to pursue justice in all its forms. Although she does not say it explicitly, her reflection about creation could inspire persons of faith to turn a theological eye to practical problems.

"Heaven and Earth Are Filled With Your Glory: Atheism and Ecological Spirituality" makes the case that contemplation of creation can help believers know God and so justify faith in response to atheism. Scripture and St. Thomas Aquinas can both facilitate a mystical experience of creation that can help persons of faith recognize the world as a sacramental mediator of the Creator. This admiration of creation can in turn inspire persons to live in right relationship with the world and advocate on its behalf. In other words, Johnson points out that "contemplation of nature" can draw people closer to God in a way that both inspires faith and moves the faithful to repent of disordered relationships with creation.

In two places, Johnson cites "unbridled reproduction" and "exploding human populations" among the causes of ecological harm. With respect to present global ecological issues like climate change, environmental degradation is often historically and more immediately due to the consumerism that Johnson also cites rather than human population growth by itself. Levels of per capita resource consumption and greenhouse gas emissions are often higher in wealthy nations with relatively lower population growth rates. Additionally, many countries with higher population growth rates can still choose more sustainable paths of economic development. Persons of faith and goodwill should largely, if not exclusively, focus on the reform of ecologically destructive elements of economic structures rather than the reduction of population growth rates.

Additionally, to the extent that population growth contributes to ecological degradation it is important to clarify that not all proposed means of population growth reduction are morally acceptable in the eyes of the magisterium.

In "Creative Giver of Life," Johnson develops the insight that ecological reflection can help persons recognize the moral imperative to live in right relationship with creation. For example, she points out that the poor are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation. Additionally, she describes how appreciation for the splendor of creation can help Christians recognize the Trinitarian presence of the sustaining Holy Spirit and redeeming Christ. With these insights, Johnson develops an ecological ethic based on the Christian awareness that humanity is inexorably related to the rest of creation in which God was, is and will be present.

In "Creation: Is God's Charity Broad Enough for Bears?" Johnson suggests why humanity currently has a disordered, i.e., "sinful," relationship with the world. Specifically, she cites the Hellenistic separation of matter and spirit, the "medieval distinction between natural and supernatural," post-Reformation anthropocentrism and an understanding of Genesis that incorrectly justifies ecological exploitation. Aware of how humanity has slipped into an ecologically abusive relationship with creation, Johnson says that humanity might thus begin the process of "ecological conversion" toward a more sustainable relationship.

At this point, Johnson could have more strongly emphasized the need for public policies to address environmental degradation. This is not to say that a critique of unjust sociopolitical and economic structures is absent from this book—see especially Chapter Nine, "The God of Life in Feminist Liberation Theology: To Honor Gustavo Gutiérrez." Rather, it is simply to point out that, especially in light of Johnson's recognition of human sinfulness, she could have taken a more Augustinian approach to environmental degradation and emphasized the need for public policies that address socially destabilizing ecological threats like climate change.

While there is much to recommend from the perspective of ecology, readers who are not especially interested in this topic will nevertheless find this book a rich source of accessible, stimulating reflections and an important gift to the church.

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King of All

CHRIST THE KING (B), NOV. 22, 2015

Readings: Dn 7:13–14; Ps 93:1–5; Rv 1:5–8; Jn 18:33–37

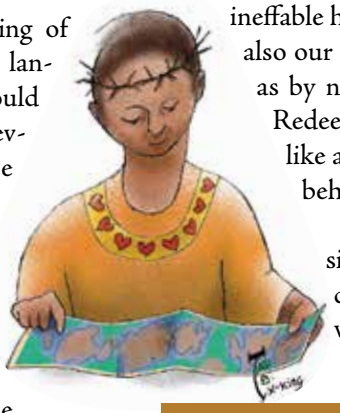
"My kingdom is not from this world"(Jn 18:36)

The political context in which Pope Pius XI, by the encyclical "Quas Primas," established the feast of Christ the King in 1925 was the still unresolved Roman Question, which concerned the papacy and the Kingdom of Italy regarding the temporal authority of the popes and the Papal States. For those of us who have grown up with the separation of church and state, the Papal States are a distant historical oddity.

Yet, even if these political issues no longer resonate for us today, "Quas Primas" commemorated these same issues and problems by taking the view that marks the church off as a unique society, one that is eternal, whose king's authority transcends all political divisions and historical epochs. The church exists in the messiness of history and responds to events that emerge from that same messiness but claims a king who transcends it all.

Already in the Book of Daniel and in earlier prophetic books, the hope for the true king, the one who would establish God's kingdom, emerged in the language and imagery of ancient Near Eastern myth, when the prophet sees "one like a Son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven." While scholars dispute the identification of the Son of Man as the messiah in Daniel, the earliest Christians understood that the one to whom "was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him" was Jesus, whose "dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away" and whose "kingship is one that shall never be destroyed." This was the king of all.

When would this king of all peoples, nations and languages arrive? When would God's kingdom, the everlasting dominion, be established? The Book of Revelation, written in opposition to the Caesars of Rome and their Empire, declared that Jesus was already "the ruler of the kings of the earth," who "made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever." And Revelation promised, evoking the language of Daniel, that Jesus' first coming will be followed by a second coming with the clouds when "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail."



Even Jesus' disciples, though, who followed him faithfully if unsurely to Jerusalem, must have wondered about the answer when they heard the Roman procurator Pilate ask their teacher, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered: "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." It is a true answer, of course, but also elusive, for though Jesus' kingdom is "not from this world" and does not involve peace treaties, concordats, armies and diplomatic corps, it includes all of this world and all that is in it.

It is a point Pope Pius XI makes in "Quas Primas" (No. 13), citing Cyril of Alexandria, who wrote that "Christ has dominion over all creatures, a dominion not seized by violence nor usurped, but his by essence and by nature." Pius XI also writes that though Jesus' "kingship is founded upon the ineffable hypostatic union," Christ is also our King "by acquired, as well as by natural right, for he is our Redeemer." Jesus' kingship is unlike any other by nature and by behavior.

But there is another consideration as to why Jesus declared that his kingdom was "not from this world."

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Reflect on Christ as king. How does Jesus' kingship comfort you when you think of political and other disputes in our own day? Does the feast of Christ the King help you make sense of the church's role in the world?

ART: TAD DUNNE

Pius XI states that all people can enter this kingdom, whoever they are and from wherever they are since "this kingdom is opposed to none other than to that of Satan and to the power of darkness" (No. 15). This kingdom welcomes all kingdoms and all people.

If we see only the messiness of history and politics, we are missing the true story of eternity and the true king of all, who is already "the ruler of the kings of the earth." If we believe it to be true, we must never despair of the politics of our age, for he came as king, is now king and is coming again in glory.

JOHN W. MARTENS

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