

America

THE JOURNAL OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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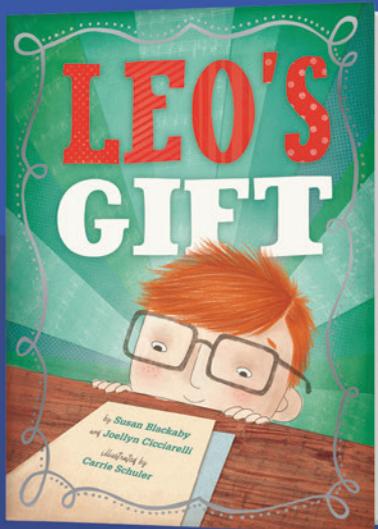
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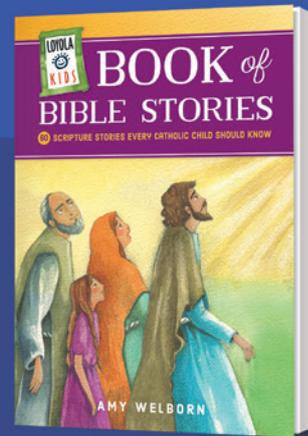
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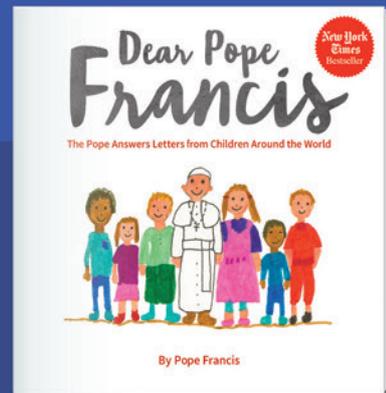
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Four Women and an Observation

Strangely enough, I received the news alert informing me that Britain's Prince Harry is engaged to be married while I was watching "The Crown," the Netflix original drama about the early reign of Queen Elizabeth II. It's great television, especially for moderate Anglophiles like me; a beautifully produced portrait of a fascinating woman, whose reign has spanned seven papacies, 12 U.S. presidents and 13 British prime ministers. During her more than 25,000 days as queen, this longest-serving British monarch has given the royal assent to 3,500 acts of Parliament and visited nearly every country on earth.

"I declare before you all," she said on her 21st birthday, "that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service." Such public devotion to duty might seem quaint nowadays if not for the fact that the queen has kept that promise for 70 years and counting.

That got me thinking about the countless women throughout the world whose devotion to duty and service largely make life possible. Whether occupying a throne, or keeping a home, or running a multinational corporation, their contributions—too often overlooked—speak to what Pope Francis has called the particular "genius of women."

Take Bette Nash, for example, the American Airlines flight attendant who last month celebrated 60 years of service. She began at Eastern Airlines the same year my own mother did, during the Eisenhower administration, when flight tickets cost 12 dollars and you didn't need a reservation. Over the years, Eastern Airlines was acquired by this or

that carrier, eventually merging with American Airlines. Through all those transitions, not to mention dramatic social changes, Ms. Nash has missed hardly a day's work. "My favorite part of flying over the years has been greeting my passengers as they board and deplane. People really are fascinating and it's truly been a joy," she told *The Washington Post*. With all those miles logged, Ms. Nash could fly any route she wants. She chooses to fly the shuttle between Washington D.C. and Boston so this single mom can be home in time to care for her son, who has Down syndrome. In whatever hours she has left, she volunteers at the food pantry at her local Catholic parish. The C.E.O. of American Airlines made a \$10,000 donation to the pantry in honor of Ms. Nash's milestone.

While the famous and the infamous garner the headlines, it's people like Bette Nash who actually run the world. And women like Catherine Cortez Masto, the U.S. senator from Nevada who has written the Last Take column in this issue of *America*. A granddaughter of Mexican immigrants, Ms. Cortez Masto is the first Latina elected to the U.S. Senate. "We need to do a better job of mentorships and role models to bring other young women along," she recently told CNN, "so that there's more women in our boardrooms, there's more women here in the United States Senate and in Congress. I think there's an important role for women to play."

There's an important role for women to play in the church too. Regardless of what one thinks about the church's teaching on gender and priestly ordination, there are plenty

of jobs in the church that could use women like Bette Nash and Catherine Cortez Masto. And there are many nonsacramental jobs that currently require priestly ordination but probably should not, especially since this would open more positions of leadership and service to women. Men and women alike benefit from such diversity.

That has certainly been our experience at *America*. In the last five years, we have hired more women at *America* than we did in the previous 100 years. They serve in every part of the organization. And it all started with another amazing woman, Patricia A. Kossmann, who in March 1999 became the first woman and the first layperson to serve on the editorial board of this review. For 13 years, Ms. Kossmann was *America's* literary editor, winning several awards for her coverage and blazing a trail for the many women who now follow in her footsteps. On Dec. 1, at the dedication of our new headquarters, we also welcomed Pat and named our conference room after her, a fitting tribute to her legacy and the many lay people who have served *America* for more than a century.

America the magazine, not to mention *America* the country, still has a lot of work to do to ensure that the voices of women are heard and the contributions of women are valued at every level of life. Celebrating the contributions women already make and the leadership they already provide to the church and the world seems like a good place to start.

Matt Malone, S.J.
Twitter: @americaeditor.



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Young people recite the Pledge of Allegiance during a naturalization ceremony in San Diego, Calif., on Nov. 17. (CNS photo/David Maung)
Cover: CNS photo/David Maung

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Which foreign policy issue worries you the most?

When asked which foreign policy issues worry them the most, 42 percent of our reader sample told us they were most concerned about climate change. From Shoreline, Wash., Julene Newland-Pyfer noted that climate change has especially adverse effects on those who are already marginalized. “Climate change affects everyone worldwide, especially the poor and most vulnerable,” she said. “I am horrified that the president has withdrawn the United States from the Paris climate accords. We should be leading these efforts.”

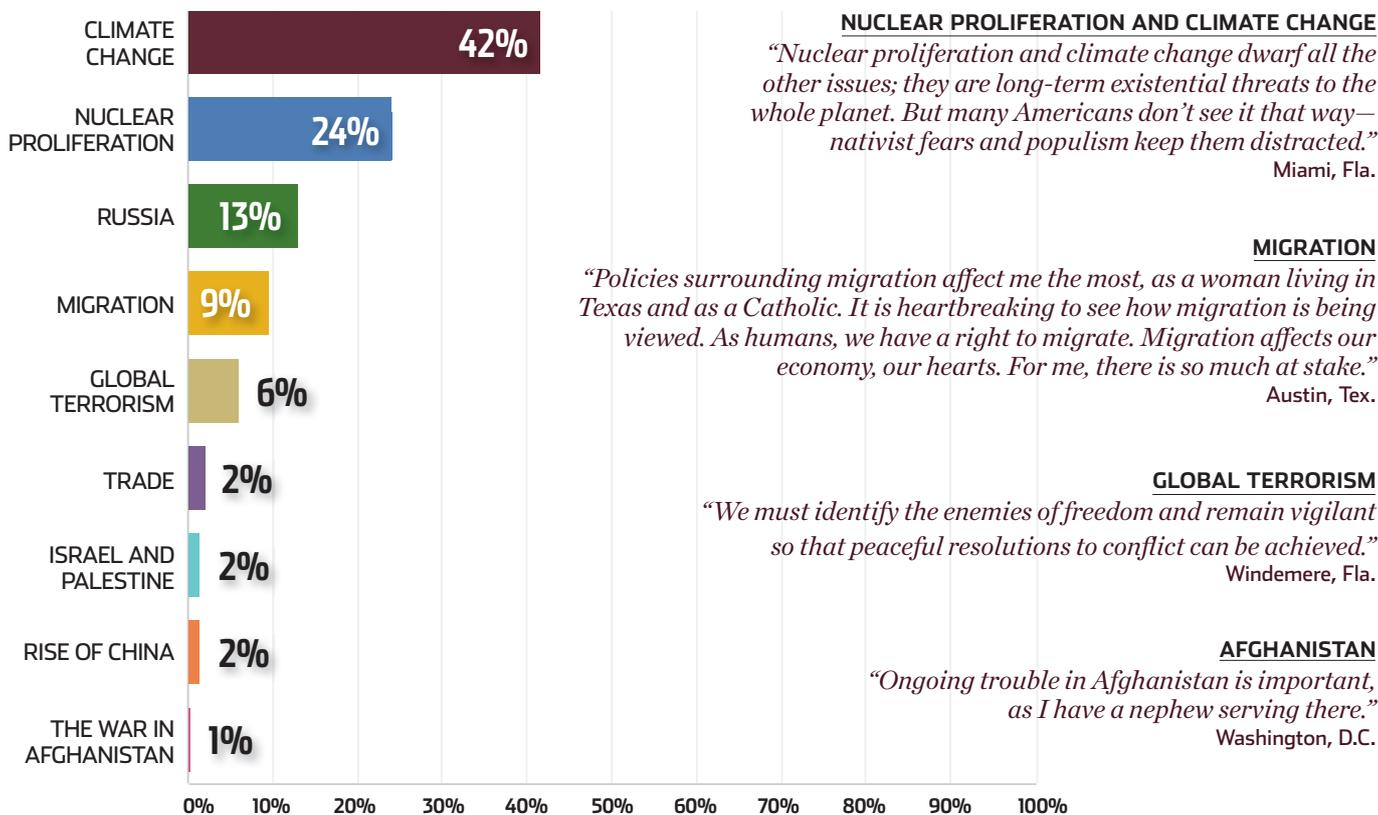
Many readers also pointed out that in comparison with other foreign policy issues, climate change’s consequences are the broadest and have the most impact. Mary Louise Hartman of Princeton, N.J., explained, “If we do not get climate change under control, we will have to worry twice as much about all the other issues.” Kelly White O’Neill of Santa Maria, Calif., agreed: “The destruction of the planet makes everything else moot. And the fact that my own country won’t even face the

truth about this makes it doubly important to contend with.”

Twenty-four percent of respondents to our informal survey said that nuclear proliferation worried them more than any other foreign policy issue. Mike Griffin of East Marion, N.Y., told **America** that his “greatest fear” is “President Trump initiating or antagonizing a nuclear war with North Korea.” An anonymous reader from Fishkill, N.Y., said, “I am very much afraid that nuclear war is more likely now than at any other time in my lifetime—and I lived during the Cold War, hiding under my desk for those ridiculous drills.”

Relations with Russia were deemed the next greatest cause for concern among foreign policy issues, with 13 percent of readers choosing this option. Philip Sclafani of Los Angeles, Calif., explained, “Russia is a formidable clandestine supporter of propagandistic incitement in Georgia, Ukraine, Brexit and on a much larger scale in the U.S. presidential election.”

WHICH OF THESE FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES DO YOU WORRY ABOUT THE MOST?



These results are based on reader responses to a poll promoted on Facebook, Twitter and in our email newsletter. Because of rounding, percentages may not add up to 100.

Dismay and Disappointment

Re “Unfortunate Tone,” by Rudy Lopez (Your Take, 11/27): It was with dismay and disappointment that I read a letter to the editor written by Mr. Rudy Lopez in reaction to an article that I recently wrote for **America** on Hispanic Catholics. Mr. Lopez claims that I use language and tone that “reinforces negative attitudes about immigrants as invading hordes who must now be tolerated to be better understood.” He would be surprised that I also find that language revolting. The problem is that Mr. Lopez seems to have read an entirely different article or simply failed to grasp the basic content of the piece. What I wrote argues exactly the opposite of what he claims I said. Whoever is familiar with my work knows where I stand on these matters.

I have no objection to criticism and debate (as an academic, that is part of what I do daily), but if anyone is going to offer a critical comment, it needs to be based on the facts in question and clear evidence that the article has been conscientiously read and analyzed. I regret that the editorial team at **America** did not hold the author of the letter accountable for this misrepresentation and gave him credence by actually allowing the comment to be in print. The conversation about Hispanic Catholicism in the United States deserves better.

Hosffman Ospino

Boston College
Boston, Mass.

Set a Local Limit

Re “Two Good Things Trapped in a Bad Tax Bill” (Our Take, 11/27): In much of California one would be hard-pressed to find a home with any kind of mortgage below \$500,000. Here in a middle-class neighborhood in San Francisco, the house across the street just sold for \$1.6 million. It is not the average homeowner who is driving up the prices. We should not be penalized for things that are so out of our control. If there is a limit on tax-deductible mortgages, it ought to be pegged somehow to local conditions.

Michael Painter

Online Comment

Consciously Objecting

Re “Mercy for Rosa María” (Our Take, 11/27): Please start a conversation about the rationalization on the part of border patrol agents—the “I was just doing my job” mentality when it comes to enforcement. We need

to start a culture of consciously objecting to unjust orders.

Karen Kerrigan

Online Comment

Reasonable Assistance

I agree that the proposed tax code should not benefit only wealthy Americans. As a special education teacher (now retired) of students with brain damage, I made a decent salary, though I certainly was not rich. As a pro-life supporter, I not only oppose the violence of legal abortion, but capital punishment, and support stringent gun control laws. I also believe that our government should provide reasonable assistance to the millions of Americans in need. The tax code should promote adoption and not eliminate the adoption tax credit.

Tim Donovan

Online Comment

Risk and Magic

Re “In Prison, Writing is an Act of Redemption,” by Valerie Shultz (11/27): I love this article. I applaud what you are doing with the inmates, Ms. Schultz. I, too, recently joined a writer’s group at the library and am discovering the risk and magic of sharing myself with readers. It is helping me to find my voice. Thank you.

Beth Cioffoletti

Online Comment

Missing Mom

Re “Día de los Muertos,” by Gina Franco and Christopher Poore (11/27): This is my first Día de Los Muertos since my mom passed away in January. As much as I grieve, today reminds me of the eternal life she now enjoys. I know I will see her when I am called to that same reward.

Veronica Zamarron

Online Comment

Helpful Reminder

I am quite moved by this article. I once took a journey to Mexico City, to the shrine of Our Lady in memory of my daughter. Later I traveled through other parts of the country. I have traveled in many countries, but my lasting memory in all my encounters was that of the dignity of the people of Mexico and their belief in something beyond self. Thank you for the reminder.

Sheila Simpson

Online Comment

Responding to Sexual Abuse and Harassment Will Take Years, and It Should

The flood of revelations about sexual harassment and assault, whether in Washington or Hollywood, is unlikely to stop anytime soon. The walls of denial built up by position and self-protective ignorance have been breached. If the tragic revelations of the Catholic Church's sex abuse crisis are any guide, the process of reckoning with problems that have been avoided for decades will itself take decades.

Neither the church as a whole nor the editors of this review are in a position to prescribe a comprehensive remedy for the systemic patterns of harassment, abuse and denial. But there are pitfalls to be avoided and small measures of hope to be encouraged, and the church's experience has some lessons to offer.

The first lesson is that the voices of the victims must be heard. The attention of media and society too easily turns to parsing the harassers' and abusers' excuses and apologies while simultaneously calling for their

exile from public life and for policy changes that might have prevented their abusing in the first place. Senator Mitch McConnell, responding to the accusations against Roy Moore in Alabama on Nov. 13, joined calls for Mr. Moore to withdraw from his Senate race. Where many others had hedged their criticisms with "if these accusations are true," Mr. McConnell said squarely, "I believe the women, yes." While surely Mr. McConnell is not completely ignoring political risks and benefits, his clear attention to the voices of the women who have accused Mr. Moore is significant.

The second lesson is that while some form of social and professional exclusion may be a necessary first step in redressing the damage done by harassers and abusers, it is not by itself a sufficient response. The swift firing or ostracizing of abusers does not absolve institutions or communities of their collective responsibility, whether they were complicit in covering up

abuse or merely ignorant of its prevalence.

The Puritan impulse to cast out the evildoer as the sole response to his transgression seeks catharsis rather than justice. Justice requires not only that past and future victims be made whole and safe but also that the structures that protect the privileged rather than the powerless be reformed. And justice also recognizes and encourages the possibility of redemption, after repentance and penalty.

The church still needs to learn and relearn how to listen to victims. It also must face the reality of sexual harassment, alongside the problem of the sexual abuse of children it has painfully learned to acknowledge. But its experience offers evidence that it is possible to begin turning even an organization as large and as old as the church toward primary concern for victims. As painful as these most recent revelations of abuse and harassment are, we need to hear them.

Failure to Pass the Dream Act Would Be a Moral Crisis

On Nov. 6, a young man named Juan Manuel Montes was detained by Border Patrol agents just north of the border wall in California. He is the first known beneficiary of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program to have been deported by the Trump administration.

Mr. Montes's detention and deportation are a sign of what could come on a far greater scale. It has been over two months since President Trump ordered an end to DACA, the Obama-era program that protected Dreamers—undocumented immi-

grants brought to the United States as children—from deportation. Yet there are no signs that we are any closer today to passage of the Dream Act, a legislative fix that would give Dreamers a path to citizenship. Some Democrats are openly flirting with the idea of forcing a government shutdown in December if legislation protecting these immigrants is not included in a must-pass spending bill. Brinkmanship is not a path to responsible governance, but the fact that Democrats are putting it on the table underscores the exigency that Dreamers face.

Most Dreamers are fully embedded in U.S. society; they are students, teachers, doctors, business owners and serve in the military. Some are the parents of U.S. citizens. If these young men and women are deported, many will almost certainly attempt to return to their homes in the United States. Most will, like Mr. Montes, be arrested and detained in inhumane conditions—at taxpayers' expense. Others may even lose their lives on the perilous trek to the border.

Catholic leaders have been vocal in their support for the Dream Act.

The question is whether strongly worded statements from the U.S. bishops and others will be enough to shake Congress into action.

“Some unjust laws impose such injustices on individuals and organizations that disobeying the laws may be justified,” the U.S. bishops wrote in 2012 in response to the Obama administration’s controversial contraception mandate. Immigration laws that break up families and expel immigrants from the only country they have ever known may also meet this criterion. Should Congress fail to enact the Dream Act, the church should be at the forefront of peaceful protests and demonstrations on behalf of our immigrant brothers and sisters. More direct resistance, like offering sanctuary to Dreamers and engaging in civil disobedience to forestall deportations, may also be justified.

The church must also reckon with the role many Catholics—both in public office and at the voting booth—have played in creating the current climate of xenophobia. “There’s something wrong in our churches, where the Gospel is proclaimed, and yet people leave our worship services, our Masses on weekends, with [anti-immigrant] rhetoric still echoing in their hearts,” Cardinal Blase J. Cupich of Chicago said at the annual gathering of bishops on Nov. 13.

What is lacking in the church and society at large is the same sense of urgency that Dreamers already feel. Can we prioritize the needs of our neighbor as we prioritize our own? The stakes are high: hundreds of thousands of lives, as American as our own in all but law.

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Pre-Bethlehem: How the church can do more for expectant parents

As thousands of families travel for the holidays, Catholics are reminded of the reason to make the trip—the Holy Family’s journey to Bethlehem for the Nativity.

This trek, which would have spanned multiple days during the season we now know as Advent, left much time for Mary and Joseph to think about uncertainties that lay ahead: Will the baby be born before we arrive? Am I ready to be a parent? How can I make sense out of the extraordinary and mysterious circumstances surrounding this conception?

These concerns are certainly spiritual ones, and they raise the question: If Catholic families today have similar uncertainties, do they have a space within the church to be heard? Is the Catholic Church, so vocal about parents teaching faith to their children, falling short in giving couples spiritual preparation for parenthood?

Recent data suggest that U.S. Catholics need help to prepare for growing a family within the church.

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate revealed some troubling statistics in its 2015 report “The Catholic Family.” Only 22 percent of Catholic families attended Mass weekly (18 percent among Catholic families with an infant); only 32 percent of Catholic parents had their children enrolled in religious education, with only 21 percent in parish-based religious education; and only 17 percent of Catholic parents who prayed on their own also prayed as a family.

While one could easily speculate that these numbers reflect increasing secularization, it may be that families

do not feel prepared to take on household faith formation or simply do not know how.

Calling family the “fundamental cell of society,” Pope Francis has placed family at the forefront of his papacy, convening the meetings of the Synod of Bishops on the family in 2015 and 2016. But the synod’s highly publicized debates over divorced and remarried Catholics seem to have overshadowed discussion about supporting new families. Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, a synod participant, said: “In first-world countries, cardinals will make the statement that we do pretty well in marriage preparation, but then we don’t follow them after they’re married. Everybody was kind of agreeing with that.”

And there is good reason to follow new families after marriage. Unlike their parents’ generation, young couples today do not live in multigenerational households, and some move far away from their own parents for career reasons. New families may feel overwhelmed, particularly in the United States, where only 14 percent of civilian workers have paid parental leave. Financial uncertainty, the drawbacks and benefits of a two-income household, day care, and raising a child in a world affected by climate change, political polarization, new ethical and moral questions, and great technological change—these are just some of the issues facing modern families.

Couples without children face challenges, too. One often-overlooked group that bears the burden of isolation in parishes across the United States is made up of people who are struggling with infertility, which affects one in

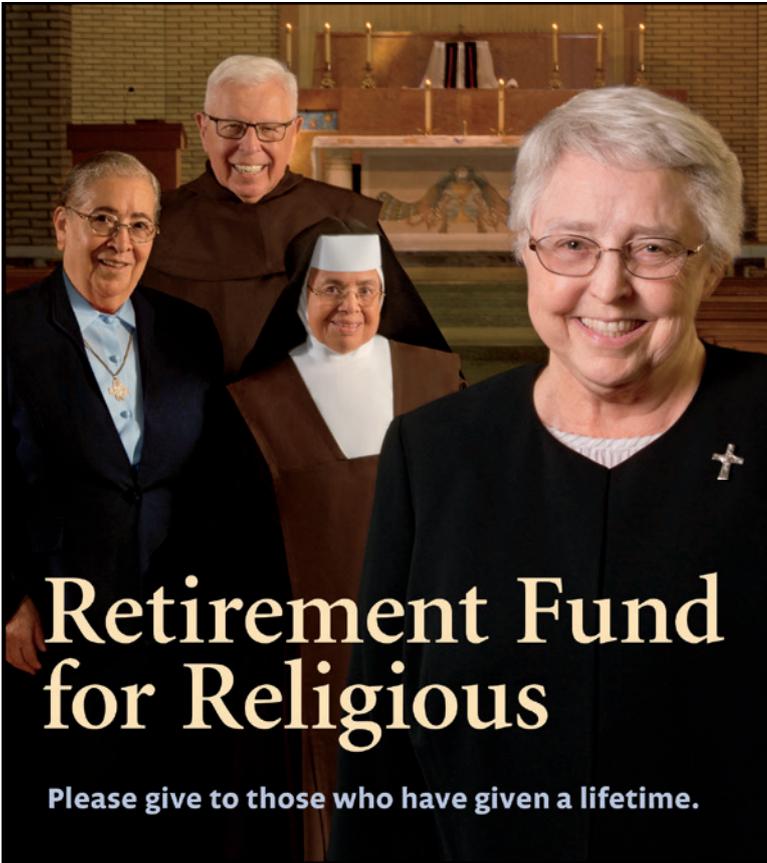
six couples. About 11 percent of women of childbearing age struggle with fertility, while others carry the grief of miscarriage, which ends 10 percent to 20 percent of known pregnancies, or stillbirth (1 percent of pregnancies). Many Catholics, however, are more familiar with church ethical teaching on assisted reproductive technology than with resources to turn to for support in these situations.

One solution may be a model with which parents of a generation ago are familiar: weekly childbirth education. Both the church and childbirth education models recognize the importance of community. There are thousands of books, blogs and websites for new parents, but childbirth education allows a group to meet regularly in a spirit of learning, support and empowerment. Women or couples can discuss their feelings of joy, confusion, worry and anticipation openly with others.

While the church recognizes that marriage is momentous and offers or even mandates programs like pre-Cana, it does not offer standard preparation for expectant parents, aside from perhaps a class for parents and godparents before baptism. This shortcoming must be amended, as supporting new families is one of the church’s most urgent tasks in the modern day.

It is time for the church to go beyond pre-Cana and begin to talk about pre-Bethlehem.

*Christina Gebel, of Boston, is a birth doula and childbirth educator. She is the author of the *Before Bethlehem* curriculum, a parish program to prepare parents for childbirth and beyond.*



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Photo (from left): Sister Gloria Rodriguez, MGSps, 80; Father Albert Bunsic, OCD, 81; Sister Alfonsina Sanchez, OCD, 96; Sister Mary Ann Hanson, SND, 79.
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CIVILITY IN AMERICA: RELIGION

Ross Douthat of *The New York Times* and James Martin, S.J., of *America* magazine, engaged in a spirited and public online dialogue on matters of Catholicism in the U.S. At this event, the first of the series, Douthat and Martin meet for a lively and spirited dialogue about civility in American public and ecclesial discourse, moderated by Matt Malone, S.J., editor in chief of *America*.

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ARE U.S. BISHOPS RESTORING THE SEAMLESS GARMENT?

By Michael O'Loughlin

In the run-up to the November meeting of U.S. bishops in Baltimore, commentators zeroed in on the election of the chair of the bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities as something of a referendum on Pope Francis, on one of his champions in the United States, Cardinal Blase Cupich, or on both. The position went to Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City on Nov. 14. Since bishops are reluctant to discuss such votes publicly, it will perhaps remain unclear why they broke with tradition and elected an archbishop instead of a cardinal for the post or why nearly three dozen of them abstained from voting.

The focus on the pro-life committee vote did, however, give renewed attention to a way of approaching a litany of thorny social and political issues known as the consistent ethic of life. This ethos, first made famous in the 1980s by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, was crafted at a time when abortion, the death penalty and nuclear war were uppermost in the minds of many Catholics.

Today, some bishops believe the consistent ethic or "seamless garment" approach to how Catholics operate in the public square could be especially helpful as the church grapples with issues like migration, health care and even taxes.

Steven P. Millies, the director of The Bernardin Center at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and a biographer

of the late archbishop, said that then-Archbishop Bernardin used the phrase "consistent ethic of life" as early as 1976 as he struggled with how the church should approach social issues in light of the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade* to legalize abortion a few years earlier.

During the first presidential election following *Roe*, in 1976, Archbishop Bernardin was president of the U.S. bishops' conference. According to Mr. Millies, he feared "abortion could completely take over the American Catholic political engagement." As a result, Mr. Millies said, "he was very conscious of trying to find a way to make sure that everything else didn't get lost."

Bishop Gerald Kicanas, who recently retired as the head of the Diocese of Tucson, was an auxiliary bishop in Chicago under Cardinal Bernardin. He said that the cardinal, who passed away in 1996, was persistently criticized during his career for promoting the consistent ethic of life because of a misunderstanding about how the framework approached abortion.

"What Cardinal Bernardin was trying to emphasize in his efforts was seeing that all life issues are intertwined and that we have to see this as a 'seamless garment,'" Bishop Kicanas said. The "seamless garment" is an image from the Gospels that the cardinal used to help explain the concept,





A broadened understanding of pro-life positions: Activists gather in Nogales, Ariz., on Nov. 12 to remember migrants who have died trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico border.

CNS photo/Jim West

which was picked up by the popular press following his speech in 1983. That image led some to believe that the cardinal believed all moral issues carried equal weight, which he did not.

“One of the most painful things for Cardinal Bernardin when he was talking about the ‘seamless garment,’ of the whole idea of seeking common ground, was that there was such a reaction by some to that, as if he had betrayed the teachings of the church,” he said.

The cardinal, Bishop Kicanas said, “wanted to somehow heal the polarization that existed, and sadly still exists, not only in the church but certainly in the world as well.”

In 2011 the Catholic writer George Weigel published an essay in the journal *First Things* titled “The End of the Bernardin Era,” in which he argued that the concept had given cover for Catholic politicians who support abortion rights, even if that was not the cardinal’s intention. Nonetheless, Mr. Weigel wrote, by 1998 U.S. bishops had moved on from the “seamless garment” approach by elevating “pro-life activism as the cultural marker of serious Catholicism in America.”

But with the election of Pope Francis in 2013, that marker began to shift. While consistently toeing the line on the church’s opposition to abortion, Francis nonetheless

suggested in an interview published by **America** early on in his pontificate that the church had become too narrowly focused on abortion and same-sex marriage, perhaps to the detriment of other issues.

Mr. Millies contends that the consistent ethic of life deserves another look as the *Roe v. Wade* decision approaches its 50th anniversary. He argues that the tactics used by bishops on abortion have not succeeded in producing anything “other than division.”

Cardinal Cupich, who was appointed to lead the Archdiocese of Chicago by Pope Francis in 2014, has led a call not only to embrace Cardinal Bernardin’s vision but to adapt it to modern times, suggesting that the seamless garment ethos should be expanded to include greater solidarity with the poor and other marginalized groups.

Another archbishop appointed by Pope Francis, Cardinal Joseph Tobin of the Diocese of Newark, said it is “necessary” to bring back this ethos because otherwise it will appear that Catholic leaders “pick and choose” which life issues are important, “rather than applying consistently the same principles” to a range of life issues.

He said migration issues, while not as prevalent during Cardinal Bernardin’s time, should certainly be part of the consistent ethic approach today.

Mr. Millies argues that Pope Francis has endorsed the consistent ethic of life, pointing to the pope's address to the U.S. bishops during his visit to the United States in 2015.

In a section urging collegiality among bishops, Pope Francis said: "The world is already so torn and divided, brokenness is now everywhere. Consequently, the church, 'the seamless garment of the Lord,' cannot allow herself to be rent, broken or fought over."

"The bishops would not have failed to connect those words to the consistent ethic," Mr. Millies said.

As for the notion that Cardinal Cupich's defeat for pro-life chair signals a defeat for Cardinal Bernardin's legacy,

Mr. Millies is dubious. He points to the publication of "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," a voting guide published by U.S. bishops, for proof.

"That document has said since at least 2003 that anything that concerns human life is of interest to the church and that anybody who's willing to be serious about forming a political opinion in light of Catholic faith has got to take every part of that seriously," he said. "And the emphasis is on every part of that—not picking and choosing."

Michael J. O'Loughlin, *national correspondent.*

Twitter: @MikeOLoughlin.

A SEASON OF GIVING

24%

OF TOTAL CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS ARE MADE BETWEEN **THANKSGIVING AND NEW YEAR'S DAY.**

50.5%

OF CHARITIES GET MOST OF THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS BETWEEN **OCTOBER AND DECEMBER.**

THE BIG PICTURE FOR 2016

TOTAL DONATIONS TO U.S. CHARITIES: **UP 2.7% FROM 2015**
\$390.05 BILLION

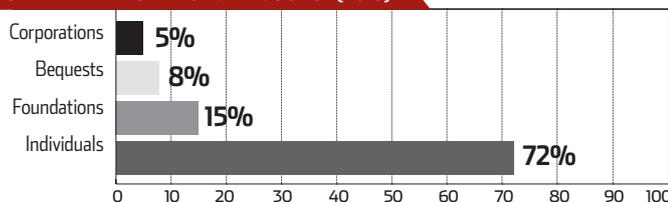
PER-CAPITA GIVING BY U.S. ADULTS **\$1,155**

1954, ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION: \$333

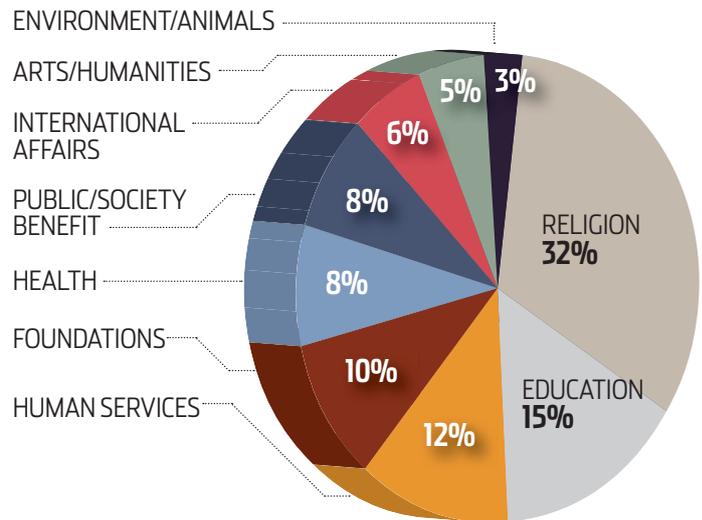
AVERAGE BY U.S. HOUSEHOLD: **\$2,240**

33% OF U.S. HOUSEHOLDS REPORT GIVING NO MONEY TO CHARITY. THE REMAINING **67%** GIVE **4%** OF THEIR INCOME, ON AVERAGE.

CHARITABLE DONATIONS BY SOURCE (2016)



CONTRIBUTIONS BY TYPE OF CHARITY (2016)



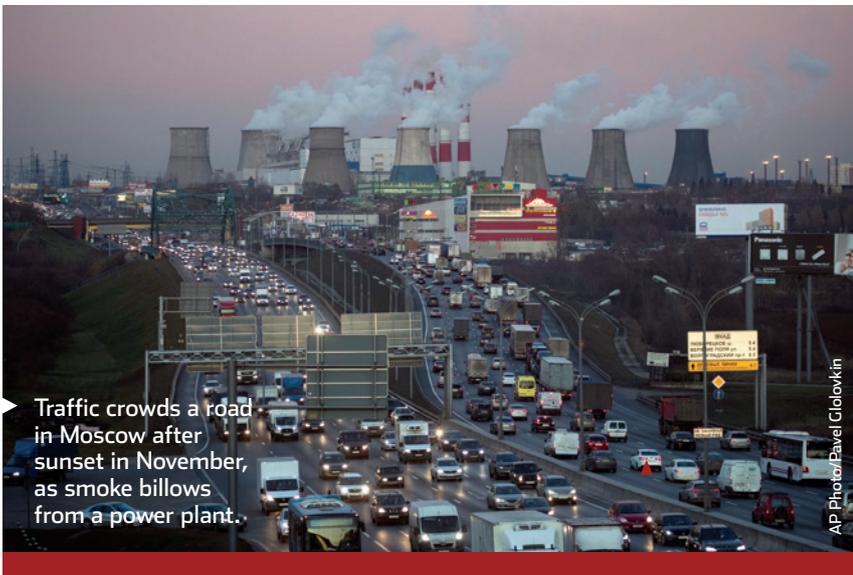
ANNUAL DONATIONS TO RELIGIOUS CAUSES BY HOUSEHOLDS

THE TYPICAL U.S. CATHOLIC HOUSEHOLD CONTRIBUTES **1.1% TO 1.2% OF ITS INCOME TO ITS CHURCH.** THE TYPICAL U.S. PROTESTANT HOUSEHOLD CONTRIBUTES **2.2% TO 2.5% OF ITS INCOME TO ITS CHURCH.**

HOUSEHOLDS ATTENDING SERVICES AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH	\$1,848
HOUSEHOLDS ATTENDING SERVICES LESS FREQUENTLY	\$111
PROTESTANTS	\$2,809
JEWS	\$2,291
OTHER	\$1,979
CATHOLICS	\$1,372

Sources: holiday giving from 2007 survey on charitable giving by the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, reported by the National Center on Charitable Statistics, and "The Effect of the Economy on the Nonprofit Sector," 2012 survey by GuideStar; "Big Picture" data from Giving USA Foundation (adjusted for inflation, the annual increase in donations was 1.4 percent), with 1954 data and household self-reporting data from the Philanthropy Roundtable; pie chart data from Giving USA Foundation; data on religious giving from "Catholic Parishes of the 21st Century," Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) and "Giving to Religion," report by the Giving USA Foundation, cited by Religion News Service.

World leaves U.S. behind on climate change



Traffic crowds a road in Moscow after sunset in November, as smoke billows from a power plant.

Representatives from around the world met in Bonn, Germany, in mid-November to coordinate international efforts to address global warming and climate change, but progress in the United States has hit a “speed bump”—the Trump administration.

Reciting a litany of recent White House moves to roll back U.S. efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions—among them, pulling out of the 2015 Paris Accord on climate change and abandoning the Obama administration’s Clean Power Plan—Dan Misleh, executive director of the Catholic Climate Covenant, said, “Everybody working on this issue in the Catholic community and beyond is frustrated for sure, but I think this just represents a speed bump, maybe several speed bumps.”

Despite White House moves, Mr. Misleh argued, “The path ahead is pretty clear.”

“What we need to do,” he explained, “is just continue to live out the challenge of ‘Laudato Si’;” which is to examine our relationship with the earth, with God and with each other to see how we can become better stewards of this gift of the earth.” And, he added, to be “more cognizant of our impacts on the earth” and on the earth’s most economically and ecologically vulnerable people.

The world is racing to prevent an increase of more than 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial global temperatures. Exceeding that level, according to many climate scientists, would put the planetary climate on the wrong side of a perilous tipping point.

The meetings in Bonn suggested the world is no longer waiting for the United States to do—or even say—the right

thing on climate change. Syria, a holdout on the 2015 Paris climate accords, became a signatory to the agreement just before the Bonn gathering, known as COP23, opened. That move means the United States is the only nation on the planet not officially in step with Paris.

A letter, promoted by the Catholic Climate Covenant and signed by representatives from more than 160 Catholic universities, religious communities and social justice and environmental institutions, urges Congress and the Trump administration to “reassert U.S. leadership in the global effort to address climate change.”

“Climate change is a global problem

that requires global solutions,” the signatories wrote to the president. “As our nation enjoys vast resources and has been a primary contributor to climate change, justice requires that the U.S. display strong and consistent leadership within the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change]. In this way, the U.S. can help secure science-based global commitments which rapidly reduce greenhouse gas pollution and avoid so-called ‘tipping points’ towards unavoidable and catastrophic impacts.”

That reversal will be a hard sell to an administration that has made a point of resisting the implications of climate change. The United States “has abdicated its leadership in the international arena,” according to Mr. Misleh.

But other nations are stepping forward. China, where air quality has become a significant problem, is leaping far ahead of the United States in research and infrastructural development of sustainable energy alternatives. “China has the scale and size economically to be a global leader on this and fill the void” left by Washington, says Mr. Misleh. China’s recent progress on sustainable energy promises not only to be a boon to its technology sector, economy and environment, he adds, but would also improve “their world stature.”

“It’s a little jarring to think that China is going to become the global leader and perhaps the global moral leader on environmental justice and good stewardship of the earth,” he says. “Not that there’s anything wrong with that, but it should be the role of the United States.”

Kevin Clarke, *chief correspondent*. *Twitter: @clarkeatamerica*.

Catholic university students respond in Puerto Rico

Hurricane Maria destroyed countless houses in Playita, a poor neighborhood in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The Category 4 hurricane hit the island on Sept. 20, but more than half of its inhabitants were still living without electricity two months later. Streetlights dangled from posts by wires.

Louis Torres stood in front of his two-story house, staring at mattresses, a couch and other destroyed furniture. “I lost everything,” he said. “Water filled my house, up to my knees.”

“We were flooded by black water. Thank God we’re alive,” said José Sánchez, standing in front of his damaged home. “It was horrible. Everything fell apart.”

Mr. Sánchez held packages of food and toiletries that students from the Universidad del Sagrado Corazón (Sacred Heart University) in San Juan had just dropped off. This is just one of 52 towns across the 3,500-square-mile island where the Catholic university is providing aid. According to the university’s president, Gilberto J. Marxuach Torrós, they have reached more than 30,000 Puerto Ricans.

“The hurricane has laid bare all the inequalities and social injustices of the island,” he said. “It has challenged us to build a new and different Puerto Rico.”

A few days after the hurricane, Mr. Marxuach Torrós accompanied a group of nursing students to Rio Grande, a northeastern coastal community of 50,000 people. There, while the team assessed medical needs, he met a young woman who attends Sagrado Corazón. The student, her younger sister and her parents fled to a shelter as floodwaters rose up to their shoulders the night of the hurricane.

“They were sleeping on the floor. They had no possessions,” Mr. Marxuach Torrós said. He shared the student’s story with others at the university. They prepared a care package and delivered it to the family the next day. The university even worked out a way for the student to continue her studies remotely.

“Our faith informs everything we do at this university,” Mr. Marxuach Torrós said. “We believe that every human being is created in the image of God and must be treated with respect. That principle inspires everything we do.”



The university has a “robust service-learning program,” he said, which has helped the university reach out to people in need after the hurricane. Journalism, communications, nursing, psychology—students from all majors are finding ways to take part in the effort. The university’s Solidarity Center includes legal experts who help residents navigate the Federal Emergency Management Agency; it also offers employment assistance and support for small businesses.

“We have been focusing on meeting emergency needs. But the next step is to truly develop the human person,” said Edwin Figueroa, who coordinates pastoral projects for Sagrado Corazón.

The university, in a joint effort with New York University and the University of Cincinnati, is offering free online courses for any university student affected by



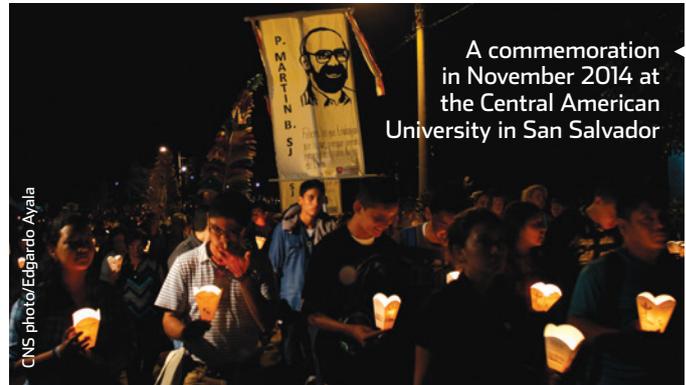
Students from Universidad del Sagrado Corazón distribute food and basic needs to San Juan residents reeling from Hurricane Maria.

Hurricane Maria. Mr. Figueroa noted that most of the students come from low- to lower-middle-income families, and many lost their jobs after the hurricane. More than 20 professors from Harvard, New York University and Wesleyan University, among others, are donating their time for the courses.

Mr. Marxuach Torrós said the students “have lifted up this whole university, challenging us to go out to the margins, as Pope Francis asks. The experience of [Hurricane] Maria has transformed these young men and women. The society they will build will be a much better one than the one we built for them.”

J. D. Long-García, senior editor. Twitter: @Jdlonggarcia.

Trial of former Salvadoran colonel could reveal new details of 1989 Jesuit massacre



A commemoration in November 2014 at the Central American University in San Salvador

On Nov. 16, 28 years ago, six Spanish Jesuits, their cook and her daughter were murdered at the University of Central America by U.S.-trained and -equipped Salvadoran military. The upcoming extradition and trial of Colonel Inocente Montano, a former Salvadoran vice minister of public security, accused as one of the authors of the massacre, could unlock key details of the case and help bring justice to the victims’ families.

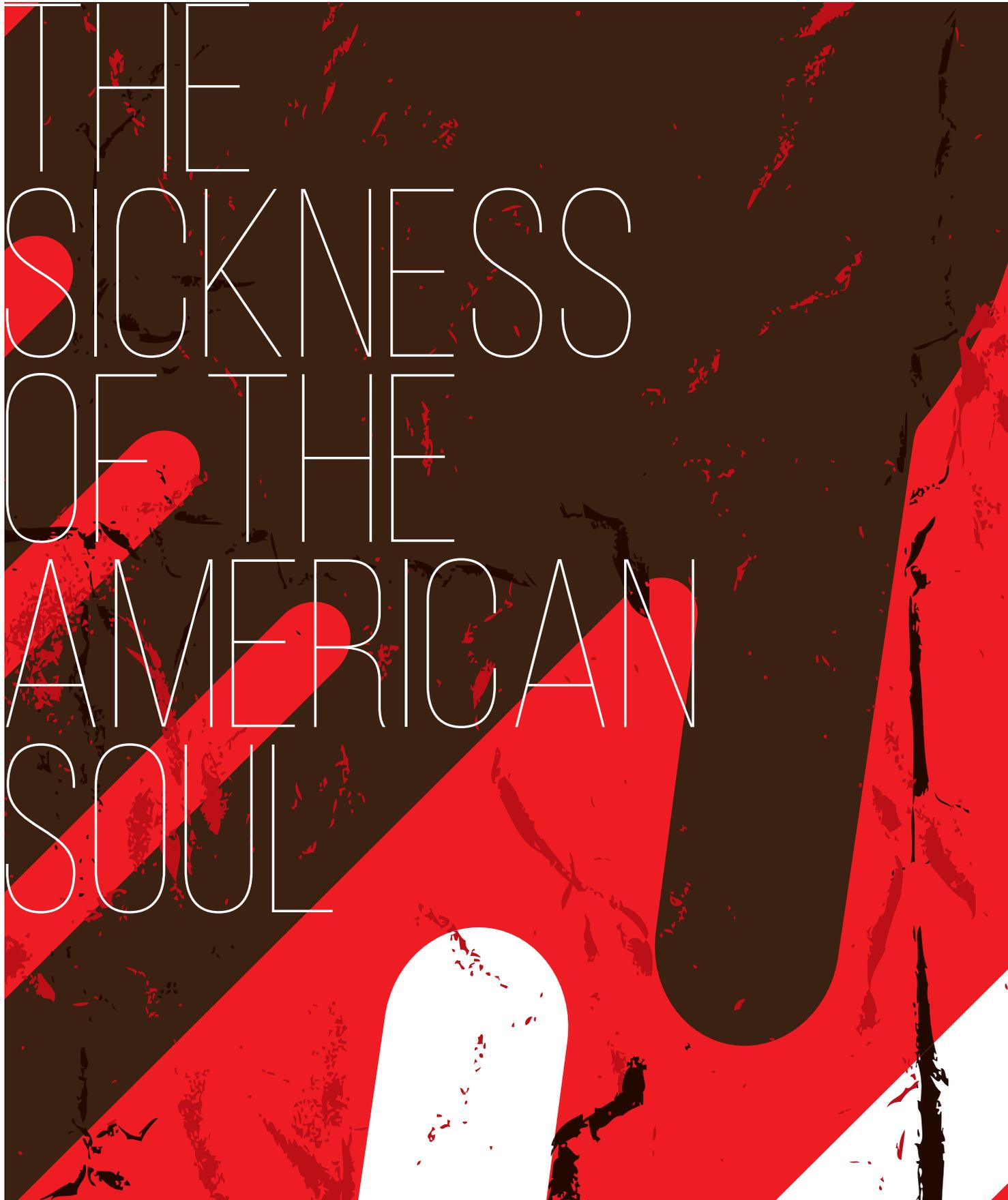
“Our objective is to defend the families of the victims but also to create pressure on El Salvador’s judicial system,” said Almudena Bernabeu, the leading international attorney on the so-called Jesuit massacre case.

In 2011 Madrid issued a request for extradition of 17 members of the high command of El Salvador’s armed forces suspected of playing a role in the massacre. El Salvador refused to comply, but the United States agreed to extradite Mr. Montano, currently detained in a federal prison in North Carolina. Mr. Montano came to the United States in the early 2000s and was arrested and imprisoned 10 years later for immigration fraud and perjury.

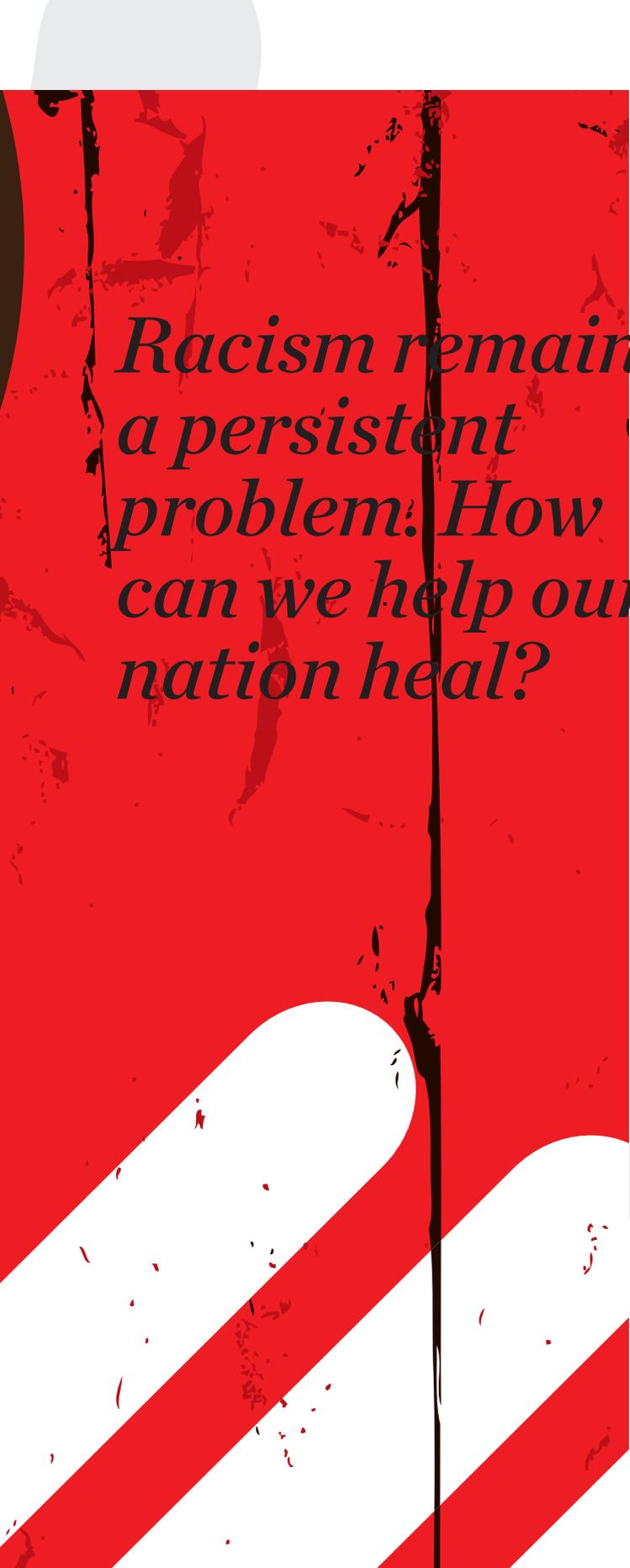
Ms. Bernabeu has been working to extradite Mr. Montano to Spain since 2008. “If he goes to El Salvador, there would be no justice,” she said.

Ms. Bernabeu hopes that this case will reveal the truth about the U.C.A. killings and also help fight impunity in El Salvador. “International pressure for investigations, prosecutions and extraditions, in this case coming from Spain and the United States, shakes the institutions of a country, including when impunity is rampant,” she explained.

Melissa Vida, contributor. Twitter: @melissaVida.



THE
SICKNESS
OF THE
AMERICAN
SOUL



*Racism remains
a persistent
problem. How
can we help our
nation heal?*

By Bryan N. Massingale

Dealing with the reality of racism in the United States is not easy. If it were, we would be well on our way to a more just world. But to have an honest, adult conversation about race, people might need to feel uncomfortable—embarrassed, ashamed, fearful, angry, overwhelmed, helpless and/or paralyzed—because there are few issues that grip and affect us emotionally more than the issue of race.

What ought to be the Ignatian contribution to the fight for racial justice, given our mission and our values? We start by looking at “the signs of the times,” that phrase from the Second Vatican Council that reminded theologians and church leaders that if we are to speak with credibility and effectiveness to our world, we have to ground ourselves in what is really going on.

A good place to start is by looking at our world through the lens of the college students who will graduate this spring as the class of 2018. What has been the experience of this senior class, and our country, when examined through the lens of race?

FOUR YEARS OF SEISMIC EVENTS

When the class of 2018 were first-year students, buying their school supplies, packing up their belongings and moving into residence halls in August of their freshman year, Michael Brown Jr. was killed on the streets of Ferguson, Mo. That summer ignited a series of protests, epitomized by the slogan “Hands up. Don’t shoot.” But Michael Brown was simply one of many—all too many—people who were killed: unarmed African-Americans, men and women, killed for doing nothing except shopping in a mall, ringing a doorbell in the middle of the night to ask for help, or sitting on a playground swing and playing with a toy gun.

In their sophomore year, the class of 2018 heard

the news that a group doing Bible study in a historic black church in Charleston, S.C., welcomed in a young white man. While they were at prayer, he opened fire, killing nine people. It was the worst shooting in a black church since the 1960s. It ignited a nationwide debate over the display of the Confederate flag and Confederate monuments, one still going on today.

Their junior year was defined by the U.S. presidential campaign. The leading Republican contender began his journey to the White House by calling Mexican immigrants rapists and holding campaign rallies filled with chants of “Build the wall.” He promised to implement a Muslim travel ban. He wanted to reinstate the unconstitutional law enforcement practice of stop-and-frisk. He denigrated a “Mexican” judge who is actually a U.S. citizen. He talked about how he was going to protect us from the “bad hombres.” He called our inner-city neighborhoods “hotbeds of violence” and encouraged us all to be afraid. He engaged in conduct that even a leader in his own party, Paul Ryan (hardly a liberal), denounced as “textbook racism.”

I was teaching a course on Catholic social teaching at Fordham University during the presidential campaign. The election was on Tuesday. That Thursday I was supposed to give an examination. When I woke up on Wednesday, I encountered something that had never happened in all of my years of teaching: I had over 25 emails from students begging me to cancel or postpone the exam, because they were too distracted and too distraught to study. That was junior year.

Now in their senior year, as the class of 2018 prepares for graduation, our nation is dealing with Char-

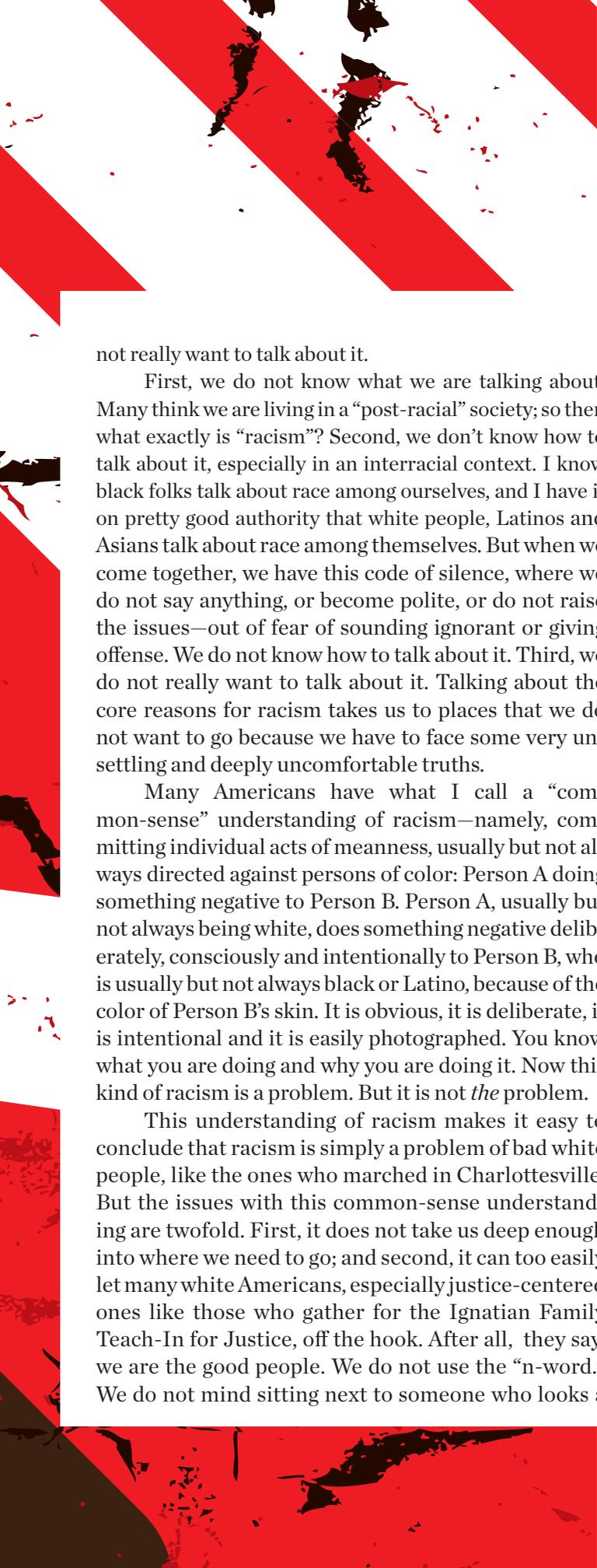
lottesville and the sight of white nationalist marchers carrying tiki torches through an American street, sights that we have not seen since the days of the civil rights movement. The class of 2018 had not ever witnessed these kinds of scenes in the United States, except in grainy black-and-white videos perhaps shown to them by a history teacher.

Any one of these events of the last four years would have been seismically significant. All of them taken together are sad proof that we are living in a time of racial tension, polarization and division worse than this country has experienced in over two generations.

THREE OBSTACLES TO HONEST TALK ABOUT RACE

We must address racism because of this simple fact: Almost every social justice challenge that faces us in the United States is entangled with or exacerbated by racism against persons of color, and African-Americans in particular. No matter what issue you bring to the table, whether it be health care access, immigration, mass incarceration, educational disparity, living wages, justice for women, pro-life, poverty or L.G.B.T.Q. issues, they are all entangled with and enmeshed in racism. If you want to deal with educational access, or immigration, or care for the environment, or poverty, and you do not deal with race, you are on a bridge to nowhere. You cannot get justice right if you do not get racism right.

Yet when we try to have an honest adult conversation about race in this country, we have to overcome three obstacles: We do not know what we are talking about; we do not know how to talk about it; and we do



not really want to talk about it.

First, we do not know what we are talking about. Many think we are living in a “post-racial” society; so then what exactly is “racism”? Second, we don’t know how to talk about it, especially in an interracial context. I know black folks talk about race among ourselves, and I have it on pretty good authority that white people, Latinos and Asians talk about race among themselves. But when we come together, we have this code of silence, where we do not say anything, or become polite, or do not raise the issues—out of fear of sounding ignorant or giving offense. We do not know how to talk about it. Third, we do not really want to talk about it. Talking about the core reasons for racism takes us to places that we do not want to go because we have to face some very unsettling and deeply uncomfortable truths.

Many Americans have what I call a “common-sense” understanding of racism—namely, committing individual acts of meanness, usually but not always directed against persons of color: Person A doing something negative to Person B. Person A, usually but not always being white, does something negative deliberately, consciously and intentionally to Person B, who is usually but not always black or Latino, because of the color of Person B’s skin. It is obvious, it is deliberate, it is intentional and it is easily photographed. You know what you are doing and why you are doing it. Now this kind of racism is a problem. But it is not *the* problem.

This understanding of racism makes it easy to conclude that racism is simply a problem of bad white people, like the ones who marched in Charlottesville. But the issues with this common-sense understanding are twofold. First, it does not take us deep enough into where we need to go; and second, it can too easily let many white Americans, especially justice-centered ones like those who gather for the Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice, off the hook. After all, they say, we are the good people. We do not use the “n-word.” We do not mind sitting next to someone who looks a

little different from us. So we have to go deeper.

IMPLICIT BIASES

Most of us have heard about Flint, Mich., and that city’s contaminated water situation. The crisis started in April 2014, and the water there has still not been certified, over three years later, as safe to drink. For over a year and a half, public authorities said, “The water is fine to drink. No worries here. No problem,” even though it was later found to have toxic levels of lead contamination. The Michigan Civil Rights Commission in 2017 asked a pertinent question: “Would the Flint water crisis have been allowed to happen in Birmingham, Ann Arbor or East Grand Rapids?” All three are very white areas of the state. “We believe the answer is no.” They then asked a further question: “Was race a factor in the Flint water crisis? Our answer is an unreserved and undeniable yes.”

In other words, what happened in Flint happened because of the social vulnerability of the people, because of the social and racial class to which they belonged. But this was not a case of public officials saying, “Oh, you’re black, so we’re not going to take care of you,” which would be a classic example of Person A doing something to Person B. Something more insidious and more subtle was going on in Flint. It was an example of what social science calls “racially selective sympathy and indifference,” the unconscious refusal to extend the same level of recognition and care to another that we would give to members of our own group, because of pervasive cultural implicit bias.

Because we live in the society that we do, in which meanings and values are attached to skin color, and learned almost by osmosis, when we relate to one another, we carry unacknowledged biases and associations. These unacknowledged biases and associations, when they become widespread and commonly shared, lead to making public policies that benefit some and disadvantage others.



Community members in Charlottesville, Va., hold a vigil for Heather Heyer on Aug. 16. She was killed on Aug. 12 during a white supremacist protest over a plan to remove the statue of a Confederate general from a city park.

CNS photo/Kate Bellows, The Cavalier Daily via Reuters

CNS photo/Eric Thayer, Reuters

Allow me to give an example of implicit bias from my own life. I was giving a talk to a group of women religious, and at the break one of them came up to me and said, “Father Massingale, you are so intelligent and so articulate. You must have been taught by one of our sisters.” I said, “No, I was taught by my mother and father.” She didn’t understand why I responded as I did. I explained, “Sister, would you have gone to a white priest and told him, ‘You’re so intelligent and articulate. You must have been taught by one of our sisters?’ Didn’t you assume that the reason I could be intelligent or articulate was because some white person made me that way?”

She walked away and did not talk to me for the rest of the weekend. But note: I was not calling her a “racist,” because she did not deliberately and consciously try to insult me. That was not her intention. Yet the offense happened because she was acting on automatic pilot. She was speak-

ing out of what she had been unconsciously taught.

Pervasive cultural implicit bias answers the question: Who counts as “us”? Such “racially selective sympathy and indifference” allows us to assume implicitly that some count and some do not, or that some lives are more disposable than others. To quote one of the final scenes of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, “All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.” That is the essence of racially selective sympathy and indifference: People with lighter skin matter more than those with darker skin.

WHITE COMFORT

Thus when we speak of racism in the United States, we are talking about a *system* of white supremacy. White supremacy fundamentally is the assumption that this country, its political institutions, its cultural heritage, its social policies and its public spaces belong to white people in a way



Demonstrators in New York (left) and Seattle (right) were among those who spoke out against the killings of unarmed black men by police officers.



CNS photo/Jason Redmond/Reuters

that they do not belong to others. It is the basic assumption that some naturally belong in our public and cultural space and others have to justify being there. Further, it is the suspicion that those “others” are in “our” space only because someone has made special allowances for them.

This is the most uncomfortable truth we must face as Americans about racism. Many want to believe that people of all races are equally guilty of racism; it is a way for the majority to let itself off the hook. But the honest truth is that if it were up to people of color, racism would have ended a long time ago. This is the deepest reason why racism is so often avoided or only dealt with in very superficial ways: because naming white supremacy makes white people uncomfortable. And white comfort sets the limits of engagement.

I am consistently amazed that whenever I speak or write about racism, sooner or later someone will ask the question, “How can I talk about this on my campus, in my classroom, or in my parish and not make white people uncomfortable?” Think about that question. Why is it that the only group in America that is never supposed to feel uncomfortable about race are white people? There is no way to have an adult, honest, intelligent conversation about race without making white people uncomfortable as a group, because the system of white supremacy exists precisely to benefit one group and not another. If we are unwilling to face that truth, then we doom ourselves to superficial and ineffective responses to social injustice.

For a believer, it is important to see racism as a soul sickness. Racism is that interior disease, that warping of

the human spirit, that enables us to create communities where some matter and some do not. To quote the paired signs worn by protesters at a recent Black Lives Matter rally: “Is his—a black man’s—life worth less than mine? Is his—a white man’s—life worth more than mine?”

I saw this soul sickness at work recently as I was passing through an airport. On the overhead televisions, a reporter was interviewing an uncle of Michael Brown Jr., who was grieving the loss of his nephew. When people are sad and overcome with grief, they do not always think about what they saying. The uncle was angry, he was upset, he was tearful, and his voice was loud. I watched the mostly white faces of those staring at CNN; instead of seeing sympathy, empathy, sorrow, compassion or understanding, I saw stone-cold anger.

What can so poison the soul that we cannot see the grief of an uncle and understand his pain?

WHAT WOULD IGNATIUS DO?

Albert Einstein once noted, “The world we have created is a product of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking.” Then he added, “No problem can be solved at the level of consciousness that created it.” So if we want to change the world, we need a new way of seeing, a new way of being, a new way of loving, a new way of living.

This leads us to the *magis*, the “more” that St. Ignatius asked of those who embraced his spirituality. The *magis* is the antidote, a response to the soul sickness that so binds us that we cannot hear another person’s pain. It is probably the most subversive word in the entire lexicon of Ignatian

vocabulary. The *magis* is that longing, that yearning, for what is beyond us. It calls us to be “bigger souled” than we ever thought that we could be—for God. It is the “ever more” for God that St. Ignatius calls for in the Spiritual Exercises; it is the *majorem* in the Jesuit motto *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*, “For the Greater Glory of God.” It is not about being more simply for ourselves, but being more for God.

The *magis* is that sacred, holy restlessness that leaves us dissatisfied, that longing for more that breaks our hearts and breaks us open, so that we can become co-creators of the new, with God’s help and for God’s greater glory.

The *magis* can be illustrated by the biblical story of the prodigal son. We all know the story. One of two sons demands his share of his father’s inheritance and squanders it. After he is flat broke, he wakes up and realizes, “This is crazy.” The passage reads: “Coming to his senses,” that is, “coming to his true self.” He leaves his world of delusion and he comes to his true self. He becomes the man he is supposed to be as he sees through his illusion. Only when he sees through his false self and begins to make the journey home does he discover that his father has been waiting for him all along. The son could not see it until he was willing to come to his true self and come to his senses. He then also realizes that the father’s mercy is more than he could imagine, just as God’s mercy is.

That is part of what what the *magis* is: an invitation to come to our senses, to our true selves, and to see through the lies. The lies that say some people are more important and less expendable simply be-

cause they have less color in their skin. We have built a whole society on an illusion, a delusion, a lie, and it is time that we came to our senses. That is what the *magis* does for us, by stretching us beyond this craziness toward the “more,” the *majorem*, the truth.

When we are soul-sick, we need to be re-created. We need to become new beings. We need a new way of thinking, a new way of living, a new way of loving. We need to become new creations. But are we ready for the *magis*? Are we ready to do this for God?

As I write this, anticipating a resounding “yes” from the readers, I can hear my grandmother saying, “Y’all are fibbing.” If we are honest, we can only respond to a *magis* invitation with hesitation. Few truly desire to be re-created. Most of us, honestly, fear the *magis* and its summons to the unknown. Everybody wants to improve, but few truly want to change.

THE RACE TO END RACISM

No, we are not ready for the *magis*. We are not ready to become a nation of equals, a nation that we have never been. The good news is that we do not have to be. When we need to be ready for the *magis* summons, the Spirit of God will make us ready and give us what we need. We also do not answer the *magis* call to greater justice on our own. We do it with each other. Racial justice is a *magis* relay race. The goal is not for us personally to cross the finish line and enter into the racial promised land. Our goal is to simply run our leg of the race and do our work, so that we can pass the baton to those who will come after us.

The Letter to the Hebrews says, “Now that we



are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, let us continue to run the race, leaving behind every encumbrance and weight of sin, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is our final goal and our perfection.” I am running my leg of the race, trying to do my part, but it is not for me to reach the finish line. It is only up to me to do what I am supposed to do, so I can hand the baton to someone else. I will not be the one who breaks the tape at the end of the race, but if I do not run my race and do what I need to do, then we together cannot win at all.

I ask others to join me in this race for racial justice, to do your part, so that together we can create a new world. The society we live in is the result of human choices and decisions. That means that human beings can change things. For what human beings break, divide and separate, we can—with God’s help—also heal, unite and restore. What is now does not have to be. Therein lies our hope and our challenge.

Bryan N. Massingale is a diocesan priest and a professor of theological and social ethics at Fordham University in New York. He is the author of *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Orbis Books). This essay is adapted from his keynote address at the Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice on Nov 4.

Crowds demonstrated around the country following the decision by a Missouri grand jury not to indict a white police officer in the fatal shooting of the unarmed black teenager Michael Brown in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson on Aug. 9.



OUR LADY'S LEGACY

*How a 486-year-old vision of
Mary in Mexico continues to shape
the church today*

By Nichole M. Flores



Photo by Mike Crupi

As I was growing up in a Mexican-American family, Guadalupe was everywhere, but most notably in the face of my grandmother, María Guadalupe García Flores. A humble woman without much formal education, her faith guided her as she raised 12 children amid immense poverty in rural Nebraska. My grandmother embodied a distinctly Guadalupan presence: prayerful, patient, joyful and strong. Whether nurturing a child, a friendship or a garden, she knew how to help things grow. In her habits of magnifying the Lord and lifting up the lowly, she emulated Guadalupe by illuminating God's pervasive beauty and good news to the poor. It was my grandmother's witness to beauty and justice that led to my own fascination with Guadalupe. Beginning with the presentation I made in seventh grade about my family's history and continuing in my academic research in theology and ethics, I have longed to know more about my grandmother's namesake and what her symbol means for the church and the world.

Indeed, the world has taken notice of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Her image can be found everywhere: at gas stations and train stations, at bars and on border fences, on cars and in cathedrals. For Mexican-Americans, especially, life has long been imbued with her presence, and Mexican people inspired by her ethos. Whether one encounters her image at a bus stop, a chapel or a public monument, Guadalupe is inevitably accompanied by disagreements about the meaning of her symbol. Her image has been emblazoned on protest banners for the United Farm Workers and leveraged as a logo for Banamex, the second largest bank in Mexico. Catholic pro-life groups invoke her as a symbol of their cause, her image prominent on rosary beads and protest signs on the National Mall during the annual March for Life.

Latin American and feminist theologians, artists, and writers have reimagined the sedate and obedient Virgin as an ordinary woman experiencing the joys and challenges of sexuality, work and motherhood as exemplified by Yolanda López's "Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe." López portrays Guadalupe as a young woman running, a middle-aged woman working at a sewing machine and an elderly woman in a seated position. Each portrait emphasizes the beauty and particularity of ordinary women while using elements of the Guadalupe image to accentuate a particular dimension of Our Lady. The range of values and visions

The women of Ciudad Juarez have joined forces to resist the systematic killing of women in their city. The women process with pink crosses engraved with the names of murdered women.



mapped onto her image reveal her contested meaning for Catholicism, culture and the common good.

And what she means matters, as Guadalupe's symbolism has urgent significance for the future of the church. Latina and Latino Catholics comprise an increasingly large share of Catholics in the United States, representing a majority of millennial generation Catholics (54 percent, according to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops). At the same time, the percentage of Latino and Latina Catholics far exceeds the percentage of Latino deacons, priests and bishops. Culturally competent clergy are needed to serve the U.S. church. These demographic realities raise concerns about the church's capacity to meet the pastoral needs of the Latino faithful. Understanding the power of Guadalupe can help the larger church understand the Latino Catholic population. And an understanding of Guadalupe must be rooted in an understanding of her history.

A HISTORIC HILL

Devotees believe that Guadalupe first appeared to Juan Diego, an indigenous man, in 1531 on a hill called Tepeyac, which is located on the outskirts of Mexico City. Our Lady admonished Juan Diego to petition the local bishop to build a basilica in her honor in that place. Juan Diego initially demurred, feeling unworthy due to his marginal

status in society. Guadalupe persisted, convincing Juan Diego to appear before the bishop.

After several unsuccessful attempts to persuade the bishop to build the basilica, Juan Diego appeared a final time with his tilma (cloak) full of roses from Guadalupe, grown in the frozen December earth. When Juan Diego unfolded his tilma to offer the flowers to the bishop, an exquisite image of Guadalupe, brilliantly colored, appeared embedded in the garment. Her image was remarkable in that it depicted both Spanish and Aztec aesthetic elements, mapping these conflicting identities onto the same canvas.

Overwhelmed by the image, the obstinate bishop finally acquiesced to Guadalupe's request to build the basilica. Today, St. Juan Diego's tilma is kept at Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, where it receives millions of visitors each year. In 1999, St. John Paul II declared Guadalupe patroness of the Americas, affirming the theological significance that was first recognized by her Mexican devotees and giving official acknowledgment to her cultural significance that extends beyond Mexico to the entire Western Hemisphere and to the world.

Although some scholars are skeptical about his existence, Juan Diego remains a popular figure in the Catholic Church. Guadalupe empowered Juan Diego to act within the colonial church by recognizing and honoring his per-



sonhood and dignity. Thus, Guadalupe is often interpreted as an image of empowerment for the least powerful members of society. Indeed, La Virgen de Guadalupe plays a vital role in the personal and ecclesial agency of many Latina Catholics in the United States.

On a personal level, Catholics often regard Guadalupe as a source of spiritual comfort. Latinas also interpret her as a source of strength. Her strength is associated with both her ability to endure suffering, as exemplified by witnessing the death of her son, and her ability to act in the face of suffering, as evident in her ability to lift up the lowly Juan Diego by empowering him to serve as her messenger to the bishop. Guadalupe comforts those on the margins of society even as she equips them for action.

On the ecclesial level, Latina Catholic leaders serve the church in myriad and crucial ways, often inspired by Guadalupe's model of comfort and empowerment. New waves of questions continue to arise about women's leadership roles in the Catholic Church. The outcome of these discussions will have a profound influence on Latinas and thus on the future of the entire U.S. church. In 2015 Pope Francis called for the development of a "theology of women," and last year he sparked renewed debates about women's ordination by inaugurating a study commission on the women's diaconate.

This commission will affect all Catholic women, but it is of particular significance to women who already serve their parishes, dioceses and the wider church in a diaconal spirit. Taken together, these questions clarify the necessity of sustained reflection on the status of Latinas in the Catholic Church. An understanding of the spirit of Guadalupe within the larger church might help inspire new paths for Latina leadership in the 21st-century church.

WOMEN ON THE MARGINS OF THE CHURCH

For all the grace and empowerment Guadalupe represents, her image is not without complications. In her book *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez* (Fortress, 2011), Nancy Pineda-Madrid describes the practice of femicide—the systematic murdering of women because of their gender—on the U.S.-Mexico border. In this city and the surrounding areas, women are raped, tortured, killed and mutilated to mark turf in battles among drug cartels. In this way, women's bodies are turned into objects in service of an idolatrous and violent power struggle.

The women of Ciudad Juárez have joined forces to resist the systematic killing of women and girls in their city. As Mexican women, one might expect them to look to Guadalupe as a symbol of resistance against violence and assertion of their personhood and human dignity. But their struggle for justice faces challenges from those who blame the problem on the women themselves, claiming that they are at fault for their own rape and murder because of provocative attire, sexual activity or working outside of the home. These assertions undermine the women's claims of systematic violence perpetuated against them. To make matters worse, the reasoning used to form these arguments too often is rooted in manipulating Guadalupe to become one part of a harmful dyad: the Guadalupe-Malinche binary. La Malinche is said to be the indigenous Aztec woman who was Hernan Cortés's translator and mistress, assisting him in his conquest of Tenochtitlan. La Malinche is a traitorous figure, one who sells out her own people and assists in their destruction. Moreover, she is said to be a whore, a woman whose sexuality is tainted by immorality and the betrayal of her people.

Whereas Guadalupe is portrayed as a symbol of virginity, purity and obedience, La Malinche is portrayed as a symbol of deceit. Society too often forces women to be labeled as one or the other: A woman is considered to be either pure or impure, with no room for nuance. In this way, the Guadalupe-Malinche binary bears much in common

with the Madonna-whore binary, where honor is associated with sexual purity and shame with sexual immorality. This binary particularly presents a difficult tension for the women of Ciudad Juárez, catalyzing the need for symbols that affirm a vision of women's dignity predicated not on her service of the interests of men but on her reflection of the image of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

For this reason, Catholic women organizing for justice in Ciudad Juárez turn to spiritual and theological resources beyond Guadalupe to symbolize their struggle against these atrocities. Rather than carrying banners depicting Guadalupe, the women process with pink crosses engraved with the names of the murdered women on the cross bar to represent Jesus Christ's identification with them in their suffering. They post these pink crosses as public memorials to the women and girls who have been murdered, reorienting the narrative surrounding their deaths from questions of their personal purity to their belonging in Christ. The crosses thus symbolize their dignity, their suffering and their hope for salvation. In this way, we see the real challenges associated with viewing Guadalupe as a symbol of empowerment. Her image can easily be contorted beyond recognition and has often been deployed against women rather than as an affirmation of the inherent dignity of women. Reclaiming the meaning of her symbol is key to understanding its liberating potential in the lives of Latinas.

The struggle of women against feminicide in Ciudad Juárez reveals important and ongoing tensions associated with contests over Guadalupe's meaning, including her significance for Latinas. And yet, Latina Catholics continue to turn to Guadalupe as a source of comfort, strength, inspiration and empowerment. How do we account for this devotion to Guadalupe?

IDENTIFICATION AND EMPOWERMENT

In her landmark study *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment Among Mexican-American Women*, published in 1994, Jeanette Rodriguez conducts interviews with young, Catholic, Mexican-American mothers to discover why Guadalupe continues to be such an inspirational figure in their lives. Rodriguez's study finds that Guadalupe has strong personal significance for these women. The women identify with Guadalupe on both a cultural and a social level. For Latinas, finding images that affirm our dignity, personhood and beauty can be difficult in the church and in broader U.S. Culture. In Guadalupe, these women

find a reflection of their own humanity and an affirmation of their inherent worth. According to Catalina, a woman interviewed in Rodriguez's study: "La virgen morena" the brown virgin, is sent to help Mexican women "feel comfortable and come to remind us of a love and a spirit that does exist."

The women also identify with Guadalupe as a mother, one who has a direct experience of the joys and agonies of bearing and raising her son. Ruth, another woman interviewed in the study, says, "I would like to do some things like her...to be a strong person, to believe in God and raise your kids the best you can." For Ruth, it is important "just to know that she's a mother." Reflecting their identity as Mexican-American mothers, these women understand Guadalupe as a figure of stability, support, acceptance, nurture and relationship.

Ms. Rodriguez finds that the women simultaneously view Guadalupe as independent and dependent, meek and strong-willed, assertive and shy. While she notes that these qualities appear to be contradictory, she avers that they represent the ways that Guadalupe serves as a guide for women in understanding our own multifaceted identities. Rather than serving as a symbol of either simply oppression or empowerment, Guadalupe captures the complexities of Latina personal and social identity.

Guadalupe is not an either/or but an already and not yet. For the women in Ms. Rodriguez's study, Guadalupe reflects an ongoing process of coming into one's own, of realizing one's own power and potential even in moments when one feels more reserved or needs to withdraw for reasons of self-care. These facets of Guadalupe's symbol create space to foster a kind of leadership that is not averse to vulnerability or even reliance on others. In this way, Guadalupe offers a full-spectrum image of women's identity while creating space for women to bring their selves in holistic entirety into the work of leadership.

GUADALUPE AND LATINA LEADERSHIP

These dynamics are also evident among Mexican and Mexican-American women taking leadership roles in their local parishes. In her book *Guadalupe in New York*, Alyshia Gálvez offers an ethnographic study of Mexican and Mexican-American leaders of the Comités Guadalupeños, or the Guadalupe committees, located in parishes throughout the Archdiocese of New York. While the comités consist of both male and female parishioners, Gálvez's study illustrates how women exercise unique au-

thority within these organizations.

Attending Guadalupe meetings at two different parishes that operate under different leadership models, Gálvez observes a central role for women in caring for the Guadalupe statue and organizing events both within the parish and in broader public settings. For example, the comités play a key leadership role in organizing the annual Antorcha Guadalupana, the Guadalupe torch run, which takes every year in the weeks leading up to Guadalupe's feast day on Dec. 12.

As in the Olympic torch relay, a group of pilgrims carries a torch from Guadalupe's Basilica outside of Mexico City, across the U.S.-Mexico border, eventually arriving at St. Patrick's Cathedral on 5th Avenue in New York City. The women of the comités play an instrumental role in organizing the torch run and the festivities that mark its conclusion, which serve both as a display of spiritual devotion and as a protest against unjust immigration laws.

In this activity, we can see women's leadership expanding from the parish context, spilling out into the streets and into public space. The torch run is a public witness to the deep social connections between the United States and Mexico. It is also an illustration of the ways in which Guadalupe inspires women to act in both ecclesiastical and political settings, reconfiguring gender ideologies that fail to honor women as full created in God's image and for God's service.

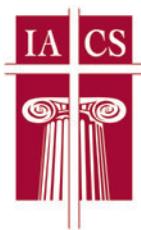
Many U.S. parishes have welcomed images of Guadalupe into their sanctuaries. Others have welcomed her to sit in their pews. But is the church in the United States ready to let Guadalupe lead? If so, the church stands to benefit from the presence of her comfort, strength, nurture, empowerment, beauty and love of justice. As Guadalupe's presence continues to proliferate across the United States, she calls upon the church to respond to the presence of Latinas in a unique way. She comes offering not only spiritual comfort but also ecclesial empowerment. She comes not only for prayerful devotion but also for public action. She comes not to orient women to men but to orient women to Jesus Christ. On her feast day, La Virgen de Guadalupe gestures toward the future of the American church, one where women are not passive objects in the pews but empowered leaders whose full range of gifts is cherished by the church.

Nichole M. Flores is an assistant professor of religious studies at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.



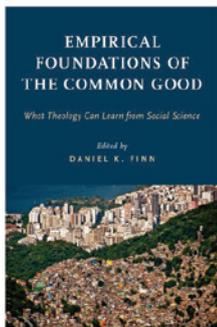
Pope Francis delivered a blessing in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe during his visit to Mexico City. Scholars say the message of Our Lady of Guadalupe is as relevant today as it was nearly 500 years ago.

CNS photo/Paul Haring



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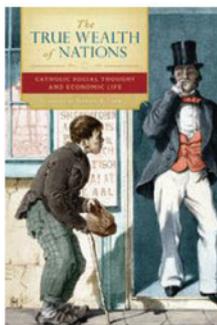
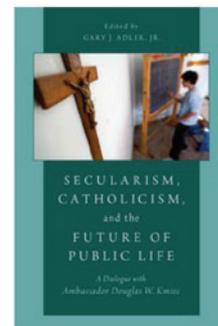
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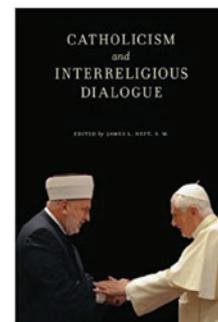
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THE SUM OF MY TERRORS

By Robert I. Craig

Beryl Markham's *West With the Night*, a memoir about flying, sits on my bookshelf collecting dust, its cover pockmarked with blood.

It is not my blood but the blood of a man who sat next to me on a flight from Phoenix to Dallas 20 years ago. I had just settled in. Others were finding seats. The book was open, across my lap. My plan was to finish it by the time we landed. The author was pictured on the cover, wearing old-fashioned flying goggles. When I think of it now, I picture her looking at me with a sideways glance.

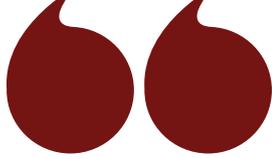
Leveling off, the plane hit some turbulence. Routine stuff. No big deal. Then we hit more. But *this* was not routine: A stewardess, serving passengers a few rows ahead, shot up in the air and hung there for a

second, plastered against the ceiling. The nose of the plane lifting, she dropped like a corpse. Later I would learn that she broke her leg.

Women screamed. Children shrieked. Debris, like artillery flak, filled the cabin. Somehow, despite all the noise and chaos, I could hear the stewardess, immobile on the floor, whimpering softly. Then something hit the man next to me. A can of Coke? A pen? A bottle opener? He was on the aisle wearing a T-shirt and shorts; his leg was bloody; and so was my copy of *West With the Night*. His blood on Beryl Markham's cheek was like a splash of red freckles.

Finally, mercifully, the plane smoothed out, and the captain's voice blared over the intercom: something about radar, that the radar was not working,





I picture the plane from overhead as it assumes in my mind the image of a cross, its crossbeam nailed to a post. ●●

that we had just collided with a “weather cell”—a *what?*—and were forced to rise suddenly to escape it. It seemed like an eternity before we landed in Dallas.

That was my first terror: June 1997.

My second terror occurred four years later on Sept. 11, 2001. My wife was in New York City that day, but I was not certain exactly where. I could not get through to her. She did finally reach me—while mentally I rehearsed what to tell our kids in case Mommy did not come home.

She did come back. I am not sure I ever did—home to a safe place away from images of the walking dead wearing suits of dust and of other souls lost and leaping from unimaginable heights.

My third terror actually occurred before these others, in December 1977—two decades before the Phoenix flight, a whole generation before Sept. 11. This one contains the sum of all my terrors. It is also more chronic than the other two. I suspect this is because it happened when I was just a young man, impressionable, unfamiliar with death. Since that night I have been trying with all my heart—with all my mind, with all my soul, as a faithful Catholic, as a member of the human race—to live peaceably with a terror that has been grafted onto me. Or I have tried to avoid it entirely or simply to grow up and get over it. But I just cannot quite get there. Not while memories recur with greater frequency as the 40th anniversary of this one terror approaches.

In the late 1970s, I was an undergrad at the University of Evansville in Indiana. On Dec. 13, 1977, a Tuesday night, with a winter storm menacing, the Evansville men’s basketball team boards a plane for a game in Louisville. The plane takes off. There is trouble from the start. Ninety seconds later—a crash.

Twenty-nine dead. No survivors.

According to the Federal Aviation Administration, somebody had left the gust locks on. Gust locks keep the tail’s rudder firmly in place while the plane sits waiting on the runway. If a gust of wind makes the rudder flap, this messes with the cockpit controls. The pilot had unknowingly tried to fly the plane with a rudder that was frozen in place.

I knew these guys. I knew them all. That is not to say we hung out. But I knew them as anybody on a small campus knows everybody else.

There was a time afterward when I wanted to avoid flying altogether. But I have family all over the United States. Nowadays my wife and our kids fly regularly, and fearlessly, and I am forced to choose between staying at home or joining the people I love. I have tried drugs. They make me sick. I tried a shrink. He seemed bored. I tried hypnosis, but it was too dreamy.

I need clarity. I need answers. I need answers this very second because I just boarded a plane.

I am all buckled in, the belt cinched tight. I have made sure to snag the best seat—window, immediately forward north of the wing, where there is less sideways movement and I can easily see the ground.

I am a little worried about that ground, for more than standard reasons. Seeing it, I feel oriented. But the sun has set. There will not be many lights because this plane is flying west, west with the night, right over the highest peaks of the Rockies. My wife is in San Francisco on business. I love her dearly. So, God help me, here I go. Again.

I have all my traveling gear. All of it is clutched in my fists: a rosary from Bethlehem, all the beads made of fragrant rose petals; a devotional opened to a chapter titled, “Be Not Afraid”; and my list of data that shows the mathematical probabilities of my dying in a crash.

Reading this list gives me comfort in a logical sort of way. Some data on the list are actually funny. I could fly every day, from coast to coast, without a crash for 19,000 years. Amazing. I will die from a toppling vending machine before anything truly bad happens on a plane.

I listen intently to the in-flight announcements. I count the rows to the nearest exit. I read about being not afraid. The author writes convincingly about Jesus calming the storm. If he can calm that storm then he can calm mine.

The plane takes off. We poke through the clouds. They inspire a little ducking and weaving. Routine stuff. No big deal. Below me, the lights of Denver are reassuring and

beautiful. But soon they recede, then disappear entirely as the plane rockets toward the mountains, climbing quickly, moaning and creaking in unidentifiable ways.

I should probably fly more often, like these happy-go-luckies all around me. They are drinking cocktails, preparing to snooze or talking as if they are at a high school reunion. The lady on my right opens her laptop. She flips on a movie. She looks bored to death.

Outside it is now dark as the abyss. No lights for orientation. We could be flying upside down, for all I know.

I unscrew the lid of the little plastic container that contains my rosary. I raise it to my nose. I take a deep breath. I expect the sweet smell of the roses to calm me. It does that when I am on the ground. But up here all it does is make me queasy. I decide that I could throw up.

I study my list of mathematical probabilities. But right now they are just that: mathematical, sterile. Meaningless. The ducking and weaving are now shudders and shakes that evoke images of a stewardess against the ceiling and of blood from a stranger splattering my book.

Calm down, I tell myself. *You are being morbid*. And the pilot, over the speaker, interrupts my thoughts. His voice is loud. It startles me.

“Folks, we’ve got some rough air up ahead. So tray tables up. Flight attendants take a seat.” Fear grips my stomach. I look outside. Maybe I am hallucinating. Maybe I do see pinpricks of light way out there in the distance. A lit up campus? A basketball court? Stars along the bottom of the galaxy—

Wham.

What was *that*?

Wham.

Mid-air collision?

I shoot a frantic glance at the woman next to me.

Engrossed in her movie, she does not seem to notice.

Wham!

What *is* that? Are the gust locks still on?

Gust locks are not part of my working vocabulary, but up here the words float naturally to the surface. I recall the news the morning after the team crashed: terrifying headlines, awful photos, lists of all the dead. One member of the team, a statistician, did not fly that night. Two weeks later he was driving a car and got killed by a drunk driver.

I grab the sick sack. I squeeze as if to choke it, as we rise and fall and rise again, a yo-yo on a string, a toy of the gods.

I am ready to scream. I am bursting to scream, my voice

deep down inside of me now gaining momentum like this afternoon’s lunch.

I picture what that would look like. I imagine what that would sound like, but what is bubbling up is not the sound of my retching. What I think I perceive are words. Only these words are not mine. Not while my teeth are clenched. I am left to assume that what I now hear is my conscience talking to me.

Aren’t you tired of this?

Y-yes, I say internally, helplessly.

Aren’t you just sick of it?

Yes, I’m sick! I could fill this bag!

Then when are you going to trust?

Trust? I’d love to trust! But this plane is—

Ignore the plane.

Which one?

The one that’s been tormenting you for 40 years.

How do I do that? I live with that plane. All those young men, all their coaches. I could recite each name. All dead because of a gust lock? You’ve got to be kidding me. One little error. So much pain. That punishment does not fit that crime!

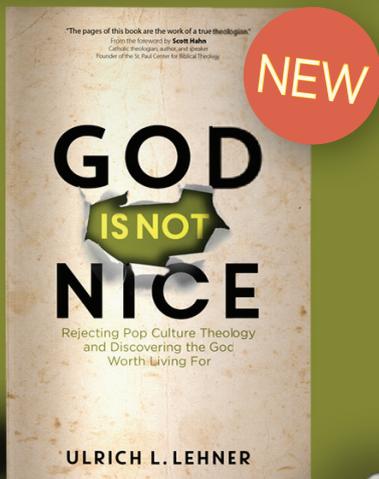
Human error has existed since Eden. As long as people exist there will be human error. It can lead to one’s first step toward redemption.

This voice, this conscience, this whatever it is, drifts off as the voice of the pilot returns. “Folks, keep those seat belts fastened!” And, hearing this, I picture the plane from overhead as it assumes in my mind the image of a cross, its crossbeam nailed to a post.

I lean against the window and the wall that surrounds it, mentally hugging it with all my might. I begin to feel, finally, after all this time, something like peace spreading tentatively, from way up here, and to the ends of the galaxy.

Robert I. Craig’s work has appeared in *Catholic Digest*, *Liguorian* and *St. Anthony Messenger*. He and his family live in Denver.

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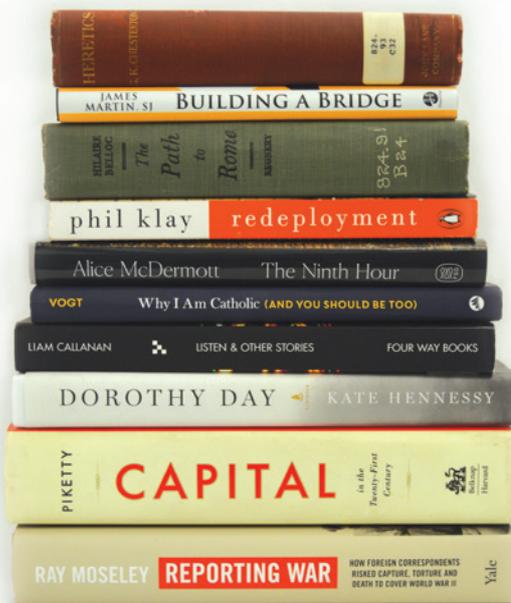
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The Fiction of Truth and the Truth of Fiction

By Liam Callanan



Images by America Films

► “Fiction moves us, engages us,” Liam Callanan writes, and “finds for us truths we may not have recognized when first presented to us as fact.”

cause I had an elderly cousin who had been a Trappist monk at Gethsemani with Thomas Merton. My cousin’s monastic name was Kevin; Merton’s, of course, was Louis. The monastery bells rang bright and clear through my every memory of visiting Gethsemani, so I tried that as my character’s last name: Bell. But it was too sweet a name for a character who was not, and so I searched for a hard consonant to make the name more discordant. Bell became Belk.

And Louis Belk, in my novel, became a man who, long before his ordination, spent World War II in the Army Air Corps, charged with cleaning up a specific type of bomb, one that the Japanese floated across the Pacific to North America using paper balloons. I did not invent the balloons, nor the fact that one of these balloons landed near Bethel, nor that at the crash site, investigators found something unusual in the wreckage: a postcard from a young boy to his father, written in Japanese. There was no record of the message.

Also true: At the time of writing this novel, I had just quit a career in corporate communications. In the wake of a personal tragedy, I had decided that I needed to pursue a writing life with more meaning.

And that meant I had to get this novel absolutely right. I interviewed historians. I interviewed veterans. I asked a bomb disposal expert to review my manuscript; he said I had gotten the bomb details mostly right but that I shouldn’t have my characters take the Lord’s name in vain.

I took his advice. I took everyone’s advice. But just days after the novel was published, I received an email from a man incredulous I had not consulted him. He, like my protagonist, was a World War II veteran. He, like my protagonist, had been in the Army Air Corps. Like my protagonist, had been around plenty of bombs.

And he, like my protagonist, was named Louis Belk.

A TWITCH UPON THE THREAD

He was startled to see his name come up in reviews of my book, a book that appeared to be about him, but was definitely not. He wasn’t mollified by my reply, which borrowed from the copyright page—“any resemblance to persons living or dead...”

Didn’t I want to know the truth?

I do not. And I do. And what I want to do in this essay is explore how and when and why writers choose fiction to find truth. It’s not that I don’t believe in nonfiction. Quite the opposite. Essays, articles, histories, discoveries: Good nonfiction teaches us what to believe. But I believe fiction teaches us to believe.

I’m not the first down this path. It even has a name: Addison’s Walk. Eighty-six years ago, it was on this path outside Oxford’s Magdalen College that three men—Hugo Dyson, J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis—discussed the nature and power of fiction, specifically myths. Lewis could not accept, let alone separate, the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection from any of a dozen other myths

I once wrote a novel, *The Cloud Atlas*, about a priest who lived in Alaska, 390 roadless miles west of Anchorage, out on the tundra in a town named Bethel. It is a real place. The Jesuits have a parish there, Immaculate Conception.

I didn’t want any confusion that my protagonist in *The Cloud Atlas* was wholly fictional, so I decided he wouldn’t be a Jesuit and I didn’t name his parish. I did name *him*, though—Louis—be-

that had a young god dying only to be reborn. “Myths are lies,” Lewis reportedly said, “even though breathed through silver.” Tolkien pressed on. Myths contained truths, he said, but Christ’s story is the truth. Lewis listened carefully. His friend had stirred something in him (and in the weather—most accounts of this evening cite a sudden breeze) and days later, after a motorcycle sidecar ride to a new zoo, Lewis realized he believed in Jesus.

This story fascinates me. I love that sudden breeze. That sidecar. And that Tolkien’s most celebrated biographer, Humphrey Carpenter, bases his retelling of this famous conversation not on a recording or a stenographer’s notes, but on a poem that Tolkien later wrote.

I believe every word of it. The poem. The biography. The story. Even Tolkien’s taxonomy of myth.

But what I believe in most is Tolkien’s focus on the power of story to reach people, move people—even, as was the case here, convert them. I teach creative writing. The first thing I disabuse students of is the notion that it is unserious work. It *is* work; it has consequences—the chief one being that, when done well, it connects two people, writer and reader, with truths that lie outside them both.

I want to be careful with this word *truth*. In part because the word feels more imperiled than ever, and in part because I want to avoid the trap Flannery O’Connor laid out in an essay, “The Church and the Fiction Writer,” which appeared in **America** in 1957. She writes, “It is generally supposed, and not least by Catholics, that the Catholic who writes fiction is out to

use fiction to prove the truth of his faith, or at least, to prove the existence of the supernatural.” But, she adds, “What the fiction writer will discover...is that he himself cannot move or mold reality in the interests of abstract truth.... [F]iction can transcend its limitations only by staying within them.”

With this in mind, I want to take a close look at how two contemporary authors transcend those limitations, and in doing so, find truths that are not abstract, but powerfully concrete.

THE PURSUIT OF GRACE

Winner of, among other prizes, the National Book Foundation’s 5-Under-35 award, Kirstin Valdez Quade published her first collection of stories, *Night at the Fiestas*, in 2015. I count O’Connor and Valdez Quade as kindred spirits; both write vivid, real, human stories—and because such reality is sometimes grotesque, both can disquiet readers as a result. Again, here is O’Connor in that 1957 essay:

[I]f we intend to encourage Catholic fiction writers, we must convince those coming along that the Church does not restrict their freedom to be artists but insures it...and to convince them of this requires, perhaps more than anything else, a body of Catholic readers who are equipped to recognize something in fiction besides passages they consider obscene.

What I continually recognize in Valdez Quade’s work is the pursuit of

grace. Grace is often out of reach of her characters—but only ever just out of reach. If only this cousin or that sister or the pregnant teenager who shows up during Lent at exactly the wrong time, if only they did the right thing, or had the right thing done for them—if only they could see, clearly, the truth, things might just work out, they might just be saved. It is a testament to Valdez Quade’s skill that engaged readers come to see the truth even as her characters do not. “I loved Christina, I did!” a character in one story says of her sister, “I see this now.” But what readers see is the overeager emphasis undermining the assertion.

Readers also see a remarkable work of fiction. The lines quoted come from a startling story, “Christina the Astonishing (1150-1224),” which Valdez Quade published in *The New Yorker* in July 2017 on the 793rd anniversary of the death of the actual Christina the Astonishing. Never formally canonized, Christina was celebrated as a folk saint for centuries. She led an enormously difficult life, and in doing so, made life enormously difficult for others.

Modern medicine might diagnose her with epilepsy, Tourette syndrome and anorexia, and Valdez Quade’s story offers ample evidence of all this and more. But the short story also makes room in the reader’s mind for the possibility that Christina’s life and works really were miraculous. It does so, daringly, by interrogating the nature of belief itself—starting with the believer who narrates the story. This is Mara, Christina’s older sister, the one who insisted that she “loved” her



“The first thing I disabuse students of is the notion that writing is unserious work. It is work; it has consequences.”

sister, that she “sees this now.” But she says this from the pews at Christina’s funeral, moments before the Agnus Dei is interrupted by the body of her dead sister rising into the rafters. Cowering below, Mara asks:

How to make sense of this? The young woman up there in the rafters is no apparition. Christina was dead, and now she’s alive, eyes shocked and glittering.... [Christina] grips the beam, her long fingers pressed so hard against the wood—splintered and rough with adze marks—that afterward they will be bloody.

What makes this account seem so real,

so true, is not its emphasis on the supernatural—that flight to the rafters—but its relentless focus on the physical: those “bloody” fingers, the wood “rough with adze marks.” The result is that, even though Valdez Quade uses a 13th-century hagiographer’s interstitial titles in her own account, by the end of the story, it comes to feel as if the medieval author has borrowed from the 21st-century scribe and not the other way around. Discussing this story, Valdez Quade told an interviewer:

Human progress is the result of our need to understand and explain the mysteries of the world around us.... However, I wanted to complicate the flat narrative of her holiness with-

out undercutting it. After all, who am I to say whether or not Christina talked to God? What do I know about the sources of insight and grace? In my story, Christina flies.

SAINTS AND SINNERS

Ron Hansen, the novelist, deacon and Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J. Professor in the Arts and Humanities at the University of Santa Clara, once had, like Valdez Quade, a difficult interview question put to him. The subject was not the metaphysics of flight, but something trickier: Catholic fiction. How to define it? Before concluding that the notion was “probably more functional in the classroom than it is in criticism,” Hansen observed:



“Good nonfiction teaches us what to believe. But I believe fiction teaches us to believe.”

[P]erhaps finally [what] distinguishes a Catholic fiction writer from all others is the Yes-And rather than the Yes-But approach to their subjects. Perhaps because of our experience of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we can see good and evil existing side by side and within the same person. We can see our tendencies toward meanness and sin just as tangents or interruptions to our striving for holiness and perfection....

I find Hansen’s take wise; I see this yes-and in Valdez Quade and elsewhere. As Hansen later points out in that same interview, readers can see it in many authors, regardless of religion. And in fact, though it took some time and much reflection, I eventually saw it in me.

THE SUPERNATURAL AND REAL

In 1986, I stood graveside in a strange cemetery I thought I’d never see again. The dead—many Irish, all Catholic—are familiar, but what they’re doing is not. Beneath the soil, one of the deceased smokes “roots of grass that died in the periodic droughts afflicting the cemetery.” Next to him, his wife weaves “crosses from the dead dandelions and other deep-rooted weeds.”

Those words are not mine, but William Kennedy’s, and they come from his 1983 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Ironweed*, which opens in St. Agnes Cemetery in Albany, N.Y. It was his book that transported me, a high school senior in Ms. Sylvia Roussev’s Advanced Placement English class at Loyola High School in late-1980s Los Angeles, to stand (to imagine I was standing) alongside Francis Phelan, in late-1930s Albany, as he peers down

at the grave of his infant son Gerald, who died after Francis accidentally dropped him.

I am not really there. I am there. As we did for Christina the Astonishing, let’s hold both as true for now, because this is what fiction does, and sometimes not euphemistically. It moves you. Over the course of Kennedy’s novel, Francis will spend three days wandering Albany, enduring one misadventure after another among Albany’s down-and-out. The story is gritty and emphatically real—except when it is not, as in these opening pages, when Kennedy describes the dead in their graves as animated beings who can smoke roots, weave crosses underground and witness the comings and goings of human flotsam like Francis Phelan.

This was like nothing I had ever read in English class. The supernat-



ural and real, presented seamlessly, without pretense or pretext. Kennedy was not the first author to do this, but he was the first to do it for me. His fiction, in short, made me believe: in Francis, in those fidgety dead parents and most significantly, in the novel's claim that though Francis's infant son Gerald had, in life, "only monosyllabic goos and gaahs in his vocabulary...[he] possessed the gift of tongues in death." Lying in his grave, Gerald understands the "chatterly squirrels" and "slithy semaphores of the slugs and worms." And the infant tries, very hard, to communicate with his wayward father, attempting to impose on him "the pressing obligation to perform his final acts of expiation for abandoning the family. You will not know, the child silently said, what these acts are until you have performed them all...Then, when these

The Witness

By Sheryl Luna

Our mistakes crack open. Each leaf
veined distinctly,

and we star-made music makers
are finger printed as well.

This is expansion: to stand as One with all.

The mountains a dense
explosion of trees.

Night comes to us sexy,
whispers to us about belief in light.

Words tumble from us. Honesty, a naked
falling.

We linger in the source of gardens.

For two hundred thousand years,
we have been deaf.

We forget meaning, our storylines
repeat the rhythm of our breaking.

The soul is without weight in the end.

We must find the calm witness
within that observes the self

quietly, the Child laughing
in a flurry of light.

Sheryl Luna's *first book*, *Pity the Drowned Horses* (University of Notre Dame Press), received the *Andres Montoya Poetry Prize*. *Seven* (3: A Taos Press) was a *finalist for the Colorado Book Award*. Recent poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Taos International Journal of Poetry and Art and Pilgrimage*.

final acts are complete, you will stop trying to die because of me.” Does Francis hear him? Kennedy doesn’t say.

I know I heard. I heard Gerald and Francis and William Kennedy besides, and I heard in those words what fiction could do, does: erase boundaries, marry minds, ignite feeling. In me was ignited the desire to do this for someone else, to conjure fictional lives that were really real. Then, there, I wanted to be a writer.

But I also wanted to know what happened at the end of the novel; it’s ambiguous. Though the novel has followed Francis on a roundabout journey of redemption, when the key moment arrives, Kennedy suddenly switches gears—and verb tenses—leaving a naïve 17-year-old like the one I was wondering about the truth of what lay ahead for Francis after the book’s last page. So I did what Sergeant Belk would do decades later. I wrote the author.

Sergeant Belk wondered why I wasn’t interested in the truth of his life, but that was just one more coincidence: Seeking the truth was what drove my protagonist, my Sergeant Belk, on his journey through my novel. What had really happened on the tundra so many years ago? How had that boy’s note to his father come to be found? Who was he, then? Where was he now? Idly googling his own name, Sergeant Belk had found me, but I wonder if he ever thought of it another way, that my book had found him, the way Kennedy’s had me. He didn’t say. I offered to send Belk a copy of my novel. It went unclaimed.

FICTION MAKES LIFE

Ms. Rousseve was stunned, and so was I: William Kennedy had sent me a reply.

I still have it. It’s short, typed on personal stationery. He thanks me for my “good words” and politely declines my brazen invitation to visit our class, a mere 5,000-mile round trip for him.

And the truth about what happens to Francis Phelan? “I will say this,” Kennedy writes. “Francis Phelan’s future is impossible to predict, but the book is meant to record his *condition* at the end of his odyssey of redemption.” The emphasis is his, and so, too, the demurral: He couldn’t tell me how the story ultimately ends.

Thirty-one years later, I can. I can tell you a story of standing amid tombstones in an ancient Catholic cemetery, above an infant’s grave. This is no longer Kennedy’s story, but mine. We’re not in Albany, but Washington, D.C. The cemetery is not St. Agnes but Mount Olivet. The baby’s name is not Gerald, but Lucy. She died just before she was born, just days before she was due. No one ever dropped her. On the contrary, as afternoon darkened into night, we held her until we couldn’t any longer. And soon after, I changed my life, because I could no longer do the work I had been doing; I needed to write the truth.

What I understood of William Kennedy, of fiction, when I was the age my students are, was that it was magic, fun. As for truth, I thought it best located in nonfiction. What I know now is that the root of the word fiction means “to make,” and what fiction makes is life. I have



“I heard in those words what fiction could do, does: erase boundaries, marry minds, ignite feeling.”

written about swimmers searching for a friend in a flooded town, about a hunter searching for a bear a scout wants to save, about 140 characters circling a convent someone needs to save, about a family searching for their father in Paris, about a real boy who attached a real postcard to a massive paper balloon 103 feet around at the end of World War II and sent it sailing because he knew of no other way to reach his long-lost father, only that words would take him there.

What I mean is this. I know that child. I know that father. Now you do, too.

The truth? Fiction moves us, engages us, finds for us truths we may not have recognized when first presented to us as fact. Fiction teaches us agility, the importance of leaping from word to meaning, and the pleasure that’s to be had in doing so.



Fiction teaches us empathy—with characters whose lives lie far beyond our own, or are so eerily similar they seem identical; with a sister, ill or prophetic or both, clawing at the rafters; with an infant who never got a chance to speak in life, but in death now speaks with such eloquence a father thinks he can hear the words and will forever, though the voice itself is inaudible.

Listen, the voice says. Believe.

Liam Callanan is the winner of the 2017 George W. Hunt, S.J., Prize for Excellence in Journalism, Arts & Letters, which is co-sponsored by America Media and Saint Thomas More Chapel & Center at Yale University. The text is a lightly edited version of the lecture he gave when the prize was presented. His new novel, *Paris by the Book*, will be published in April.

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In search of the perfect, published present

By Jon M. Sweeney

In this selection of books, publishers are not so much meeting a need as anticipating one.

Someone has probably already invented a software program that enables readers to design novels they would like to read. Every turn of phrase, character description, dark night and lonely precipice has been fed into a database that asks the reader to make simple choices. If your interest is historical mysteries, you choose your sleuth: medieval monk, bumbling priest, recovering alcoholic, retired coroner, French gourmand, man, woman or woman with help of three-legged dog. You choose your setting: the century, decade, continent, city. You spend a few minutes voicing your preferences and then receive a new novel to read each month, for a price.

This is not too different from how most novels are written and published today. As most readers know, fiction follows formulas. Most readers also find deep comfort in this approach to reading, and not just in fiction. All publishing categories seem to follow the same strategies. Writers and publishers try to be creative, but most often we are not. We produce more of what is selling. Rarely do we make something original.

Every now and then, however, one comes across a book that seems

unique. Its authors, editors and publisher are not so much meeting an already-expressed need as they are anticipating (or creating) one. I imagine these sorts of books might make good Christmas presents.

The Jewish Annotated New Testament, Second Edition, edited by Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, published this fall (Oxford University Press), is such a book. It is likely the editors, contributors and publisher had little confidence that the book they were creating would be in demand. I can imagine the marketing uncertainty at the meetings when the project was first conceived in 2011. But this revised and augmented edition continues to change how Christians read the New Testament and provides the first safe entry to the New Testament for many Jews—"from Orthodox to secular," as the editors put it in their new preface—who have never read the Christian Scriptures before. The first edition had 30 essays; there are now 54, on subjects ranging from "Jesus' Views of Love" to "Moses' Radiant Face."

Rather different in its appeal is Jonathan Eig's **Ali: A Life** (Houghton Mifflin). I found this biography enlightening as no book before about the

boxer, and special among biographies of celebrities. Eig sensitively reveals Ali's Islamic faith as essential to each stage of his adult life. In Eig's hands, Ali's life is a pilgrimage. The arrogance, immaturity and infidelities are still on display, as they have been in other books and films, but we see more of Ali's devout wife, Belinda, challenging the boxer to make faith real, and the retirement-era Ali studying the Quran and practicing good deeds. Ali brought the world together to a significant degree in the 1970s, and perhaps he can help us again.

Crossing the Atlantic, one can find gems in new translations from the French. I was among those delighted and surprised by Jean Findlay's 2015 biography of Scott Moncrieff (*Chasing Lost Time: The Life of C. K. Scott Moncrieff: Soldier, Spy, and Translator*), the fascinating translator of Marcel Proust's seven-volume *Remembrance of Things Past*. Findlay went into detail about Moncrieff's Catholicism and revealed how the man behind the artist was an artist himself. I have never quite understood the appeal of Proust, but I have not stopped trying; so this year, I have been reading a multivolume memoir that is thoroughly Proust-

tian. Written by Michel Leiris, another French intellectual of the 20th century, **The Rules of the Game** (Yale University Press) is beautifully translated from the French by Lydia Davis, another acclaimed Proust translator.

Like Proust, Leiris is for readers with patience and a love for language. After 150 pages of Volume 1, Leiris is still just 3½ years old. Then Leiris describes the evocations of an early 20th-century French Catholic childhood with saints, the Virgin, Mass and catechism. There are humiliations at school. In Volume 2, he looks back on the Manicheism of that childhood, “when everything..was either theological virtue or capital sin, treasure of the good or arsenal of the wicked,” which he has been struggling to unlearn. Also in Volume 2, Leiris spends dozens of pages recalling a prostitute he knew while soldiering in North Africa, returning again and again to ponder the innocence or depravity of their kisses, the fidelity or fleetingness of their partnership. Not many writers I know in English would pause, while describing such a love, to consider a Hebrew matriarch this way: “Rebecca’ was one of the biblical names that struck me the most when I was a child because of the meeting at the water hole and the word itself, which evokes something soft and aromatic, like a raisin or a muscadine grape, also something hard and obstinate....”

This is the Proust of Leiris, and this is what I have been finding most interesting about an unusual memoir. Leiris’s subject is not simply himself, or his thoughts and feelings and actions, but writing itself. Three volumes of *The Rules of the Game* have been published thus far *Scratches*, *Scraps* and

Fibrils (Yale University Press). They are in Yale’s Margellos World Republic of Letters, an endowed series that makes literary works from around the globe available in English.

Each book mentioned so far has been an effort to come to terms with otherness: how we try to but cannot ultimately understand each other and ourselves. But there is another aspect to otherness: how we cope, survive, rationalize and discriminate by creating, in our minds and habits, others. No book addresses this more profoundly than Toni Morrison’s small book of essays, **The Origin of Others** (Harvard University Press). I recommend this particularly because I, like many, have in recent years admired the essays and novels of our other pre-eminent American woman of letters, Marilynne Robinson (*Gilead*, *The Givenness of Things* and more). The contrast could not be starker. Robinson was the lauded public intellectual of the Obama years (the former president interviewed her in *The New York Review of Books* just last year); Morrison will go unheralded by the current administration because it’s Trumpism that makes her insights essential now.

Morrison addresses the “romancing of slavery” in our literature and history. She looks carefully at what “being or becoming a stranger” means in American life. She analyzes our fetishes with darkness, our preoccupations with blackness and the tropes we perpetuate regarding Africa: menace, depravity, incomprehensibility. This is not easy, comforting reading for a Christmas morning, but it is a book we need to be talking about.

Lastly, there is occasionally a book

whose origin no one can satisfactorily explain. I imagine such volumes springing from the head of Zeus. Jacques Barzun’s *From Dawn to Decadence* was such a book in 2000; his 500,000-word study of five centuries of Western civilization was a *New York Times* best-seller back when that really meant something. This year, it would have to be **Meetings With Remarkable Manuscripts**, by Christopher de Hamel (Penguin Press), which won several awards in England when it was published there last year. Lovers of art, history and religion—including psalters, Gospels and books of hours—should treat themselves to it. (Do not expect your adult kids to discover this one on their own.)

Like Barzun’s classic, this is de Hamel’s masterpiece, and has come at the end of a long and distinguished career. De Hamel writes in his introduction of his desire to communicate “the thrill of bringing a well-informed but non-specialist reader into intimate contact with major medieval manuscripts.” He does it brilliantly, and in full color. This would have to be my book of the year.

Jon M. Sweeney is the author of 30 books, including Meister Eckhart’s *Book of the Heart*, with Mark S. Burrows, and Phyllis Tickle: *A Life*, to be published in February.

Following Fulton Sheen

Catholics in the United States have been awaiting the second coming of Fulton Sheen ever since the archbishop and legendary television apologist died in 1979, and in recent years Bishop Robert Barron has emerged as arguably the strongest candidate for that role.

It is easy to see why. For more than a decade, Barron—a Chicago priest who taught for years at Mundelein Seminary outside Chicago before being named an auxiliary bishop of Los Angeles in 2015—has built up a remarkable multimedia platform for his Word on Fire ministry. Through social media, YouTube, blog posts, DVDs and television appearances, Barron has been a relentless evangelizer, using wit, warmth and a Sheen-like talent for

easily communicating complex ideas. His goal is to push back against what he sees as the insipid “beige Catholicism” of the 1970s and offer a more colorful and bracing religious tradition to an increasingly secular world.

Now Barron, a youthful 59, has packaged his new wine in a decidedly older wineskin—a printed book. *To Light a Fire on the Earth: Proclaiming the Gospel in a Secular Age* seeks to present Robert Barron and Word on Fire as a new ecclesial movement on par with Communion and Liberation or the Neocatechumenal Way.

This is an ambitious undertaking that Barron unveils at the end of the book, which amounts to an extended and enthusiastically laudatory profile of Barron by the well-known Vaticanista John Allen, founder and editor of the Catholic news site Crux. With charac-

teristic brio, Allen hits the high points of Barron’s many passions, from Bob Dylan to baseball to *Brideshead Revisited*, with periodic passages in Barron’s voice as he explains how he tries to reach people where they are, and then bring them the Christian message of truth and beauty and salvation.

Whether *To Light a Fire on the Earth* will find an audience beyond Barron’s fan club is unclear. Then again, this book may not be so much about converting others as it is about pitching Word on Fire as a new kind of ministry, one that might outlast Barron himself, something not even Sheen could manage. That would arguably be Barron’s greatest conversion yet.

David Gibson is an award-winning journalist and director of Fordham University’s Center on Religion and Culture.

Wisdom from Father G

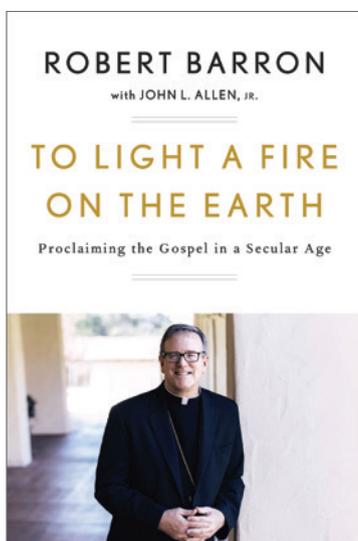
The first book by Greg Boyle, S.J., was a triumph, a bestseller and a road hazard. I listened to the audiobook version of *Tattoos on the Heart* while driving through California and was so frequently moved to tears by his stories of compassion, solidarity and hope that I was forced to switch to the radio, or else be reduced to a blubbing mess. So, as a safety precaution, while reading his latest book, *Barking to the Choir*, I stuck with the hard copy, reading it only in places where I was not operating heavy machinery. It was a wise decision, because Boyle’s second effort also manages to break your heart just enough for the power of his grace-filled wisdom to seep in through the cracks.

Since founding Homeboy Industries in 1992, this Jesuit priest’s work to provide education, job training and a supportive community for ex-gang members has become world-famous, as has Father Boyle’s ability to captivate a crowd with stories of the hardships and healing experienced by the “homies.” *Barking to the Choir* is filled with such stories. The book is not a single narrative, but rather a collection of vignettes, conversations and reflections centered around themes like awe, inclusion and love. As in *Tattoos*, the homies’ malapropisms, mistakes and strength in the face of suffering often prompt deep revelations for Father G, as he is known to them.

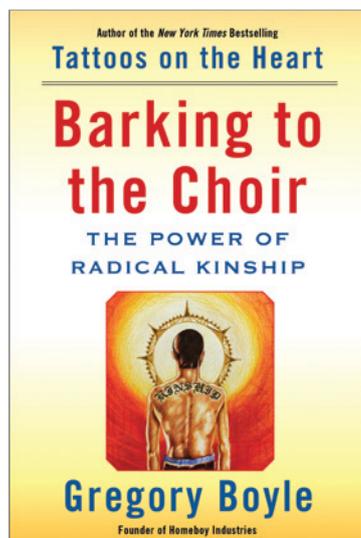
“God is too busy loving you to have any time left over to be disappointed,” Father Boyle writes in a line that could

serve as the book’s thesis statement. *Barking to the Choir* reminds us of the many forms that this love takes, often appearing in surprising ways or from unexpected sources. The sentiments and some of the stories may be familiar to those who have heard Father Boyle speak, but their power is not diminished in print and his call to kinship feels newly relevant at a time when our country remains divided in so many ways. Over and over, the book reminds us of one question: In the face of adversity, what other answer is there but love?

Kerry Weber, executive editor.
Twitter: @Kerry_Weber.



To Light a Fire on the Earth:
Proclaiming the Gospel in a
Secular Age
By Robert Barron, John L. Allen Jr.
Image. 272p \$27



Barking to the Choir
The Power of Radical Kinship
By Gregory Boyle
Simon & Schuster. 224p \$26

Two bad worlds

Laleh Khadivi attempts an enormous task in *A Good Country*: She constructs an unlikely scenario where a young man at an elite prep school in an earthly paradise ends up as a foot soldier in a living hell. In doing so, she faces another daunting challenge: painting beautiful Southern California as repellent and brutal and portraying ISIS-plagued Syria as attractive.

A teenage protagonist, Reza, bridges the gap, pulled between two worlds that are closer than one thinks. Khadivi teaches at the (Jesuit) University of San Francisco, and writes well about three faiths colliding: nature worship, self worship and a generic desire “to know God.”

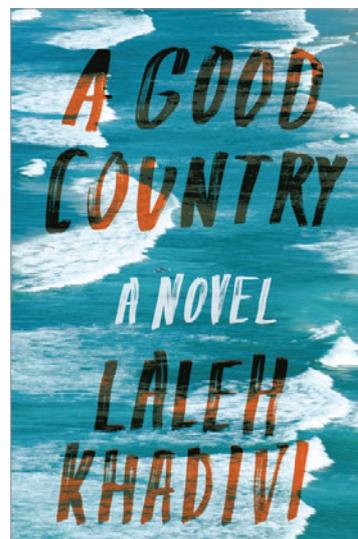
Khadivi knows California. She stacks mighty heaps of detail, name-dropping relentlessly: albums and musicians, restaurants’ famous dishes, neighborhoods, even vehicles and actual malls, all seasoned with California drug culture. She excels by focusing on the everyday people. Khadivi’s ISIS is not exactly paradise, but it is understandable: It is a new world, a welcoming home for the oppressed and rejected, those looked down upon and worse—from every Western nation. A great “us” and a beautiful “we”: a fresh start, growing together in God.

But it is still a huge stretch. Southern California’s Sodom-and-Gomorrah nihilism and ISIS’ brutal caliphate may each in its own way be a destructive path. But while plenty get swallowed, who volunteers for both? In order to leap over a number of plot holes with any faith, one must also love the main character, Reza, the focal point

of every scene and the vehicle for most dialogue. Little happens without him. He is the story, and Khadivi goes deep developing him.

The end result is confusing. If Southern California culture is so repellent as to drive its talented youths into war zones, why spend 250 pages painting a portrait of hip tunes, amazing people, perfect waves, delicious treats and all the best weed?

Willy Thorn, a longtime California resident, worked for Catholic News Service and is an award-winning sports writer.



A Good Country
By Laleh Khadivi
Bloomsbury. 256p \$27



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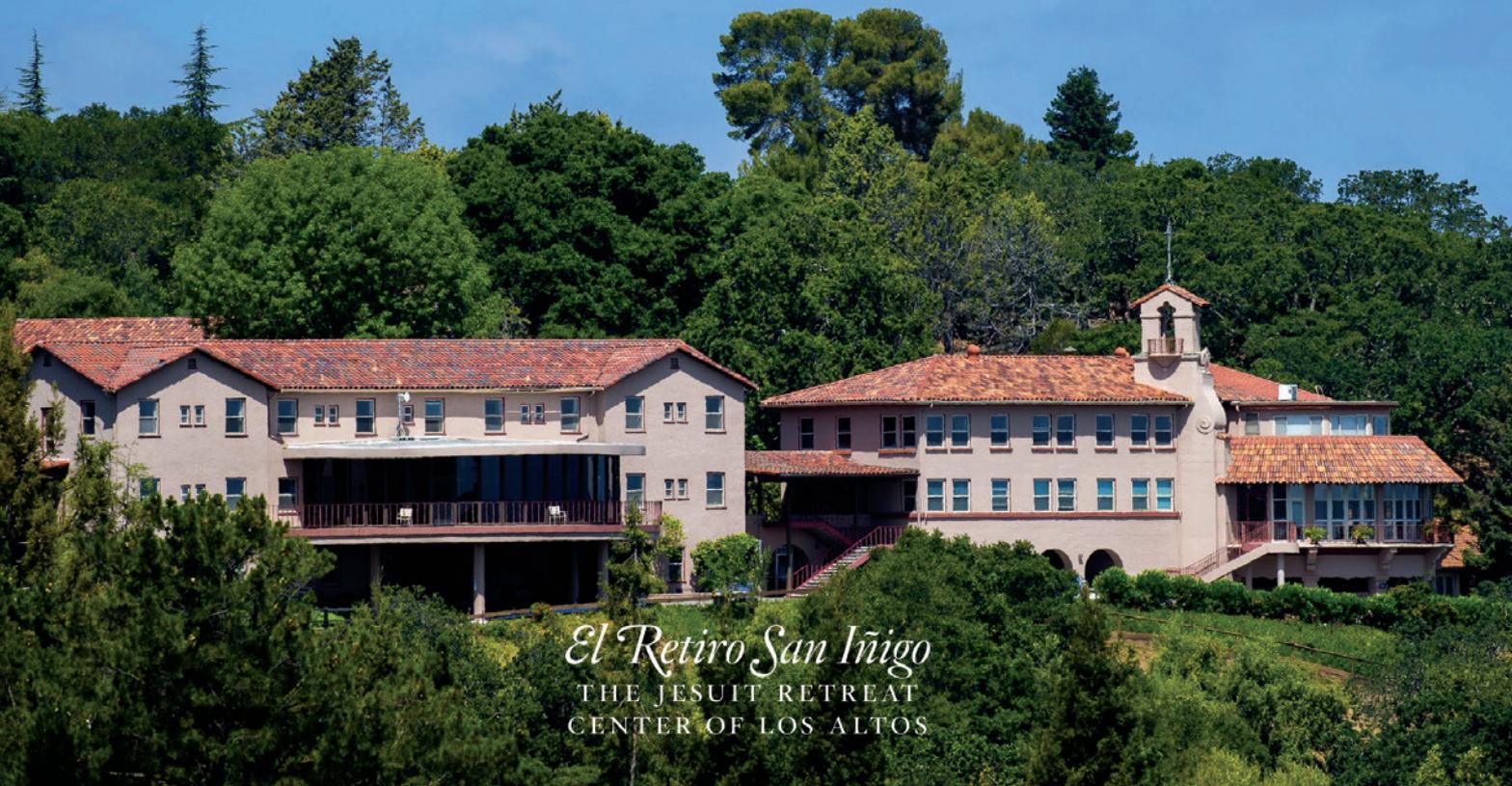
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The '80s are back, on stage and in the White House

By Rob Weinert-Kendt

In the popular thumbnail history of the 20th century, the 1960s typically get pride of place as the great cultural pivot. Vietnam, civil rights, sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll—we know the litany well. But viewed with the unblinking hindsight of 2017, another decade looks at least as consequential, particularly as a presage of our current political moment: the shoulder-padded, “greed is good” 1980s. The dawn of the Reagan revolution and the twilight of the New Deal liberal consensus, the decade began with the assassination of John Lennon and ended with the deceptively peaceful end of the Cold War.

It is perhaps too simple to call it a conservative retrenchment that set the United States on a rightward course ever since. History is never that neat, and there is a strong argument that the Reagan catechism, as implemented by Newt Gingrich and others who followed, is more radical than small-c conservative. What's more, in the ascent of a populist, mercantilist demagogue like Donald J. Trump, whose *The Art of the Deal* was a bestseller in 1987, we see less a triumph of right-wing orthodoxy than

of revanchist nationalism.

The American theater is wrestling, in fits and starts, with the Trump era: in a post-industrial social realist drama like Lynn Nottage's “Sweat” or in parodic depictions of Trump-like figures—like the Public Theater's bloody “Julius Caesar” last summer and Jon Robin Baitz's new play “Vicuña,” recently in Washington, D.C. But on New York stages currently, three plays invite us to look back on the decade that effectively launched Trump as a time of churning ambivalence and upheaval, both social and personal, beneath the smiling “Morning in America” facade.

An Off Broadway revival of Harvey Fierstein's “**Torch Song**” (previously “Torch Song Trilogy”) at Second Stage places us back at a crucial bridge moment in the gay rights struggle, between the defiantly promiscuous '70s and the mainstreamed domestication that followed in the '90s and after. A lavish Broadway revival of David Henry Hwang's “M. Butterfly,” directed by Julie Taymor of “The Lion King,” reminds us that audiences of three decades ago were happy to embrace an ambitious, unsettling examination

of gender, race and orientalism (the show was a long-running hit starting in 1988). And Ayad Akhtar's new play, “Junk,” at Lincoln Center portrays the '80s-era fall of a Michael Milken-like financier as an amorality play aimed directly at our over-leveraged, materialist age.

Much like William Finn's musical “Falsettos,” “Torch Song” began as a series of plays about men hooking up in the post-Stonewall clubs of New York City, then grappling with the challenges, both external and internal, of forging lasting relationships and building families. Also as in Finn's musical, one half of the “Torch Song's” main couple, Ed, confusedly tries to merge the nuclear family with gay sexuality by marrying a woman while stringing along Arnold, the drag queen, originally played by the playwright Fierstein, from whose point of view the play is told.

At its best, the ebullient new revival by the director Moises Kaufman—still essentially three playlets now streamlined into one two-act evening—makes a case for the play as a contemporary classic. It also beautifully matches form to meaning, un-

Image courtesy of Fox Searchlight



With plays like “Junk,” the American theater is wrestling, in fits and starts, with the Trump era.

folding from atomized monologues into a kind of bed-hopping fugue among two couples, culminating in an alternately rollicking and moving single-set domestic comedy-drama in which three generations reckon with a new definition of family that is not all that new after all. In the lead role of Arnold, Michael Urie gives a strong, shaded star performance, even if his lithe, wiry frame is an odd fit for a character explicitly referred to as heavy, unlovely and possessed of a froggy voice (i.e., Harvey Fierstein). And in the role of his widowed mother, Mercedes Ruehl stirs exactly the right blend of flint and warmth.

Still, as satisfying as “Torch Song” is as a kind of coming-in tale, in which a gay man essentially rejoins the family (and the American family drama) on his own terms, it remains haunted by a historical absence. It premiered in early 1982, a time when an unnamed new “gay disease” had only begun its devastation. By decade’s end H.I.V./AIDS would claim tens of thousands of lives, and the struggle for gay rights to dignity and legal recognition would acquire a profound new urgency. “Torch Song” emerges, fortu-

itously untouched by that plague, to serenade us anew with the universal admonition that love is an action, not a feeling.

In “**M. Butterfly**,” love is far more complicated, even impossible, doomed by the unequal crossfire of Western imperialism and an ascendant Cultural Revolution in communist China. Inspired by the true story of a French diplomat stationed in 1960s-era Peking who took a young Chinese singer as his lover without realizing she was in fact a male spy, the play is framed as a confession from the cell of Gallimard (Clive Owen) as he tries to explain how he fell for this elaborate but intimate deception at the hands of what he believed was “the perfect woman.”

Hwang’s brilliant play has the bracing momentum of a procedural, as Gallimard’s romance with Song Liling (Jin Ha) ensnares both in a relationship not just distorted by the masks of orientalism but fatefully determined by it. But it also takes time to plumb the bitter ironies and strange bedfellows that arise from an East-West divide that is not only about race and power but crucially about gender, as crystallized by the dehumanizing exoticization of the compliant, long-suffering Japanese heroine of the Puccini opera evoked by the title.

Like “Torch Song,” “**M. Butterfly**” emerges, in Julie Taymor’s odd, transfixing hot mess of a Broadway production, as a modern classic, destined to be with us as long there are stages. And this is in spite of the new revival’s several obvious deficits: extensive new revisions by Hwang that over-complicate the play’s sexual politics; a busy, diverting but curiously rootless design scheme (sets are by Paul Steinberg); and the casting of Owen, whose hangdog, macho glare makes

the central love story both less plausible and more combustible. When Gallimard, like Mitch with Blanche in “**A Streetcar Named Desire**,” demands that Song turn up the lights and show him her true identity, there is a real sense of physical threat—provided we can get past the nagging sense that the truth is already staring Gallimard in the face.

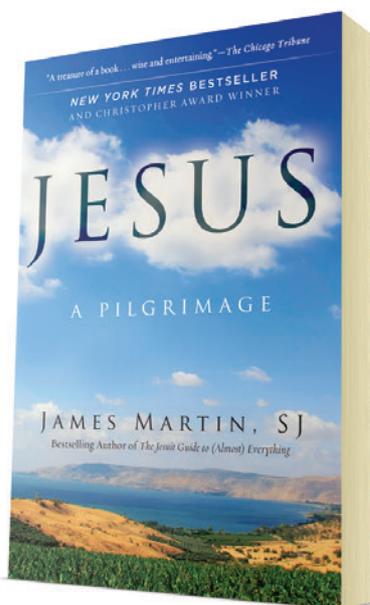
There is much deception but precious little mystery in “**Junk**,” a sleek, somewhat airless contraption constructed with watchmaker’s care by Ayad Akhtar (“**Disgraced**”). Written in the bullet-like staccato of vintage David Mamet, with a dash of Aaron Sorkin-ish speechifying, the play depicts the fall of Robert Merkin (Steven Pasquale), a self-styled evangelist for debt financing, a.k.a. junk bonds, though old-fashioned insider trading is his ultimate undoing.

Crisply directed by Doug Hughes, in a slam-bang style that would not have been out of place on an American stage any time in the last 30 years, “**Junk**” suffers by comparison with any number of financial exposés (“**The Big Short**,” “**Margin Call**”), though at its best it conjures the dangerous allure of the con man who believes his own B.S. The 1980s did not invent this type, but they may have given us its *reductio ad absurdum* in the person of Mr. Trump, our tycoon-in-chief, who by 1990 was more than \$3 billion in hock, largely in the form of junk bonds. In a sense, that is a debt we are still paying down.

Rob Weinert-Kendt, an arts journalist and editor of *American Theatre* magazine, has written for *The New York Times* and *Time Out New York*.

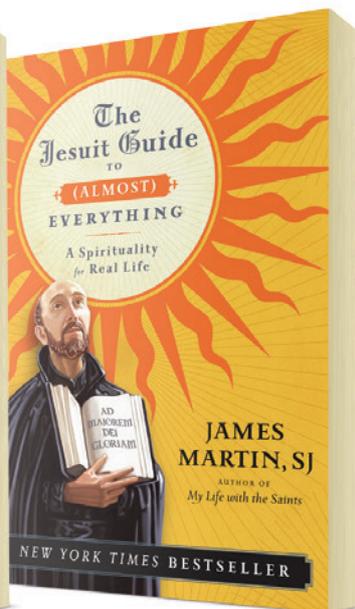
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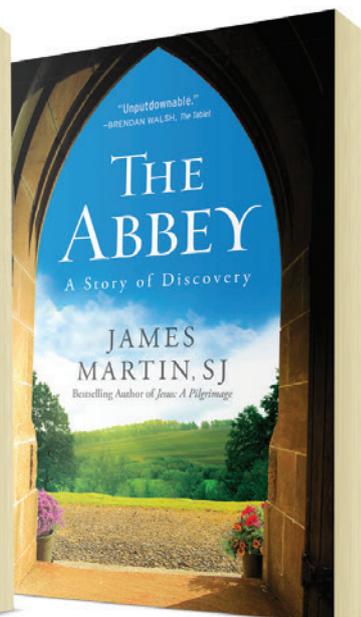
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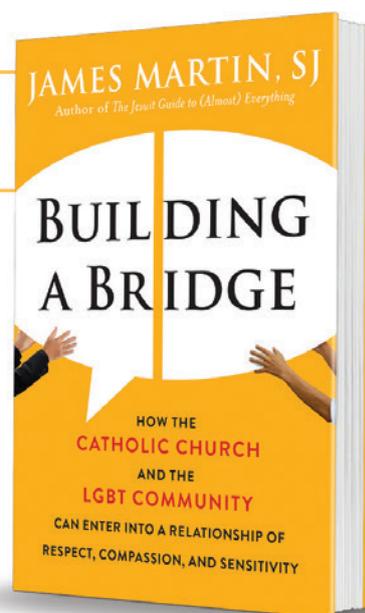
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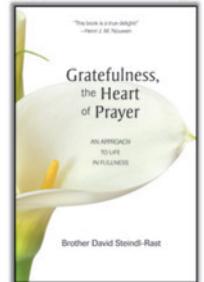
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Become the Light

Readings: Is 61:1-11, Lk 1:46-54, 1 Thes 5:16-24, Jn 1:6-28

The Advent readings offer Christians a twofold preparation. They help to prepare the hearts of believers for a new encounter with the mystery of the Nativity. They also teach Christ's disciples how to prepare others for a first arrival of Christ in their lives. Just as John the Baptist prepared the world for Christ's light, so we today must reflect the light we see in Christ and be beacons of hope for the world.

Light is a symbol that entranced biblical authors of every period. Human eyes are extraordinarily sensitive to illumination. Unlike many animals, human eyes can adjust to see well at twilight and high noon. We can also train our eyes to function in abnormally bright or dim light. People who live in desert and polar regions can see through a midday glare that would blind anyone not accustomed to it, and many indigenous dwellers in the tropics hunt successfully even in the semi-darkness of a rainforest floor.

Writing around the year A.D. 200, the early Christian scholar Origen recorded some thoughts on today's Gospel passage that played on the sensitivity of human vision. The light that John speaks of in today's Gospel is the teaching and example that Jesus left us. When individuals believe in Christ, model their lives on him and follow his commandments, they learn everything they need to love God and neighbor. This model and teaching is the light Jesus Christ offers.

Origen reminds us that the sun's brilliance can illuminate places that other lights cannot reach. It reflects off walls and shines around corners. It finds cracks and imperfections in roofs and doors and shuttered windows and lights up even closed rooms. Just so, the light of Christ breaks through the closed doors of our mind. Those who follow Christ find unexpected insights in his Spirit. They discover new answers to ancient problems. They hear a call to deeper love and service. Christ's disciples walk in the light even while others around them stumble in the gloom.

Grace builds on nature. Origen reminds us that just as human eyes will adapt to bright light, a life spent following

He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.

(Jn 1:8)



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How can you increase your capacity to see Christ's light?

How can you share Christ's light with others?

Christ increases the capacity to live out his teaching. This realization lies behind this week's second reading too. "Do not quench the Spirit," St. Paul tells us. A life spent listening to and following the Spirit prepares us in "spirit, soul and body" for the arrival of Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist walked a path illumined by such brilliance. The Gospel says that John came to testify to the light "so that all might believe through him." Everything John said or did refracted divine brilliance onto those around him. People eventually came to see the light of Christ because they had already seen it shine through John. As Origen said, God sends the stars to guide us until we are ready to look at the sun.

In the era before modern navigation, the stars guided lost sailors home. If we let Christ's light shine through us, we can be a similar beacon for so many who wander. This is how we can testify to the light today. If we let Christ's light shine through us, we can be the stars they follow.

Michael Simone, S.J., teaches Scripture at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

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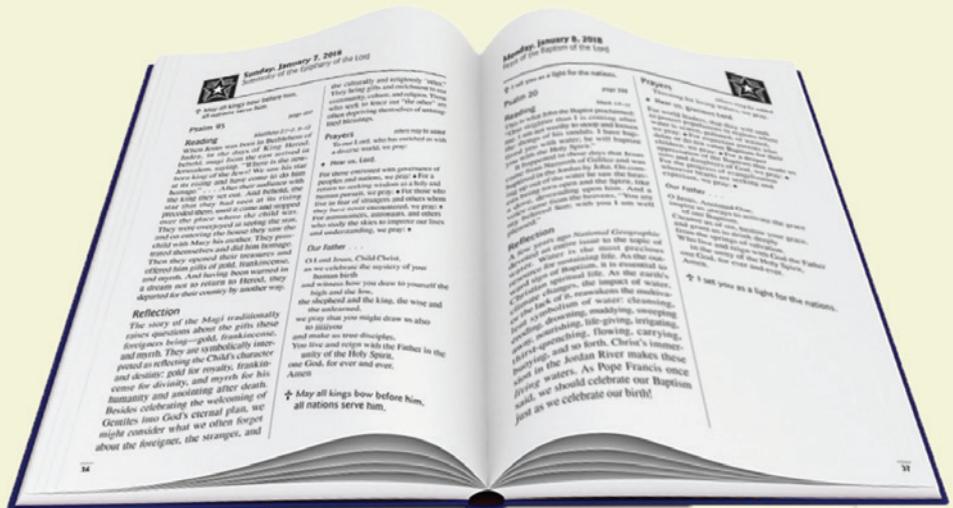
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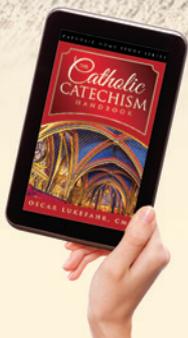
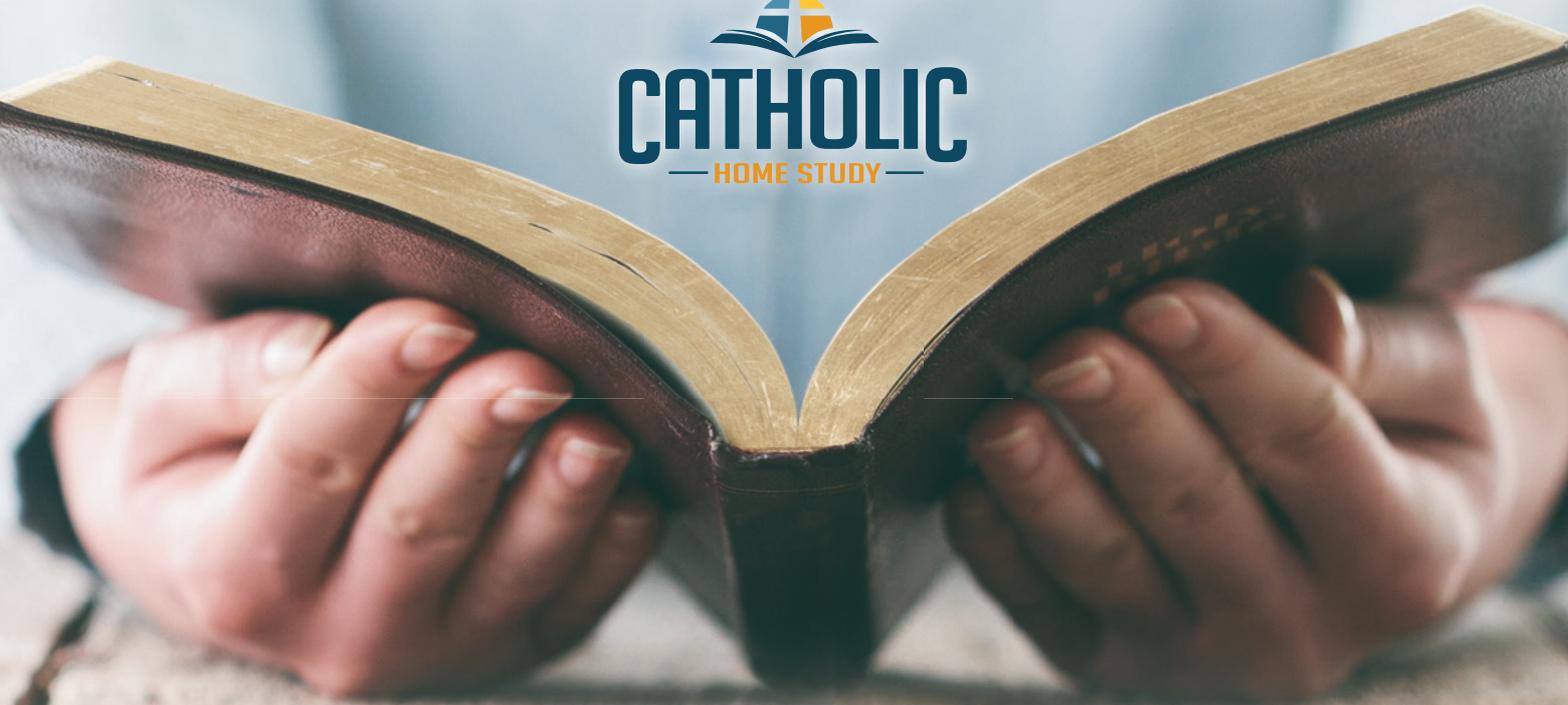


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The Call to Stewardship

As Catholics, caring for the planet begins with us

By Catherine Cortez Masto



Some of my fondest memories growing up in southern Nevada include exploring with my family the ruby sandstone outcrops at Red Rock Canyon and the Valley of Fire and the dramatic alpine trails and seasonal waterfalls of Mount Charleston. From an early age, these otherworldly landscapes exposed me to the wonders of the natural world and taught me to appreciate and respect the magnificence of the Lord's creation. With this sense of respect also came the profound understanding that, as Catholics, we are to steward the land, the creatures that inhabit it and the environment that sustains life.

Environmental stewardship is nothing new to the Catholic faith. From the Old Testament to Pope Francis' "Laudato Si'," our faith has recognized and treasured mankind's intimate relationship with the earth and all the life that calls it home. Additionally, St. Francis of Assisi—whose "Canticle of the Sun" is the origin of the title "Laudato Si'"—is often revered for his patronage of the environment and animals.

My Catholic faith guides me and imbues the principles I hold in protecting and preserving God's creation. As a U.S. senator, I strive to bring this faith to my work and allow these principles to guide me as I consider the best way to influence public policy and create laws with my colleagues.

Safeguarding our common home is not only essential to protecting endangered species and preserving old-

growth forests, it is also paramount to ending poverty, fighting injustice and protecting the long-term survival of humankind and of our faith.

The reckless contamination of our air, water and soil has reached crisis levels. In recent years, our planet has been warming at an alarming rate and seen record-breaking temperatures. We are now witnessing the sixth mass extinction event in the earth's geologic history. Our sea levels are rising at an alarming rate, threatening our largest cities, like New York, Los Angeles and Miami. These changes affect the most vulnerable nations worldwide. Bangladesh, home to 163 million people and one of the world's poorest countries, is already a third under water from floods.

Without a healthy environment, how can we address the devastating effects of climate change on these nations? My faith has shown me that we are all part of an interrelated whole through Christ. If our climate breaks down it will cause additional breakdowns of global supply chains that provide medicine to the sick, and it will create droughts that will lead to even greater outbreaks of famine across the world. As Christians, we are responsible for our brothers and sisters suffering and fighting for the basic resources we all need to survive.

To deny this is to turn a deaf ear to God's teachings. As Pope Francis has expressed, we must focus less on maximizing profits and more on what nourishes the spirit. Our care for the environment

must be central to those ideals, and the United States must lead in that mission. Our country's withdrawal from the Paris climate accord, the threatened opening of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and natural gas drilling, the revocation of the Clean Power Plan and the increasing threats to U.S. national parks has placed the United States diametrically at odds with the values of the Catholic faith and Catholic Americans.

As fellow U.S. citizens, human beings and Catholics, we cannot stand idle as our country contributes to the ecological destruction of our planet, nor can we accept it when our leaders try to stymie the progress of the rest of the world. Despite the tragic state of our environment, there is hope. In the face of the grim reality that our world faces, I do not despair. I take solace in the Gospel.

I hope that together we do not despair. We must act decisively for the sake of our children, family and neighbors. The pope, in "Laudato Si'," provides us with a guide that rededicates us to our faith and sets the path forward for us all. It would be too costly for us to ignore its message.

Catherine Cortez Masto is the Democratic U.S. Senator from Nevada. From 2007 to 2015, Senator Cortez Masto served two terms as Nevada's attorney general. She also served as a federal criminal prosecutor for the U.S. Attorney's Office in Washington, D.C., and was chief of staff to Gov. Bob Miller. Senator Cortez is the first Latina elected to serve in the Senate.



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