

# America



FEBRUARY 18, 2019

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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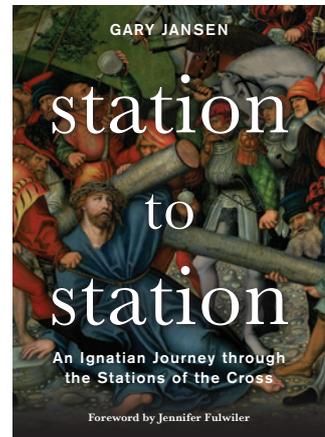
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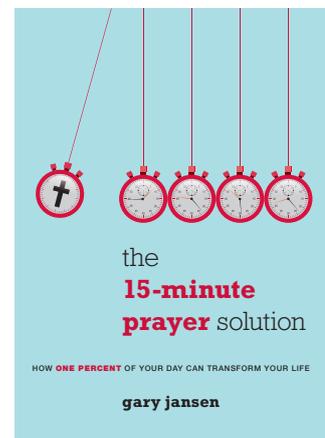
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## The Ability to Pray

Longtime readers of this column may recall that I once wrote here about the day, eight years ago, when I lost more than half of my hearing in a freak occurrence of sudden sensorineural hearing loss—what was in effect a stroke in my inner ear. Overnight I lost the ability to hear much of what is said, and it took me several years to figure out a work-around. Now, through creative positioning, I am able to place myself in a room in such a way that I have the maximum chance of hearing the gist of things. But there are some situations that are still largely impossible.

My most recent experience of this was at a gathering last week hosted by the Leadership Roundtable, a church management group that was hosting a summit on the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church. Much of the two-day affair involved simultaneous conversations at about 40 tables in a ballroom at the Four Seasons Hotel in Washington, D.C. Knowing that this was going to be a problem, I informed my tablemates right away that I have a hearing disability and that I would likely miss much of the conversation.

The next morning, one of my tablemates, a deacon and subscriber to this magazine, handed me a device called the PocketTalker 2.0. It is a lightweight microphone, just a little smaller than an iPhone. The idea, he said, was to place the instrument in the center of the table and the earbud in my good ear, allowing the sound collected by the microphone to be transmitted directly into the ear. I gave it a try. It worked! I could hardly believe it. The kindness of your fellow reader made it possible for me to hear the conversation at my table and to make a meaningful contri-

bution. I decided then and there that I would be putting this little miracle to work in many other situations.

Which got me thinking during my trip back to New York. How many times have I stood greeting parishioners after Mass who told me they could not hear the homily or much of anything else? That happens a lot. Most churches were designed and built prior to audio amplification, many even before electricity. The high, vaulted ceilings and marble floors of most churches create a thunderous echo, which creates a perfect storm of frustration for someone with hearing loss.

But what if every parish had a set of PocketTalkers that they could lend to parishioners, much the way Broadway theaters make similar devices available free of charge for their audiences? Better yet, what if a benefactor donated sets of these or similar devices to every parish in their area? Here is a problem we can actually solve with some smarts and a relatively modest financial commitment. Sounds good to me.

That made me think even more about the current state of Catholic philanthropy. As is well known, Catholics are among the most generous people on earth. The Catholic Church is the largest private provider of social services in the world. No one could doubt or question our commitment. But are we smart about how we deliver on our commitment? Are we taking advantage of new technologies and best practices to deliver those charitable goods and services? As our contributor Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry noted in these pages last year, “historically speaking, the church

has produced countless innovations, both social and technological.” An entrepreneurial mindset, Gobry argued, was “central to performing the church’s work of feeding the hungry, instructing the ignorant and effecting broad-based social change.”

How about today? Is anyone thinking, for example, about how the church will take advantage of the driverless car? What if a benefactor or a parish were to make available two or three driverless cars, which could pick up elderly or infirm parishioners and transport them to and from Mass? Or to a Knights of Columbus function? Or to a doctor’s appointment? Right now, the loss of a driver’s license means isolation from the community for too many of our seniors. But we could solve that problem with some smart planning and a bit of fundraising.

There are many solveable problems like this. All that is lacking is a culture that sees these new technologies as opportunities for evangelization and solidarity rather than scary, bewildering forces that can only pull us apart.

We should dream of a day when an elderly parishioner is able to return to Sunday Mass because the parish has sent a driverless car to get her; and when she gets to the church, she will hear every word of the liturgy through her PocketTalker. And her fellow parishioners would have made it all possible through some smart thinking and generous hearts, and by tapping their ATM cards against the digital device in the collection basket.

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



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CNS photo/Philimon Bulawayo, Reuters

Pope Francis greets the crowd during his general audience in Paul VI Hall at the Vatican on Jan. 30.

Cover: iStock

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## What role does social media play in your life?

Asked what role social media plays in their lives, our readers noted ways in which it affects their interpersonal relationships, news consumption, faith life and health. They ranked interpersonal relationships as the area of their lives most positively and negatively affected by social media.

Thirty-six percent of respondents said social media affects their relationships positively, allowing them to keep in contact with friends and relatives who live far away. But another 26 percent of respondents were wary of social media, saying it has negatively affected their interpersonal relationships. “Sometimes I read what I think are hateful comments from people from whom I would never expect it,” said Jan Casper, from New Berlin, Wis.

Twenty-six percent of our reader sample said social media negatively affected their news consumption, citing misinformation and bias. Another 26 percent, however, said it has positively affected their news consumption.

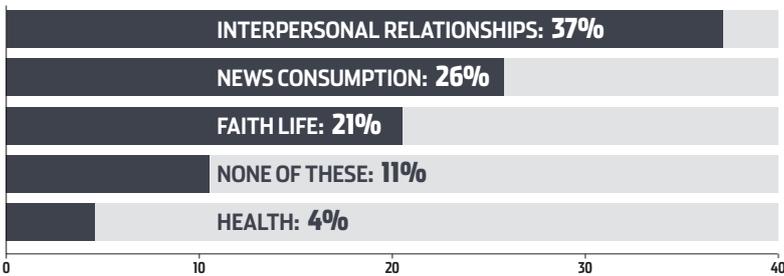
Julie Lai, a millennial respondent from San Diego,

Calif., said that social media makes news more accessible. “My family did not watch the news or talk about politics growing up,” she wrote. “However, because of my internet use, I am more aware of current events than anyone in my family.”

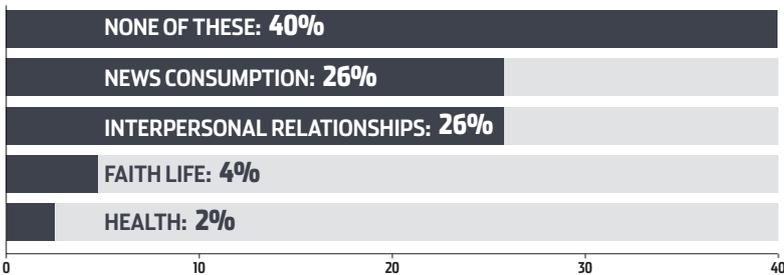
But Ms. Lai’s view of social media is not altogether rosy. She also views it as a source of anxiety. “While social media helps me to communicate better with friends, I would say the area of my life that has been more negatively affected by social media is my self-esteem,” she wrote. “As a teenager and young adult, it was and is very easy to be caught up in managing my image online and feeling like ‘likes’ are some indicator of worth.”

Readers also mentioned increasing political polarization, which has coincided with the rise of social media. For DeAnne Hall, of Oswego, N.Y., the last presidential race was a turning point. “People lack filters on social media, so that sometimes shines a light in dark places,” she wrote. “The 2016 election cost many relationships.”

### WHICH OF THESE HAS BEEN MOST POSITIVELY AFFECTED BY SOCIAL MEDIA?



### WHICH OF THESE HAS BEEN MOST NEGATIVELY AFFECTED BY SOCIAL MEDIA?



I ‘follow’ many religious organizations and individuals that provide me with daily inspiration, a deeper understanding of Scripture and news about the church.

Deborah Hastings  
Downington, Pa.

My peer group and I use social media to share spiritual quotes, biblical quotations, sermons and teachings. This has helped me grow tremendously in my faith life and even helped me find the right church to attend.

Chris Lawlor  
Cairo, N.Y.

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.

### Religious Discrimination

Re “Politicians Fail the Country by Applying Religious Tests” (Our Take, 2/4): When it comes to the religious value of opposing abortion, I do not believe one can just compartmentalize oneself. The same for cases about refugees or capital punishment or torture (if it were ever to be legal again). Requiring a judge to resign from a religious organization is religious discrimination. Even questioning someone on their religious beliefs is, if they swear to uphold the laws and the Constitution.

Rose-Ellen Caminer

### A Public Issue

Re “Don’t You Buy Me a Mercedes-Benz” (Our Take, 2/4): We need to see car usage not as a personal problem but as a public issue—of infrastructure, tax revenue and long-term solutions. Yes, effective public transit will cost a lot, but so did the interstate highway system. In the end, as a nation we need a Christian effort of will that does not ask, “What is in it for me?” but “What is in it for us and those who come after us?”

Paul J. Marasa

### More Aid

Re “Death Toll Remains High for World’s Migrant People,” by Kevin Clarke (2/4): In the end, it is wrong to force countries to take in migrants they are ill-equipped to handle. I am not saying countries should ignore the situation, but the United Nations should do more to provide humanitarian aid and stabilize the countries these migrants are running away from.

Robert Boatwright

### A Courageous Article

Re “The Reality of Racism,” by Rachel Lu (2/4): Ms. Lu, your willingness to turn around and take a careful look at yourself inspires me to turn around and look carefully at myself. You inspire hope that even in our fearfully polarized society, there may yet be constructive dialogue. This is a great gift. Thank you for this courageous article and for nurturing the love that shines through it.

Alan Baer

### A Place to Learn

Re “Catholic Schools Reimagined,” by Betsy Shirley (2/4): I think it is a great idea that many charter schools are choosing to offer religious meetings and education after school with private funds. This takes the pressure off schools while still there is a place after school for students to learn and share in their faith that is privately funded. It would be even better if they allowed different faiths the opportunity to privately fund lectures and religious sharing groups after school so kids could visit various spaces and learn about different faiths and religions.

Nora Bolcon

### White Responsibility for Racism

Re “Enduring Pain,” by Anonymous (2/4): Until white folks are willing to accept responsibility for slavery, racism will continue to be rampant in these United States. And it is rampant, and it is as much my fault as anyone’s. Every time a white person fails to call out and confront racism in its many forms, it is our collective fault.

Peter Schwimer

### Oh, Ireland

Re “Richard Rodriguez Will Not Fit Into Your Categories,” by Olga Segura (2/4): My favorite piece by Richard Rodriguez is “Oh, Ireland.” It is a paean to the Irish nuns and priests who guided and influenced him through childhood. I have always loved it because it reminds me of my own childhood in West Harlem in a diverse community that started proportionally, though not predominantly, as Irish.

Vincent Gaglione

### Nowhere to Go

Re “Pro-life Priorities for the U.S. Supreme Court and Beyond” (Our Take, 1/21): The priority given to judicial appointments in the political agenda is absurd. Republicans put the party agenda first and the moral decision second, and the Democrats require a pro-choice litmus test. As a former Democrat of Bronx Irish vintage and a pro-lifer by conviction who resents the Democrat litmus test, I have nowhere to go. I will vote for credentials, character and country, not a party, in voting for candidates.

Richard Kane

Stewartsville, N.J.

Comments drawn from our website, [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org), and America Media’s social media platforms.

Letters to the editor can be sent to [letters@americamedia.org](mailto:letters@americamedia.org). Please include the article title, author and issue date, as well as your name and where you are writing from.

## The Tragedy of Abortion Absolutism and How the Pro-Life Movement Can Respond

Last month the stark reality of abortion entered public consciousness to a degree not seen in years. Americans were just beginning to understand how radical New York's Reproductive Health Act, passed on Jan. 22, really was. At the same time, a Virginia state delegate acknowledged, during a legislative hearing, that the bill she had proposed to loosen regulation of late-term abortions would in fact allow abortion up until the moment of delivery.

The governor of Virginia, himself a pediatric neurosurgeon, addressed the same issue on a radio show. He explained that it was more likely that such a case, involving a baby with severe deformities or who was expected to be nonviable, would result in a delivery, but that the child would only be resuscitated if the mother and family desired. His clinical discussion of choosing to allow an infant to die shocked many. And while it did not attract as much attention, the governor of Rhode Island vowed to sign a similar bill in her state.

As we pointed out in "Pro-Life Priorities for the U.S. Supreme Court and Beyond" (1/21), with *Roe v. Wade* under potential threat at the Supreme Court, pro-choice activists are pushing to have its effects codified into state law—and sometimes trying to expand access to abortion at the same time. This challenge calls for careful discernment from the pro-life movement. The fact that some consciences are being awakened to recognize the tragedy of abortion is an opportunity for pro-lifers to broaden the circle of those who are willing to support pregnant women and be concerned for unborn children.

Here are three ways to engage this challenge constructively:

First, take great care to be clear, accurate and fair in describing the negative effects of these laws. They are shocking enough without any exaggeration. Also, veterans of pro-life work are not surprised that the controversies over these laws are already being described in terms of "attacks" on the politicians arguing for them. While there is no easy way to achieve fair media coverage of the moral concerns about abortion, it is still important to do what is possible to avoid the most predictable media bias. Some commentators immediately equated the Virginia governor's remarks to "infanticide," which the governor described as a bad-faith interpretation—and that allowed the news cycle to turn to parsing the criticism of the governor rather than keeping the focus on the moral question.

Second, be proactive about acknowledging and engaging the best possible motives behind even these very bad laws and resist the temptation to demonize those who support them. Many pro-choice advocates point out—accurately—that the late-term abortions to which these laws expand access are rare and usually connected to tragic diagnoses of fetal abnormality, maternal risk or the expectation that a child will die shortly after birth. Instead of relying solely on blunt, accurate descriptions of the violence of late-term abortions, pro-lifers should give even more emphasis to compassionate care for both mother and child in these terrible circumstances. Op-

tions like perinatal hospice, which provides support and care for the mother, infant and family in situations where a child is expected to die before or shortly after birth, should be much better known. Efforts need to be made to guarantee that they are presented as part of the standard of care and resourced well enough to be available wherever needed. Too often, silence about these possibilities leads to the false choice between late-term abortion and "forcing" a mother to give birth.

Third, legislative efforts to defeat and reverse these laws should be paired with opportunities to reach across the aisle and work for reforms that will help expectant parents and make it easier for them to choose to bring their children into the world. This is not a retreat from the effort to protect unborn children in law—it is a recognition that pro-lifers should be willing to use every practical means to support and defend the dignity of life. If legal limits on abortion are connected to increases in support for parental leave and protections against pregnancy discrimination, they can potentially attract a much wider base of support. Such an approach is not only a chance for real policy improvements but also a potential opening to win minds and hearts to recognize the value of every human life at all stages of development.

## A Time for Action

*Cunctando regitur mundus*: “By delay is the world ruled.” This ancient Latin aphorism has long been a guiding principle of the practice of *romanita*, the art of getting things done in the Eternal City. In a church that tends to measure time in centuries, patience to wait for the right moment to act is indeed important.

The U.S. Catholic bishops and their flock got a taste of how *romanita* works before and during the U.S.C.C.B. meeting in November in Baltimore, when Pope Francis asked them to table a vote on new sex abuse reforms until after the worldwide meeting of the presidents of the bishops’ conferences of the Catholic Church in Rome planned from Feb. 21 to 24. Pope Francis and his advisers, it seemed, did not want the U.S. bishops to act unilaterally or rashly on an issue with worldwide implications.

Now that the Vatican meeting is finally upon us, hopes are high (perhaps too high) that the summit will bring about significant and lasting change in the church’s approach to the plague of sex abuse and its cover-up. We pray for those gathered in Rome and urge them to remember that this is no longer a time for waiting. The church needs strong and unequivocal guidelines for the prevention of abuse and justice for the abused, a public declaration that the rights of victims have priority and legislative action to ensure that no one in the church, even bishops and cardinals, is above the law.

Sometimes by transparency and decisive action is the world ruled.

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## Beyond the dream: taking Martin Luther King Jr. out of the box

A year after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, the poet Carl Wendell Hines Jr. published “A Dead Man’s Dream,” in which he wrote: “Dead men make such convenient heroes/ For they cannot rise to challenge the images/ That we might fashion from their lives.”

Dr. King was a remarkable visionary, a true social justice warrior and a devoted lover of God. What makes me uncomfortable is that the man we celebrate today, both on his birthday and during African-American History Month, is often reduced to a speech about dreams.

Too often, commemorating King means only remembering the parts of him that make us feel comfortable—that make us feel we have achieved something because today little black boys and little black girls are able to join hands with little white boys and little white girls. It is easier to reside in the comfort of “I Have a Dream,” his address at the March on Washington in 1963, than to take King out of the box and wrestle with the more radical parts of his vision.

What do we lose when we focus on the dream? And more practically, how do we move beyond the dream? Here are a few suggestions.

First, we can embrace the radical Dr. King by examining his later works. For example, in the fall of 1967, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation asked him to present a series of lectures, titled “The Trumpet of Conscience,” on topics like economic injustice, international human rights and his opposition to the Vietnam War. Alternately described as “King’s Call to Peace,” these lectures focused on what he called the “triple American evils of racism, materialism and

militarism.” But King’s attention to economic injustice and labor organizing is often overlooked today.

Taking King out of the box means asking how far we have come in addressing income inequality. It means remembering that King called for “a true revolution of values [that looks] uneasily on the glaring contrast between poverty and wealth.”

We can also take King out of the box by posing questions like those he asked later in his career. On the day before he died, in the “Promised Land” speech given in support of striking sanitation workers in Tennessee, he retold the story of the good Samaritan. He said that those who refused to stop for the wounded man on the road asked, “If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?”—but the good Samaritan instead asked, “If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?”

Today, we should also ask questions like these: If I do not stop to help families separated at the border, what will happen to them? If I do not stop to help the homeless, what will happen to them? If I do not stop to help survivors of rape and sexual abuse, what will happen to them? And if I do not stop to help victims of racist and homophobic violence, what will happen to them?

Finally, to move beyond the dream, we can learn about and celebrate those who worked hand in hand with King. In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in 1964, King referred to “the many people who make a successful journey possible, the known pilots and the unknown ground crew.” These are people like the civil rights activist Ella Baker. Explaining her role in the founding of the Student

Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, she once said: “You didn’t see me on television, you didn’t see news stories about me. The kind of role that I tried to play was to pick up pieces or put together pieces out of which I hoped organization might come.”

As the scholar-activist Barbara Ransby reminds us, when we take the time to consider other, relatively marginal figures of the civil rights movement, a different model of activism and social justice work surfaces that is collective and communal rather than narrowly focused on one person.

In his study of King, the historian Vincent Harding concludes, “Perhaps each generation must forge its own understanding of King’s meaning, must determine and demonstrate the power of his impact and influence for our lives.” It is incumbent on us to ask: What is our understanding of Dr. King? Is it to keep him in a box? Is it to limit ourselves to the “I Have a Dream” speech? Is it to embrace the radical King? Is it to sing hosannas to his name? Or is it to build a better world?

---

*Régine Michelle Jean-Charles is an associate professor of French and African and African diaspora studies at Boston College. She is the author of Conflict Bodies: The Politics of Rape Representation in the Francophone Imaginary.*

# THE CHURCH IN AMERICA



Greg Boyle, S.J.  
Founder,  
Homeboy Industries

Greg Boyle, S.J., will speak about the joys and challenges of helping those who have been caught up in cycles of gang violence to rebuild their lives. Father Boyle is the founder of Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, Calif., the largest gang intervention, rehabilitation, and re-entry program in the world.

As pastor of Dolores Mission Church, Father Boyle witnessed the devastating impact of gang violence on his community during the so-called "decade of death" that began in Los Angeles in the late 1980s and peaked at 1,000 gang-related killings in 1992.

In 1988 he and parish and community members started what would eventually become Homeboy Industries, which employs and trains former gang members in a range of social enterprises, as well as provides critical services to thousands of men and women who walk through its doors every year seeking a better life.

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## As Venezuela crisis continues, Mexico discourages outside intervention

By Jan-Albert Hootsen

*Neutral* does not equal *passive*, at least as far as Mexico's position on confronting the grave political crisis in Venezuela is concerned.

On Jan. 30 the governments of Mexico and Uruguay called for an international summit to be convened in Uruguay's capital of Montevideo on Feb. 7. Its purpose? "Laying down the basis to establish a new mechanism for dialogue that, with the inclusion of all Venezuelan forces, helps return stability and peace to the country," according to a joint statement.

The call for a summit was the latest twist in a crisis that continued to divide the world after Venezuela's embattled socialist president, Nicolás Maduro, was sworn in for a second term on Jan. 10 amid accusations of broad electoral

fraud. His administration is also being held responsible for human rights violations leading up to and after the elections and economic mismanagement that has caused millions to flee Venezuela.

Juan Guaidó, 35, the head of the opposition-led National Assembly, declared himself interim president on Jan. 23, telling cheering supporters that he would lead Venezuela until new elections could be held. He was immediately recognized by the United States and Canada and a majority of Latin American countries, while President Maduro continued to enjoy support from China and Russia.

Mexican officials announced on Jan. 23 that Mexico would not support Mr. Guaidó's claim and would continue to recognize Mr. Maduro's presidency, although not with-

“No more dictatorship” is the message of this demonstration against President Nicolás Maduro in Caracas on Jan. 30.

out expressing grave concerns over the state of human rights in the South American country. On Jan. 24, Mexico’s foreign secretary, Marcelo Ebrard, reiterated that position, telling journalists at a press conference in Mexico City that Mexico will continue to propagate “non-intervention, and disposition to contribute, with our little grain of sand, to whichever process will lead to peace and dialogue.”

That neutrality was echoed by the Mexican Catholic Church, which traditionally refrains from political expressions in a country with one of the strictest separations of church and state in the world. In a statement released on Jan. 30, the Mexican Catholic bishops’ conference expressed its concern over the crisis but did not offer a political solution.

“We know of the situation, dramatic and extremely grave, [in which Venezuela’s] people live, of the deterioration of its rights and quality of life, plunged into growing poverty and the feeling of having no one to turn to,” the statement said.

Many human rights activists and opponents of the Maduro regime were disappointed by Mexico’s stance. Some felt the second largest Latin American country was being needlessly timid in the face of the disorder in Venezuela. Others believe Mexico’s non-interventionism revealed a sympathetic attitude toward Mr. Maduro on the

part of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

“Mexico isn’t representing values or principles; it’s the position of being friends with everyone,” said Fernando Dworak, a political scientist and media commentator. “It’s passing up not just an opportunity to show regional relevance. We’re also talking about a geopolitical problem. Mexico is part of an increasingly [smaller number] of countries in the hemisphere that support authoritarianism.”

Many others, however, disagree. Both supporters of Mr. López Obrador and independent observers in Mexico said that non-interventionism is not only shrewdly pragmatic but also consistent with Mexico’s tradition of neutrality on the international stage.

“There are people in López Obrador’s party, the Move-

ment for National Regeneration, who are sympathetic to Maduro and Venezuela, but this is a very small minority,” said Rodolfo Soriano-Nuñez, a sociologist in Mexico City. “I don’t see how this could be framed as ideological. Mexico’s stance is strictly pragmatic.”

Some supporters of Mr. López Obrador have mentioned the so-called Estrada Doctrine as the basis for Mexico’s neutrality. The doctrine, adopted in the early 1930s and named after then-foreign-secretary Genaro Estrada, dominated Mexican foreign policy for most of the 20th century. It was based on the principles of respecting sovereignty, non-interventionism and peaceful resolutions of conflicts through dialogue.

“Talking about the Estrada Doctrine nowadays is kind of odd, but it has its roots in the very painful experience of Mexico-U.S. relations in the 19th century,” said Mr. Soriano-Nuñez, referring to the Mexican-American war of 1846-48, during which Mexico lost half of its territory to its northern neighbor. “We were the very first country to experience the consequences of U.S. imperialism. Any kind of U.S.-sanctioned military or interventionist solution in any kind of Latin American country is going to cause trouble for the Mexican government.”

But its detractors do not consider the Estrada Doctrine to be a serious argument to support the position of the López Obrador government. “It’s just an excuse. It’s a way for Mexico to say that it won’t intervene in other countries, but it also discredits the opinion of other countries about our affairs,” said Mr. Dworak. “In the 1980s, for example, the Estrada Doctrine was used to [prevent] international observers to oversee our elections.”

Doctrine or no doctrine, it remains to be seen whether Mexico and Uruguay’s neutrality will have provided a solution for the crisis. Although Mr. Maduro expressed willingness to negotiate with the opposition, previous attempts at such a dialogue in Venezuela have consistently failed.

“Mexico [is] walking a very thin line,” said Mr. Soriano-Nuñez. “The best way to go would be to try to convince Maduro into calling for completely new national elections. It’s a better approach than following Washington’s lead.”

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AP Photo/Ariana Cubillos

# Signs of peace-building at risk

Western diplomats often cite peace-making as an important policy tool in building a better future, especially for those living in more impoverished corners in the world. It is, after all, difficult to focus on social and economic development in societies riven by ethnic, religious or political conflict. But are Western powers backing up that belief with financial support for peace-building initiatives?

Not as much as they should, conclude researchers at the European Centre for Development Policy Management. In a report published last September they argue that while “the nature of conflict and violence is changing and old tools and approaches need rejuvenation, funding for peace-building, while increasing, actually remains low.” Worse, researchers say, support for such efforts is vulnerable to sudden domestic policy shifts inside donor states. “The current geopolitical flux will profoundly affect political support to peace-building,” E.C.D.P.M. researchers worry.

Peace-building and conflict resolution interventions have clear positive effects on development outcomes, but the dollars committed to such efforts represent mere accounting errors compared to global defense outlays. In 2017 donors provided \$3.4 billion to such initiatives. The peace investments in fact represent just 2 percent of the total foreign aid offered by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development donors.

Compare those paltry numbers to outlays on defense. In 2017 the United States was the world’s top spender on defense, directing \$610 billion to the more than \$1.7 trillion total global expenditure on military hardware. That figure was almost 10 times the \$66 billion spent by Russia and nearly three times the \$228 billion spent by the world’s second most profligate defense spender, China.

Most of the funding for peace-building comes from European nations, but between 2007 and 2015 the United States was the top annual donor to efforts to promote civilian peace-building, conflict prevention and resolution. By 2016 it had dropped to third, reducing its commitment to peace building efforts from \$349 million in 2007 to \$299 million. One among many worrying signals about the future effectiveness of peace-making as a tool for global human development.



TOTAL WORLD MILITARY EXPENDITURE 2017

**\$1,739 BILLION** 

The highest level since the end of the Cold War, 2.2 percent of global GDP; \$230 per person on Earth.

HUMANITARIAN SPENDING INTERNATIONALLY

**2017: \$27.3 BILLION**

80 percent of humanitarian needs are driven by conflict.

FUNDING FOR PEACE BUILDING

**2016: \$3.4 BILLION**

**2 BILLION PEOPLE LIVE IN COUNTRIES WHERE DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES ARE AFFECTED BY “FRAGILITY, CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE.”** 

**201 MILLION ARE IN NEED OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE.** 

NUMBER OF CONFLICTS ON THE RISE SINCE 2010

**2015: 52**      **2014: 41**      **2010: 31**  
(HIGHEST SINCE 1991)

NUMBER OF GLOBAL CASUALTIES FROM CONFLICT **INCREASED MORE THAN 700 PERCENT** BETWEEN 2000 AND 2016.

**ONLY 2 PERCENT** OF THE WORLD’S PEOPLE LIVE IN A COUNTRY WHERE CIVIC SPACE IS **“FULLY OPEN.”**

Sources: “Supporting Peacebuilding in Times of Change,” by Andrew Sherriff, Pauline Veron, Matthias Deneckere and Volker Hauck, published by the European Centre for Development Policy Management, [ecdpm.org/changingpeacebuilding](http://ecdpm.org/changingpeacebuilding).



Nitish Meena on Unsplash

## Why the MAGA hats at the March for Life?

*Kentucky's Bishop Stowe 'astonished' by images from a controversial encounter*

In a strongly worded newspaper column, a Kentucky bishop urged Catholics to consider the church's full teaching on life and to resist temptations to align themselves with the Make America Great Again movement started by President Donald Trump.

Bishop John Stowe of Lexington wrote that it "astonishes" him that some students gathered in Washington, D.C., to protest abortion at the March for Life in January—including students caught on video in an exchange with a Native American tribal leader—wore so-called MAGA caps, which he said support a president whose policies are putting lives at risk.

"Without engaging the discussion about the context of the viral video or placing the blame entirely on these adolescents," the bishop wrote in *The Lexington Herald-Leader*, "it astonishes me that any students participating in a pro-life activity on behalf of their school and their Catholic faith could be wearing apparel sporting the slogans of a president who denigrates the lives of immigrants, refugees and people from countries that he describes with indecent words and haphazardly endangers with life-threatening policies."

A group of students from Covington Catholic High School, located about 80 miles north of Bishop Stowe's diocese, were filmed wearing the red baseball caps while interacting with a group of Native American protesters who had been participating in an indigenous people's march. A tribal leader, Nathan Phillips, said he felt threatened and disrespected by the students. But some of the students said that they had been harassed by a third group of protesters, from an African-American organization called Hebrew Israelites, who shouted racist and homophobic comments at them, and that they did not intend to disrespect Mr. Phillips when he approached them.

According to polling by the Public Religion Research Institute, 59 percent of Catholics overall held an unfavor-

able view of the president as of last September. But that unfavorability number was only 50 percent among white, non-Hispanic Catholics, with 46 percent of them giving Mr. Trump a favorable rating. Many Catholic voters have been supportive of President Trump, in part because of his support for judges who are opposed to abortion.

In his op-ed, Bishop Stowe questioned the logic of Catholics supporting a president who, while against abortion, clashes with church teaching on a number of other issues. "We cannot uncritically ally ourselves with someone with whom we share the policy goal of ending abortion," he wrote.

Bishop Stowe wrote that the pro-life movement began with "peace activists who saw their opposition to abortion as a natural extension of opposition to all forms of violence." He took issue with what he sees as the cleaving of abortion from the church's broader social justice ministry.

"While the church's opposition to abortion has been steadfast, it has become a stand-alone issue for many and has become disconnected [from] other issues of human dignity," he wrote. The bishop, appointed by Pope Francis in 2015, highlighted the U.S. bishops' recent pastoral letter on racism, noting that it describes racism as a "life" issue and saying that insight should enter school curriculums.

"Students must grapple with this history and ask themselves how they are going to live differently," he wrote.

"The pro-life movement claims that it wants more than the policy change of making abortion illegal [and] aims to make it unthinkable. That would require deep changes in society and policies that would support those who find it difficult to afford children," Bishop Stowe wrote. "The association of our young people with racist acts and a politics of hate must also become unthinkable."

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## Far from 'zero poverty' ambitions in Argentina

*President Macri's agenda frustrated as misery rises*

Before his election, President Mauricio Macri of Argentina vowed to wipe poverty off the map, invoking the campaign slogan “Zero Poverty.” But as the end of Mr. Macri’s first term nears, soup lines are longer, more people depend on charities to get by, and thousands have joined the burgeoning populations of Argentina’s impoverished *villas*, its urban slums. Measures Mr. Macri took to liberalize the economy, impose government austerity, increase taxes for public services and “open Argentina to the world” had no positive effect in 2018. Adding to the misery, the president failed to respond adequately to a currency crisis that pushed Argentina into a new recession.

If the expectation of zeroing out poverty was unrealistic, now it is barely a dream. The national poverty rate was estimated to be 33.6 percent in the third quarter of 2018, according to the Argentinian Social Debt Observatory of the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina. The number of poor people in the country increased from 11.4 million in 2017 to 13.6 million in 2018.

Ana Castellani, director of the Center of Workers Innovation at Argentina’s National Research Council, links the increase in poverty to the flagging fortunes among Argentina’s “new poor,” lower-working-class people who swing in and out of poverty. The new poor often have a minimum level of ed-

ucation; they may even own a home, yet each day is a struggle to find work and pay the bills. “Although in 2018 there was impoverishment in all levels, it is clear that the ones who fell below the poverty line are those who were right in the border area,” Ms. Castellani said.

Ms. Castellani does not believe that Argentinians’ overwhelming unhappiness with the economy means they will vote Mr. Macri out of office in the country’s next presidential election this October. The president manages to keep a core of faithful voters because of a communication strategy that “legitimizes” the economic crisis, she said. He has persuaded supporters that the blame can be laid on past administrations and global circumstances beyond his control.

Uneasy with rising poverty in his homeland, Pope Francis has expressed his concerns to Mr. Macri on several occasions. In March 2018, Francis advised the president in a letter that “the future is built with the contribution of everyone, starting with social justice, encounter and the search for unity.”

Emilce Cuda, a political theologian and professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina and at Boston College, said that Catholic bishops in Argentina are especially attentive to the rise of unemployment among youth and are worried about the appeal of organized crime



Lining up at a community soup kitchen in Buenos Aires in 2014

CNS photo/Enrique Marciano, Reuters

during hard times. “Without formal employment, young people are captured by the informal market or drug trafficking,” she said.

According to Ms. Cuda, the Argentine bishops’ conference is in constant dialogue with Mr. Macri’s government because of the church’s charity and social work. But it is not always supportive of his policies. In response to growing violence, for example, the Macri administration is seeking to reduce the age of criminal responsibility from 18 to 14 years, a measure that the bishops’ conference officially opposes. Argentina’s bishops instead support broader programs to contain poverty, drugs and crime.

“Poverty is not a number. Every child and teenager who falls into drugs instead of receiving education is the real poverty index,” said Ms. Cuda. Raising the church’s social justice concerns during this time of economic crisis, she argues, “is not to be against Macri, but to be fully Christian.”

“Pope Francis consistently said that politics is the highest form of charity,” Ms. Cuda said.

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CNS photo/Chaz Muth

## GOODNEWS

### In Panama City, the Jama Mosque offers water to thirsty pilgrims

Thousands of World Youth Day pilgrims stopped by the Jama Mosque in Panama City on Jan. 24 en route to catch a glimpse of Pope Francis.

“Brothers, sisters, you need water,” Hashim Bhana called from under a tent that announced a “hydration center” outside the mosque, a place where pilgrims could pick up free water or catch some needed shade and a smile as they struggled to stay hydrated under the blazing sun.

“This is an event for the good of young people, it benefits them, so how could we say no” to helping them, said Mr. Bhana.

While hundreds of vendors sold water to the thirsty, the Muslim community at the oldest mosque in Panama City gave it away free near a banner that said, “Welcome Pilgrim Friends.” By the time Pope Francis had arrived at Santa Maria la Antigua Field, they had handed out 15,000 bottles and were looking for more because of the demand, said Mr. Bhana.

In Panama City, people of different religions get along well, he said, so the gesture was not unusual. “What’s important to us is that we’re all brothers and sisters. We don’t ask about your religion, your skin color, age. We’re all humans and we want everyone to be well,” said Kasim Bhana, who was helping distribute water.

Having the pope in Panama City is a blessing, he said.

Members of the mosque were taking turns staffing the water stations during the hottest times of the day. Others bought and delivered water and ice to keep the water bottles cold. On the day the pope was going to be closest to the mosque, they opened earlier.

“This was the best day,” Kasim Bhana said.

Catholic News Service

# THE MYTHS OF MASS INCARCERATION

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## *What reformers get wrong about crime and punishment*

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By John Pfaff

Even with all the attention it receives, the scale of incarceration and punishment in the United States can still be hard to comprehend. On any given day, about 1.5 million people are in state and federal prisons; another 750,000 are in county jails (most still awaiting trial); and over 4.5 million are on probation or parole. Over the course of a year, over 600,000 people enter prison, and roughly the same number are sent home; and over 10 million people are admitted to jails annually. About 2.5 million more enter or leave parole or probation.

Put differently, the United States is home to about 5 percent of the world's population but holds over 20 percent of the world's prisoners and nearly one-third of its women prisoners. The only countries with rates even close to ours are places like El Salvador, Turkmenistan and Cuba; allies like Canada, France and Germany have rates on the order of one-tenth ours (yet have similar crime rates and substantially lower homicide rates). Ours is a massive experiment in punitive social control that imposes disproportionate costs on people of color and those who are poor—and one that is nearly impossible to justify even remotely, at least on public safety grounds.

Remarkably, our brutal punitiveness is a relatively new development. From the 1920s, when we first have regular, reliable data, to the 1970s, our incarceration rate was relatively stable and not much different from Europe's. In the mid-1970s, however, our prison population and incarceration rate started growing. Some talk of it “exploding,” but that mischaracterizes what happened. From 1972 to 2010, the prison popula-







# Ours is a massive experiment in punitive social control that imposes disproportionate costs on people of color and those who are poor. ●●

tion steadily rose every single year, almost always by less than 10 percent. Perhaps we should not be surprised that the prison population rose as the crime rate soared from the early 1960s to 1991, but it continued to rise even as crime fell steadily and sharply over the 1990s and 2000s.

In 2010, however, total prison populations dropped for the first time in nearly four decades and then fell again in every year between 2011 and 2016 except one (2013). Preliminary data suggest that it fell again in 2017. The total decline has not been great nor widely spread—the total drop is just under 7 percent through 2016, half that decline is in the state of California alone, and only half the states have experienced a drop—but after 40 years of unrelenting, nationwide increases, any sort of reversal is worth celebrating.

Yet it is still important to ask what exactly we are celebrating. It could be that the United States is emerging from some sort of punitive fever and that this is the start of a major recalibration of how we confront crime. It is equally possible, however, that this is just a small correction and that we are heading for a new, stable incarceration rate a bit below where we peaked in 2010 but still far higher than that seen overseas, than in our own country 100 years ago or than what public safety actually requires.

Unfortunately, there are already some troubling signs that some level of mass incarceration is here to stay. Some states have started to roll back the reforms they just passed, and most reforms continue to ignore several fundamental underlying causes that led to mass incarceration in the first place. So let's take a look at why we should aim to cut prison populations, why our current reforms look so tenuous and the difficult issues we have to confront to achieve real reform.

## What Goes Up

Incarceration and crime have a complicated relationship, at least in the United States. Reported crime started to rise in the 1960s, but prison populations held steady for almost a decade; only from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s did crime and prison figures rise together. Then, from about 1991 onward, crime steadily fell, but prison populations kept on rising.

Defenders of incarceration see nothing surprising about this story: Crime rose in the 1960s and 1970s because prison populations did not rise, and crime fell in the 1990s and 2000s because prison populations increased. The evidence, however, simply does not support this narrative. An ever-growing stack of studies consistently shows that longer prison sentences do not significantly deter crime; that prisons are ineffective at rehabilitating those detained in them; and that while longer incarceration prevents those who are in prison from committing offenses outside those institutions while they are confined, it also increases the risk that they will reoffend later.

Now, to be clear, the studies that return the most dismal results for prison are looking at the impact of incarceration rates in recent years, when crime has been low and prison populations high. Other reliable studies suggest that the rise in incarceration did help stem the rise in crime during the 1970s and 1980s and helped contribute to the decline of crime especially in the 1990s; the rise in incarceration could have been responsible for as much as 25 percent of the initial drop in crime.

But even these studies do not justify our reliance on incarceration. It is increasingly clear that other approaches could have achieved the same reduction in crime at far less cost—not just financial cost but social cost as well. Within the “conventional” criminal justice system, for example, a dollar spent on policing produces far more crime reduction than a dollar spent on prisons. Recent studies have shown that programs like Cure Violence, which relies on trained community members rather than police to intervene and stop violence, can be quite effective. Improved employment also reduces crime significantly, as does improved access to health care and drug treatment.

Unlike prison, all these programs reduce crime more by preventing it in the first place than by detaining the person who committed it after the fact. As a result, they avoid that post-incarceration jump in offending that offsets much of the benefit from prison and leads to more victimization. That also means they avoid many



The real costs of prison are the harms that incarceration imposes on the people it locks up, their families and their communities.

if not most of the social costs of punishment, which are staggering and uncounted. When we talk about the “cost of prisons,” the number we often hear is that we spend about \$50 billion on state prisons and \$30 billion on county jails. But that is just the fiscal cost—the budget dollars that the states and counties spend, at least two-thirds of which goes to staff wages.

But the real costs of prison are the harms that incarceration imposes on the people it locks up, their families and their communities. People are physically and sexually assaulted in prison, and some are killed by other inmates or even just by the horrific conditions in which the state decides to detain them, like un-air-conditioned cells in Florida and Texas. Prisons are a vector for diseases, and the risk of death by drug overdose soars immediately upon release. Time in prison leads to lower future income, and it heavily taxes family and friends who have to spend money on usurious charges for collect calls, on trips to distant prisons located far from the cities where most inmates lived before their incarceration and on providing the prisoner with money for snacks and toiletries. Having a loved one in prison imposes deep emotional costs on family members, and some evidence suggests that children with an incarcerated parent are themselves

more likely to have contact with the criminal justice system in the future.

These are just a few amid the vast array of costs related to incarceration, and no study has begun to reliably estimate their magnitude. Importantly, all the alternatives to prison—even increased policing, with its attendant risk of police violence—surely impose fewer of these costs and appear to reduce crime as effectively if not more effectively. Some of these alternatives, like improved employment and Medicaid expansion, reduce crime while providing social benefits, making them a rare win-win. And in recent surveys, victims of crimes generally prefer these sorts of non-prison options as well.

In other words, we should rely on prison less, whether crime rates are going down or up. It is not surprising that the push to cut prisons has come after more than 20 years of falling crime—but prisons were an ineffective way to respond to crime from the start.

Unfortunately, this is not how reform efforts are generally framed. Far too often, advocates premise reforms on the decline in crime: “Look,” they say, “since 2010 we’ve cut prison populations and crime has continued to fall, so the policy is a success and we should keep cutting more!” The political appeal of this approach, of course, is clear: Amer-



If we really want to scale back our reliance on prison, we need to change how we approach violence. Most people—politicians, reformers, the public—seem unwilling to do this. ●●

icans think a lot about crime and tend to be quite afraid of it, so showing that cutting prisons does not “cause” crime to rise resonates with them.

This strategy, however, is a short-term one that brings with it some longer-term risks—some of which we are already starting to see materialize. Lurking in this framing is the idea that if crime starts to go up again, we might need to turn back to prisons. This clearly is not the intent of advocates who make this point, but it is nonetheless implicit, and almost explicit, in the arguments they make. And as violent crime has ticked up in some places over the past few years, so, too, has the push to undo reforms. We have framed decarceration as a low-crime luxury, not as sound policy regardless of what crime rates are doing.

Over the past year, we have seen states respond to increases in violence by rolling back reforms and pushing for more prison time. Alaska decided to respond to a rise in violence that was tied to the opioid crisis and a weak economy by repealing much of its expansive, barely-one-year-old criminal justice reform law—including provisions that had not even gone into effect yet and thus could not explain the rise in crime. Maryland recently adopted new mandatory minimums in response to gun violence in Baltimore, and Illinois did the same in response to violence in Chicago.

We need to find the political courage to attack prison as a crime-fighting tool head-on. Unfortunately, shifting away from prisons requires us to tackle two confounding issues that are at the heart of mass incarceration but defy easy fixes: changing how we respond to violent crimes and altering the dysfunctional political structures that give ev-

eryone from police to prosecutors to parole boards incentives only to be harsh and never to be lenient.

### The Third Rail of Reform

Almost all reforms to date have focused on how we punish those convicted of drug and other “nonviolent” crimes, like theft. And there is much to be said for such changes. Prison is surely a needlessly costly place to detain people who often pose little risk of physically harming someone else.

Yet, however logical it may have been to make these changes a starting place for reform, nearly 10 years into this “reform” moment we seem unwilling to move past reforms aimed at property offenses and, especially, the “low-level, nonviolent drug offender.” A poll conducted by Vox.com in 2016 illuminates the challenge we now face. The poll found that a majority of respondents—from 55 percent of liberals to 68 percent of conservatives—opposed reducing the time spent in prison by those convicted of violence, even if they posed little risk of reoffending. And this is not surprising, because over 60 percent of those polled thought that about half of all people in prison are in for drugs.

But that supposition—that about half of all people in prison are there for drugs—although widely repeated and widely believed, is fundamentally, unambiguously incorrect.

Here are the numbers: In the state systems, which hold about 90 percent of all prisoners, those convicted of drugs make up 15 percent, not 50 percent. Most people in prison—about 53 percent right now—have been convicted of a violent crime, and almost all people who are serving long sentences have been convicted of violence, almost always serious violence like murder, manslaughter or rape. It is true that about half of all federal prisoners are serving time for drug charges, but the feds hold only about 10 percent of all prisoners. This is why federal reform efforts, like the First Step Act, which passed through the Senate with an overwhelming bipartisan majority on Dec. 18, will have only minor effects on overall national incarceration rates.

As that Vox poll made clear, however, people believe that most of those in prison are there for drugs, which leads them to think that we can end mass incarceration by focusing almost entirely on the easier, more sympathetic, nonviolent cases. We cannot. If we really want to scale back our reliance on prison, we need to change how we approach violence, and most people—politicians, reformers, the public—seem unwilling to do this.

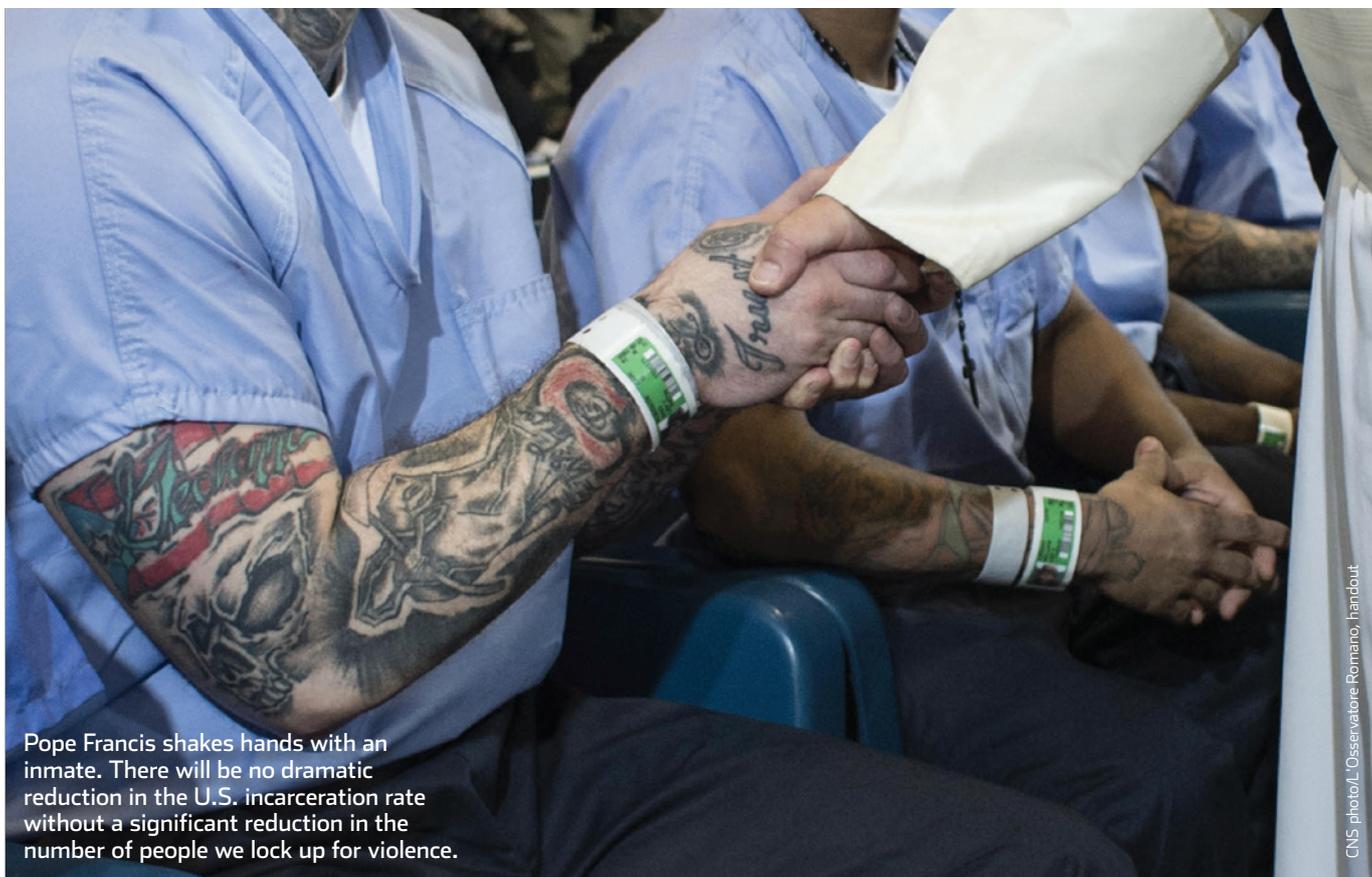
New York State provides a stark cautionary tale on the limits of a drugs-only or even an all-but-violence approach.

New York started to decarcerate years before the rest of the country, in 1999. Since then, the prison population has dropped from almost 73,000 in 1999 to barely 50,000 at the end of 2016. That decline, however, is due almost entirely to reducing the population in prison for drug crimes; the number in for violence barely budged over 20 years, from 37,000 to 32,000, despite precipitous declines in violence across the state and especially in New York City. If tomorrow New York released everyone who is in prison for nonviolent crime, it would still have a prison population of over 30,000—a population that is 50 percent larger than the 20,500 in prison for all crimes in 1978.

The national numbers tell a similar story. There were about 175,000 people in state prisons in 1970. There are currently 707,000 people in state prisons for violence alone, including over 175,000 just for murder or manslaughter. There will be no dramatic reduction in the U.S. incarceration rate without a significant reduction in the number of people we lock up for violence—including serious violence, including homicide.

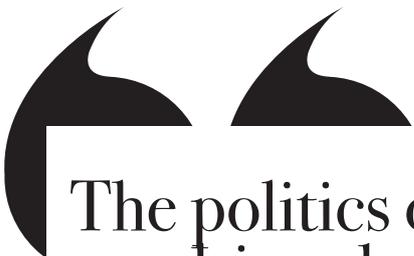
It is essential, therefore, to point out that our prison-focused response to violence is strongly at odds with the science of violent behavior. We often describe people who commit violent crimes as “violent offenders,” but that misstates how violence operates. While some people are undeniably more prone to violence than others, violence tends to be a young person’s issue, young men in particular. As a result of various hormonal, neurological, physical and social factors, people “age into” violence in their mid- to late-teens and start “aging out” sometime in their 20s and 30s and almost all by their 40s.

And yet we often impose our longest sentences on our oldest defendants because it takes time to generate a long record. In Pennsylvania, for example, a majority of defendants who are sentenced to life without parole because of a “third strike” are over 40—and thus are likely about to start desisting. Long sentences imposed on the young are similarly foolish, in part, because we remain incapable of identifying who, when young, poses a serious ongoing risk of violence but also because such sentences view the young



Pope Francis shakes hands with an inmate. There will be no dramatic reduction in the U.S. incarceration rate without a significant reduction in the number of people we lock up for violence.

CNS photo/L'Osservatore Romano, handout



# The politics of crime is not driven by the general outcome. It is driven by politicians who are terrified of that one bad, outlier case that grabs the media's attention. ●●

man as irredeemably “violent,” contrary to all the evidence about how people change.

The age profile of offenders even cautions against over-using short prison terms to respond to crimes, even violent offenses. A growing body of evidence shows that a major pathway away from violent and antisocial behavior is social developments like reliable employment, marriage and finding a stable home. Just receiving a felony conviction interferes with all of these and thus can make it harder for someone to leave crime behind; prison only makes this harder still.

None of these arguments, of course, may sway the retributivist, who sees long prison sentences as morally required to offset the harm caused. I personally do not subscribe to that belief, and it is a position I find hard to reconcile with the Christian faith I have been taught, of a Jesus who talks of love and forgiveness. But I will concede that to the extent such retributive instincts fuel our desire to punish, arguments about deterrence and aging out of violence will fall on deaf ears. But to the extent that our policies should be designed to maximize safety at the lowest fiscal and social cost—and I think many if not most people think this is a central goal—then we can treat violence in a far less, well, violent way.

The politics here, however, are a nightmare. We could send fewer people to prison for violence than we already do, we could incarcerate those we send there for less time, and we could release many of those already in prison for violence far earlier than they are currently slated to be sent home, and as a general matter the public would be just as safe as before, if not safer. But the politics of crime is not driven by the general outcome. It is driven by politicians who are terrified of that one bad, outlier case that grabs the media's attention.

## **The Politics of Punishment**

Ever since its founding, American attitudes toward crime

and criminals have been harsher than those in Europe, even if our prison populations did not differ much throughout most of the 20th century. This harshness, however, is compounded by the fact that our criminal justice system is haphazardly organized in ways that consistently incentivize severity and punish lenience.

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the heart of the problem is an excess of democratic accountability. In no other country are criminal justice actors so immediately accountable to the public. We are the only nation in the world that elects its prosecutors, and, for all intents and purposes, the only one that elects its judges as well. Moreover, our single-member district, first-past-the-post process for electing legislators means that even senior legislative leaders are at risk of losing their seats in any election—and bad crime stories are a powerful political tool for opponents to use.

And while Americans voters care a lot about crime, they respond far less to broad overarching trends and far more to highly salient, shocking, “newsworthy” cases—which are often newsworthy because they are unusual. As a result, they are far more attuned to errors in leniency—when a preventable, headline-grabbing crime occurs—than to the far-more-often invisible excess severity.

This effect is so common that it has a name: the Willie Horton Effect, named after William Horton, a man who was serving time for homicide in Massachusetts and who in 1986 absconded from a furlough program that allowed inmates to visit with family. A year later he committed a violent rape and assault in Maryland, and his story was used in a virulently racist ad run against Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis when he ran for president in 1988. That the furlough program had a success rate of over 99 percent never came up; one shocking crime stripped public awareness of the program of all context and support.

Excessive severity, however, imposes little to no downside for elected officials. How do you prove the counterfactual that someone would not have reoffended had he been locked up for less time? Perhaps we can show it with data, but a regression will never have the political power of a flesh-and-blood victim.

And it is clear that the Willie Horton Effect persists to this day. Arkansas saw its prison population drop by over 9 percent in 2012, only to rise by over 17 percent in 2013, as a single murder that year by a single parolee led to immediate policy changes. Even New York City's progressive mayor, Bill de Blasio, proposed changing diversion programs in the state in the wake of a single murder of a New York City police officer.

This politically driven harshness is then magnified by other ill-conceived distortions in the system. Prosecutors, for example, are county officials, elected by and generally paid for by the county they serve, while prisons are paid for by the state. So not only is being harsh politically safe, but a different government picks up the tab. In fact, less-harsh options, like county jail or probation, are paid for by the county, so it is actually cheaper to be harsher and shift the costs away from the county to the state prison system.

Our continuing legacy of racial segregation further amplifies this punitiveness. Wealthier, whiter suburban voters often wield disproportionate electoral influence when it comes to electing the prosecutor. These voters like the feeling of crime going down—but they face none of the costs of aggressive policies. After all, it is not their brothers or fathers or uncles or sons who face the unnecessary police stops or arrests or indictments or convictions or prison terms. Those costs are disproportionately borne by poorer people of color in the city, whom those voters do not know or even interact with.

These problems have always been with us. But they are more problematic now because as our prisons have grown, so, too, have the groups that benefit from them—and who thus have an incentive to manipulate people’s punitiveness and fear of crime for their own ends. Though many would at this juncture quickly point to private prison firms, they are not the main ones “profiting” off prisons. They hold about 9 percent of the nation’s prisoners and generally have little impact on policy.

It is various public sector actors who truly benefit. About two-thirds of \$50 billion we spend on prisons—\$33 billion or so—goes to the wages and benefits of prison staff. It is not surprising, then, that (public sector) correctional officer unions fight reforms, given how much is at stake. That many if not most prisons are located in economically distressed areas and provide some of the few well-paying jobs in the region only magnifies this effect.

Or consider the impact of “prison gerrymandering.” When drawing legislative districts, 44 states count prisoners as residing in their prison, not their prior home—but do not let them vote. All across the country, state and local legislators know that a decline in prison population means a decline in their district’s population for election purposes, putting their seats at risk of redistricting.

Moreover, there is a particularly stark partisan bent to this distortion. Prisoners are disproportionately people of color from cities, which suggests they are disproportionately Democrats. Prisons are increasingly

located in more conservative rural areas. This “prison gerrymandering” thus inflates Republican statehouse representation while simultaneously suppressing Democratic turnout, creating a powerful partisan resistance to deep changes.

All of these responses are perfectly rational. Yet so far, no effort has been made to address these and other defects that politicians and various interest groups exploit. Reform efforts have opted to capitalize on favorable conditions (low crime, high prison populations, soaring costs) to push reform bills through the same broken system that gave us mass incarceration and mass punishment in the first place. As long as these political incentives remain in place, it will not take much of a rise in crime, whatever its causes, to see reforms start to crumble.

It was never going to be possible to significantly scale back our outsized reliance on prisons easily. Mass incarceration did not arise by accident or due to one or two small mistakes. It is the product of a deep, racially driven punitiveness, combined with a vast array of incentives that consistently make harshness politically safe and leniency dangerous. Our seven-year reduction in prison populations is certainly something to celebrate, but those reductions are modest and always vulnerable. And they will remain modest and vulnerable unless we tackle some very difficult issues, such as how we treat violence and the even the basic design of our criminal justice systems.

Yet these issues are not intractable. One reason why California has seen such a large decline in its prison population is that it is the one state to actually confront the fiscal moral hazards of county prosecutors having unlimited access to state-funded prisons. There have even been a few small, halting steps toward treating violence less harshly. Neither major structural political change nor comprehensive shifts in the response to violence is dominating discussions about criminal justice reform, but each is increasingly making itself heard. There are still many ways for broad, comprehensive reform to fail but many—if challenging—ways for it to succeed as well.

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*John Pfaff is a professor of law at Fordham University and the author of *Locked In: The True Causes of Mass Incarceration and How to Achieve Real Reform*.*

# A CALL TO LOVE

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## What can the Black Lives Matter movement and the Catholic Church learn from each other?

By Olga Segura

Felix Cepeda, a 38-year-old Catholic activist and community organizer, cannot remember how many protests he has participated in. But there is one, in particular, that stays with him. On the night of Oct. 18, 2016, Deborah Danner, a 66-year-old African-American woman with schizophrenia, was shot and killed by a sergeant in the New York Police Department. Ms. Danner lived in the Castle Hill section of the Bronx, where Mr. Cepeda currently lives. Just a day later, Mr. Cepeda and dozens of others marched in a protest in the Bronx. The march was an expression of the anger, disgust and fear felt by people of color over police brutality, and it was part of a larger, nationwide group galvanized by the death of Trayvon Martin in 2013, the Black Lives Matter movement.

Mr. Cepeda tells me he felt called to march with Black Lives Matter because of his experience growing up black and Catholic.





Black Catholics are among those who feel the Black Lives Matter movement has helped to move conversations around racial justice forward.



# The fight for racial justice has been galvanized by the deaths of black Americans at the hands of police officers and armed citizens.

Mr. Cepeda's parents arrived in New York in the 1970s from Jimayaco, a small neighborhood with strong Catholic roots in the city of La Vega, the third largest city in the Dominican Republic. Mr. Cepeda grew up in Harlem in the 1980s, a time when life in New York was difficult. The use of crack cocaine was on the rise, and it fueled the city's already high rate of crime and violence. Our Lady of Annunciation, his family's home parish, was one of the few spaces where he felt safe. "Our parish in Harlem was bilingual—we went to Spanish Mass every Sunday, and I was an altar boy," he says.

Mr. Cepeda credits his Catholic faith with instilling in him a sense of activism. "I realized that the church I love," he says, has "this history of resistance, where a few Catholics have pushed the church to fight against racism. They inspire me to fight for racial justice inside the church and in society." He has been involved in protest movements in New York and the Dominican Republic for over 10 years. Last year he gained media attention after spending weeks in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral demanding that Catholic churches in New York City serve as sanctuaries for undocumented immigrants.

Mr. Cepeda is not alone in his desire to combine his faith with his work for racial equality. In recent years, many religious leaders, including Catholics, have contributed to the national conversations around race.

While racial justice has not been at the forefront of the public agenda of the Catholic Church, many Catholics, like Mr. Cepeda, have encouraged church leaders to meet with activists within the movement. "I think, like the civil rights movement and the black power movement, the Black Lives Matter movement is this generation's response to racism," Mr. Cepeda says, adding that there is

much the Catholic Church can learn from the black citizens leading the movement.

## **A Movement Is Born**

In 2013, following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager in Florida, Alicia Garza, a civil rights activist from Oakland, Calif., wrote what she describes as a love letter to black people on Facebook: "Black people, I love you. I love us. We matter. Our lives matter." The post was eventually shared by Patrisse Cullors, a California-based artist and activist, with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. Along with Opal Tometi, a community organizer based in New York City, Ms. Garza and Ms. Cullors began to build the B.L.M. network on social media. The women wanted to draw attention to the ways that black and brown bodies are devalued and criminalized in the United States.

While the B.L.M. organization was born in 2013, Ms. Garza emphasizes that the organization is part of a movement that has been around for much longer. "The movements to eradicate racism and systemic oppression, of black people in particular, have been around since this country was founded," she tells me. She points to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s as an example.

In recent years, the fight for racial justice has been galvanized by the deaths of black Americans at the hands of police officers and armed citizens, including but not limited to: 17-year-old Jordan Davis, killed by an armed white man in Florida in 2012; 18-year-old Renisha McBride, killed by an armed white man in Michigan in 2013; 43-year-old Eric Garner, killed by a New York City police officer on Staten Island; 23-year-old Sylville Smith, killed by a Milwaukee police officer in 2016; and, most recently, Emantic Fitzgerald Bradford Jr., a 21-year-old black man shot in the back by a police officer in Hoover, Ala., last November.

Black Lives Matter has channeled the organization's passion into powerful posts on Facebook and Twitter, giving the country an unrelenting look into these deaths and those of other black Americans. In 2014, following the shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., Ms. Cullors and the activist and writer Darnell Moore organized the Black Life Matters Freedom Ride. In two weeks they gathered over 600 people to support the network's first in-person protest.

Ferguson quickly became a defining moment in the organization's history, and in the five years since, the movement has grown to become the first major racial justice

movement in the United States since the civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s. Unlike its predecessor, which was led by the direct action of churches and Christian leaders like the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the Black Lives Matter movement is by and large secular. There are B.L.M. chapters in England, Canada, South Africa, France and Germany. Activists within the organization have met with politicians to discuss policies to combat police brutality and launched Campaign Zero—focused on ending police brutality—and the Police Union Contract Project, which investigates the contracts given to U.S. police officers and emphasizes police accountability. “We’ve had politicians who were corrupt be ousted because of this movement,” Ms. Garza says. “We have had a new international dialogue about the pervasiveness and endurance of racism because of this movement.”

The group has also given rise to movements like the #SayHerName campaign, which raises awareness of the often ignored violence faced by black women and girls in the United States.

### A Voice Crying Out

Many Catholics of color feel that issues of racial justice are not sufficiently emphasized by church leaders. The B.L.M. movement has given voice to the experiences of black individuals in the United States through its unyielding critique of white privilege and the complicity of white Americans in systems of oppression.

Ariana Allen is a journalism student in her senior year at Loyola University in Chicago. Born and raised Catholic in Washington, D.C., she moved to St. Louis when she was 10. “I was very involved in church—choir, altar serving, drama ministry,” she tells me. “The church was always a good experience for me.” She says she never thought about her identity as a black woman and her identity as a Catholic as intersecting until she started at Loyola in 2015.

The death of Michael Brown awakened her to police brutality. “I had friends who knew him,” she tells me. “I have always been aware that I am a black woman, but that was the first time I really realized that blackness could be criminalized, that blackness could be used as something that scares others.” Ms. Allen’s home parish, Our Lady of Guadalupe, was involved in the Ferguson protests; but, she adds, most of the religious presence she witnessed was from the Baptist community. She tells me that if there were more of a push among Catholics to advocate for black lives, more black Americans would feel that the church was listening to them.



Many Catholics hope for further commitment from the church to conversations about racism and prejudice. Here, a woman speaks during an ecumenical prayer service at the grotto at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Ferguson, Mo. The service commemorated the first anniversary of the shooting death of 18-year-old Michael Brown.

Harriet Martin, a junior at Loyola University Chicago, was born and raised Catholic in Phoenix, Ariz. Her family moved to Virginia when she was 12 years old, where she lived for three years before moving to Alaska. Ms. Martin did not fully embrace her Catholic identity until her father, who was Baptist, joined the Catholic Church. Like Ms. Allen, she tells me that the church has not done enough when it comes to racial justice, adding that church leaders should embrace the Black Lives Matter movement. “The movement isn’t saying that all lives don’t matter—just that black people are being unjustly treated,” she says. “I think the movement and Catholicism go hand in hand.”

### Race and Reparations

While many individual Catholics have long worked for racial justice, the institutional response from the church has often been less obvious. In recent years, the Catholic Church in the United States has begun to acknowledge publicly many of the ways it has been complicit in systems of racism and oppression. Among those responding is Georgetown University, the oldest Catholic university in the United States. In 2016 it formed the Working Group on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation. The goal of the



CNS photo/Jason Redmond, Reuters

Demonstrators march in Seattle following the Missouri grand jury decision.

working group is to present the university's history and ties to slavery. In 1838 the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus, which founded Georgetown, sold 272 men, women and children whom it had earlier purchased as slaves.

The working group has published a report with recommendations for ways that the university can begin to atone for its slaveholding past. These include renaming buildings, creating the Institute for the Study of Slavery and Its Legacies and dedicating a memorial to the 272 enslaved persons sold by the Jesuits. John J. DeGioia, the president of Georgetown, also announced that the school will offer preferential admission to students who apply and are direct descendants of the individuals the Jesuits sold. Many have described Georgetown's initiatives as the first examples of what slavery reparations in the

United States might look like.

Onita Estes-Hicks was born in 1936 in New Orleans, where black Catholicism has a rich history. Her father was a fourth-degree member of the Knights of Peter Claver, and her mother loved the church. Growing up, there were always priests visiting her family home. From the Latin Masses to choir practices to the education she received from the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, Ms. Estes-Hicks loved the church.

Her faith was tested when in 2004 she discovered that her paternal great-great-grandparents, Nace and Biby Butler, and their children were among the slaves sold by the Jesuits of Georgetown. "This breached our awareness of ourselves, who we were as Catholics," Ms. Estes-Hicks tells me. For years, she worked with her family to recover the loss of identity the discovery spurred. They retold

## AMERICA'S GUIDE TO RETREATS

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Many of our readers are curious about retreats. What does one do on a retreat? Where does one go? What are some good retreat houses? Simply put, a retreat is an extended period of prayer, usually done in silence, and usually at a retreat house, where a team of spiritual directors helps you find God in your prayer. There are also different kinds of retreats. On a directed retreat a person meets daily with a spiritual director to discuss what is happening in prayer. A guided retreat focuses more on one topic (say, women's spirituality) and offers presentations as well as opportunities to meet with a director a few times. Preached retreats consist in listening to presentations and praying on your own, but with less opportunity for direction.

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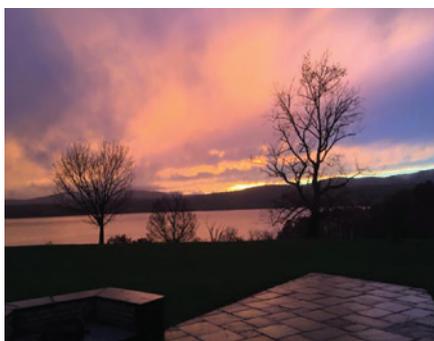
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Ph: (301) 392-0800; Email: [reservations@loyolaretreat.org](mailto:reservations@loyolaretreat.org)

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St. Mary's, Hatton Road, Kinnoull, Perth, PH2 7BP, Scotland, UK  
 Ph: +44 (0) 1738 624075; Email: [info@kinnoullmonastery.co.uk](mailto:info@kinnoullmonastery.co.uk)  
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*Continued from Page 30*

Catholic stories they had always heard growing up. Ms. Estes-Hicks says she found comfort in the memory of her father and the Catholic rituals he had practiced while alive.

It was not until 2016, however, when Georgetown publicly acknowledged the slave sale, that she began to feel whole again. “I came out with a deeper sense of what it meant to be a Catholic and also with a deeper sense of how Catholicism had failed us.”

### **Responding to the Call**

Some institutional progress is being made in the Catholic Church. Last year the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops formed the Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism, which was established to develop pastoral and political strategies to tackle racism in the United States. Bishop Shelton J. Fabre of Houma-Thibodaux, La., chairman of the committee, said in an email that the U.S.C.C.B. decided to form the committee because of an “awareness of a resurgence of harmful and racially charged attitudes, hatred and bigotry that have gripped the country.”

In the past year, Bishop Fabre says, the committee has held interfaith gatherings and hosted speakers like Bryan Stevenson, the founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Ala. Last November, the U.S. bishops promulgated the church’s first pastoral letter on racism since the statement “Brothers and Sisters to Us” was published in 1979.

The new pastoral letter, “Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love,” was drafted by the ad hoc committee along with the U.S.C.C.B.’s Committee on Cultural Diversity and touches on issues like the water crisis in Flint, Mich., police misconduct, racial biases in the criminal justice system and the relationship between racism and other forms of prejudice, including anti-Semitism and xenophobia. The letter also calls on Catholics to work for racial justice and proposes practical steps, including acknowledging the complicity of Catholics in the sin of racism, educating people about the nation’s legacies of slavery and discrimination and working for racial justice in parishes as well as in civic and social institutions. Bishop Fabre says he hopes the pastoral letter will challenge all Catholics.

Matthew Cressler, the author of *Authentically Black and Truly Catholic: The Rise of Black Catholicism in the Great Migrations*, says that while the newest pastoral letter is an improvement over the 1979 statement, it is not enough.

Mr. Cressler says that while the letter recognizes that racism is one of the United States’ historical sins, it fails to

define explicitly the role of the Catholic Church and white Catholics in this sin. “I think that it is imperative that white Catholics recognize their past and present and ongoing culpability and complicity and the maintenance of and sustaining of white supremacy in our country,” he tells me. He adds that the omission of the Black Lives Matter movement within the pastoral letter is troubling, adding that the Catholic Church has a lot to learn from one of the most important racial justice movements since the 1960s.

When asked why many within the church are unwilling to engage with members of the movement, Bishop Fabre said, “I don’t know how many within the church have or have not engaged with the members of the Black Lives Matter movement, nor do I know what their motivations are if they have not.” He continued, “What I do know is that as bishops we are teachers and our primary focus is teaching and preaching the Gospel and ideally divulging the beauty of the Catholic faith, wherein the notion of justice and mercy are central concepts.”

### **Words Into Actions**

Many black Catholics interviewed for this article appreciate the effort behind the new pastoral letter but have concerns about the execution of its recommendations.

Adrienne Alexander was born in Atlanta and raised Catholic. She credits the black parishes of her childhood with forming her Catholic identity. “For most of my life, my dad has worked for the church. Because of that, I was exposed to different parishes and expressions of Catholicism,” Ms. Alexander says. Her family never missed Mass, was involved in their parish community and prayed together daily.

Ms. Alexander, who works for a labor union in Chicago, where she lives with her husband and 2-year-old daughter, has been plugged into church news for most of her life. She has awaited the publication of the pastoral letter since the bishops conference announced the anti-racism committee last year, but she is disappointed with the results. “The letter had the feel of ‘Racism 101.’ You could sense the carefulness with which the words were crafted, the land mines which they seemed to be dodging,” she says. “I wish we still weren’t at entry-level discussions, but I guess that is to be expected when the conversation has not really been advanced at the national level in decades.”

Leslye Colvin echoes Ms. Alexander’s sentiments. Ms. Colvin was born in Ozark, Ala., in 1958. In the 1960s, three generations of her family converted to Catholicism and,



# I wish there had been a call for allies who are white to step forward. ●●

despite living in a segregated town, were welcomed by clergy and parishioners.

While she welcomes the latest efforts by the U.S. church, she wishes the pastoral letter had discussed white privilege and how it has contributed to racism and oppression in this country. She adds that the bishops should have made a clear distinction between prejudice and racism rather than describing the latter as something all Catholics have been complicit in. Anyone can hold prejudiced views, she believes, but racism involves individuals and systems with power using their resources to discriminate and oppress people of color.

“Anyone can be prejudiced, but in the society in which I live, in the United States of America, I, as an African-American woman, cannot be racist because I don’t have the power that accompanies being white,” she tells me. “White privilege cannot be dismantled by people of color. I wish that there had been a call for allies who are white to step forward.”

Father Michael Trail is a diocesan priest in Chicago. Born and raised Catholic, he grew up in a multicultural parish in Detroit. While the seeds of his vocation were planted in Detroit, it was after moving to Chicago and making his faith his own that he felt called to the priesthood. He was ordained in 2015. He is now the associate pastor at Queen of All Saints Basilica in the Sauganash neighborhood, an affluent community in the city of Chicago. As Catholics, Father Trail says, we are called to be vocal on issues like racial justice. He tries to make a difference through his preaching. “For me, a person of color, I think I can speak about it with a different perspective because I’ve seen it first hand.” He adds that he wants to build a bridge between the world he grew up knowing and the world of his parishioners.

Father Trail tells me he was pleased when the bishops created the anti-racism committee last year and published the pastoral letter in November. “I’m happy to see that the bishops put out the document because it’s a concrete mo-

ment to show that the bishops see racism as a serious issue that needs to be addressed.”

He adds that the place where he has seen the largest efforts from the church on racial justice is at the local level. He credits the office of Cardinal Blase Cupich, the archbishop of Chicago, for addressing and working to combat violence in the city. And while he welcomes the antiracism letter from the bishops, he, too, believes there must be more. Regarding the church’s response, he says, “On the national level, I think [it is] still very muted, and we’ve not grasped talking about racial justice as much as we should.”

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At the national level, programs like the U.S. bishops’ Catholic Campaign for Human Development can make a big difference by lifting up local activists and their work. In 2014, Meg Olson was based in St. Louis, where she worked in the advocacy department of Catholic Charities and directed the local chapter of the campaign. Upon hearing about the death of Michael Brown, she says she “felt incredibly called to go out in the streets.”

Ms. Olson helped medical teams that were assisting activists who had been exposed to tear gas or hit with rubber bullets. She worked with Metropolitan Congregations United, which is a part of the Gamaliel Network that trains community and faith leaders nationwide to advocate for social justice, to set up churches and places of worship as safe spaces for Ferguson activists. During the third week of her involvement in Ferguson, she received two key phone calls: one from Ralph McCloud, the national director of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, and another from the Rev. Jack Schuler, who at the time was the chaplain for Catholic Charities and a pastor in St. Louis. They both asked Ms. Olson the same question: What can we do to help you?

She said that local Catholic leaders like Father Schuler urged Catholics to get involved in the protest movement in Ferguson. “There are many Catholic parishes that are affiliates of Metropolitan Congregations United, but M.C.U., which is funded by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, was really on the ground organizing as a local faith-based organization,” she says. “It was really through them...that many of the Catholics that I was working with were entering into the work.”

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The three million African-American Catholics in the United States make up just over 4 percent of the U.S. Catholic population. While the number of black U.S.



Following the decision by a grand jury in Missouri not to indict a white police officer in the fatal shooting of Michael Brown, protestors marched in the streets of Oakland.

Catholics might be small, their faith is rich, and their stories and perspectives are an intrinsic part of the church. Many said that although at times they feel ignored by the church, they cannot imagine leaving. “I think it’s the long suffering of black Catholics, who had to go into a religion that, to all intents and purposes, was a white religion,” Ms. Estes-Hicks tells me. “But look what we did to it. We transformed it—we made that religion our own.”

All the black Catholics I spoke with hope that the church will continue to change and grow in its advocacy against racism. Many suggested practical steps: transparency and concrete follow-up when releasing documents about the church’s complicity in racism; Catholic leaders and clergy explicitly, consistently and continually calling out systems of oppression within the United States and white people’s roles in perpetuating racism. Many said the links should be more visible between the work bishops are doing and what the faithful are seeing. And, finally, almost everyone I spoke with agreed that the Catholic Church will not succeed in its work toward racial reconciliation unless the hierarchy enters into dialogue with the Black Lives Matter movement.

Father Trail believes this dialogue would be advantageous not just for the church but for the movement as well. “The church is in all aspects of society,” he says, “I think

that the Black Lives Matter movement can learn from the church in the way in which she dialogues with so many different paths of society. I think there is mutual enrichment all the way around.”

Ms. Garza, one of the founders of the movement, would welcome such dialogue. “The purpose of faith, I think, is to be connected to something bigger than yourself and to be able to carry out the agenda of that faith,” she says. Ms. Estes-Hicks echoes this sentiment. While she is grateful for the groundbreaking strides made at Georgetown, she says that the church overall must always challenge itself to do more. She believes a good next step would be entering into dialogue with activists within the movement.

“I don’t see how the church can remain outside something as significant as Black Lives Matter,” Ms. Estes-Hicks says. “It’s a Christlike movement.”

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Olga Segura is an associate editor of *America*.



# Without Love of Neighbor, No Salvation

By Peter Schineller

Let me begin this essay with a radical statement, one which of course will need much explanation and justification: “outside love of neighbor, no salvation.”

I recall hearing a story about the famous theologian Karl Rahner, S.J. A student going through a crisis of faith asked Rahner for books to read to regain his faith. Rahner replied: Rather than books, “go out and join a group of Christians who help the poor.” Somewhat similarly, it is said that for several years St. Vincent de Paul suffered temptations against the faith. How were these doubts and temptations resolved? They left him when he resolved to spend his life serving the poor.

Deep down, at stake is the question of how

and where we find and touch God.

My opening statement is derived from another statement that has played a key role in the history of the church: “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*,” that is, “outside the church, no salvation.” I am arguing that in the last few decades the Catholic Church, at a theological level, has moved from “outside the church, no salvation” to “outside of love of neighbor, no salvation.” Yes, this is affirming that one can be saved and reach eternal life without being a full member of the Catholic Church, without baptism by water and the seven sacraments, without explicit belief in Jesus Christ—indeed, even without explicit belief in God!



unsplash

Radical? Yes. Absurd? I think not. In fact, I wish to show that Catholic theology has moved in this direction and can truly affirm “outside of love of neighbor, no salvation.”

One important step is found in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. In addition to affirming that the Jewish people and Muslims can be saved, the council went further to include atheists, those who do not believe in God, as among those who could be saved (in the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” No. 16):

Nor shall divine providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who, without any fault of theirs, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life.

Note that the church affirms that grace is necessary; and in the Catholic tradition, all grace is the grace of Jesus Christ. How one is saved is put powerfully, positively and beautifully in the council document “The Church in the Modern World,” No. 22:

All this holds true not only for Christians but for all people of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly. Because Christ died for everyone, and since all are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery.

It is by contact with, sharing in and living the paschal mystery that anyone and everyone can be saved. And here we return to the theme of this article: “outside of love of neighbor, no salvation.” In a word, being a partner in the paschal mystery means sacrificing, thinking of others, following Jesus—even to laying down one’s life for others.

We can arrive at a similar conclusion by reflecting on the importance of “love of neighbor” in the Scriptures. In Matthew 25 we have a description of the Last Judgment. Note that the criterion of judgment is not belief in God, not membership in the church, not baptism, but whether one reaches out to help the poor, the person in need. “I was hungry, thirsty, in prison, etc., and you visited me.” Love of neighbor is *the* criterion. The person in need is where we not only touch and meet

Jesus, but the place where salvation is gained or lost.

A look at the Gospel of John and First Letter of John likewise affirms this centrality and indeed priority of love of neighbor. “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another” (Jn 13:34). And “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12). Of course John does not deny love of God, but the emphasis here is strongly on love of neighbor. The letter of John is even stronger: “The message from the beginning is that we should love one another” (1 Jn 3:14). He continues that “those who say ‘I love God’ and hate their brothers and sisters are liars, for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen” (1 Jn 4:20).

St. Paul too emphasizes love of neighbor. “The commandments...are summed up in this word, ‘love your neighbor as yourself’” (Rom 13:9). The letter of James states that “religion pure and undefiled is to care for the widow” (Jas 1:26). He continues that “faith without works is dead” (Jas 2:26). Dare we say that in reality there are not two great commandments, but one, namely to love the neighbor? We can love the neighbor only if we love God, and the way to show our love for God is by loving the neighbor.

How did this shift, this renewed emphasis on “love of neighbor” rather than focus on the love of God come about? And what does it reveal about the nature of Christianity? One factor would be that we see men and women of all religious traditions, and those without faith in God, who do love the neighbor. From our Christian perspective, we say that for this to be possible, God’s grace and love must be with them. Thus we have a more generous and more expansive view of how God’s grace is present and operative in the world. We have expanded our view of baptism from water baptism to include baptism of desire. We have expanded our view of Jesus Christ to say that if we love the neighbor we are living with an implicit or anonymous faith in Jesus Christ.

What does this mean for the mission of the Christian and the Christian churches? Clearly there is a shift. No longer do we think of those unbaptized as sent to hell or limbo. Infants who die without baptism are entrusted to the love and mercy of God (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1261). We say too that the Jewish covenant is still valid and that the Jewish people will be saved by being faithful to that covenant. See the 2015 Vatican doc-

ument, “The Gifts and Calling of God Are Irrevocable.” Those who do not believe in God can be saved by following their conscience and leading a good life. This means loving the neighbor.

Surely we welcome and accept those who wish to convert to Catholicism, but we do not have the obligation to proselytize. Might we say that our concern and our mission is not primarily to convert others to God or to the church, but to love of neighbor. In addition, because God’s grace, love and truth are widely and generously distributed, we have the opportunity and the mission to listen to and learn from others, from all religious and even atheistic traditions. We tread slowly and respectfully when we enter into dialogue, because we say, “We are standing on sacred ground, and God has been there before us.”

Rather than undercutting or minimizing the importance of the Catholic Church and membership in it by this emphasis on love of neighbor, the church should be a visible sign of love of neighbor. Pope Francis remarked that we do not have the obligation to proselytize. At the same time, he emphasized that Catholics should evangelize by the living example of their love. The church will grow by being an attractive witness.

Similarly, instead of undercutting or minimizing the importance of the Mass for Catholics, the focus on love of neighbor gains new emphasis and power from the Catholic liturgy. Pope John Paul II spoke of the Mass as “the permanent school of charity, justice, and peace,” and as the “school of active love for the neighbor.” The Mass leads to mission, especially to love of neighbor.

Moreover, if we focus on the meaning and centrality of love of neighbor, we gain insight into the special nature of Christianity. Christianity is not so much a series of doctrines, articles of a creed, but a way of life, the way of love. Christianity is a worldly religion, rooted in the world, and that is where we find and serve God. That is where we achieve salvation. In Jesus Christ we see God and humanity, God and the neighbor come together. In Jesus Christ we see that God is love, and that to love God we must love the neighbor. There is an inseparability between love of God and love of neighbor. It is one movement, the movement enabled by grace (the grace of God in Christ Jesus) to which we give witness.

Rather than a reduction or shrinking of Christianity to love of neighbor, it is an expansion, so that God is met

every day, especially in the person in need, as in Matthew 25. Rather than God being edged out or eliminated, God is found in the near, in the neighbor, as well as in the transcendent. God is found in love more than in fear.

I hope these reflections can show the wisdom of the words of Rahner that we began with. If you want to find or re-find God, go out and join those who love and help the poor. Jesus Christ is a model for this in what he did and what he said. “Greater love has no one, than to lay down his or her life for a friend” (Jn 15:13). Jesus preaches and lives the story of the good shepherd who goes out in search of the lost. Jesus tells us to model our lives after the good Samaritan, and after the father in the story of the prodigal son.

The secular is not really secular. In the Christian, incarnational worldview, our task is not to flee from our world as if it were a vale of tears, a place of exile. Rather it is to see earth as a garden. We are laborers in the Lord’s vineyard, bringing love, being love in our world. Yet we should not think that this emphasis on love of neighbor is easy. As Dorothy Day reminds us, “Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing.” All too often, we can and do remain self-enclosed, self-centered instead of reaching out to see, touch, help the neighbor.

Finally, in a strange paradox, the Second Vatican Council reminds us that because we are Roman Catholics, we will be judged not more mildly but more severely. We have been given more. In Christ we have a deeper revelation of the love of God. If we fail to respond to this, we shall be judged all the more severely.

All the church’s children should remember that their exalted status is to be attributed not to their own merits but to the special grace of Christ. If they fail, moreover, to respond to that grace in thought, word and deed, not only shall they not be saved but they will be the more severely judged (“Constitution on the Church,” No. 14).

We have come a long way, from a church-centered worldview to a position where love is at the center, where God is love and where we show and share in that love of God by loving the neighbor. Indeed, “outside of love there is no salvation.”

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Peter Schineller, S.J., is a former associate editor of *America*.



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# IGNATIAN YOGA

By Joe Hoover

Fad, workout or spiritual practice? A skeptical Jesuit investigates.

“Ignatian yoga,” a new entity that is drawing enthusiastic crowds to retreats and workshops across the country, sounds like a gimmick. People love yoga. People love the spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola. Mash the two together, and you have created a nice, marketable concept that can sweep a bundle of folks into the arms of the Lord and/or the Society of Jesus.

A Jesuit yoga teacher in a cobalt blue T-shirt (“IHS” nestled in the middle of a lotus flower) guides students through Christian spirituality and then mesmerizes them with yoga poses. They do this in a church sanctuary, rubber mats spread on marble floors. It seems perfect for a world in which anything can become anything, in which all spiritualities and traditions are completely fluid and can bleed into each other with little self-awareness or sense of fundamental boundaries.

It seems perfect because the Catholic faith is spiritual and yoga is spiritual and both have to do with people and people are good and they have souls and a corner of a good person’s soul touches Jesus and another corner of the soul brushes against yoga because yoga exists, and thus Jesus and Patanjali, Francis Xavier and Swami Vivekananda, Rome and Delhi, the empty tomb and the emptying of desire are essentially in some broader cosmic sense part of, if not the same thing. Why make distinctions between the two when to distinguish is to deny, to exclude, to create harsh boundaries? And so yoga and Christian spirituality can be in some ways two co-equal wings of the same Creator and his entire recommended path of living, and so it all works out. It all works out. Time for final savasana.

The practice of Ignatian yoga in the United States began in 2013 at Fordham University with a Jesuit scholas-



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# When you are doing something slowly, you have more time to notice what you are doing. ●●

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tic named Bobby Karle. A certified yoga instructor, Karle began offering sessions in yoga framed by Jesuit principles before weeknight liturgies at the campus church. By 2017, Ignatian yoga had taken shape as an established organization. Karle and his teaching partner, Alan Haras, have held workshops and retreats in Hollywood, Detroit, Milford, Ohio, Worcester, Mass., Boston, New York, Cleveland and even Australia.

Last year, I gave a talk and led a chapel meditation at one of these Ignatian yoga retreats. It took place at a retreat center about an hour north of Manhattan. I had never attended an Ignatian yoga event, and I admit, even though I was one of the speakers, I was a bit skeptical of the whole thing.

In contradistinction to the above litany of modern spirituality, it seemed that with “Ignatian yoga” you could end up with either a corruption of yoga or a corruption of Catholic spirituality. Yoga is plucked from its roots in the Rig Veda and various Indian philosophies and elsewhere (it has a complicated lineage) and lashed onto the altar of Christ. Yoga undergoes the old, sly Christian gimmick of retrofitting pagan rites and festivals for the worship of Jesus (see: Easter, Christmas, the Super Bowl, kind of). Or, inversely, Christian spirituality is attached like a barnacle to a segment of pop culture to draw in more converts, like staging a prayer meeting in the parking lot of an Ariana Grande concert, and Christianity somehow becomes lesser.

Further, members of the Society of Jesus are used to having “Ignatian” or “Jesuit” strung like a verbal sling around any number of spiritual or educational things that Catholics run to lend them a sort of mystical legitimacy or “brand recognition.” The more quickly an institution founded by Jesuits is renamed to include the term “Jesuit,” for instance, the more certainly that institution has lost

most of its Jesuits. If Duluth Prep suddenly becomes Duluth Jesuit Prep, it means there are now between one and zero Jesuits at the school.

But back to the actual yoga. Consider this: Most American yoga is actually workout yoga. It does not involve Americans—80 percent of whom are in one fashion or another Christian—making limber supplication to pagan gods. Contrary to the warnings of some church leaders, the practice of yoga is not tantamount to a kind of physical heresy. American gym yoga is mainly done by people who want to get fit, work out kinks, do some cardio, meet guys, find some inner calm, strengthen muscles, get centered, shed pounds, meet women—the usual reasons people go to gyms.

Yoga in this country is not overflowing with people who read Sanskrit, attend all kinds of profoundly impacting yoga retreats or meditate deeply on Vedic spirituality. Sure, some people are into that. And in most yoga classes, you are encouraged by teachers with yoga advice that can sometimes meld into life advice. You may hear a quote at the end of the session, sometimes by a yogi, sometimes by someone like Mother Teresa or Marianne Williamson. And God bless, it is helpful and meaningful. But for a Christian, the rituals of yoga are not by any stretch a substitute for the rituals of the paschal mystery of Christ.

I do, every so often, hot yoga, cheap yoga, non-spiritual yoga, workout yoga. I started off a few years ago with a rigorous practice of Bikram yoga in St. Louis. (An acting teacher once said to our class: “Bikram yoga? Isn’t that the lowest form of yoga?” I know what she means: It is a mass-marketed and—until recent court decisions and controversies surrounding its founder Bikram Choudhury—an all-but-franchised thing, with an unvarying sequence of 26 poses and even a prescribed “patter” by the yoga teachers. It is also a smoking workout.)

At the same time, no matter how gym-ish it is and whether or not the yoga teacher says anything vaguely denominational at all, yoga is always a spiritual practice. But how?

Because it is a slow workout. And when you are doing something slowly, you have more time to notice what you are doing. And one of the first things you notice when you slowly start to do slow American gym yoga is you that you have a body. You have a body, and this body is doing things on a rubber mat, on a wood floor, flanked by mirrors and ballet barres, and surrounded by two dozen insanely good-looking 25-year-olds.

Doing a workout, slowly, with a guide who is encouraging you to stay in the poses, to make minor adjustments, to breathe, is by nature a spiritual exercise. It is harder to pay attention when you are, say, playing soccer or running track. No coach is going to scream as you crash down the finish line to “align your chakra with the sprint” or “open your heart space on the final straightaway.”

Granted, some people get into a zone where they really do feel God’s spirit at work in the body during even the more robust sports. In the 1981 movie “Chariots of Fire,” the runner Eric Liddell delivers the greatest sports-leads-us-to-Jesus line in all of British cinematic history. Arguing with his sister, who wants him to quit track and go begin his missionary work in China, Liddell says gently: “Jenny, God made me for China. But he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure.”

And yoga can do the same, regardless of whether you are looking for it or not. You can feel a great spirit moving within. And Catholics name that spirit God and name Christ God incarnate.

At the retreat I attended, Karle and Haras began sessions with a talk on the fundamentals of Ignatian spirituality and the principles of yoga and how these two traditions can benefit one another. They then led the retreatants through the asanas (yoga poses). Following the asanas, while the students rested on their mats, Karle and Haras led them through a guided Ignatian meditation.

The point of the retreat was not to fabricate some awkward blend of the two spiritualities, to create a room full of half-yogi, half-Catholic centaurs. Karle describes Ignatian yoga as a vehicle for calming and centering a person, so he or she is able to receive more fully the Christian spirituality on offer. In Ignatian yoga, unlike many current trends in spirituality, distinctions actually are made. The retreat offered Mass and confession but without any horrifying syncretism. We did not celebrate the liturgy while flowing through vinyasa poses; the priest did not intone “Namaste” instead of “Body of Christ” while distributing Communion. Mass was Mass, in a chapel, with the regular prayers, and confession was confession.

That said, outside of Mass, the asanas were often practiced in the church sanctuary, around the altar. While this is not sacrilegious or heretical or anything, it did feel like a bit much. You can connect yoga and Christianity without having to literally bring them together around the table of the holy and perfect sacrifice of Christ. But maybe I am terrifically rigid. (Karle tells me the location is not an essential

feature of Ignatian yoga.)

During the retreat, while leading the yoga classes, Karle and Haras came off as very normal and funny but without trying to be normal and funny in that cloying way that some teachers do. They had no schtick. They bore authority but not smugness. Smug is the death of religion. Smugness in a spiritual leader asphyxiates everything she is trying to do: “I have God figured out and even you, seeker, with your questions and mistakes, are worthy of my amused smile and gentle, pitying instruction.” Karle and Haras put people at ease by their energy and bearing. The two leaders were calm and peaceful but not—and this is hard to describe or convey exactly—not in the typical yoga-teacher way.

What is more, they had long hair, but somehow they did not have long hair in a cool way. They were from Detroit. Haras, in fact, had just this side of a mullet. And Bobby Karle is possibly the last non-ironic Jesuit living outside a novitiate in the entire United States. He is just a ridiculously great guy. So my experience of Ignatian yoga was, all in all, Detroit, uncool, Catholic, noncondescending, un-ironic, anti-yoga teacher, meditative, non-syncretic, lovely yoga. It was hard not to like it.

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Brother Joe Hoover, S.J., is *America’s* poetry editor.

# HEALTH CARE IS A HUMAN RIGHT

Jesus tells us, *“Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”* Mt 25:40

As Catholics and Christians, we believe that we are all created in the image and likeness of God and are called to care for one another. Health care is essential to human flourishing – not just for the few or the fortunate, but for everyone.

As physicians, nurses and professionals of Catholic health care – the largest group of nonprofit health providers in the U.S. – we see first-hand the suffering caused by the lack of access to health care in our emergency departments, hospitals, clinics and long-term care facilities in communities across the country.

Thankfully today, Medicaid makes it possible for 74 million low-income Americans and those with complex medical needs to have insurance coverage to get care they need; care that helps them go to work, stay in school, take care of their families and live productive lives in the community. It allows them to get check-ups, buy medications, and steps in when a person falls on hard times, ensuring access to medical treatments and medicines during recovery from an illness or care for a sick child or parent.

Yet, there are those who want to impose limits and restrict access to Medicaid for the very people who need it most. According to recent data from the Kaiser Family Foundation:

- **60%** of working age, non-disabled Medicaid recipients work full- or part-time.
- **Eight out of ten** adult Medicaid beneficiaries are in working families and need the services and security of Medicaid to continue to work.
- **49%** of all births in the United States are made possible by Medicaid.

As citizens, Catholics and members of the Catholic Church’s health ministry, we need to stand together to protect this vital safety net program for our children, the elderly, disabled persons, veterans and individuals with complex medical needs.

The Catholic Health Association of the United States has launched the national “Medicaid Makes It Possible” campaign to dispel myths about Medicaid and show how it benefits patients, families, health facilities and parishes across the country. Videos, posters, fact sheets and additional resources are available at [chausa.org/Medicaid](http://chausa.org/Medicaid) for meetings, community events, parishes and advocacy initiatives.

## CAMPAIGN SPOTLIGHT: "MEDICAID MAKES IT POSSIBLE"

A key focus of the campaign is to share stories from people whose lives are directly impacted and improved by Medicaid.

People like Jill who had an unexpected pregnancy during her medical training and needed Medicaid to get vital maternity care and earn her degree. Today, she is a practicing optometrist and a Medicaid provider herself.

Or 3-year-old Micah who has autism and complex medical problems that affect his speech and ability to eat and walk. Thanks to comprehensive treatment made possible by Medicaid coverage, he is making great progress in communicating with his family and doing things that were never possible before.

Join us to share your stories about what Medicaid makes possible for families, patients, health facilities and parishes in your community at [chausa.org/Medicaid](http://chausa.org/Medicaid) and [#MedicaidPossible](https://twitter.com/MedicaidPossible).

# HELP PROTECT MEDICAID

MEDICAID MAKES IT  
POSSIBLE FOR

**1 IN 5**  
Americans

INCLUDING MANY WITH COMPLEX MEDICAL NEEDS

to access  
affordable health  
coverage.



SOURCE: The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF)

THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF THE  
UNITED STATES IS GATHERING STORIES  
ABOUT THE POSITIVE IMPACT MEDICAID HAS  
ON THE HEALTH OF OUR NATION.

SHARE YOUR STORIES @ [CHAUSA.ORG/MEDICAID](https://CHAUSA.ORG/MEDICAID)



Medicaid makes  
it possible.



# *The Spiritual Case Against the Mobile Office*

By Peter Fleming



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◀ Computerization is making us increasingly nomadic in every part of our lives—even in our workplaces.

The thirst for distraction is a sure sign of despair—and we live in one of the most distracted cultures imaginable.

Of course, computer culture feeds such distraction and has made it an addiction. People flit from screen to screen, website to website, meaningless piece of gossip to meaningless piece of gossip. What can be said about computers may be said of any human tool. Like a hammer, a computer can help build something significant, or it can alternatively do in your head.

But it is not technology per se that is causing our restlessness. What is worrisome is the way computerization is being used to make us increasingly nomadic in every part of our lives—even in our workplaces. The open offices and flexible seating assignments that are now commonplace promise, rather like false prophets, more creativity, communication and (most of all) profit. But we must ask, in the manner of Jesus' incisive question, "What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" (Mk 8:36).

Perhaps this brand of nomadism is not new. It was pagan culture that made restlessness a spiritual exercise. Pagan worshipers in the pre-Christian era had to remember so many gods, pay them homage and rush from statue to statue, temple to temple. It was as if, without the light of Christ in their lives, they could

only run around in a panic, seeking tiny pieces of solace wherever they could glean them.

Now we have adopted the ancient worship practice for our modern working habits.

"Hot desks," for the blissfully uninitiated, are single places at work that can be occupied by a variety of employees at different times of the day. Nobody has a place to settle. Everybody can be "deskless," or at least, have no desk they can call their own. This impersonal place, open to all, belonging to none, is part of a phenomenon that is coming to be known as "hoteling," by which any office worker can "check in" to an open seat on a first come, first served basis.

This supposedly happy state of eternal disturbance, of mobile and mutable inconstancy, is arguably the end product of one of the sadder American cultural trends.

America has given the world the gloriously astonishing notion of the "drive-through," and not just for fast food. There are drive-through pharmacies and even drive-through banks, which almost makes the getaway car redundant. But then, one could make the case that American culture has pioneered modern materialism; and materialism breeds a million ever-changing pagan gods, and therefore a great deal of pointless racing around.

Jesus, however, was a great sitter. Sometimes, he even reclined. Great moments of min-

istry were accomplished sitting down: the Sermon on the Mount ("He went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him," Mt 5:1); the discussion with the woman at the well ("Jacob's well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well," Jn 4:6); the Last Supper ("as they reclined at table and were eating...." Mk 14:18).

True, he travelled. That was part of his mission, but when he arrived, he sat. We should not assume that it was his ideal to have to move from place to place before sitting; it was the pressures of an imperfect world that forced him into physical restlessness. Jesus was begotten for permanence: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the word was God." Having accomplished an ultimate spiritual permanence beyond this physical world, he is, we are assured, permanently "seated at the right hand of the Father." We know where to find him.

In the Catholic world of Christian humanism, there are fewer troubling words than those used after a pope has died and, for a brief spell, the church is without its human spiritual center: *sede vacante*. Roughly translated, it means, "The chair [of Peter] being empty." Ss. Peter and Paul both found their final mortal home in the eternal city of Rome. St. Paul, despite traveling a great deal, loved to find one place after having traveled, usually close



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# Personal reflection flourishes in familiar places. To be perpetually on the run is to be controlled by whoever is pursuing you.

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to the synagogue, where he could sit, think and be found. His day job was tentmaking, but in sitting and stitching impermanent structures of transience, he shaped enduring metaphors of the eternal: “If the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands” (2 Cor 5:1).

St. Peter certainly did not want to be dragged off to the other end of the world, to Rome. He could probably have remained in Jerusalem (or perhaps, Capernaum) until old age. But together with Paul, he made Rome the permanent seat of Christianity, and the church was rescued from a potential history of distracting nomadism so that it could reflect on the things that last.

Whenever anyone has had important and lasting work to be done, they have invariably established a place for themselves that is as permanent as anything in this life can be: a room, a study, a desk with shelves. Adequate and secure housing has become a statement of principle in the United Nations. The modern principles of personal and intellectual freedom have assumed

the right of a human being to a space that is their own, free from the impositions of the passing and restless parade. As with so much that is mysteriously spiritual, such thinking aligns with the natural realities of human life. We think freely when we can repose in familiar spaces that are our own. Reflection requires respite.

It is also a strange inversion of alleged progress that the technological revolution that forced us to sit behind a computer for hours a day has now made possible a sort of endless restlessness through newer and newer forms of the addictive machines: hence the “hot desks,” the “agile workplaces” and “hoteling.” The idols have shifted into our hands, our pockets. Who needs a *lararium* when you have a laptop? But personal reflection flourishes in familiar places. To be perpetually on the run is to be controlled by whoever is pursuing you.

But eternal motion is for pinballs, not people. It is the great heritage of Christianity that it wrestles with the difference between the transient and the eternal, the things of this world and the things of heaven. Jesus travelled so that he could sit with friends, like Martha and Mary,

and tell them that Mary, sitting and pondering in her own familiar home, had chosen the better path.

It is when human beings settle down to do the important things of life, like composing a symphony, writing “Hamlet” or pondering the immutable laws of the universe, that one needs to sit at one’s own familiar and permanent workplace. Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who labor...and I will give you rest.” He might well have added, “and a desk.”

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Peter Fleming is the author of *Would I Like Jesus?* (Paulist Press) and *The Unexpected Light: Reflections From a Year of Mercy* (Morning Star Publishing). He is a regular columnist for *Australian Catholics* magazine.

## Flannery's Pigs

*"I owe my existence and cheerful countenance to the pituitary glands of thousands of pigs butchered daily in Chicago, Illinois at the Armour packing plant. If pigs wore garments I wouldn't be worthy to kiss the hems of them."*

—Flannery O'Connor describing ACTH, a drug made from hormonal secretions from pigs and administered to treat lupus.

I see them lining up for slaughter,  
Judas at the head of the pack  
grunting his way to survival, while my  
pigs do not stand a chance, doomed creatures  
that they are, and it's a good thing. The fact  
is, they save me. Without them I'd be dead  
as they are after the bloody deed gets  
done. I'm not one to sentimentalize.  
I'd win no prizes for sweetness in the sweep-  
stakes of life. Earth is a hard place,  
but you get used to it. I can't weep  
for what must be, nor can I erase  
the need that blinds and binds us. The debt I owe is big.  
Each day I rise alive, I am the Judas pig.

## Flannery's Conversion

*"I don't know if anybody can be converted without seeing themselves in a kind of blasting annihilating light, a blast that will last a lifetime."*

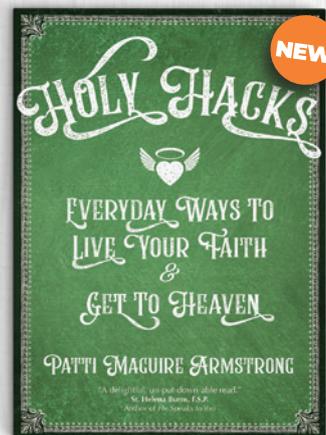
—Flannery O'Connor

I felt the first blast when my father passed  
out of this life and into another.  
My face flushed hot and my young body shook  
like a bride's, the sheer shock of losing that man  
to eternity. I felt death's black breath  
in my ear hissing his dark song.  
I knew I was alone, despite my mother.  
She couldn't save me from what could & can  
devour me. I wouldn't look  
when they set him in the ground. I asked  
God to forgive my sins. And for a long  
time prayer was private shibboleth  
to keep me out of hell. I loved & hated  
the world, stood in the light and waited.

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Angela Alaimo O'Donnell has published five full-length collections of poems, including *Still Pilgrim* and *Saint Sinatra*. Her collection *Andalusian Hours* is forthcoming in 2020. She teaches at Fordham University in New York City.

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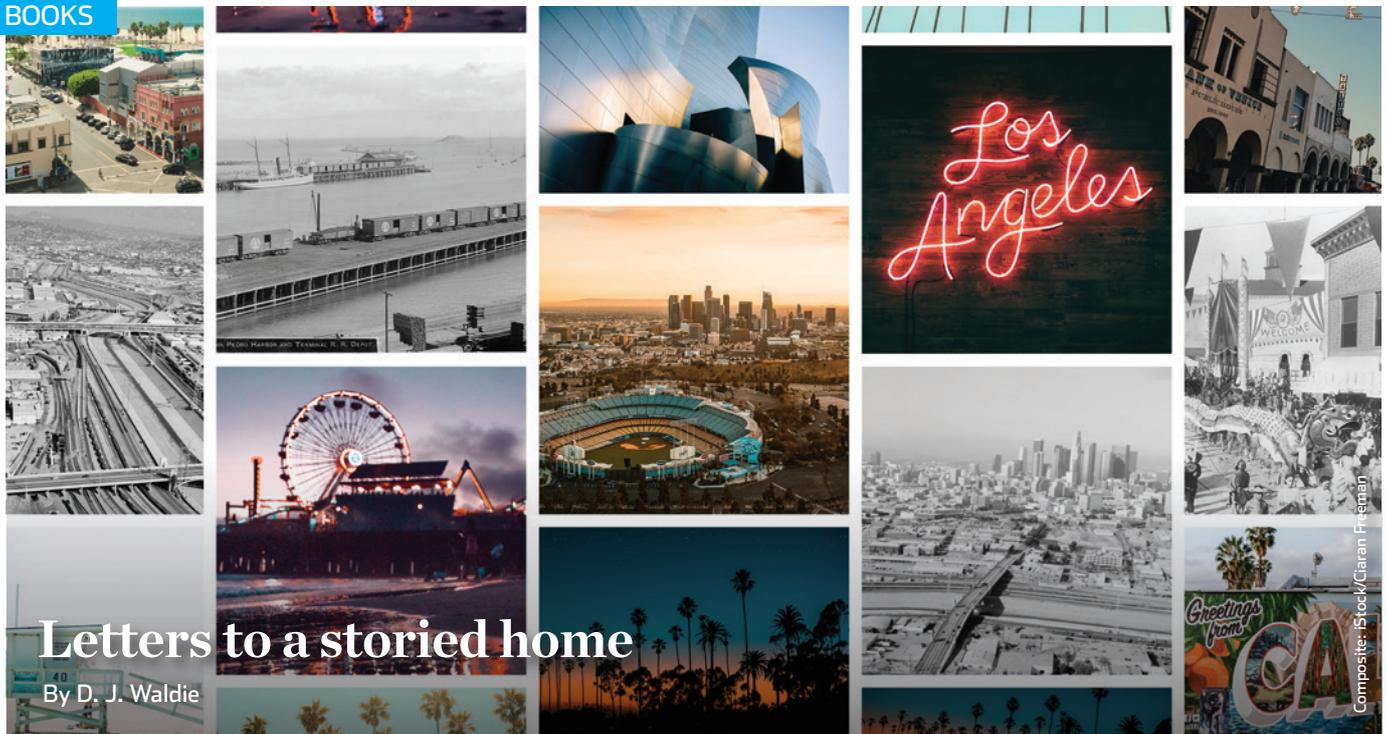
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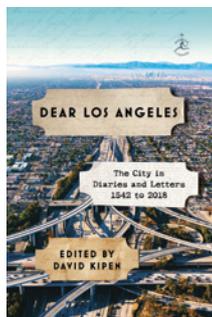
  
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## Letters to a storied home

By D. J. Waldie



**Dear Los Angeles**  
The City in Diaries  
and Letters, 1542  
to 2018

Edited By David Kipen  
The Modern Library  
559p \$26

Los Angeles is a city that grabs you by the arm—nearly by the throat—and insists you hear another explanation of what it means. In *Dear Los Angeles: The City in Diaries and Letters, 1542 to 2018*, editor David Kipen has amassed more than 900 attempts. They are sudden glimpses and micro-histories of his hometown excerpted from profiles, interviews, telegrams and journals, as well as letters and diaries, skewing who is included to those famous enough (or brazen enough) to have published their accounts. For balance—and greater immediacy—Kipen includes the unpublished reflections of today’s Angeleños.

In his enthusiasm for more, Kipen begins the book with his own email address and an invitation. “Haul out your *bubbe’s* Saratoga trunk. Open up your *abuelita’s* closet...,” and send him the best bits from their yellowed notebooks and bundled love letters. I hope he gets thousands.

The template for *Dear Los Angeles* is Teresa Carpenter’s *New York Diaries* from 2012 and Simon Brett’s *The Faber Book of Diaries* from 1989. Like them, *Dear Los Angeles* has entries for each day of a year, complementing, quarreling and hybridizing across decades and centuries. Stories wheel within stories, steadily picking up density and texture: a 19th-century fragment in January echoing through a 21st-century one in November. The book is as much a commentary on the action of memory as it is a way of seeing Los Angeles. The form of the book enacts an eternal periodicity, ever-returning time conferring what sacredness it can on a city that Bertolt Brecht, on contemplating hell, thought “must be still more like Los Angeles.”

Brecht has the company of other writers in suffering. William Faulkner, John Dos Passos, Tennessee Williams, F. Scott Fitzgerald and P. G. Wodehouse (among others) stewed in Hollywood, writing for a big payday and hating that they were doing it. Williams, told to write a vehicle for Lana Turner to star in, felt like “an obstetrician required to successfully deliver a mastodon from a beaver.” Wodehouse complained, “No one knows anything about anything at all in Hollywood.” “I’ve said goodbye to Paramount, so I feel very much better,” wrote a relieved Dos Passos.

Their Los Angeles was a shrouded city of “treacherous unbrightness,” in Faulkner’s bleak phrase—the city whose people, climate and architecture are contemptibly insubstantial yet perversely resilient.

Ironically is supposed to be the only way to look at Los Angeles, but *Dear Los Angeles* gives a contrarian’s view. What the book delivers initially is Kipen’s wonder at the onrushing pres-

ence of so many lives intersecting in a particular place. Kipen quips in his introduction that Los Angeles is the place Angeleños are “forever approaching but can never quite get to.” It mirrors a truth about Los Angeles (although not the whole truth): This place has been a collective of the footloose from the moment, 13,000 or so years ago, when its first possessors walked through a pass in the bordering hills down to a nameless river that crossed a wide plain open to the sea. Their Tongva and Chumash successors, arriving 3,000 years ago from the east (as many later migrants would), painted their commentary on rock faces as spirals, cogwheels and the silhouettes of men. Their Spanish successors—missionaries and soldiers—wrote glowingly of real estate opportunities and named them after saints’ days. Some names stuck, including *el pueblo de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles*, given in 1781 and soon whittled down to Los Angeles and finally to L.A.

The Franciscan missionaries were gone by 1840 by order of republican Mexico. The missions’ Native American neophytes were scattered soon after. The lordly *Californio* rancheros, made American by conquest in 1847, were bankrupt by the drought years of the 1860s. Their American successors were a diaspora of Basque wool dealers, French winemakers, German-Jewish dry goods merchants and shrewd entrepreneurs from the South for whom Los Angeles was the necessary end of their wandering westward. Always diverse, today’s city is even more so.

In 1850, it was a village made of dried mud (i.e., adobe bricks). By 1886, it was a plausible simulation of a Midwest county seat—a farm town

with bumptious ambitions and hardly 34,000 residents. Then the rest of America rushed in on newly laid transcontinental rail lines, first to be fleeced by real estate speculators and then to build the 20th-century Los Angeles that glints and blurs in the observations and recollections of its casual tourists, unhappy sojourners and more permanent settlers. They thought Los Angeles was exceptional—altogether too perfect as heaven or hell. Imperfect Los Angeles is neither. Nor is it Hollywood, despite the temptation to confer its eccentricities on the whole city. What unites the Angeleños in *Dear Los Angeles*, apart from an inordinate number of them being interred at Forest Lawn, is not geography. It is the human ordinariness of their conjunction with an often shockingly beautiful place.

I’m not sure that Kipen, with whom I have shared speaker’s platforms, would entirely agree with this assessment. Yet to have any moral point at all, Los Angeles cannot be the great exception of American place-making. The city’s story is an instance of the American experience, argued the late historian Kevin Starr, and essential to that experience. It is a story of homelessness and longing to call somewhere home, of hungry migrants and the plumply self-satisfied, of killers and those they killed, suicides and births, of chance meetings and failed connections in a city, half built up and half torn down, where the dead are too often buried in forgetfulness. What other than all this ordinariness would ever make some of us love Los Angeles? And yet we do. But steadfastness in love is hard in the face of the city’s distances and its aching, unmet de-

sires. “Los Angeles, give me some of you!” the novelist John Fante pleaded. Los Angeles did not reply.

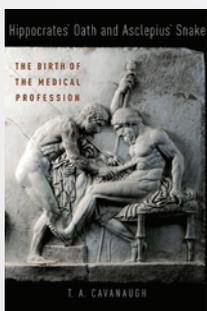
In these fragments of what it has meant to become an Angeleño—or to have rejected that appellation utterly—are boom times and busts, tyrannies of white privilege big and small, disasters and reinventions, police militarization and civil unrest, optimistic suburbanism and Didionesque anomie, million-dollar teardowns and poor families penned 10 to a room. What distinguishes Kipen’s achievement in *Dear Los Angeles* is his reluctance to find the obvious interpretation and his readiness to remain mystified. The tropes of sunshine and noir never explained very much about this flawed, tragic and humanizing city.

Readers who persist will come to the end of days in *Dear Los Angeles* to find Kipen’s droll—and occasionally snarky—sketches of his contributors. H. L. Mencken “enjoyed his brief reporting visit like a mountain lion enjoys a mule deer.” Discovering the novels of John Fante “is like tasting garlic for the first time.” Don Marquis, creator of the newspaper feature “archy and mehitabel,” came to Los Angeles to write scripts and “hated it. Went home.”

With luck, you will not hate the city in *Dear Los Angeles*. You may even marvel at how much it shares with the geography of your own home, and just as storied and fabulous.

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D. J. Waldie is the author of *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir, Where We Are Now, House and other books.*



### Hippocrates' Oath and Asclepius' Snake

By T. A. Cavanaugh  
Oxford University Press  
192p \$29.95

#### First, do no harm

Have you ever wondered why a snake entwined on a staff is a symbol of medicine? Or why doctors take an oath to practice medicine? Or what would be lost if they did not take the oath? T. A. Cavanaugh answers these questions and more in a readable, clear and insightful exploration of medical practice ancient and modern. *Hippocrates' Oath and Asclepius' Snake: The Birth of the Medical Profession* is required reading for anyone interested in the ethics of medicine.

To understand the meaning of a text requires an understanding of the original context, in this case the ancient Greek context. So Cavanaugh's approach is interdisciplinary, drawing upon sources like the *Iliad* of Homer, the "Clouds" of Aristophanes and the "Protagoras" of Plato to cast light on the ancient oath.

As Alasdair MacIntyre pointed out, a practice like medicine can be undertaken for the sake of goods external to the practice, such as money, power or fame. But there are also goods internal to practice, and Cavanaugh argues that the good internal to the practice of medicine is the restoration of health. However, the technical skills of the medical art make the physician also capable of

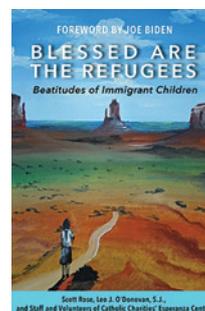
wounding individuals or helping others to inflict injury, as the case of the infamous French Dr. Guillotin (explored in the text) makes clear. The Hippocratic Oath is intended to forestall any impingement on the autonomy of physicians to pursue the goods internal to the practice of medicine.

The oath expresses a medical ethic that both protects the role of the physician and enhances the trust between doctors and patients. Given the power of a doctor, and temptations to misuse that power for goods external to the practice of medicine, the oath in ancient times guided the medical art to its proper *telos*.

Given that technology has enhanced the powers of doctors beyond what was possible in ancient times, Cavanaugh underscores the contemporary importance of the oath. His *Hippocrates' Oath and Asclepius' Snake* is a splendid contribution both to the history of the medical art and to its proper role today.

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Christopher Kaczor is professor of philosophy at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles and the author of *The Seven Big Myths About the Catholic Church*.



### Blessed Are the Refugees

Edited By Scott Rose and Leo J. O'Donovan, S.J.  
Orbis Books  
120p \$18

#### The rhetoric of love

The sprawling Honduran city of San Pedro Sula entered the news during the 2018 midterm election campaign as the point of departure for the "migrant caravan." In 2014, when San Pedro Sula had the highest homicide rate in the world, I went there to document Catholic efforts to curb the bloodshed. I recall visiting a Catholic youth center in one of the city's most violent neighborhoods: The streets were eerily deserted ("People don't want to get shot," remarked our Honduran guide), and we avoided stopping at intersections ("We don't want to get shot either").

Every child at the youth center had a parent, a sibling, a friend—often several—who had been murdered. (Eighty percent of cocaine consumed in the United States is trafficked through Honduras, a principal cause of the relentless killing.) If only we could bus down Christians in the United States who fear Central American immigration, I thought, and let them witness the hurts and dreams of these kids, hearts would be transformed.

*Blessed Are the Refugees* offers the next best thing: not by a physical journey but a spiritual and artistic one. Through prose, paintings and

prayer, the reader is introduced to a half dozen or so young Latino immigrants who have found their way to Esperanza Center, a Catholic Charities-run immigration resource center in Baltimore.

Scott Rose, a pro bono attorney at Esperanza who co-edited the book, observes that when “we make decisions out of fear, not love, our responses are more limited.” This book confronts the rhetoric of fear, all too prevalent in recent immigration debates, with the rhetoric of the Gospel, the rhetoric of love. The authors invite us to see immigrants through the frame of the Beatitudes, to recognize that these young people are deserving of our care and protection.

Leo J. O’Donovan, S.J., director of mission for Jesuit Refugee Service/USA and a former Jesuit housemate, offers poignant prayers on each of the Beatitudes interspersed between the migrant stories, and two young Salvadoran artists render stirring images of the migrant journey.

You will want to keep this book on the nightstand and meditate on it over a few weeks or a month. By the end, you may just discover your own heart transformed.

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Jeremy Zipple, S.J., is associate pastor of St. Martin de Porres Catholic Church in Belize City and a documentary filmmaker.  
Twitter: @jzipple.



**The Grace of Enough**  
Pursuing Less and Living More in a Throwaway Culture  
By Haley Stewart  
Ave Maria Press  
192p \$16.95

### The call to simplicity

“If there is one word to describe modern culture,” writes Haley Stewart, “it might be unsatisfied. No matter how much we have, it’s never enough.”

In her new book, *The Grace of Enough*, Stewart gets to the heart of this modern, consumeristic malaise. She urges readers to make sure that their attachments to physical things aren’t keeping them from living lives built on joyful, self-sacrificial love and gratitude for the gifts God has given them.

Stewart’s memoir tells the story of how she and her husband, Daniel, made the decision to uproot their family from their Florida home, selling their house and leaving Daniel’s job behind to spend a year living on a cooperative farm in Texas. They squeezed themselves and their three children into a two-bedroom apartment with no flushing toilets. The experience taught them to ask themselves what really matters, articulate what they wanted to spend their lives pursuing and then go after it. Stewart encourages her readers to do the same, intentionally building

habits that can help us reorient ourselves toward the Gospel...living simply,

offering hospitality, reviving food culture, reconnecting with the land, nurturing community, prioritizing beauty, developing a sense of wonder, being intentional about technology, seeking authentic intimacy, and centering life around home, family, and relationships.

While Stewart’s own story is one of dramatic change, she emphasizes that not everyone is called to take such drastic measures. She offers practical questions to help readers evaluate how their decisions line up with their beliefs and values. For Stewart’s husband, this self-evaluation led to leaving a soul-sucking job that he did not enjoy.

Unfortunately, the book does not provide much practical guidance for people who love their jobs but struggle to balance them with prioritizing family and home (let alone the kind of quiet time in nature or lovely slow-food, multi-course dinner parties Stewart describes). Still, the principles she lays out are sound, and the book is compelling enough to inspire readers to find their own ways of living out the Gospel’s radical call to simplicity.

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Serena Sigillito is the editor of *Public Discourse*, the online journal of the Witherspoon Institute in Princeton, N.J.



Full book reviews at  
[americamagazine.org/books](http://americamagazine.org/books)


 A group of rabbits, including adults and a small chick, are shown in a lush green field filled with purple flowers. The rabbits are rendered with detailed fur and expressive faces, looking in various directions. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.
 

## Talking rabbits fighting an evil empire

By Rob Weinert-Kendt

The author Richard Adams took his book title from the name of an actual nearby hill in the south of England, but he could hardly have chosen a more evocative one than *Watership Down* for his epic 1972 tale of sentient rabbits with their own language, customs and mythology, who eventually find their ideal warren on that Hampshire upland. With its intimations of seafaring battle and folkloric tragedy, the title has a talismanic power. And the turns of the tale itself are unmistakably the products of Adams's midcentury British worldview.

Though he famously disavowed any of his story's allegorical interpretations, it hardly seems coincidental that this World War II veteran and former environmental civil servant should conjure the heroic story of triumph over a fascistic collective, against the backdrop of nature under threat of human encroachment.

A new BBC/Netflix adaptation brings out the story's aspects of adven-

ture and conflict, with occasionally pulse-pounding results. Over four episodes we follow the ragtag band led by the thoughtful Hazel, the roughneck Bigwig and the visionary Fiver from a soon-to-be-devastated warren to the open countryside, through close encounters with their species' numerous predators, and at last to a reckoning with Efrafa, a grimly militarized rabbit civilization led by a twisted old tyrant, General Woundwort. Tom Biddle's script makes some deft adjustments and inserts some welcome gender equality into Adams's male-centered narrative, with flourishes of romance and jeopardy that range from gratuitous to invigorating.

But the new series's biggest problem is not its story choices but its look and feel. In theory, advances in computer animation promise to show us the individual hairs on these rabbits' heads and the leaves of grass they munch on. But in practice, while there are some lovely vistas and bracing gestures, the

combination of computerized animal movements and action-movie clichés makes for some grim going.

Which raises the question: Is *Watership Down* really for kids? For my part I have found the text, which I've been reading aloud to my preteen boys, deeply involving as only a challenge can be. It's a reliably calming end-of-day exercise to make our racing minds slow down and pay attention to the dense vocabulary and subtle machinations of the plot. But the novel's aura of threat and danger is never oppressive. In Adams's lapine mythos, the god Frith has given other creatures myriad tools to kill the rabbit but has endowed the rabbit, in turn, with speed and cunning.

You could argue that if anything marks *Watership Down* as a juvenile work, it is its Manichean theory of evil, manifest in its depiction of Efrafa as a fiercely regulated and paranoid totalitarian state. Indeed, most of the questions I field from my sons are about why General Woundwort is so mean, and



One could argue that if anything marks *Watership Down* as a juvenile work, it is its Manichean theory of evil.

why the rabbits under his rule in Efrafa don't just leave. This throws me back to my childhood in the waning decades of the Cold War. The stories we were told about the "Evil Empire" were no less childlike in their simplicity.

Risibly, the new BBC series gives Woundwort a flashback to a childhood trauma to help explain his fearful, fearsome personality. But we don't have to look back to our childhoods, or across the globe, to see that the temptations of power are as corrupting and corrosive as ever, and that a selfish, zero-sum view of the world threatens to leave us all impoverished and embattled. If "Watership Down" has anything to teach us, it may be that we find our best selves not in competition for scarcity but in cooperation with each other and life's abundance. That is a message I'm happy to have some talking rabbits teach my children.

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Rob Weinert-Kendt is an arts journalist and editor of *American Theatre* magazine.

## Pastor, president and political independent

Theodore Hesburgh, the Holy Cross priest, civil rights leader and president of the University of Notre Dame from 1952 to 1987, knew how to create a spirit of encounter, even among people who disagreed with each other.

Several years into serving on the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Father Hesburgh and other members of the commission could not agree on what legislative recommendations they should make to Congress and President Eisenhower. After two years of investigating voter suppression in Montgomery, Ala., overseeing the rollout of integration in Nashville and holding hearings about housing discrimination, members of the commission had proposed 12 recommendations for promoting equality.

But not every member of the commission agreed with these proposals. Hoping to break the impasse, Father Hesburgh organized a working retreat at Notre Dame's Land O' Lakes property in northern Wisconsin. Father Hesburgh was the only nonpartisan, a political independent. And he was able to find something everyone could agree on: fishing.

After a day outdoors on the beautiful, secluded lake, members of the commission softened and found common

ground. Eleven of the proposals were agreed upon unanimously; the 12th received just one dissenting vote. This is just one of the stories of bridge building told in the documentary film "Hesburgh," created by Patrick Creadon, Christine O'Malley and Jerry Barca.

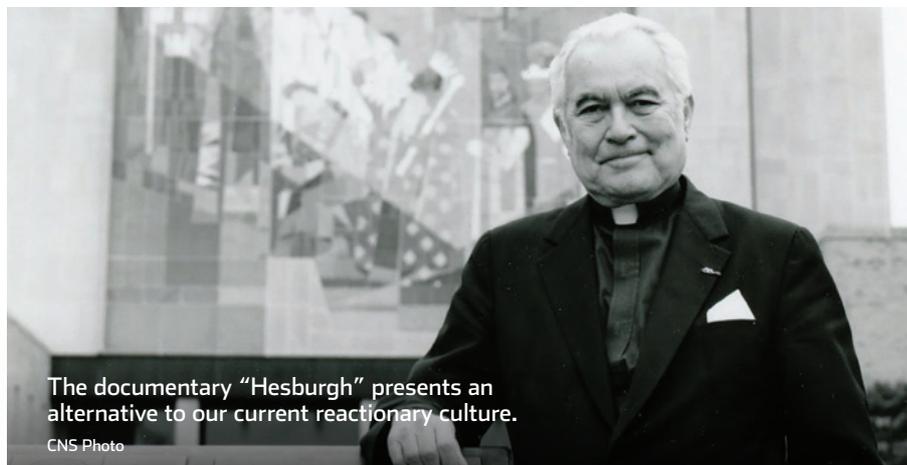
"It's very, very easy to be polarized. It's easy to lob grenades over the fence at people you don't know," said Mr. Creadon, the film's director, at a panel discussion after a screening of the film at America Media's headquarters in New York. "It's a lot harder to take the time and have the empathy to get to know your adversaries."

The film presents an alternative to our current reactionary culture. Though he was steadfast in his own positions on justice issues, Father Hesburgh did not shy away from engaging with opposing views on campus. He even allowed Gov. George C. Wallace, a proponent of segregationist policies, to speak at Notre Dame.

Some of the film's most memorable interviews come from students and Father Hesburgh's longtime driver, Marty Ogren. They best capture the pastoral approach Father Hesburgh took with students and in his public life.

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Emma Winters, *Joseph A. O'Hare* fellow.



The documentary "Hesburgh" presents an alternative to our current reactionary culture.

CNS Photo

# Children of Mercy

Readings: 1 Sm 26:2-23, Ps 103, 1 Cor 15:45-49, Lk 6:27-38

Christians call Jesus “Son of God” and his disciples “children of God.” These phrases have become so common in the Christian lexicon that it is easy to forget what they mean. Some might look around at their fellow Christians and find little that confirms such exalted claims. Others only know the words as signs of the promises God made in Christ: As children of God, Christians can hope for blessings in this life and eternal fellowship with God in the next.

These promises are true, but they tell only half the story. Fellowship with God actually begins in this life, and it requires a disciple to live according to the instructions of the Gospel. Jesus did not craft these commandments arbitrarily; he drew them from the Father’s own words and example. As Christians continue to study and live out the Gospel, they can learn, as Jesus did, how to conform their life to the example of the Father. Disciples who do so are truly children of God.

This is Luke’s message. Luke understands Jesus to be a prophet, and in this Sunday’s Gospel reading, he relates some of Jesus’ most challenging and difficult teachings. Jesus’ words are easy to dismiss as impossible, or to disparage as ideals that no one was ever meant to achieve. This would be a mistake. Jesus intended his disciples to strive to fulfill these commandments. He drew these lessons from careful study of the Father’s ways, and he expected his disciples to pattern their lives after the things the Father had taught him.

His first lesson was the Father’s gift of eternal love. At every moment in his life, Jesus knew the Father’s love, followed the Father’s command to love and sought to fulfill the Father’s dream of a world built on love.

Another lesson came from study of the Father’s ways in Israel’s history. Although the people of Israel strayed from the covenant, again and again the Father sought them out and forgave them. Scripture even records times that God took Israel back when it did not seem sensible (Is 43:19-28; Ez 20:40-44). Divine love always overcame judgment, and God’s fidelity to the covenant remained strong regardless of human transgression.

*‘Your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.’ (Lk 6:35)*

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

In what ways do you already resemble God?

Where in Scripture or in nature have you learned the lessons of God?

In what ways must you still strive to live out those lessons?

A final lesson came from nature; the sun rises on both sinners and saints, and God’s rain falls equally on the righteous and the wicked. Jesus built his own life around these lessons, and he expected his disciples to do the same.

Children resemble their parents. It might be astonishing at first to realize that living the Gospel makes us like the Father, but this is what it means to be a child of God. There is no hubris in finding the loving thing to do in any given situation, or forgiving those who wrong us, or sharing our gifts even with those who do not deserve them. God is always ready to love, give and forgive; just so, those who call themselves “children of God” must follow God’s example in all ways.

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

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"We have, as a church, lost our way;  
our structures are weakened if not  
corrupt; our leadership in disarray."

— Michael W. Higgins

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Hosffman Ospino, Ph.D., is an associate professor of theology and religious education at Boston College, School of Theology and Ministry, where he is also the director of graduate programs in Hispanic ministry.

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# Principle and Foundation

Readings: Sir 27:4-7, Ps 92, 1 Cor 15:54-58, Lk 6:39-45

In both Matthew's Gospel and Luke's, Jesus delivers a wide-ranging sermon near the beginning of his ministry. Matthew's account, lengthier and better known, is called the Sermon on the Mount, since Jesus delivered it from an elevated point in rural Galilee. Scholars note Matthew's careful portrayal of Jesus as a teacher with an extensive knowledge of Israel's wisdom literature. Jesus was a rabbi who had made Israel's traditions his own and who could instruct with confidence the crowds who had gathered along with his disciples.

In Luke's "Sermon on the Plain," by contrast, Jesus gathers with his closest disciples in a meadow or field near Capernaum. He instructs them like a Greek philosopher initiating his inmost circle into the world's mysteries. Elements from the Sermon on the Plain appear in each of the other Gospels, but only Luke brings them together into a unified statement of teaching. Unlike Matthew, who portrayed Jesus as a rabbi, Luke uses this sermon to depict Jesus as a philosopher-prophet. Such a character would be especially appealing to the Hellenized Jews who many

scholars believe composed Luke's audience.

Luke uses philosophical idioms throughout his sermon. An obvious example appears in Luke's version of the beatitudes, which appear just before today's Gospel passage. In addition to declaring "happy" the poor, hungry, weeping and hated, Luke includes a series of parallel "woes." Such pairing of opposites was a common rhetorical trope in the Stoic and Cynic philosophy of Luke's day. The use of such a trope primed Luke's audience to attend to Jesus' words as the teaching of a sage.

Luke structures the account in this Sunday's Gospel passage around two proverbs, which he calls "parables." The first, "Can a blind person guide a blind person?" encourages self-scrutiny, a practice highly valued among Greek thinkers. Jesus is especially severe with the disciples. If they learn well, they will become like him; but if they fall prey to self-deception, they will they fail and drag others down too.

In the second proverb, "A good tree does not bear rotten fruit," Jesus reminds his followers of the dangers of hypocrisy. The word *hypocrite* originally came from the language of the theater and referred to an actor skilled in mimicry. A hypocritical disciple can say all the right words and can even perform certain highly visible actions, but only those with true commitment and perseverance will live according to the Gospel. The pattern of their consistent deeds will reveal the nature of their inner character.

This philosophical program has a prophetic purpose. Unlike Greek philosophers, who might have grounded their teaching in first principles or in appeals to pure reason, Jesus offers God's own example as a model for transformation and character. In this, Jesus reveals the roots of his teaching in the traditions of Israel. It is not enough for his disciples to believe that God loves them or that God has acted to save them; their own behavior must reveal the God of saving love as the model for every deed.

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

*'No disciple is superior to the teacher; but when fully trained, every disciple will be like his teacher.'* (Lk 6:40)

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

What beam must you remove from your eye?

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# ‘Show Deep Love for Each Other’

Care and prayer can help overcome childhood trauma

By Michael R. Lovell



As part of the Ignatian Colleagues Program, a leadership opportunity for lay administrators and faculty at Jesuit institutions, I read the Rev. Bryan Massingale’s *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*. Father Massingale writes that if Catholics see systems or processes that are unfair to certain populations, God calls us to change them to be more equitable. To do anything less is a sin.

After reading it, I felt God calling me to use my position as the president of Marquette University to make a difference in Milwaukee. However, the problems facing our inner city seemed too big and overwhelming. I did not know where to start.

This all changed in November 2017, when I attended a campus event on the epidemic of trauma. A panel of experts spoke about how our most pressing societal challenges, including health disparities, segregation, violence and crime, were rooted in generational trauma. Research has shown that when children experience abuse and neglect, it changes the development of their brains and their reactions to different situations. As an engineer, I was amazed by the science behind this.

A groundbreaking study done 30 years ago measured 10 types of adverse childhood experiences (A.C.E.s), including abuse, neglect, violence, mental illness, incarceration of a family member and substance

abuse. An A.C.E. score of four or higher was found to greatly increase an individual’s chances of experiencing depression, incarceration, heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

This hit home for me because my wife and I both experienced significant trauma as children. In my family, there was mental illness, violence and alcohol abuse. When I was growing up, my grandfather died by suicide and my mother had multiple suicide attempts. All of these factors had an impact on my development. I took the A.C.E. test and learned I have a score of five. Since then, I have been working to build my resiliency through prayer and self-reflection.

No matter where I am or what I have on my plate, I take at least 15 minutes a day to pray, reflect and have quiet time. I have found that praying 15 minutes every day is an important form of self-care.

Without taking time to be quiet and reflective in prayer, it can be easy to miss the signs and calls from God. For Amy and me, our call to serve was that trauma panel in late 2017. Shortly after attending this panel, we pulled together a group of 30 people to discuss the topic of trauma. We called our group Scaling Wellness in Milwaukee (SWIM) and started meeting every six weeks.

Today, we usually have about 150 people at these open meetings—everyone from health care practitioners and

social workers to government officials, pastors and community organizers.

The mission of SWIM is to inspire dynamic collaboration among participants that heals trauma and creates a resilient community. Working together, we hope to make Milwaukee the most trauma-informed city in the country. In the fall of 2018, we held a trauma conference to bring together the top researchers and experts in the field, and we had an overwhelming response: More than 1,200 people attended from 14 states. Our next project is the development of a mobile clinic to provide primary and mental health care in areas of Milwaukee that do not have adequate services.

None of this would have been possible if we were not taking time to reflect and listen to God’s call. In the First Letter of Peter, the writer says, “Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.” At the same time, neurological research has shown that the best way to limit the catastrophic effects of childhood trauma and to stop its intergenerational spread is through close, loving relationships. The science supports the faith on this one.

**Michael R. Lovell is the president of Marquette University in Milwaukee and the university’s first lay president.**

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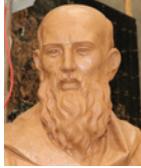
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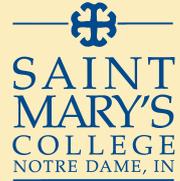
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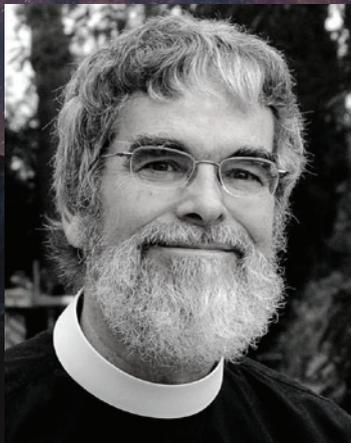
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