

THE AMERICA PROFILE

America

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The Gentleman From Ohio

*Former Speaker
John Boehner*

Matt Malone

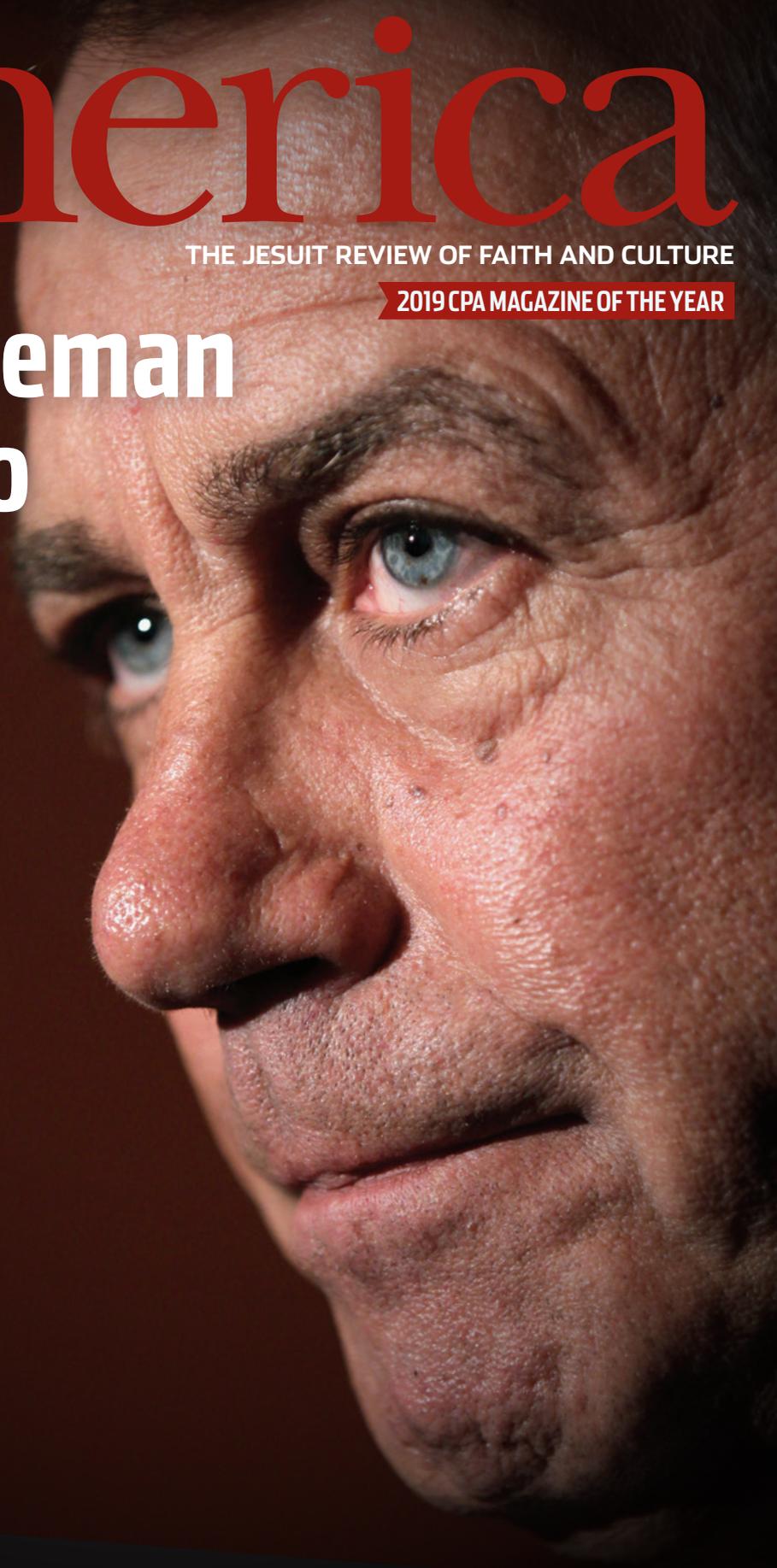
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The 2019 America Profile

Every time I travel to Florida, where I am writing this column this morning, I am struck by the same thought: I have yet to visit a state that is more different from my beloved Massachusetts than the Sunshine State. Not worse, not better, but different. Life in the Bay State is defined by its history—the American Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, the curious cultural mix of Old World WASP-iness and New World immigrant Catholicism. People in Massachusetts, or Virginia for that matter, are more likely not to do something simply because it has never been done before. People in Florida, on the other hand, are attracted to something precisely because it has never been done before. (Perhaps that is one reason why the spacecraft that landed on the moon was launched from Florida’s eastern coast.) I’m drawing caricatures, of course, but there’s some truth in them.

And it all makes sense to me. Florida, after all, barely has a history. True, Europeans first reached its shores in the 16th century, and Florida entered the union in 1845. But consider this: Until the mid-20th century, Florida was one of the least populous states. In 1900, there were a mere 500,000 people living here, less than 10 percent of the population of present-day Massachusetts. Today, Florida has three times the population of the Bay State, and its trillion-dollar economy would be the 17th largest economy in the world if it were an independent country.

What that means is that nearly everything one encounters in Florida is less than 120 years old. Think about that. The entire state was created virtually *ex nihilo* within the lifetimes of a significant number of living Amer-

icans: every motel, every highway, every home and Waffle House, even that sprawling Mickey Mouse operation in Orlando. The development of this vast peninsula is one of the great achievements of American and, dare I say, human history, a product of free enterprise, hard work and not a little daring. Was this a problem-free achievement? Of course not. Racism, brute commercial speculation and forced displacements are also a part of this story. But they are a part of the story of every state in the union—of any place, in fact, populated by fallen human beings.

This got me thinking about the recent Democratic presidential debates. As I listened to the various candidates, I think I could have been forgiven for thinking that they believe that the state is the most powerful force in the world, that some American-style socialism is the order of the day. But to borrow a line from Bill Clinton, that dog just won’t hunt this time. The American people are surrounded by achievements made possible through the power of the marketplace—they live and work in those achievements. While the state has an important role to play in providing a safety net, regulating the excesses of the market and encouraging innovation, government is not the greatest creative force in America—and Americans know it. I think former President Obama hit the nail on the head when he told fretting Democrats on Nov. 15 that “this is still a country that is less revolutionary than it is interested in improvement. They like seeing things improved. But the average American doesn’t think that we have to completely tear down the system and remake it. And I think it’s important for us not to lose sight of that.”

The American people will not lose sight of that and Mr. Obama is right in saying that Democrats take a huge risk by thinking otherwise. The American people know, as Dr. Fiona Hill said in her testimony during the House impeachment proceedings, that they and their families have been given opportunities in this country that they never could have received elsewhere. The state also helped to create that opportunity, and state-sponsored programs have lifted countless people out of poverty. But the most powerful anti-poverty initiative is what it has always been: a good job at a good wage in a vibrant, expanding economy.

In what other country could the son of a saloonkeeper, one of 12 children in a two-bedroom house, rise to become the speaker of the national assembly? That is John Boehner’s story. It is America’s story. For this reason, I selected former House Speaker John Boehner as the subject of this year’s **America Profile**.

...

Astute readers will have noticed a change in The Word column, the scriptural reflections we publish at the back of the magazine. As this liturgical year comes to an end, so does the three-year cycle of readings. We welcome Jaime L. Waters, who teaches Scripture at DePaul University in Chicago, as our new Word columnist. She is an associate professor of Catholic studies. We also bid adieu to Michael Simone, S.J., who did an exceptional job these last three years. Thank you, Michael. And welcome, Jaime!

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



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AP Photo/Natacha Pisarenko

Supporters of former President Evo Morales of Bolivia protect themselves from tear gas in La Paz on Nov. 15. Political disputes pushed Morales to self-exile in Mexico after 14 years in power.

Cover: AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite

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TARA ISABELLA BURTON

My journey from in-between Christianity

When is the right time to decorate for Christmas?

At the risk of wading into one of our nation's and church's most contentious questions, **America** asked our readers when they think is the right time to decorate for Christmas. We encouraged them to come up with a spiritual justification for their answers. Here's what they said.

Around Thanksgiving.

When my family was young, we were very deliberate. First Sunday of Advent was reserved for the Advent wreath. Second Sunday for the crèche, with the baby absent and the kings traveling from afar. Third Sunday we put up lights for Gaudete Sunday. And Fourth Sunday we put up the tree. It slowed us down, built up anticipation and was so memorable! But alas, now I am old—it's too cold for me to wait so late to put up lights, and too hard to save big projects like the tree till the very last minute. And so, I've given myself joyful permission to get going around Thanksgiving!

Renee Goodspeed

Rochester, N.H.

Please, Not Until the First Sunday of Advent!

First, I've typically just barely cleaned my house post-Thanksgiving and am likely too lazy to do more stuff around the house. Second, the First Sunday of Advent appears to be the most consistent with the rhythms of the liturgical calendar—slowly decorating for Christmas is like the slow prep for a loved one's long-awaited visit home. Third, actually following the liturgical calendar is countercultural and is a way to “stick it to the Man,” given the heavy emphasis on the secular and material aspects of Christmas.

Bernadette Libao

Chicago, Ill.

After Thanksgiving

We already have commercial hijacking of Christmas too early! I have a neighbor who has ALREADY [Nov. 19] put up inflatable and other Thanksgiving and Christmas decorations in his yard! Tom the Turkey and Santa in one scene! It's like seeing humans and dinosaurs in a historical diorama—ughhhh!

Mark Kroncke

San Rafael, Calif.

After Thanksgiving

For people who enjoy decorating early, Christmas brings a sense of joy, and peace and many memories of family love

and traditions. I think Jesus would say “go for it!”

Emily Douglass

Spring, Tex.

After Thanksgiving

I believe in a gradual, already/not yet approach. So I start after Thanksgiving, remembering to be thankful that Christ has already come. We used to put up our tree but without lights or decorations—except for simple purple and pink ribbons to celebrate Advent—to also focus on the “not yet.” I try not to go overboard until Dec. 17 and then keep the decorations up until the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. He has come, is present now and will come again.

Harry Dudley

New Castle, Penn.

It's Never Too Early

Christmas means joy and happiness. Why postpone joy? We need more happiness and smiles. As Charles Dickens said (to paraphrase): keep Christmas in our hearts every day. We do and will. Love and hugs to all. Pops.

Tom Dooling

Cincinnati, Ohio

Christmas Eve or the Weekend Right Before Christmas

The worst thing about starting [too early] is that you're just sick and tired of the din before Christmas comes along. With such rich liturgy ahead: 12 days of Christmas, Epiphany, Baptism of the Lord and finally the traditional finale at Candlemas (Feb. 2)... Please do not spoil our Catholic month-plus of cheer (Dec. 24-Feb. 2) by taking it all away on Dec. 26!

Keith Henry

San Francisco, Calif.

Not Until the First Sunday of Advent!

Advent is about waiting. Putting the decorations up too soon means we don't have to wait for them. Also, it means we get sick of them before Christmas actually arrives!

Karen Park

Appleton, Wis.

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World AIDS Day and the Premiere of ‘Plague’

World AIDS Day, observed on Dec. 1, is a day to reflect on an epidemic that has claimed 32 million lives worldwide, including 700,000 in the United States. This year, the first day of December is also the premiere date of “Plague: Untold Stories of AIDS and the Catholic Church,” an ambitious podcast created and hosted by **America’s** national correspondent, Michael J. O’Loughlin.

“Plague” includes interviews and firsthand accounts from the very beginning of the epidemic, including the first mention of the disease in *The New York Times*. (“Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals” was the headline of a story on July 3, 1981.) Mr. O’Loughlin details the efforts of gay Catholics to make their church and their individual parishes places of hope and care, as well as the tireless work of Catholic health care providers to cope with the epidemic—often facing resistance from some in the institutional church. The series also

looks at how individual Catholics were involved in the earliest days of those organizations instrumental in responding to the crisis, including the Gay Men’s Health Crisis in New York. **America** is proud to bring new attention to these stories.

But “Plague” is not a valedictory project. The H.I.V. and AIDS epidemic is still gathering force, and about 39,000 people in the United States are newly diagnosed with H.I.V. each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In 2018, the global number of new H.I.V. diagnoses was 1.7 million, according to the World Health Organization. In three countries in Africa, more than 20 percent of the population lives with H.I.V. or AIDS.

The prevention of new H.I.V. and AIDS cases has been uneven. From 2012 to 2016, the C.D.C. reports, new cases in the United States among white men decreased by 14 percent, but there was no significant change

among black men, and the number of cases went up by 12 percent among Hispanic/Latino men. In 2017, new cases per capita were much higher in the South than in any other region. The HIV.gov website, managed by the Department of Health and Human Services, reports that new infections have plateaued because effective H.I.V. prevention and treatment are not reaching the marginalized communities that could most benefit from them. This is part of a larger challenge of inequities in health care, including diminished access to medical services in rural areas.

“Plague” reminds us that there is hope in even the darkest moments of tragedy and that the people of God closest to the ground can and do take the initiative in helping and comforting the afflicted. It is a reminder that we should all look for ways to make a difference at every level of the church’s life—not just on World AIDS Day.

The President’s Attacks on Public Servants

President Trump has raised the stakes in the impeachment drama by questioning the integrity and motives of civil servants who have chosen to testify at the congressional hearings.

During the testimony of Marie Yovanovitch, the former ambassador to Ukraine and a three-decade veteran of the Foreign Service, for example, Mr. Trump tweeted: “Everywhere Marie Yovanovitch went turned bad. She started off in Somalia, how did that go?” (Ms. Yovanovitch was briefly stationed as a junior officer in Somalia in the late 1980s, her first job with the Foreign Service.) Mr. Trump

ended his tweet by asserting that “It is a U.S. President’s absolute right to appoint ambassadors.”

The president’s right to choose his own political appointees has not been and should not be in question. Political appointees serve at the pleasure of the president, and all civil servants in the executive branch are ultimately accountable to the chief executive. Indeed, as the House moves toward a vote on impeachment, Mr. Trump has a right and even a duty to defend the prerogatives of his office. Yet, ironically, the public, direct and malicious

way in which Mr. Trump has criticized these civil servants, even questioning their national loyalty, is the greatest threat to the principle he claims to want to uphold.

Public servants are not mere bureaucrats who only slow things down. They are a positive good. They do not comprise a “deep state” opposed to the government but in fact are doing the work of the government. Their expertise is not always highly regarded in a political system that attributes special value to outsiders, but it is vital to the functioning of our government. Unfortunately, career civil

servants, who could generally demand much higher compensation in the private sector, are never more appreciated than when they are gone, replaced by those with more ideological fervor than practical knowledge.

Mr. Trump, who places a high value on personal loyalty, appears to believe that any member of the executive branch testifying in the impeachment inquiry has thereby betrayed his trust. But Mr. Trump himself has laid the groundwork for this rupture, forcing nonpartisan professionals into an impossible choice between keeping faith with what they perceive to be the self-interested use of his office or fulfilling their duty to the Constitution, the Congress and the American people.

A president deserves to employ trustworthy executive branch officials—but such trust is owed to the president as the chief executive, not to the president personally, and it relies on an even greater trust, that which the American people place in the president to faithfully discharge his constitutional duties.

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Lessons for the opioid crisis from a Catholic addict and poet

We are in a new wave of the opioid crisis, caused by the movement of fentanyl, a highly dangerous and illegal synthetic drug, into some of the communities already hardest hit by addiction. So despite fewer prescriptions being written for opioids, the number of deaths from these drugs remains steady.

The situation is daunting, but as Catholics reflect on what can be done to address it, they have an unlikely prophet in the the English poet Francis Thompson (1859-1907), himself an opioid addict. Alongside his theological and romantic poetry, Thompson left us with a few important principles for thinking about our present crisis.

Thompson's struggle with opiates began during a period of loneliness, illness and aimlessness, which fits a pattern identified in the emerging research on opioid overdoses as a subset of "deaths of despair." Taking opium after a nervous breakdown and amid bouts of bad health, he soon found himself addicted. In a poem titled "The Poppy," he wrote of the "sleep flower" whose "fruit is dreams," which, in time, would steal "All that the world of me esteems—/ My withered dreams, my withered dreams."

Thompson wound up penniless, sleeping on the cold streets outside Charing Cross train station in London. Years later, in his final and most beloved poem, "In No Strange Land," he would describe the grace that reached even into this pit of hopelessness. ("... lo, Christ walking on the water/ Not of Genesareth, but Thames!")

It was only through the intervention of a generous couple, Alice and Wilfred Meynell, who took Thompson into their home, that we know of his literary genius today. The couple were

editors of a London periodical and became aware of Thompson when he sent them a few poems written out on a dirty piece of scrap paper. Thompson had come near to killing himself by the time the Meynells tracked him down and helped him find his feet as a writer.

The public discussion in Victorian England over poverty, despair and substance abuse would feel familiar today. Opiates had become prevalent as a means of treating aches and pains, and a pattern of abuse emerged, especially among the working class and the poor.

After getting a handle on his addiction, Thompson wrote in the Meynells' magazine, *Merry England*, as one who "was more intimate than most with this life that was not a life." He identified deep roots to drug abuse in the divide between flourishing urban settlements and old, abandoned manufacturing areas. In the latter, "misery cries out to me from the curb-stone, despair passes me by in the ways."

The cause, he thought, was at least partly an "individualism" that manifests itself in the loss of a sense of mutual care and dependence among members of a community. There was in his day too much emphasis, Thompson thought, on meritocracy, or the idea that the strong and capable should flourish as best they can, and so much the worse for those who get left behind.

What Thompson identified as the neglect of those left behind in Victorian England seems taken to the extreme today in the callousness of some drug companies. But we each play a part in social breakdown to the degree that we extract ourselves from our communities and treat our lives as a set of exchanges whose final goal is to build the most comfortable, untroubled existence.

"The script of self-help," Thompson wrote, "has become the script of selfishness." But Catholics, he said, are called to "put on Christ," and Christ's life was a message that our neighbor is our responsibility.

Remember, the Meynells looked after the poet when he was still a stranger. That is the sort of thing Thompson had in mind: inviting people into our homes, building up the religious and civic communities that act as a salve for alienation and ministering to individuals in the grip of addiction. Thompson went so far as to call on Catholics to engage in a new monasticism. He wrote, quoting St. Vincent de Paul, that the new monastery should be the rooms of the sick, and the "cloister the streets of the town or the wards of the hospital."

It is in the spirit of Thompson and St. Vincent that Pope Francis has issued a constant call for a church that "goes out to the margins" and ministers to those too often neglected by society. Not everyone is called to, or capable of, the Meynells' act of service, but all are capable of some service in their own way.

In the time of the opioid crisis, Thompson's charge still needs hearing: "You have tried palliatives that fall short; here, too, then, venture a heroic remedy."

Nathan Beacom is a writer from Des Moines, Iowa. His writing has appeared in *Comment Magazine*, *The Des Moines Register*, *Front Porch Republic* and elsewhere.



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Meet Archbishop José Gomez, first Latino president of the U.S. bishops

By J.D. Long-García

A crowd of lay faithful engulfed Archbishop José H. Gomez after the Día de los Muertos procession on Nov. 2 at Calvary Cemetery in East Los Angeles. The archbishop had celebrated a bilingual Mass, blessed the altars commemorating loved ones and followed *matachines*, Mexican folk dancers, as they made their way around the cemetery. Now it was time for pictures.

Despite the midday sun, he posed for photos with anyone who wanted one. He even recorded a special message and blessing for a woman on her iPhone. (It took at least three takes to get it right.)

“He’s a man of faith,” Doris Quinania, who attended the celebration with a group from St. Frances X. Cabrini Parish in Los Angeles, said. “He has a heart for all the poor, but in a special way for the immigrants.”

On Nov. 12, the U.S. bishops elected Archbishop Gomez president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the first time the conference has elected a Latino as its leader.

Archbishop Gomez, who was born in Monterrey, Mexico, was ordained to the priesthood in the Opus Dei prelature in 1978. He served as a priest in Texas from 1987 to

2000, and in 2001 he became an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Denver. St. John Paul II appointed him as archbishop of San Antonio in 2005, and Pope Benedict XVI appointed him coadjutor of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in 2011. He succeeded Cardinal Roger Mahony as archbishop about a year later, in 2012.

Before his election the archbishop spoke with **America** at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in downtown Los Angeles. Archbishop Gomez described the new evangelization as the main issue confronting the church in the United States today—“how to continue what Pope Francis is asking us to do in *‘The Joy of the Gospel,’*” he said, referring to the pope’s 2013 apostolic exhortation.

“I think it is clear that we need to find a way to get across the beautiful message of the Catholic faith,” he said, “the fact that we are children of God, that God really cares about us, that we are also called to love God and love one another.”

“The first step is to show what the church is doing,” he said. “I think that’s what young people are looking for—mission, going out, helping people, living their faith. That

Archbishop José H. Gomez takes part in a Día de los Muertos celebration at Calvary Cemetery in East Los Angeles.

takes them to an encounter with Christ, and they start learning more about the teachings of Jesus.”

During their fall meeting, the bishops voted to continue to describe abortion as the “pre-eminent priority” in a letter intended to introduce the upcoming “Faithful Citizenship” statement. But end-of-life issues and immigration reform will also have a claim on Archbishop Gomez’s attention as he steps into his new role in the conference.

“My role is not political. My role is spiritual and humanitarian—in support of the human person,” he said. “We are not following the Democrats, and we are not following the Republicans. We are following the plan of God.”

On immigration, he said, the nation’s political leaders have to work toward a comprehensive solution even as immigration issues are addressed one dimension at a time, from dealing justly with refugees to the more than 10 million undocumented immigrants in the United States.

“Historically, the United States has been a country that is open and welcoming to people in those difficult situations. That’s our identity,” he said, touching upon a major theme of his book *Immigration and the Next America* (2013). He believes there can be an agreement on immigration that addresses border protection, brings in workers needed by the economy and assists “families that strengthen our society.”

“Most of the immigrants that come to our country want to actively participate in the building of a society that is just and that offers them security and that makes the United States the best country in the world,” he said.

On end-of-life care, Archbishop Gomez said he “tries to share with elected officials that life is a gift of God and that we should respect that and support people who are in difficult situations.”

“Part of the mission of the church is to be there with people at the end of life,” he said. “We don’t want to impose things on other people or force them to do anything they don’t want to do, but I think it is important to see that God has given us the gift of life and is calling us to support each other in every single moment of our life.”

Archbishop Gomez said that support begins with un-

born children but includes all children. That support also extends to the homeless, he said, noting a number of ongoing outreach efforts in Los Angeles, including the assistance programs hosted by the city’s Society of St. Vincent de Paul and its St. Francis Center, which provides hunger relief and comprehensive services for homeless and low-income families and individuals.

In September Archbishop Gomez led a delegation that presented Pope Francis with the findings of the V Encuentro, a four-year initiative from the U.S. bishops intended to better serve the growing Latin American community. He said the Encuentro exemplifies the synodality that the pope is calling for in the church.

“It was about listening to the lay faithful and forming small communities in the parishes,” he said. “It’s been an extraordinary success. The challenge now is the follow-up.”

At their November meeting, the bishops approved a proposal to develop a new pastoral plan for Latino Catholics in response to the Encuentro process.

“It’s really creating that sense of mission and ownership of the lay faithful as we are all trying to make real the Second Vatican Council’s universal call to holiness,” Archbishop Gomez said. The Encuentro process is similar to what the church in Latin America experienced during the Fifth General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Aparecida, Brazil, in 2007, he said. Jorge Bergoglio, S.J., then a cardinal, oversaw the writing of the Aparecida document.

The consultation that typifies the Encuentro process has always been important to the archbishop.

“In my ministry as a bishop,” he said. “I have always tried to rely on the advice and direction of the lay faithful. Because we are all the church. Hopefully they feel that I am doing that,” he said. “Because that’s a priority for me.

“It’s a challenge, obviously,” he said. “I never expected to be here, in this beautiful archdiocese. Or just to be a bishop.

“I don’t know how I’m doing it, but I feel the help of the grace of God and of the people and this sense that we are doing it together,” Archbishop Gomez said. “It’s not just myself. It’s the church working together.”

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

Seniors squeeze out kids in federal budget

The share of federal spending devoted to children’s programs is projected to fall from 9.2 percent to 7.5 percent over the next decade, according to the latest analysis by the Urban Institute, as programs supporting senior citizens and interest payments on the national debt eat up more and more of the budget. The 2019 “Kids’ Share” report, released in September, finds that federal spending on children fell to 1.9 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product in 2018, the lowest level in a decade. Cuts in federal spending on education and nutrition programs, as well as a temporary reduction in child-related tax credits, accounted for the decline.

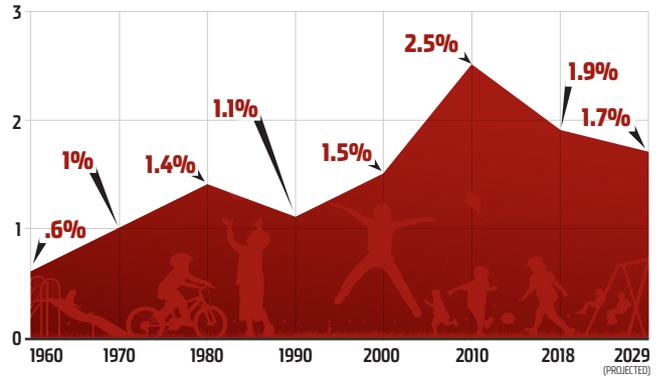
Even at 7.5 percent, the slice of the federal pie given to children’s programs would be more than double what it was in 1960 (3.3 percent). In that year, federal aid to children mostly took the form of cash payments and tax credits (in particular, the exemption for dependents), but that was before the introduction of many programs targeting health care, education and nutrition needs—and before a drastic reduction in defense spending from its Cold War highs.

It should be noted that most government spending on behalf of children is at the state and local levels, where public education is administered. But combining all levels of government, the United States still spent more than twice per capita to benefit older adults as children in 2016—\$32,146 per adult over the age of 65 versus \$14,389 per child.

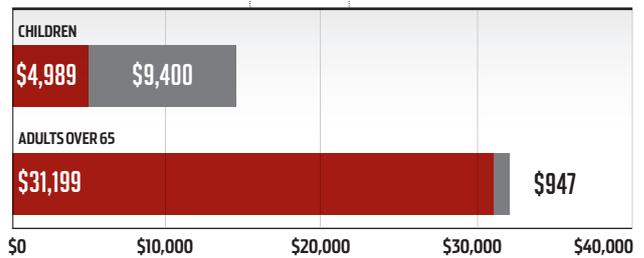
Looking forward from current trends, the Urban Institute projects that children’s programs will receive only 3 percent of a \$1.5 trillion increase in federal spending over the next decade. (Defense spending is projected to remain at its current level, adjusted for inflation.) That means a bigger burden on state and local governments, assuming they do not want their children to fall behind in education and well-being. Some 60 years after Washington began an ambitious effort to iron out inequities, the level of government assistance available to a child may increasingly depend on where that child lives.

Robert David Sullivan, senior editor.
Twitter: @robertdsullivan.

Federal spending on children as share of G.D.P.



Per capita spending (2018)

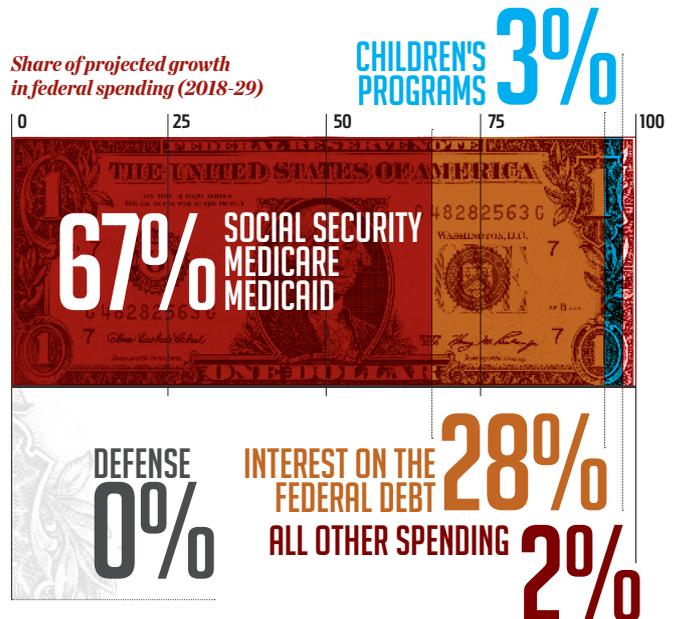


Federal expenditures on children by program, in billions (2018)

HEALTH CARE	\$116 (24%)
TAX EXEMPTIONS/DEDUCTIONS*	\$106 (22%)
REFUNDABLE TAX CREDITS*	\$73 (15%)
NUTRITION	\$57 (12%)
CASH BENEFITS	\$55 (11%)
EDUCATION/CHILD CARE	\$56 (11%)

*The earned income tax credit accounts for \$59 billion, including \$52 billion in refundable tax credits and \$7 billion in tax deductions.

Share of projected growth in federal spending (2018-29)



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CNS photo/Ivan Alvarado, Reuters

Chile is reeling from protests. Where is the Catholic Church?

A demonstrator in Santiago, Chile, holds up a picture of President Sebastián Piñera of Chile. Protesters have been demanding his resignation.

As mass demonstrations sweeping across Chile continue, Chilean bishops have condemned the violence exhibited by some protesters, and they have urged political leaders to preserve the common good. But is anyone listening to them?

Jorge Costadoat, S.J., a researcher at the Theological Center Manuel Larraín in Santiago, sees the current unrest as the rotten fruit of decades of extreme neoliberal economic policies first instituted by the dictator Augusto Pinochet in the 1970s but renewed for decades by the democratically elected administrations that followed his regime.

“At the same time, the very socially committed episcopate Chile had in the 1970s and in the 1980s was replaced by [politically and socially] conservative bishops with a focus on sexual morality,” Father Costadoat said. In 2018, revelations of decades of sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the Chilean clergy and covered up by the Catholic hierarchy led to the resignation of seven bishops and the investigation of dozens of priests, bishops and laypeople by authorities.

In Father Costadoat’s assessment, after three decades obsessing over sexual morality and ignoring Chile’s social and economic inequities, “the sex abuse scandals destroyed all credibility of the church.”

Perhaps a sign of how far the church has fallen in public esteem has been the willingness of some protesters to break into Catholic churches. On Nov. 8 pews and statuary from the Church of the Assumption in Santiago were thrown into the street and set afire as barricades against security forces. In Valparaíso, demonstrators invaded another church and dragged its pews into the street.

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Chile condemned the desecrations, arguing that the continuing violence “prevents us from giving the right amount of attention to the claims of the majority of the Chilean people who yearn

for real and peaceful solutions.”

The demonstrations in Chile began in early October after the government announced an increase in Santiago’s mass transit fares. By Oct. 18, hundreds of thousands of people were in the streets of the capital in what had become a broad antigovernment protest.

Since then Chilean cities have experienced daily demonstrations against the high cost of living, inadequate and inaccessible health services and medicines, and insufficient pensions and political corruption. Scores of protesters have been killed or wounded by police.

Despite the bishops’ fall from grace, Agustín Moreira, S.J., said there remains good news about the status of the church in Chilean society. Many Catholics are continually working to build social harmony in Chile, if quietly, he said.

“Many Catholic institutions, such as the universities, are functioning as spaces of dialogue and reflection on the current unrest,” Father Moreira said. “At the same time, missionaries throughout the country have been working with the most poor and marginalized people in society, listening to their needs and demands.”

These are not efforts that draw much attention from Chilean media, he said, but they have been consistently performed for years and point a way out of the current crisis. “Taking sides with the poor again, the Catholic Church will recover its credibility,” Father Moreira said.

“Over decades, Chilean Catholicism has been all about sacraments and had almost no relation with the social reality,” said Ronald Villalobos, O.F.M., of Santiago.

He believes now could be a good time for the church to reassert itself to take a stand on those realities. “I think it’s a great opportunity for the country and for the church.”

Eduardo Campos Lima writes from São Paulo, Brazil.

HEAL THE SICK



**“TODAY, HEALTHCARE IS RECOGNIZED AS A
UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHT AND AS AN ESSENTIAL DIMENSION
OF INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.” — POPE FRANCIS**

His Holiness Pope Francis confirmed the mission of **SOMOS** in reclaiming the role of the family doctor as a voice for immigrants, the poor, and the most vulnerable people in New York City.

SOMOS



A priest is killed as ISIS revives in Syria Deadly protests continue in Iraq

The already precarious state of Christians in Syria and Iraq grew even more uncertain in November as antigovernment protests continued to roil Iraq and an Armenian Catholic priest and his father were gunned down in northern Syria in an apparent act of revived ISIS terror.

Funeral services were held on Nov. 12 for the Rev. Hovsep Hanna Petoyan and his father, Hanna Petoyan, in Qamishli, Syria. The two men were killed as they traveled to the nearby community of Deir ez-Zor, where Syrian Christians are attempting to re-establish themselves. “For us they are martyrs, and what happened to them is a confirmation that the war is not over here, as we had hoped,” Boutros Marayati, the Armenian Catholic archbishop of Aleppo, told Fides, the Vatican news service.

The day before the killing of the two men, bomb attacks claimed six lives and wounded 26 others in Qamishli, a city largely controlled by Kurdish fighters. At least one of the suicide bombers appeared to target the city’s Chaldean Catholic Church.

According to the Kurdish Rojava Information Center, ISIS claimed 30 attacks in the first 10 days of November—an increase of nearly 300 percent compared with the first days of October, before the Turkish incursion into Kurdish-controlled northern Syria. That campaign to seize con-

trol of Syrian territory along the border with Turkey, an area that includes many Syrian Christian villages, has been spearheaded by Syrian militia infiltrated by ISIS, according to Kurdish officials.

Speaking to Aid to the Church in Need on Nov. 11, Archbishop Marayati described the attack on Father Hovsep and his companions: “Shortly before they arrived at Deir ez-Zor, two armed men on a motorcycle overtook their car and opened fire. The father of the priest was killed instantly, while Father Hovsep Hanna died later outside the hospital in Hasaka.” A deacon traveling with the deceased was also wounded, while another man escaped uninjured.

Father Hovsep, 46, married and the father of three, was ordained only five years ago. He traveled frequently from Qamishli to Deir ez-Zor to help coordinate its restoration of churches and the homes of Christians that had been damaged or destroyed, either by ISIS or during the campaign to remove the militants from the region.

The region has also recently been troubled by large-scale discontent in Iraq as a broad protest movement has crossed sectarian lines, expressing public frustration with corruption and incompetence on the part of the central government and growing resentment toward Iranian meddling in Iraqi affairs. In Baghdad, security forces fired live



CNS photo/courtesy Middle East Council of Churches

The Rev. Hovsep Ibrahim Bedoyan, pictured here in an undated photo.

rounds and tear gas at antigovernment protesters on Nov. 15, killing three people, as bloody confrontations continued despite an influential Shiite leader's call for calm.

By mid-November at least 320 people had been killed and thousands more wounded since the unrest began on Oct. 1. Iraqi Christians have been joining the protests in Baghdad. On social media, many of them voiced support for the protests, some likening the movement to a revolution and expressing delight in the unity the demonstrations have inspired among young Iraqis across religious divides.

Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, the Chaldean patriarch, urged fasting and prayer for an end to the chaos and violence and renewed an appeal to both demonstrators and Iraqi government officials to exercise "wisdom and moderation" and to seek the common good for all Iraqi people.

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

With content from The Associated Press and Aid to the Church in Need.



AP Photo/Wason Wanchakorn

Mass at the National Stadium in Bangkok, Thailand, on Nov. 21

GOODNEWS: Pope Francis celebrates 350 years of faith in Thailand

The joy was palpable as the pope arrived at the national stadium in Bangkok, Thailand, to celebrate Mass on Nov. 21. Some 60,000 Catholics from Thailand as well as from Vietnam and the Philippines were gathered, cheering as the missionary pope arrived. The Mass, commemorating the 350th anniversary of the establishment of the first Catholic mission in Thailand, was among the pope's first events in a brief papal tour of Thailand and Japan in November.

During his homily, Pope Francis reflected on the efforts of the first missionaries in Thailand. He recalled that Jesus told his disciples that it is not blood relations or ethnic belonging that makes one part of Jesus' family, but "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, sister and mother."

He reminded Thai Catholics, a tiny minority in this largely Buddhist nation, that "the Gospel is an invitation and a freely bestowed right for all those who want to hear it." Pope Francis said, "A missionary disciple is not a mercenary of the faith or a producer of proselytes but rather a humble mendicant who feels the absence of brothers, sisters and mothers with whom to share the irrevocable gift of reconciliation that Jesus grants to all."

He encouraged them to reach out to the "migrants, deprived of their homes and families, and so many others, who like them can feel orphaned, abandoned, without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ."

"A missionary disciple," the pope said, "knows that evangelization is not about gaining more members or about appearing powerful. Rather, it is about opening doors in order to experience and share the merciful and healing embrace of God the Father, which makes of us one family."

Gerard O'Connell, *Vatican correspondent.*
Twitter: @gerryrome.



A conversation with former House Speaker John Boehner

By Matt Malone

Pope Francis stood in the center doorway of the U.S. House of Representatives, awaiting his moment. He was about to become the first bishop of Rome to address a joint session of the U.S. Congress, and he looked a little nervous, perhaps at the prospect of speaking English rather than his native Spanish.

At the other end of the center aisle, at the rostrum where he had been presiding for more than four turbulent years, sat John A. Boehner, the 53rd speaker of the House. He could see the pope in the doorway, standing below a bas-relief of Moses, a reminder that this was not the first time that a prophet had addressed an anxious nation. For nearly 25 years, almost from the day he had arrived as a freshman from Ohio's Eighth Congressional District, Mr. Boehner had been trying to arrange for a papal address. Now, across the expanse of a jam-packed chamber, it was to John Boehner that the sergeant-at-arms addressed his words: "Mr. Speaker! The Pope of the Holy See!"

Mr. Boehner bit his lower lip. He was trying not to cry. After Francis made his way to the rostrum amid a thunderous ovation, the speaker formally introduced





Isabelle Senechal/ America Media

‘95 percent of the people I served with on both sides of the aisle were good, honest, decent people trying to do what they thought was best for their constituents and the country.’

John Boehner now has a Washington office at the law firm of Squire, Patton and Boggs, the third-largest lobbying group in the country.

My parents were the most patient people God ever put on Earth. I got a healthy dose of that patience, somehow.

the pope. His voice briefly cracked—then, another lip bite. It was clear he would not hold it together very long. Indeed, just moments later, when the pope said that he was grateful “to address this joint session of Congress in ‘the land of the free and the home of the brave,’” Mr. Boehner’s emotion burst forth, in full view of a national audience.

John Boehner already had a well-earned reputation for being an emotional guy, unable to conceal his feelings in moments like this. But longtime observers thought he seemed different that day, even more intense. Robert Costa, a reporter for *The Washington Post*, closely observed Mr. Boehner throughout the pope’s visit. “Here was a man strikingly at ease after months of tumult in his ranks, a man who said he felt blessed,” Mr. Costa wrote the day after the speech to Congress. “We sensed that something had changed.”

Less than 24 hours after the pope’s departure from Capitol Hill, on Sept. 25, 2015, John Boehner surprised the Republican caucus by announcing that he would not finish out his current term. He was stepping down as speaker and resigning from Congress.

Something had definitely changed.

The ‘Dean Martin’ of U.S. politics

A whiff of cigarette smoke signals that I am nearing his office. It is the autumn of 2019 and after a year of back and forth between us, John Boehner has consented to an interview. “You were persistent,” he tells me. As Mr. Boehner sees it, one of the benefits of his retirement is that he no longer has to answer questions from journalists. He is unhappy with the current state of the news media, saying, “It’s all intended to push and pull people into one of two camps, leaving fewer and fewer people in the middle.”

Still, he may have found it more difficult to say no to a journalist who is also a priest. That helps explain why I am here, for the Jesuits occupy a special place in Mr. Boehner’s heart.

After his discharge from the U.S. Navy, Mr. Boehner enrolled at the Jesuit-run Xavier University in Cincinnati, becoming in 1977 the first member of his family to graduate from college. It took him six years to earn his degree—he was also working full time to pay his tuition and to provide for his wife, Debbie, and their two daughters. Xavier’s registrar, also a Jesuit, helped him to arrange his schedule so he could do it all. “The Jebbies were always there,” he says.

For the few days each month he is in Washington, D.C., these days, Mr. Boehner hangs his hat at the law firm of Squire, Patton and Boggs, the third largest lobbying group in the country, where he represents a variety of major business clients and serves on the board of directors of the tobacco company Reynolds American. Throughout his career he has had a close relationship with big tobacco (he came under heavy criticism in 1995 for delivering campaign donations from tobacco lobbyists to members on the floor of the House), but at least he puts his money where his mouth is—literally. As I enter his office, Mr. Boehner is just coming in from having one of the five cigarettes he will smoke in two hours.

His office is a modest corner room filled with mementoes of his congressional career—photos with presidents, the sign with his name that hung above his office door on Capitol Hill, a small plaque with the inscription, “Oh God, Thy sea is so great and my boat so small.” But the casual, almost languid way he shows me these things suggests that he is almost indifferent to these things, as if they are displayed here mainly for the benefit of visitors like me. Mr. Boehner’s aloofness, and his reputation for being “cool,” has prompted observers to say that he could have run with the Rat Pack—“the Dean Martin of American politics,” as many Republican colleagues have described him. Up close, I can see why: the tan that never fades; the hair that never seems to gray completely, even a couple of months before he turned 70; the effortless way he moves; the deep baritone voice.

On one shelf there is a bottle of Johnny Walker. On another, a bottle of Merlot. “Are you a connoisseur?” I ask him.

“No,” he says, and then changes the subject. No one has ever called John Boehner verbose. Ask a yes-or-no question and you will get a yes or a no and nothing else.

“This was the only picture that was on my mantel” on Capitol Hill, he says, as he picks up a framed photo of the golf legends Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus. Mr. Boehner loves the game and, while *Golf* magazine once described the hitch in his swing as “cringe-inducing,” he has

Mr. Boehner shares mementos of his 25-year congressional career.

had a handicap as low as 4.8. He tells me that the photo was taken on the balcony outside his House office. “I went up to them and said, ‘What are you guys talking about?’ And you won’t believe it, we’re talking about how easily we turn into tears.... We all have the same problem. Simple as that.”

I ask him later if he has always been like that, an easy crier. “No,” he says. “Somewhere along the way it happened. There are some things I have a hard time talking about: kids, soldiers, veterans, some of these moments. It used to be a problem. My staff used to yell at me. And I said, ‘Listen, it just is what it is. I’m not going to worry about it.’”

His Catholic faith is one of those things Mr. Boehner has a hard time talking about. He does not like wearing it on his sleeve. I ask him if there is a devotion, a place or a saint that speaks to him.

“Nope. I’ve got two places I go,” he says, meaning sources of daily, spiritual reflection. “I don’t talk about this, but two places I go and get the message of the day, and then I go take my walk. I walk for about an hour every morning. It’s the serious start to the conversations.” By “conversations” Mr. Boehner appears to mean prayer, though he does not use that word. “Reading the devotionals and thinking about it is one thing, but taking my walk, there’s an hourlong conversation about whatever. It’s pretty good.”

His is a simple, though not simplistic, faith, born of the piety and devotions he was taught during a hardscrabble youth in working-class, southwest Ohio. Mr. Boehner was one of 12 children in a two-bedroom, one-bathroom house in Reading, a suburb of Cincinnati.

“My parents were the most patient people God ever put on Earth,” he says, as he begins to tear up—the first of several times during my visit. “I got a healthy dose of that patience, somehow.” In his farewell address to Congress, Mr. Boehner would tell his colleagues that “patience is what makes all things real.”

“But [faith] was the foundation of how my parents



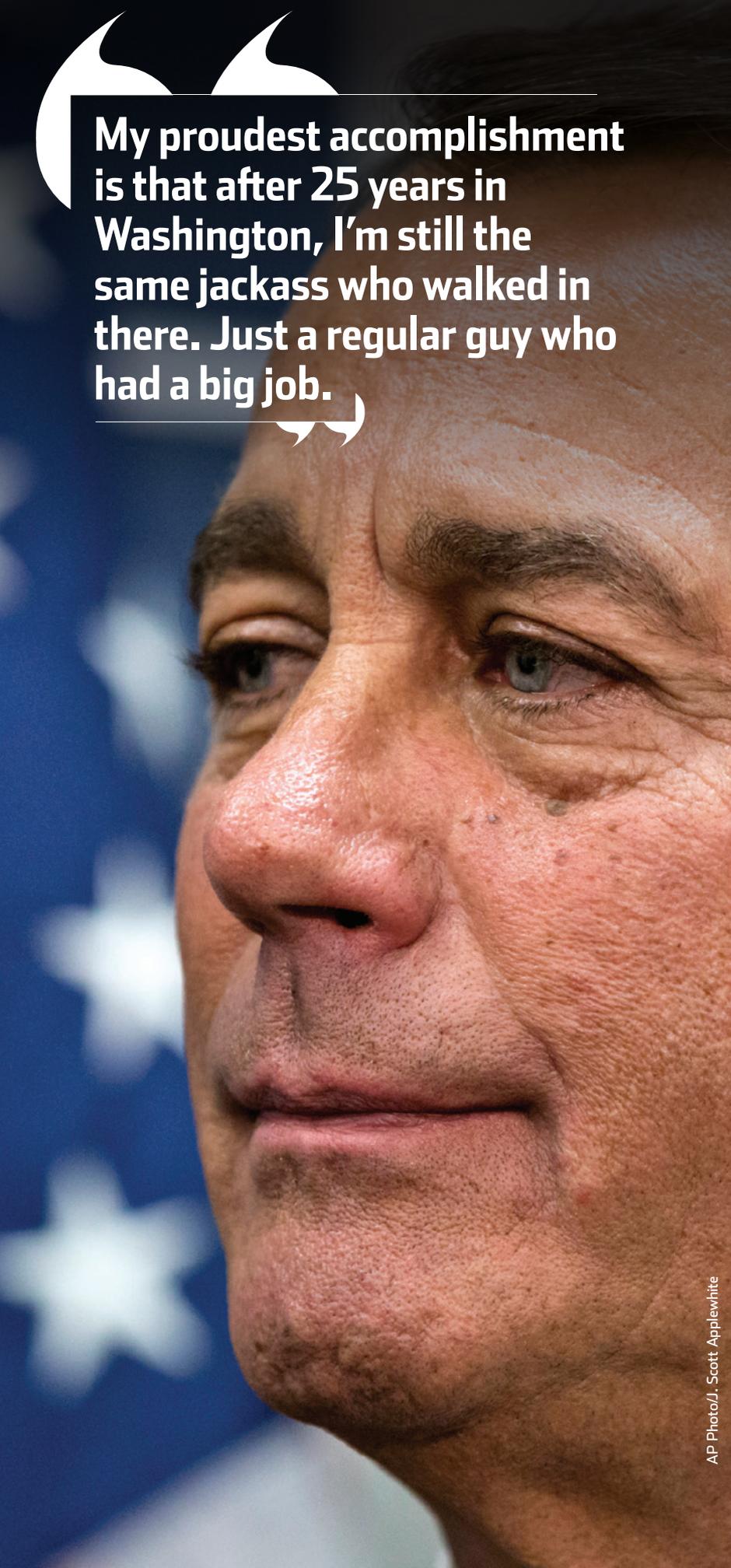
Isabel Senechal/America Media

lived,” he says, “and what they taught us. Simple as that.”

To make his point, Mr. Boehner tells me that, as a teenager, he played football at Moeller High School, where his coach was the legendary Gerry Faust, who would go on to be the head coach for the University of Notre Dame. “We said Hail Marys before football practice, during practice, after practice,” he recalls. “And my God, the day of a game, we went to Mass. We prayed before the game, we prayed on the bus. I could say a Hail Mary every day for the rest of my life and I’ll never say half the Hail Marys I did in high school.”

By the mid-1980s, Mr. Boehner had established a local business when he began to think that his life might take a different path. “I was busy running my business, I was in the packaging and plastic business, and along the way, I got involved in my neighborhood homeowners’ association,” which sparked an interest in politics. Then, he says, “one thing led to another, to another.” That first “another” was a successful run for the Ohio House of Representatives in 1985. After four years in the legislature, with the incumbent congressman mired in a personal scandal, Mr. Boehner’s supporters and friends were encouraging him to think about a run for the congressional seat.

But John Boehner wasn’t sure. “Is this me?” he asked



My proudest accomplishment is that after 25 years in Washington, I'm still the same jackass who walked in there. Just a regular guy who had a big job.

himself. "Is this me or is this what the Lord wants me to do? So I went to Mass 10 days in a row. Downstairs, below the church, in the chapel, 12 old ladies and I show up. They're all looking at me. I show up the next day. I caused quite a scene with these ladies, all of whom I got to know later; but after 10 days, I was like, 'Alright, yeah. I think this is what he wants me to do.' So I did it."

I get the feeling that the decision really was as simple as that.

"Next thing you know, I'm the speaker of the House," he says.

Yet the next few years were not as simple as that. Mr. Boehner's ascent to the speakership had its setbacks, including his defeat for re-election as Republican conference chairman following the G.O.P. losses in the 1998 midterm election. But he was a survivor.

"He withstood these challenges, came back, and became speaker of the House" his congressional colleague Mike Oxley said in 2015. "It's extraordinary, and probably the only time that has ever happened in that kind of a sequence."

Mr. Boehner says he was just as surprised. "Thirty-five years" after he entered public life, he says, "It's like, 'This is not what I was going to do with my life.' But I was made to do what I was doing, and you don't realize it, sometimes God has other ideas."

"Did you feel like you were being led?" I ask him.

"Oh, no question," he says, without hesitating. "No question. By the time I became speaker of the House, I had no doubt that the Lord decided I was going to be the speaker of the House. No doubt. I was convinced of it. There were days I'd sit in my office by myself—this vaulted ceiling, highly painted, decorated. I'd look up and go, 'Hello? Hello? You put me here. Well, come on, where are the answers?' The answers came, just not as quickly as I wanted them to."

I marvel for a moment at the irony. On the one hand, Mr. Boehner is a man who is pretty reluctant to discuss his faith. On the other hand, he is certain that God wanted

him to be speaker, and he does not mind who knows it. Said by someone else, such a claim might seem arrogant or presumptuous, but Mr. Boehner appears to be saying something else. What I think he means is that God had to have done it because he could not have done it himself. He just doesn't think that highly of himself.

Yet even if he harbored doubts about his natural abilities, Mr. Boehner clearly had ambition. Men and women without it don't become speaker, except by accident. Still, when he fulfilled his ambition to be speaker, it was important, he says, that he not allow the job to change him. "Being speaker," he says, "was never going to be about me. I said it my first day as speaker when Nancy Pelosi handed me the gavel. I talked about service. I talked about Lent and getting the ashes. 'You are dust, and from dust, and you will become dust.' Something like that. You know the words better than I do."

Then he doubles down on his point: "I would work overtime, even before I was speaker, just to be me.... Sometimes my staff thought I was too much like me, but my proudest accomplishment is that after 25 years in Washington, I'm still the same jackass who walked in there. Just a regular guy who had a big job."

An Open-Door Policy

John Boehner's education for that "big job," he says, began in his father's bar, in the Carthage neighborhood of Cincinnati, where he started working when he was 8. "Drunks would be sitting there all night," he says, "and you don't want to agree with a guy, but you don't want to get into a fight with him all night, so you find a way to disagree without being disagreeable." Mr. Boehner says that was "one of the greatest lessons that helped me in my political career."

"When you were a kid," I ask him, "was your district Democratic?"

His answer surprises me: "I've no idea. We didn't know about politics. We never talked about politics. We were Kennedy Democrats, but it was never a conversation. Never one political conversation that I can ever recall."

When did he decide he wasn't a Kennedy Democrat?

"Oh, early '70s," he says. "I thought, 'I don't know about this Muskie guy. Really? I don't think so.' And then '76: 'Ah, I think Ford's a better pick.' And then by the late '70s, I knew I was for Ronald Reagan. Yeah, I'm a Republican. And the funny thing is my entire family all became Republicans. I never had one conversation with any of them."

He learned another lesson in his dad's bar, Mr. Boehner says. "You have to learn to deal with every jackass that walks through the door. Trust me, when you're the speaker

of the House, they're all walking in the door." During his four years as speaker, his door was always open, he says, to Democrats, Republicans, whomever. And they all wanted something. "If I couldn't do it, I just told them I can't do it," he says. "Or if there was a chance I could do it, I'd tell them there was a chance I could do it. I just told them as honestly as I could."

Mr. Boehner won the speaker's chair with the Republican takeover of the House in 2010, after stints as both House minority and majority leader. He was the unanimous choice of the Republican caucus, but that momentary good will did not prove a harbinger of his tenure. This was during the turbulent middle years of the presidency of Barack Obama, whose election in 2008 had mobilized the forces of reaction as never before. The rise of the far right—the Tea Party, the Freedom Caucus, the Fox News juggernaut—caught the establishment, including John Boehner, by surprise. Politicians who were considered conservative by almost any standard were all of a sudden not conservative enough for the new wave of Republican activists, increasingly isolationist in foreign affairs and populist at home. Though his rise was facilitated in part by the Gingrich revolution of 1994, in many ways Mr. Boehner is a pre-Tea party politician in a post-Tea Party world. As a result, Speaker Boehner was bedeviled by the far right as much as he was by the left.

Still, while "it was polarized [in my time]," he says, things are worse today.

"I think it's media, talk radio, cable TV, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, the internet, people starting organizations overnight, spreading"—he makes air quotes—"news." He saw the erosion of common ground during his time as speaker, and I get the sense that he felt powerless to stop it. "It got to the point," he says, "where I used to go to see President Obama, and I'd have to sneak into the White House, because if I walked in where the press would always see me, the right-wing press would go crazy and the left-wing press would go crazy on President Obama."

While Mr. Boehner concedes that he failed to make the "grand bargain" with President Obama—a big, bipartisan deal to reduce the national debt—he says he has no regrets. "There's some things I wish we could've gotten done that didn't get done, but no, not one [regret]." That's because, he says, he did what he thought was right. He says he used to tell his colleagues, "Listen, this is what my parents taught me, this is what I taught my kids, and I'm going to teach you. If they do the right things every day, for the right reasons, the right things will happen.... It never seemed to be that hard to me."

Mr. Boehner blames the media for a lot of the polariza-

You find a way to disagree without being disagreeable.

tion and the sorry state of American politics, but he hints at other possible causes. He insists, for example, that he is an optimist—“always,” he says—and that he was born with his glass half full. I think he believes that, though I am not convinced that it’s true: He seems more wishful, which is not the same thing. When I ask Mr. Boehner what it will take to fix the country’s politics, he says, “either God’s hand or some horrific event,” which seems pretty pessimistic.

There has to be a moment, Mr. Boehner says, big enough to cause “Americans to look up and go, ‘Oh, yes. I might be liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican, but first, I’m an American,’ which they’ve forgotten.”

I ask whether he would go into politics if he were a young man today. He responds with a hearty laugh: “No! Shoot me, shoot me!” He is careful to add, however, that “95 percent of the people I served with on both sides of the aisle were good, honest, decent people trying to do what they thought was best for their constituents and the country. We had our share of disagreements, but we got along a lot better back then.”

When Mr. Boehner talks about his relationships with some of his former colleagues, it sounds as if he is describing life from a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, rather than things as they were done here in Washington just a few years ago. I ask him, for example, about the people who inspired him in public life. “Ted Kennedy,” he says, invoking the name of the late liberal lion from Massachusetts. “Ted Kennedy and I, they used to call us the political bookends. For about five years, I was the chairman of the House Education and Workforce Committee, and he was the head of a similar committee on the Senate side. We did all these things together, all this legislation together. We never sounded like it because he’d go out and make all this noise [campaigning against Republicans], but he was a serious legislator who wanted to get things done. We always got things done. I learned a lot of political lessons from Teddy.”

“Was he a friend?”

“Oh yeah,” he says. “Dear friend. Yes.”

The Washington where John Boehner—a pro-life, pro-tobacco, fiscal conservative—could be friends and a productive partner with a man who was the symbol of everything opposite seems long gone. Or is it? A lot still gets done in Washington, but when people work across the aisle, the media doesn’t cover it, Mr. Boehner says. He mentions Joe Biden, who as vice president sat next to Mr. Boehner when the pope addressed Congress. “Joe and I could’ve worked anything out on any subject,” he says, growing wistful. “He was a moderate Democrat. I was a conservative Republican, but I wasn’t crazy. He and I knew each other, liked each other, we resolved all kinds of things. Frankly, there’s nothing we couldn’t resolve.”

“So what got in the way of resolving the big stuff?” I ask him.

“Oh, everybody else,” he says. “You have to remember, a leader without followers is simply a man taking a walk.”

In light of what he had just said, I ask Mr. Boehner how he would vote if 2020 turned out to be a choice between Joe Biden and Donald Trump. He is evasive, then adds, with a flash of annoyance, “also not a fair question.”

While Mr. Boehner may not have regrets about his political career, he does regret one thing. I ask him if he prayed a lot when he was speaker. “Every day,” he says. “All day.” Then he pauses and adds, without my prompting, that “one of the things that I was sorry about was that I didn’t understand the need to have this personal relationship with our Lord earlier on. Somewhere along the way, over the last 30 years, probably 35 years, I began to understand the importance of this personal relationship, where the Lord is my King, and my comrade, my colleague, my companion.”

Alone With Francis

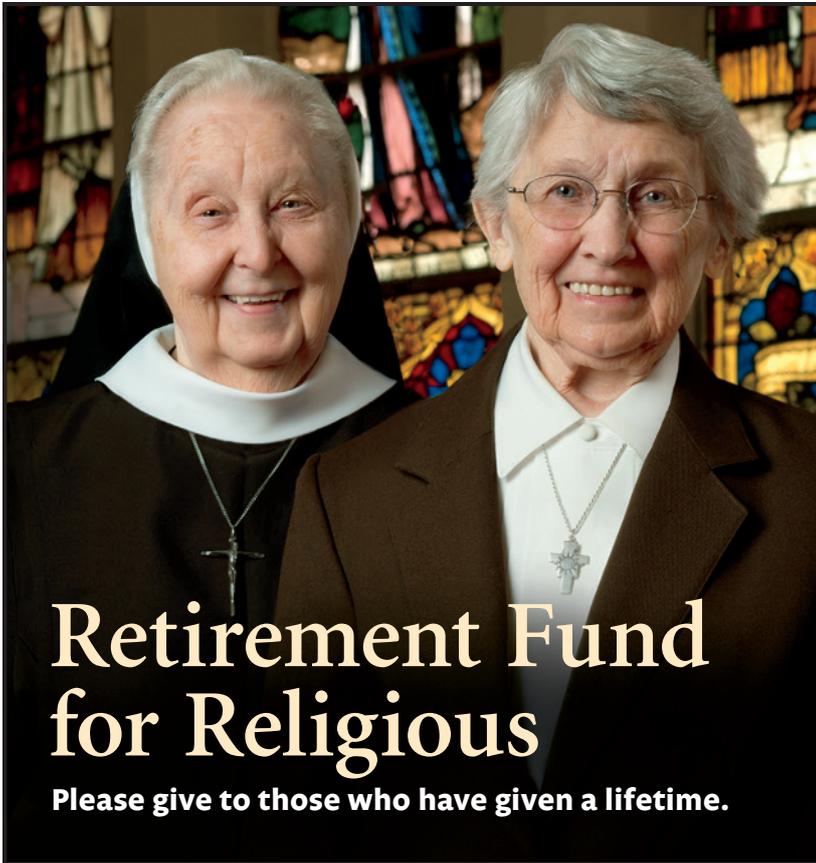
Pope Francis was standing on the balcony of the U.S. Capitol, not far from where Mr. Boehner had talked with Mr. Nicklaus and Mr. Palmer. The pope had just concluded his address to Congress and now he was greeting the crowd of 75,000 that had gathered outside. “They were cheering and carrying on,” Mr. Boehner says. “I didn’t know what the plan was, so I leaned over and said, ‘Holy Father, you might want to say a few things.’”

“Oh, yes, yes,” the pope replied.

By the time the pope said “God bless America,” Mr. Boehner was weeping.

I ask him, “Why was it so important for you that the pope address Congress? Why did you persevere for 20 years in trying to make that happen?”

“I don’t know,” he says. “Catholic grade school, Cath-



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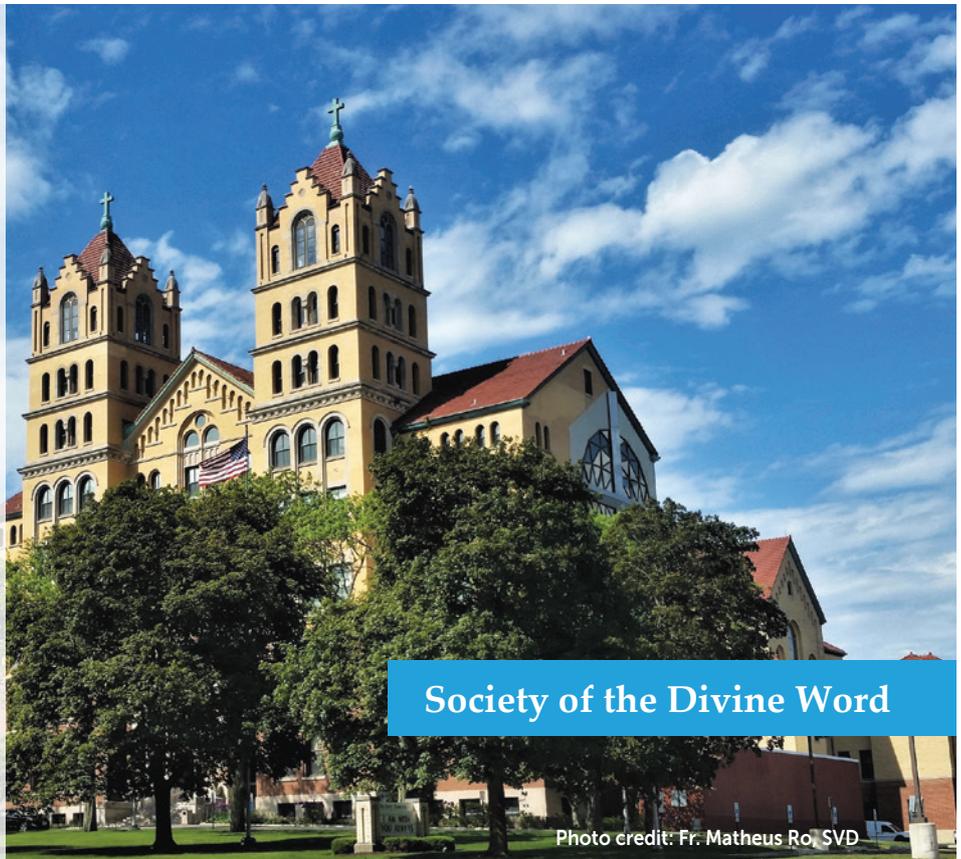
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Photo credit: Fr. Matheus Ro, SVD



Pope Francis and then-House Speaker John Boehner at the pope's address to Congress on Sept. 24, 2015.

olic high school, Catholic university. I'm pretty Catholic. The pope's always played a big role."

This pope, especially, played a big role in the final chapter of Mr. Boehner's political career. By the autumn of 2015, he knew that he would probably not run for re-election. Times were changing. The Republican caucus had steadily moved further rightward during his tenure. His hold on the speakership was tenuous and Mr. Boehner knew it. But any announcement about his retirement was still several months away, or so he thought.

"I met [the pope] on the first floor and there's this departure ceremony," he says. "And I look up; it's the pope and me. There's not another soul anywhere, and the pope takes his left hand and he grabs my left arm and pulls me next to him and starts saying the nicest thing anybody's ever said to me. He's still holding onto me, gives me this giant bear hug with his right arm and says, 'Speaker, would you pray for me?'"

"Who, me?"

"Yes, yes," the pope says.

In the 25 years he had served as a member of Congress, Mr. Boehner says, "I'd never seen the Hill happier than it was that day.... It was all the members. There were a lot of Catholic members, but members of the Protestant faith, Jewish faith, Muslim faith, they were all happy."

Can America recapture the sense of unity that prevailed that day? Playing the optimist, Mr. Boehner says we can.

"Americans, we're the most resilient people God ever put on Earth. We make mistakes, but we seem to figure it out. And at some point, the American people will say, 'All right, I've had enough of this noise. I've had enough of Washington being Washington. I'm going to vote for someone else.'"

Still, even if we can regain some of the spirit of that day, John Boehner realized something else as he watched the pope leave Capitol Hill: There was never going to be a day to equal that day. So when Mr. Boehner got home that night, he said to his wife, Debbie: "I might make an announcement tomorrow."

"Announce what?" she asked.

"That I'm out of here."

But there was someone else he had to check with, something else Mr. Boehner had to do before he made the final decision. He needed to have one of those "conversations."

Early the next morning, after getting "the message of the day," he went for a long walk. "I walked up to Pete's Diner, where I had eaten breakfast for 25 years. I was walking down Second Street from Pete's Diner and I walked right past St. Peter's Church, where there was a grotto. In the grotto was a statue of the Virgin Mary.

"I glanced over there and I went, 'Yup. Today's the day.'"

Matt Malone, S.J., is president and editor in chief of America Media.



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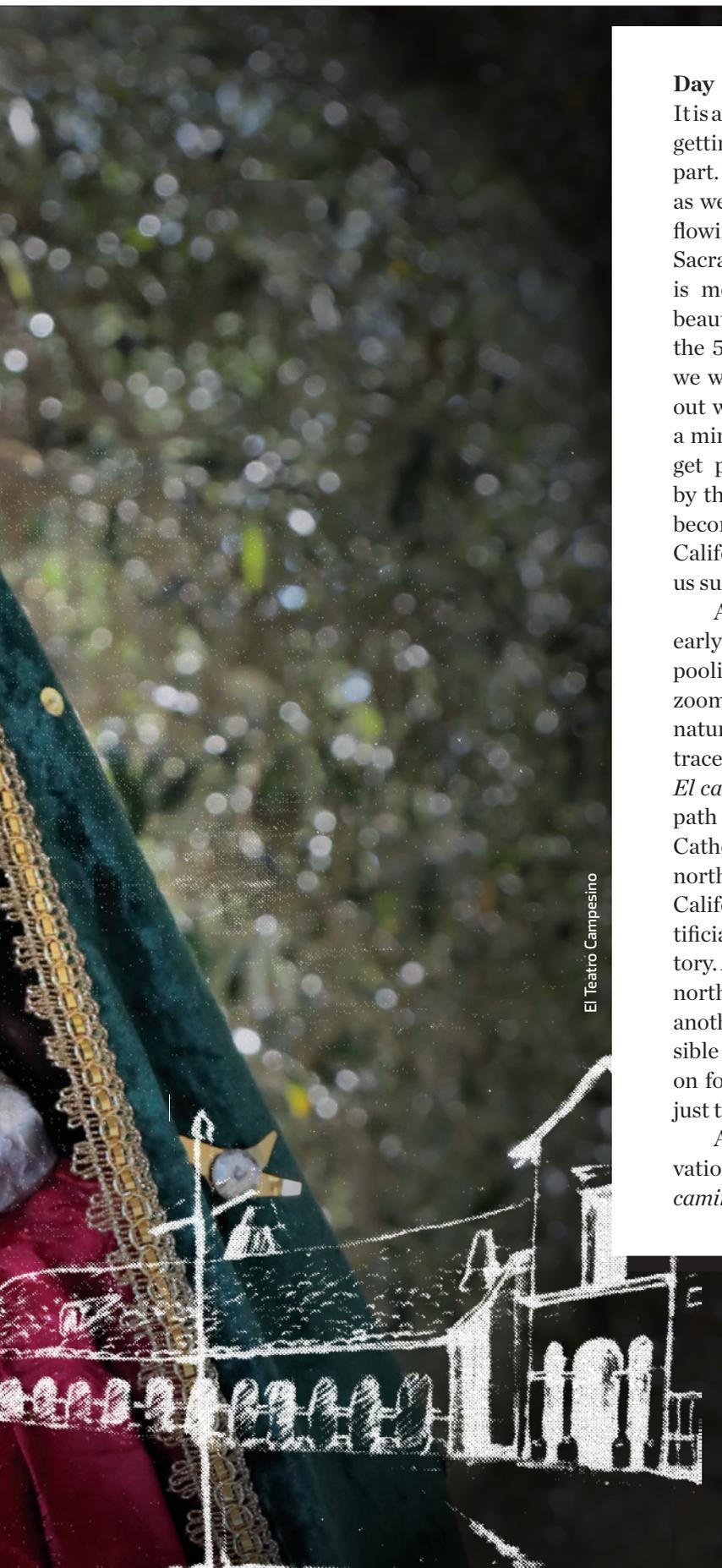
OUR LADY'S FINAL APPEARANCE

The Legacy of 'La Virgen del Tepeyac' at St. Juan Bautista Mission

By Cecilia González-Andrieu

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E. Gab - Mich. Gab





El Teatro Campesino

Day

It is a five-hour drive when traffic is kind, although getting out of Los Angeles is always the hardest part. That is five hours if you take Interstate 5, or as we used to call it, the Golden State Freeway, flowing riverlike north-south from San Diego to Sacramento. The road along the Pacific Coast is more beautiful but takes much longer, as beautiful things often do. My father used to call the 5 *la rayita*, “the little line,” and we knew if we were traveling on *la rayita* we had to figure out ways to not fight with our siblings. The 5 is a mind-numbingly uninteresting road once you get past the mountain pass, the “Grapevine” by the historic Fort Tejón, which in winter can become treacherous with snow and rain. We Californianos are not good with “weather”; give us sunshine, we know how to deal with that.

As my husband and I set out on this trip it is early December. No snow yet, just gray clouds pooling dark shadows on the landscape as we zoom north. Here and there are reminders of the nature of this particular trip, following the road traced out by California’s earliest missionaries. *El camino real*, the “royal road,” was a 600-mile path for people and pack animals, the way the Catholic faith made its way from the south to the northern parts of Mexico. Los Angeles is in Alta California, the international border’s painful artificiality made evident by *el camino* and its history. As missions were established along the path north, they were spaced one day’s ride from one another. Looking out the car window, it is impossible to imagine making such a trip on a burro or on foot. Yet many of our intrepid ancestors did just that.

At the start of the last century, conservationists wanting to keep the memory of *el camino* alive suspended mission bells from tall,

El Teatro Campesino has staged “La Virgen del Tepeyac” at San Juan Bautista Mission Church in California every other year since 1971.

This photo illustration overlays a sketch of the 1847 mission on a photograph of the actress who plays Our Lady of Guadalupe.



Inside the darkened church, the air vibrates with the sound of drums and the deep wail of a ceremonial conch shell.



bronze posts resembling the shepherd's crook as markers on the road. Without official care, the *campanas* deteriorated. A century later, as our state began to value our history more than the cement expanses of "progress," replicas were restored to 555 sites. I spot one, the familiar shape, the delicate verdigris color, the reminder of generations who were here before us and the ones to come. It always tells me, "You're home."

As cities on either side of *la rayita* give way to fields and the occasional cattle farm (which prompts a panicked rush to close the windows), the valley and the sky open up. The vastness of the Golden State is breathtaking. California is a palimpsest, where new writing is inscribed on top of older words, as the faded texts of the past and the words of the present create surprising new sentences. The names of saints define our state's geography, and our capital honors the Blessed Sacrament, even if most people today do not know this. On *el camino* are the missions that birthed our world-class cities—San Diego de Alcalá, San Fernando and San Gabriel in Los Angeles, and San Francisco de Asís—as well as the missions that first settled areas that are now centers for the arts, wine-making and relaxation: Santa Barbara, Carmel, Santa Cruz. One mission church serves as the chapel for a Jesuit university, Santa Clara de Asís, and a precious few have remained protected in communities hidden from view. It is to one of these that our GPS guides us.

After checking into the small Posada de San Juan Bautista, we venture out into the town. On the corner of the old mission church is a well-worn car covered in pictures proudly announcing it is a "bookmobile on a mission-to-mission pilgrimage of the *camino real*." San Juan Bautista is the seventh in the network of 21 California missions, most of which still serve vibrant Catholic communities.



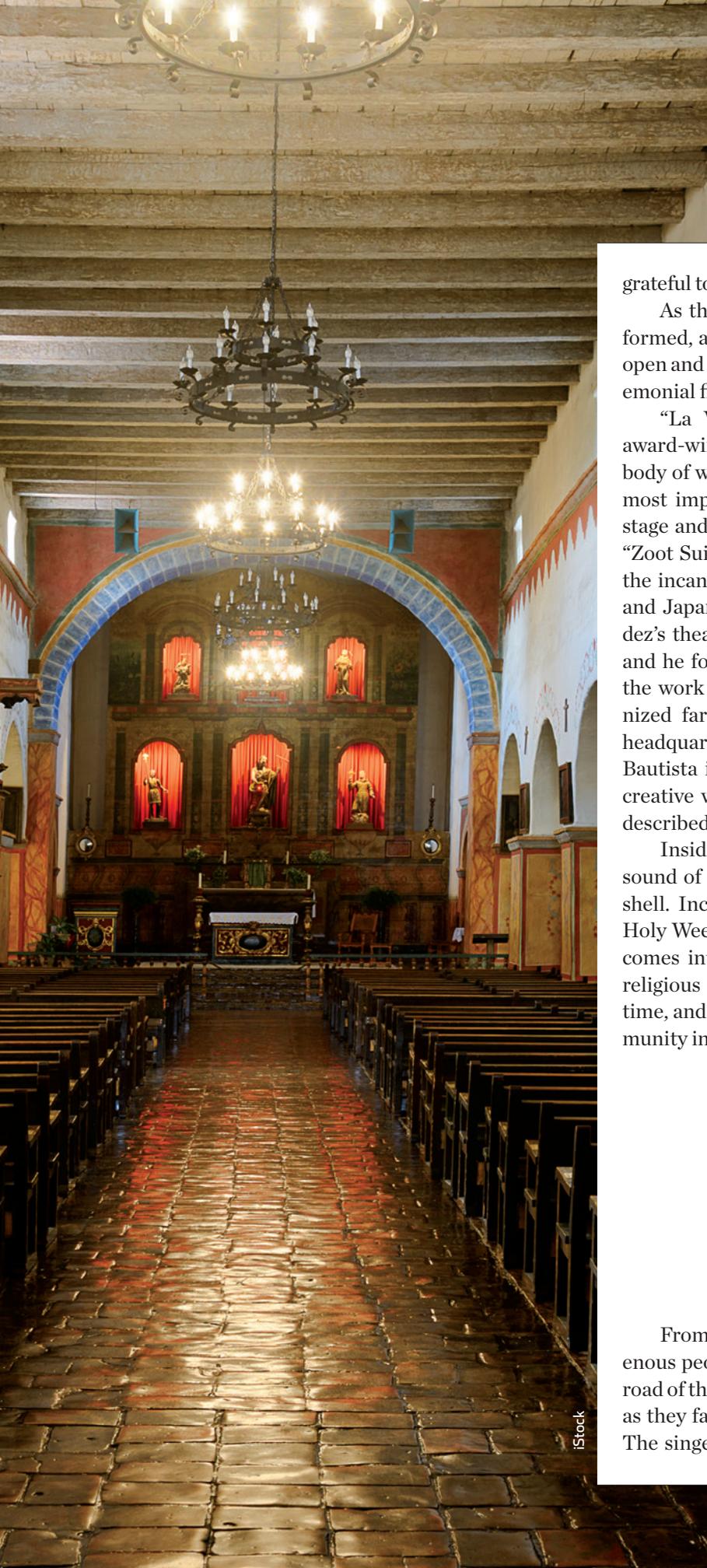
Although a small section of the *camino* still leads to it, the town is tiny and isolated. In the 19th century, the town rejected the Southern Pacific Railroad's proposal to go through it, leaving the small pueblo frozen in time as an unintentional gift. Because of this, San Juan Bautista preserves the only original plaza from Spanish times in all of California; and the mission church, the largest of all, defines the center of life now much as it did at its founding in 1797. I marvel at the mission's location, its verdant cemetery resonant with the memories of centuries miraculously undisturbed, as the hillside dips and meets the San Andreas fault. I walk on the fault for the first time, feeling the earth's aliveness and mystery beneath my feet. But that is not why I came. I came for what will happen this night.

Night

The air is chilly beneath abundant stars, as families huddle together in a line stretching along the mission cloister. Parish-life posters invite us to come back in the morning, when La Fiesta de la Virgen de Guadalupe continues with a town parade, concerts and many delights on the mission grounds. Behind us a young couple tells me they have come from a nearby town, intrigued by what they have heard. In front is a large family, the elderly patriarch wrapped in a bright red Mexican blanket surrounded by three generations of progeny. I note the few visitors speaking English, but most everyone converses in Spanish, joining in from the surrounding areas of the San Benito and Salinas valleys and west to the Monterey coast.

A respected elder, who has been personally greeting members of this unique congregation, takes the microphone. "Welcome," she says in English, "I want to remind you this is an active parish, it is my parish." We are in a sacred place and we must behave as such. She switches between languages effortlessly as she explains that what we are about to experience is the world famous theater company El Teatro Campesino in its home, the San Juan Bautista Mission Church. The play "La Virgen del Tepeyac" has been staged at the mission every other year since 1971.

I did not know it then, but this is the very last time the play will be performed inside the mission church. Safety concerns and the installation of permanent pews have brought this half century of tradition to a close. I am saddened, but



San Juan Bautista Mission Church has hosted Teatro Campesino's performance of "La Virgen del Tepeyac" for the last time. Safety concerns and the installation of permanent pews brought the tradition to a close.

grateful to be among the blessed few to experience it.

As the lights dim, the interior of the church is transformed, and the last 500 years seem to vanish. The doors open and the indigenous people enter in their splendid ceremonial finery.

"La Virgen del Tepeyac" is a masterwork by the award-winning playwright Luis Valdez, born in 1940. His body of work spans decades and defines him as one of the most important living American playwrights, prolific on stage and film, most memorably with his groundbreaking "Zoot Suit" (play 1979, film 1981). His most recent play is the incandescent commentary on migrations by Mexican and Japanese families, "Valley of the Heart" (2014). Valdez's theater grew out of his social justice commitments, and he founded El Teatro Campesino in 1965 to support the work of Cesar Chavez as the civil rights leader organized farmworkers. That his theater company remains headquartered among the agricultural fields of San Juan Bautista is a testament to his continued commitment to creative work that does justice, or as another playwright described it to me, to (agri)cultural work.

Inside the darkened church, the air vibrates with the sound of drums and the deep wail of a ceremonial conch shell. Incense fills the space, evoking memories of both Holy Week and ancient indigenous rituals. Everything becomes interlaced into a tapestry, two great civilizations, religious traditions, worldviews, are meeting for the first time, and the stage is set by the hymn the indigenous community intones:

*Estrella del Oriente
que nos dió su santa luz
ya es hora que sigamos
el camino de la cruz.
(Star of the East,
that gave its holy light
it is time for us to follow.
the road of the cross.)*

From this opening moment, the suffering of the indigenous peoples is united to the suffering of Christ; and the road of the cross follows the pattern of the paschal mystery, as they face death and God's intervention in renewed life. The singers, children, parents and grandparents, all from

istock

I did not know it then, but this is the very last time the play will be performed inside the mission church.



“La Virgen del Tepeyac” is a masterwork by the award-winning playwright Luis Valdez, born in 1940. He began with an 18th-century unsigned script by a friar recounting the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe in 1531.

the local farm worker community, reverently perform the traditional indigenous blessing to the four winds in the center aisle. As will happen throughout the night, the two religious traditions are joined. The singers kneel, blessing simultaneously the earth and the Gospels. They sing lovingly that the East has “the soul” of St. John, the North of St. Luke, the West of St. Matthew and the South of St. Mark. As the hymn is sung, several friars and the bishop make their way through the group, stopping at the center of the nave. The encounter has begun.

The feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe is celebrated on Dec. 12. In 1999 Pope John Paul II, visiting the basilica honoring her in Mexico City, prayed: “Holy Virgin of Gua-

dalupe, Queen of Peace! Save the nations and peoples of this continent. Teach everyone, political leaders and citizens, to live in true freedom and to act according to the requirements of justice and respect for human rights, so that peace may thus be established once and for all.”

Story

The play itself is unpublished. Our university librarians helped me locate an original 1976 copy of “La Virgen del Tepeyac,” banged out on a typewriter with handwritten notes. Valdez began with an 18th-century unsigned script by a friar recounting the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe in 1531, which, the pages reveal, was then sent to



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a translator in Mexico City by the name of Enrique Marcito Chino, who encloses a note about the complex nature of Nahuatl and that given more time he should record “a cassette tape,” so they might hear it. What Valdez builds from there embodies the story by adding the inescapable context of a bloody history, mixing the verses of two poetic languages, Spanish and Nahuatl, and weaving indigenous symbols, songs and dances with Catholic images, prayers and hymns.

The story of “La Virgen del Tepeyac” is about the birth of a people.

In Valdez’s telling, acted out between the church doors and main altar, two religious traditions meet and in the midst of unspeakable suffering and despair are loved into becoming a new creation by the mother of the poor, Our Lady of Guadalupe. As the encounter begins, the community cries out: “Do with us what you wish, we are common people, we are mortal. Allow us to die, as our gods have died.” The door of time has opened to a moment of devastation. As they leave the stage, their voices rise in plaintive song to their Madrecita Tonantzin, the venerated mother figure of their ancient beliefs and a name they will bestow on La Virgen. As we witness the horror of battles and destruction, something unexpected happens in an instant that changes history—the *indio* Juan Diego is baptized. Filled with an indescribable happiness he speaks of a growing “sun within my breast,” while simultaneously the truth of his hard life and the grinding poverty and brokenness of the community call out mournfully to the *madrecita* in heaven.

The entirety of the play shows how the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe are solidly grounded in the Scriptures, most especially Psalm 34, Mary’s Magnificat (Lk 1:46-56) and Revelation, Chapter 12. The gathered community of farmworkers, in costumes and in the pews, know this; it is why they are here. Valdez presents the Guadalupean tradition as the origin story of the mixed peoples of the American continent and as a defiant act of political theology. As with the God of Israel, it is the indigenous community’s calls that bring heaven’s beautiful response in La Virgen. As she explains, she is present at that moment and at that place to accompany the suffering and the poor. “This is your land,” she tells Juan Diego, “and I am Mother of the land.” La Virgen hears the community’s wounded cries that they are “no one,” answering in multiple ways that they are someone, they are her beloved children. This night, the young and old who fill the mission church feel the abundant love of God and, grace-filled, recognize their own worth. Like Juan Diego, they believe her reassurance

of her accompaniment in their suffering and her advocacy on their behalf.

In the sanctuary, each apparition of La Virgen is staged as a new revelation, as heaven opens up and the lights change, the colors are new, her clothes resplendent. As she addresses Juan Diego by calling him Xocoyotzin, her young son, Valdez, inserts an unexpected question: Why does she want the bishop to build her a temple and not the *indios*? La Virgen’s reply is at the very center of Valdez’s interpretation of God’s timeless preferential option for the poor:

*You are the indios
you have formed this land
this is why I have come
to end the injustices done in my son’s name.
This is Christ crucified.
Let the Bishop build a temple
to symbolize in America
that the indios are also children of our beloved God.
Because here the indios
in hunger and pain
are dying....*

And so, the morning after the play is staged, the church fills with the faithful at Mass, who then spill out into the mission gardens for the great fiesta and to share food and stories. Coming from miles around to this one sacred place, the community celebrates one more year of fervently believing that the Mother of God has come to console and love them. She brings them new life, and her children fill up the church with the flowers she first brought to them 500 years ago.

Cecilia González-Andrieu is an associate professor of theological studies at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, Calif., and a contributing writer for **America**.



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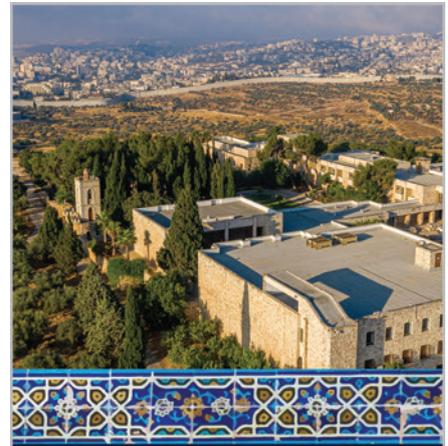
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The Voices of Advent

In this time of silence,
listen to the everyday
prophets in your life

By Jeffrey Essmann

Advent is possessed of a marvelous strangeness. We move through its purple days lighting candles against a darkening world, singing “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” which tells us to rejoice but sounds like a dirge. And we listen to those peculiar poets, the prophets. They pop up, of course, throughout the year, but at Advent, they take center stage: John the Baptist announcing the “Spirit and fire,” Isaiah awaiting “a great light.” The real strangeness of Advent is the strangeness of the prophetic voice, a voice that flutters between warning and consolation, the present and the future, cause and effect. It is a voice that echoes in the sacred silence at the very heart of us, and Advent is a season of stillness so that we may pick up the resonance of—and be drawn to God by—that echo.

While prophets, in general, seemed to be attention-grabbers, Jesus pointed out that they went unrecognized in their hometown. This implies that we may, throughout our lives, have encountered prophets unaware, those people who through gentleness or annoyance (or some combination of the two) called us to who we really are and pointed to where we were supposed to go—people like our parents. The Bible is rife with parents whose intimacy with God propelled their children into lives of holiness and

extraordinary witness: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the mother of the Maccabean martyrs, the mother of the Sons of Zebedee. Mary was a prophet at the wedding at Cana when she told Jesus they had run out of wine. Her prophecy: “Your private life is over. It’s time to shine.”

My father was an unlikely prophet—perhaps, per the tradition, even a reluctant one. He was not a particularly religious man and not a particularly talkative one. But prophets are not necessarily garrulous. (Yes, Isaiah goes on for 66 chapters, but Obadiah is barely a couple of pages.) There was also a prophecy of symbolic acts—Jeremiah burying the loincloth, Ezekiel lying on his side for over a year—that constituted a kind of Bronze Age performance art. And while my father was certainly capable of the occasional diatribe, particularly during my teens as he saw me careening into the idolatries of the ’60s counterculture, his true prophecy was quiet, steady, performative, pointing me toward a kingdom that looked mysteriously like the Midwest.

Every summer he would take the family for a week or two to a lakeside cottage in northern Wisconsin, my first experiences of the beauty of nature and of the mystery behind that beauty. A few hours into the drive north, the tree ratio would shift from deciduous to conifer, and the air took



unsplash

The real strangeness of Advent is the strangeness of the prophetic voice, a voice that flutters between warning and consolation, the present and the future. ●●

on the clean mint of endless evergreens. After supper, he and Mom would sit down by the lake and watch the sun go down, while my brother and I prowled the patches of birch along the shore trying to catch the small frogs that came out only at dusk. Every vacation included a visit to a state park and a hike through deep forest, where I first sensed that there was something in the world, in life, that was utterly nameless and inexpressibly good.

It was also at the lake that my father taught me silence. Some mornings after breakfast, he would tell me to get my fishing pole and meet him down at the pier. As he rowed us out onto the lake and I began chattering in excitement, he would remind me that fishing was essentially a quiet activity: “You don’t want to scare the fish.”

We baited our hooks and pursued our perch in near monastic silence. I might occasionally have a question (Why do loons sound so funny?); he might share some piece of fishing history (a northern pike he caught before I was born). But, in general, we were silent—silent and happy. I watched my bobber bounce and totter in the morning sun; heard a tiny errant wave lap the side of the boat. And I adored my father. Those moments of sitting quietly in the presence of a loving father taught me just about everything I needed to know about prayer, about heaven. Today, whatever minor ecstasies I may enjoy are redolent of freshwater lake and worms.

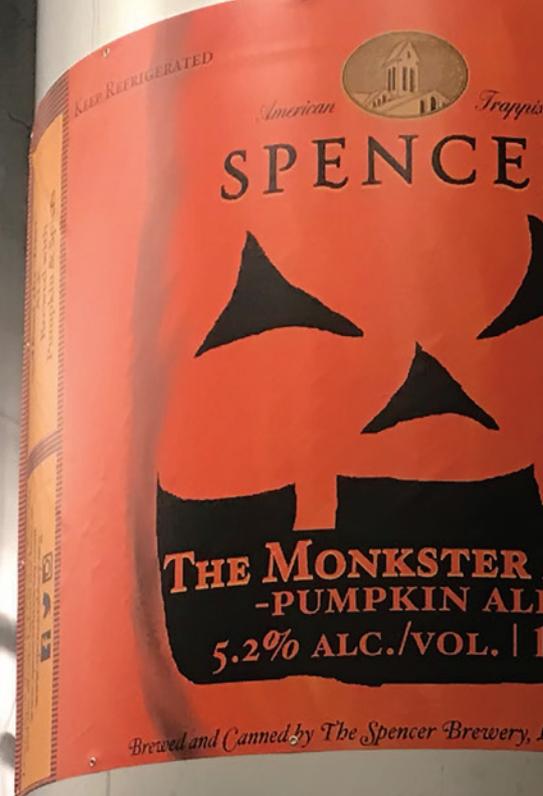
In the fullness of time, I was turned over to a community of prophetesses for my formal education: the School Sisters of Notre Dame. While we usually associate prophecy with individuals, there were in Old Testament times also prophetic communities, either ongoing or ad hoc. (At one point during the 40 years in the desert, God poured out the prophesying spirit not only on Moses but on 70 Israelite elders—but only for a short time). But, solo or communal, the prophetic charism was the same: prompted by an intense experience of the living God, to call the people back to covenant and form them into a community worthy of his children. The S.S.N.D.s, in the desert of suburban Milwaukee, kept their eye on the prize. With a vision as keen as Isaiah’s,

they saw the future—and it was Catholic.

The sisters encompassed the full range of prophetic temperament. Sister Julita in first grade was all consolation, taking clear delight in showing us the love of God; Sister Gemma in fourth leaned more toward his wrath. While the sisters were unrelenting in their focus on the good and the true, they nonetheless never forsook the beautiful. It was the “art nun” who first introduced me to Cézanne (and, by extension, the glories of color); a group of sisters doing a choral reading of “Leaves of Grass” that turned me on to Walt Whitman. And, in the most traditional, predictive sense of prophecy, it was my sixth-grade nun who first told me I was going to be a writer. Most important of all, they introduced me to a God still active in the world through his children. The last time I saw my seventh-grade teacher was in a photo on the front page of the archdiocesan newspaper, arm-in-arm with other Catholic religious at the front line of a civil rights demonstration.

We live in a world in which prophecy has been swamped by prediction: the weather, elections, the stock market. But John the Baptist did not conduct polls; Isaiah’s accuracy did not have a margin of plus or minus 3 percentage points. Prophets simply tell the truth. And we focus on them during Advent because it is the season leading up to the greatest truth of all: God is with us. He is here, now. We are saved. It is an extraordinary message that all of us utterly ordinary Christians—parents, teachers, parishioners, pals—are supposed to pass along. At baptism we were anointed to be prophets to one another and to the world, to bear witness to the great light, to burn with the Spirit and fire and to echo the voice of God at the heart of us. And yes, we may go unnoticed in our hometowns; but if we are lucky, we might raise an eyebrow in the kingdom of God.

Jeffrey Essmann’s essays and poems have appeared in numerous magazines and journals, including *America*, *U.S. Catholic*, *PILGRIM*, *Dappled Things*, the *St. Austin Review* and *The Road Not Taken*. He lives in New York.



The Secret Business Life of Monks

A monastery in Massachusetts
revives a centuries-old brewing tradition

By John W. Miller



All photos by John W. Miller

Every morning, Isaac Keeley, O.C.S.O., a contemplative Trappist in the autumn of his days, wakes up at 2:30 a.m. and prays until dawn. Then he tries to boost beer sales.

The 69-year-old monk runs Spencer Brewery, America's first and only Trappist beer-maker, at St. Joseph's Abbey near Boston, combining modern capitalism with ancient religious practice and revealing the frailties of both the dollar and the divine.

With sales stagnating in a crowded craft beer market, Father Isaac, a former hermit, has summoned his inner Jack Welch. He has had to fire people, master modern analytics and

learn jargon like "key performance indicators." ("It's sort of like confession. It's about revealing the truth of what's going on.") He has brought in consultants and invited Harvard Business School to carry out a study. Four times a year, he travels to Europe on business.

The Spencer Brewery does not have shareholders to satisfy, but it does have monks to feed—and obey. Father Isaac must follow the wishes of his own community of 54 brethren, not all of them beer lovers, and the powerful International Trappist Association, controlled by Belgian monks. The director of the Spencer brewery is probably the only monk who has ever

had to defend American cultural practices like pumpkin-spiced ales and "tallboy" beer cans.

There are also loans to pay off and, most important, aging monks to care for. The monastery declined to discuss finances with me, but it aims to produce 10,000 barrels of beer a year within 10 years. (By comparison, Dogfish Head, a major Delaware-based craft brewer, brews around 200,000 barrels a year.) Each Spencer barrel is sold for around \$300, according to distributors. That would be around three million dollars a year in revenue. Currently, they are shipping around half that amount. The brewery is on monastic grounds;

Spencer Brewery does not have shareholders to satisfy, but it does have monks to feed. ●●

if it fails, selling the business to non-monks is not an option.

Like any good chief executive officer, Father Isaac trumpets his corporate slogan—“Pair with family and friends”—and his employees: “We have a really lean team.” He is also revving up media exposure, which is why he invited me for a two-day visit. When I covered Belgian beer for *The Wall Street Journal*, monasteries were never this open to reporters.

While walking the corporate walk, Father Isaac must strive to live a life that is, according to his monastic vocation, “ordinary, obscure and laborious.”

Running a brewery “is an incredibly steep learning curve,” the gentle, moon-faced priest told me when I visited on a bright day in October. The hours of prayer before dawn strengthen him for work: “If I take care of that part of life, I have the peace to live in my corner of the business world. If I can do the business out of that framework, something good is happening to me.”

A Centuries-Old Tradition

The name Trappists, one of the strictest orders in the Catholic Church, is a nickname for the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, founded in La Trappe, France, in the 1660s. They follow the Rule of St. Benedict, written in the sixth century, and pray seven hours a day.

Like any family, Catholic monks need income for food, shelter, health care and the local charities they sup-

port. In addition, their per capita cost is rising, as communities age and vocations to the monastic life decline, meaning there are fewer able-bodied monks left to work. Sources of income can vary: The world’s 169 Trappist communities make coffee, fudge, fruitcakes, jams, cheese, bread and even clothes. (Only 12 brew beer.)

The origins of St. Joseph’s Abbey are in the French Revolution. In 1789, rebels bent on destroying both throne and steeple torched churches and monasteries, confiscating buildings, art and furniture. Men and women religious scattered, heading to Belgium, Switzerland and other neighboring countries, as well as to the New World. In 1825, one band of brothers made it to Nova Scotia, Canada, where they farmed corn. After membership dwindled, the community moved to Rhode Island, and then, in 1950, to where it is now: Spencer, Mass., an hour’s drive west of Boston. The monastery earned a living at first by making vestments for priests and jellies and jams.

Meanwhile, in Belgium, surviving Trappist communities rebuilt their crumbling walls. To raise money, they brewed, as their forefathers had done in medieval Europe, where beer was safer than water and integral to secular and religious culture. They had no rules against drinking—those were for Protestants. Initially, their beer was mainly sold locally, but in Europe after the Second World War, sales took off.

I was born in Brussels in 1977, and by the time I started drinking beer in the mid-1990s, the Trappists reigned supreme in a beer-crazy nation. My favorites were Chimay, Orval and Rochefort, magical elixirs, dry and fruity, brewed masterfully with malted barley, hops and yeast. The popularity expanded across the ocean, and some of the monasteries set up distribution networks around the United States. I have found Chimay in bars in Ohio.

Monks in other countries have taken notice, with Trappists in the Netherlands (Zundert), Austria (Engelszell), England (Mount Saint Bernard) and Italy (Tre Fontane) launching breweries to sustain their abbeys.

In 2000 the abbot at St. Joseph’s decided he needed to secure a stronger financial future for the monastery. “Self-support has been an important part of monastic life since the beginning,” Damian Carr, the monastery’s current abbot, told me. “We need as much money to support ourselves as any family would.” In particular, the aging of the community, combined with the rising cost of American health care, is challenging. An advisory group of non-monks, including business leaders and academics, concluded that more revenue was needed.

They ended up with beer “by process of elimination,” said Father Isaac. “It certainly wasn’t where we started. The typical thing would be to make more of what you’re doing to support yourselves.” At Spencer, that meant jams and jellies. “But we’re a niche player in a very mature market”—so those did not offer much opportunity for growth, and would not be a promising investment.

Their other market, for priestly vestments, was also shrinking. “Our main customer has been Catholic priests, and in the last 30 years, the



Spencer Brewery aims to produce 10,000 barrels of beer a year within 10 years.

Catholic priest population has decreased by tens of percentages,” said Father Isaac. They looked at wind turbine electrical production. The Federal Aviation Administration ruled out their preferred location because it was on the flight pattern of a local airport. A second location suffered from weak wind. Finally, somebody suggested a brewery. The advisory board was skeptical. But after they tried a test beer, they liked it and approved the project.

But first, they needed a blessing—and some technical help—from Belgium.

Beer Barons

Belgium, a tiny North Sea country of 11.4 million, is home to six of the world’s 12 Trappist breweries, including the top-rated Chimay, Orval, Achel, Rochefort, Westmalle and Westvleteren. Westvleteren 12 has been ranked as the best beer in the world. Their beers are heavy in alcohol and taste more like a creamy cocktail than a beer. You don’t want to

(or shouldn’t) drink more than two.

Belgian monks set up the International Trappist Association in 1997 to protect and market their brand. Commercial breweries without any religious affiliation were making so-called “abbey” beers, and the Belgian monks wanted their brews marked as authentic. They retained lawyers and threatened to sue imitators. Only the I.T.A. can authorize the placement of the Trappist hexagonal logo on beer and other products.

In February 2010 Father Isaac and another monk flew to Zaventem airport outside Brussels. On that first trip, they took a wrong turn and got lost. “We first went to Westmalle, Achel, Westvleteren; probably Chimay was next, then Orval, Rochefort,” said Father Isaac.

The Belgian monks were skeptical. “They were concerned we would try to become the American Trappist Bud,” said Father Isaac. “In other words, they worried we would not appreciate what they were doing, and that some had spent more than a century growing.”

(The I.T.A. did not return emails seeking comment for this article.)

After two years of “shuttle diplomacy,” the Belgian monks approved the project, but recommended that Spencer build a state-of-the-art brewery and only make one kind of beer during its first five years. In 2012, Spencer joined the I.T.A.

An Unlikely Place for a Brewery?

St. Joseph’s Abbey is spread over 2,000 acres, on slopes covered with bright meadows and forests of oak, maple and pine. The peace and beauty are stunning. “The Irish like to say there are places where the boundary between heaven and earth is thin,” said Father Isaac. “It doesn’t matter who you are, if you’re a believer or not. When you’re in that space, you know it’s a special space. God has a way of touching people in that space. You can’t create a thin space. Spencer is a thin space. We’re just the caretakers.”

When I first arrived in a rental car from Logan Airport, an 87-year-old monk from Louisiana named Gabriel



Spencer Brewery is run by Father Isaac Keeley. It has overestimated how much resonance the Trappist brand would have in the United States.

Bertoniere gave me a tour. He has lived at the monastery since 1952, when he arrived as an English major from Harvard, part of a wave of young men inspired by the writings of Thomas Merton, perhaps the most famous Trappist. Father Gabriel approves of the brewery, even if he does not consume its products. “I’m more of a wine guy,” he said.

The brewery lies beyond the chapel and cloisters, a boxy factory adjacent to a tranquil pond. The monastery will not disclose the cost of operations, but it is very modern, with automated machines that require only a handful of workers.

Everything is top-of-the-line. Bottling lines come from Italy, brewing gear from Germany. Thicker bottles designed to withstand higher fermentation pressures are imported from Belgium. Hops come from the western United States and Germany, malts from the United States, Germany, Canada, the Czech Republic and Canada.

On bottling day—usually Thursday—a couple dozen monks come to help out. On other days, Father Isaac

and a few assistants can manage the entire high-tech brewery on their own. “The project was designed to be as automated as possible in this market,” said Brother Michael Rzasa, a former mortician from Johnstown, Pa., who became a monk seven years ago.

A Rough Start

In 2013, the brewery launched Spencer Trappist Ale, a 6.5-percent alcohol golden ale. (The average alcohol content of most commercial American beers is 4.5 percent.) Beer websites describe the beer as a “Belgian pale ale.” That’s wrong, according to Father Isaac. “It’s sui generis,” he said, adding: “The right way to describe it is that it’s brewed to have the color of the sunrise on Nauset Beach on Cape Cod on the third Monday of September.” The beer is good—peachy and refreshing—and I recommend drinking it if you can find it.

The beer critic Owen Ogletree, in a review for *The Beer Connoisseur*, called the beer “elegant” and said it “produces restrained aromas of fruity Belgian esters, banana, allspice, nut-

meg, vanilla and light tropical fruit allusions.” The beer, he concluded, “ranks as a respectable example of a graceful style of ‘everyday’ beers enjoyed by many Trappist monks.”

It was a good start, but Spencer overestimated how much resonance the Trappist brand would have in the United States. “We were hoping that the Trappist name would sell itself,” said Larry Littlehale, Spencer’s brewmaster. “In Europe, it’s an older population that knows the Trappist brand, which is not the case in America.” Sales did not take off.

“Unfortunately, Trappist ales are not as popular in America as they once were,” Mr. Ogletree wrote me in an email. “American craft beer geeks seem to be looking for anything that is not classic. Fruit-puree sour beers, two-dimensional kettle soured ales, hazy I.P.A.s sweetened with loads of lactose, and dessert-like pastry stouts are all the rage—along with anything that makes the beer not taste like beer but more like candy or breakfast cereal from childhood.”

Continued on Page 46

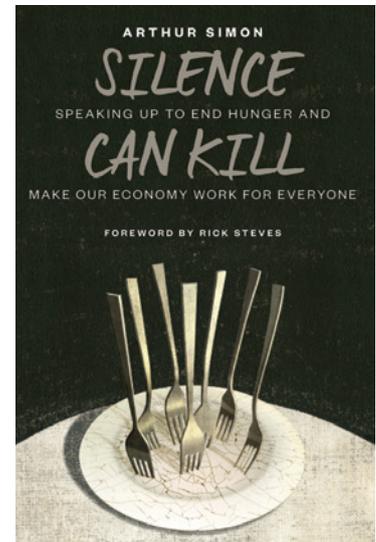
Prayers at 4

By Bill Simmons

On hearing a baby cry
I lost myself on myself
60 years ago, the horror
I was born knowing,
Knowing existence is brutal,
Thoughts chaotic; hate and
Desperation, all I knew.
Somehow I got Memory,
And I knew this wasn't right.
I would stand out in the mallows
And cow pastures, arms and eyes
Opened wide, crying, praying:
“God, why am I here?
Why did You put me here?
This is the wrong house.
I don't know these people.
I don't belong here.
They don't want me.
Who am I?”
Then I'd shudder and walk
Back to the house hoping
No one, except God, heard me.

Bill Simmons writes and lives in Carroll, Iowa. He conducts the poetry group in Carroll and started a writers' group with Des Moines Area Community College instructors in Boone, Iowa.

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The Belgians have been surprised by Spencer's troubles. They had thought the American beer market was infinite. ☪☪

Continued from Page 44

The Belgians have been surprised by Spencer's troubles. They had thought the American beer market was infinite. The solution, Spencer decided, was to diversify. "Starbucks doesn't have one kind of coffee," said Father Isaac. Mindful of changing tastes, Spencer introduced other beers, including an imperial stout and an I.P.A.

Spencer now sells around nine different types of beer, including The Monkster Mash, a pumpkin-spiced ale.

The beer that was the hardest for the I.T.A. to accept was the pilsner, a classic light table beer with roots in Germany and the Czech Republic. Trappist monasteries had been overtaken by Nazi troops during the Second World War. "The concern was that it was going to cheapen the brand," said Father Isaac. "There was animated discussion. Basically, the message was, 'it's the German invasion all over again, coming from America.'" Finally, the chair of the meeting tells everyone: "Let's stop and just drink the beer." They liked the beer. "They asked us never to export it to Europe."

Monky Business

Besides reckoning with a saturated beer market, Spencer also faced other hurdles, including a distributor that pulled out of its agreement without warning. After the initial missteps, "we

didn't really have a plan B, so we just picked up the pieces," said Father Isaac.

Last year he invited Harvard Business School students to study the brewery's business strategy. Among their conclusions: Use analytics to target specific markets and zip codes, and improve its sales and market-

ing. "Higher level sales leadership is essential to grow the business to the next level," they said.

Father Isaac called a consultant with experience importing Belgian beers. "We evaluated their sales team," James Williams, the managing partner at Edge Beverage Consulting, told me. "We decided it would be good to start with a new sales team."

Mr. Williams and his team also instituted key performance indicators, where salespeople defend their performance to their bosses. That was a new one for Father Isaac.

Luckily, the brewery is popular in the area, said Emily Manoogian, a saleswoman who is from a nearby town. In 2019 more than 7,000 people attended an open house. Unfortunately, the brewery is closed the rest of the year. Unlike other breweries, the monastery does not have a tasting room, which limits its appeal to the lucrative market in beer tourism. The community, in keeping with a U.S. Protestant culture, is split on the issue. "I'm not a drinker," said Father Vincent Rogers, a monk from California who oversees finances at the monastery. "A tasting room is more than I would be comfortable with."

If you want to drink the beer while you're visiting, you have to hop over to the Black and White Grille, a pizza,

nachos and sports bar up the road. By contrast, when I visited Orval in Belgium on a retreat in 2017, the monks served their beer with lunch.

On a walk outside, a car with tourists made a looping approach to the brewery. Father Isaac waved at them. "We have to tell people to turn around and leave," he said. "Unless they're from far away. Sometimes we get people from Belgium. I welcome them in."

Father Isaac, who is from upstate New York and once spent 18 months as a hermit in the Arizona desert, never received any formal education in business. "My father used to tell me he wanted me to go into business and make a lot of money," he said. "I said 'I don't care about money.'"

Now, his calling dictates that he must not only care about money—he must make it. "The beer market is a really tough market because there are so many, and there are a lot of good beers," he said, sounding with every word more like a C.E.O. and less like a monk. "So what's really essential is we don't brew for ourselves. We brew for the consumer. But your beer has to come from who you are. So it's really important to get a real handle on your identity in the brew world and then really create from that center."

And where is God in all this? Father Isaac prays while he works. "You're mindful of work. You remember to remember." He called the brewery a 100-year project. "If it doesn't work out," he said, "we've done our best with the best available information."

It is appropriate that the work is hard, he added. "We're trying to re-found our economy, keep the monastery going," he said. "That's a big deal."

John W. Miller is a Pittsburgh-based writer and former staff reporter and foreign correspondent for The Wall Street Journal.



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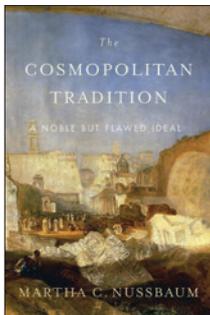
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A thrilling vision from Martha Nussbaum

By Aidan Johnson

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The Cosmopolitan Tradition

A Noble But Flawed Ideal

By Martha Nussbaum
Belknap Press
320p \$27.95

In their chart-topping 1985 hit “We Built This City,” Starship imagines the human community as a town founded on a principle of harmonious love. “We built this city!” the band sings. “We built this city—on rock ’n’ roll!” This life-giving citadel replaces a sin-filled world, where “knee deep in hoopla, sinking in your fight/ we got too many runaways eating up the night.” Fortunately, the song prophesies, we all have rock ’n’ roll inside us.

In her brilliant new book, *The Cosmopolitan Tradition*, Martha Nussbaum argues for an even more thrilling vision: the whole biosphere conceived and treated as a “cosmic

city,” in which humans carefully do their part to ensure that the capabilities of all creatures can be activated as much as possible. In this aspirational community, each individual is afforded the resources she or he needs for flourishing by the commons. The individual is owed this grant, in Nussbaum’s view, not because of her ability for moral reasoning, as in Stoic ethics, but because of her sentience—the very fact of her ability to flourish.

In abandoning the Stoic privileging of the moral intellect for a concept of rights flowing from sentience, Nussbaum is able to make the case her own conscience dictates: an argument for full inclusion in the community of rights for nonhuman animals and mentally disabled humans. The rights of the mentally disabled and of animals are neglected by the Stoic moral view, Nussbaum submits, because animals and many mentally disabled humans cannot engage in formal moral reasoning. “The gates of the cosmic city,” Nussbaum writes, “must be open to all.”

Nussbaum is widely regarded as one of the most important modern English-language philosophers and is currently serving as the Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago. *The Cosmopolitan Tradition* proves that her reputation is well deserved. It enriches liberal political theory with a vision at once spiritual, practical and deeply reverent toward the sweep of the philosophical tradition, from ancient Greece and Rome through the Renaissance and Enlightenment.

The book will be of interest to Catholic readers for several reasons, not least among them the longstanding Catholic interest in Nussbaum’s core concern: determining precisely what features are required, at a minimum, for a truly just social order at the local and international levels. Nussbaum is a Reform Jew. True to the best in her own faith tradition, she argues for a “rationalist” public ethics in which people of all religions and of none can feel genuinely respected.

Martha Nussbaum is widely regarded as one of the most important modern English-language philosophers.

“Among the Christian faiths, Roman Catholicism has a profound rationalist aspect, and typically values secular moral philosophy very highly,” Nussbaum writes. “Respecting one’s fellow citizens means respecting their choice to live their lives in their own way, by their own doctrines, so long as they do not invade the basic rights of others.”

The book’s central argument is that the ancient Cynic-Stoic ideal of a “cosmic city”—a global community of universal human concern—is in need of deep rethinking and expansion. Diogenes the Cynic was apparently the first philosopher to call himself “cosmopolitan,” or a “citizen of the world.” The word represented a powerful rejection of the still-common idea that the wise person ought to see rank, local geographic area and gender as markers of her true community and identity. Nussbaum is inspired by Diogenes’s bold anticlassism. But she also argues that there have been flaws in the cosmopolitan vision from the start.

Nussbaum takes pains in her refutation of (and building on) the Stoics, because the Stoics did much to found the cosmopolitan vision after Diogenes. (Christians who accept the much-debated view that the letters of Paul are shaped by a critical engagement with Stoicism will find much to relish in Nussbaum’s richly nuanced discussion.) The “flaws” in the Stoics’ philosophical work must be corrected, Nussbaum argues, in order to neutralize the serious stumbling blocks they put in our way to global justice. One such trap is the Stoics’ neglect of the need for material aid, including redistribution of wealth. Simultaneously,

Nussbaum argues against much foreign aid policy as currently organized because of that system’s widespread corruption. She prefers democratic international development, permitting nations to amass their own wealth for distribution pursuant to their own citizens’ plans and values.

Another flaw that Nussbaum corrects in Stoic cosmopolitanism is the tradition’s deep-seated mistrust of emotion, and thus of humans’ normal instincts. Nussbaum argues that the Stoic view of emotion amounts to a shallow and dehumanizing psychology. While not a focus of *The Cosmopolitan Tradition*, Nussbaum’s philosophy of emotion has been a key concern of her career. In *Upheavals of Thought* (2003), Nussbaum affirms the Stoic argument that emotion is a form of cognitive appraisal, while rejecting the related Stoic position that passion-based choices are necessarily irrational. In so doing, Nussbaum makes room for what she herself passionately recommends: decision-making based on generosity.

From a Catholic perspective, it is worth noting that Nussbaum is in step here with St. Thomas Aquinas, amplifying Aquinas’s own core view of emotion. “Passions are not called ‘diseases’ or ‘disturbances’ of the soul,” Aquinas says in the *Summa Theologiae*, “save when they are not controlled by reason.” Aquinas is explicitly refuting the Stoics with an argument that passion is, at least in many cases, a fruit of the Spirit. A few lines before, Aquinas quotes from Augustine’s *City of God* to clarify the nature of reason, “controller” of the heart: “All these emotions are right in those whose

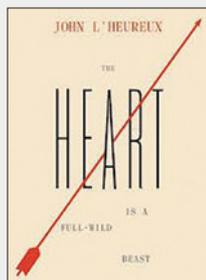
love is rightly placed.”

Nussbaum goes even further than Thomas in defending emotion: For her, passions are not merely controlled by reason, but often are reason, and thus indistinguishable from right judgment itself—emotional generosity being a key example. Nussbaum and Thomas agree that the Stoic language of “disease” in relation to passion misses a beautiful truth. This expansion of the ideas of the Angelic Doctor is only implicit (Nussbaum does not refer to Aquinas), but it is important as an example of the fruitful conversation to which she invites the theologically inclined reader.

A theologian Nussbaum does explicitly cite, and in a fascinating way, is Jacques Maritain. Drawing particularly on Maritain’s *The Rights of Man and Natural Law* (1943), Nussbaum proposes that “the reason for not including your own religious ideas in a political doctrine that involves other people who don’t share your religion is not skepticism or frivolity, it is respect.” When Jacques Maritain “proposes ‘dignity’ as a way of capturing, in secular ethical terms, what he as a Christian would mean by ‘soul,’ he was expressing the core values of the Cynic-Stoic tradition.”

To see the Catholic moral tradition deployed to such profound effect by a non-Catholic philosopher gives hope that a true “overlapping consensus” can be developed about the things that matter most.

Aidan Johnson works in poverty law in the Niagara region of Canada.



The Heart Is a Full-Wild Beast
By John L'Heureux
A Public Space
Books
432p \$28

A most literary life

A woman tells her doctor she is a promiscuous nonpracticing Jew who doesn't believe in God as he diagnoses her stigmata in "Witness," one of the standout short stories in John L'Heureux's *The Heart Is a Full-Wild Beast*. "I have no aspirations to sanctity or indeed to any kind of singularity arising from belief in God, especially belief in a Catholic God," she assures him. Still, she experiences stabbing pains and blood from her wrists, and according to people around her (and eventually her own research), she has been specially chosen for this suffering as well as for the grace it offers her.

After a former lover tells her she can't escape grace, she resigns herself. "On Sunday, she awoke perfectly calm, perfectly composed," L'Heureux writes. "She lay on the sofa, still in her dress and heels, and said to the empty room, 'I have the stigmata. I am a stigmatic. There is no escape, no place to hide.'" Once she does accept it, however, those around her stop believing her, leaving the reader as her sole witness—not only to her suffering, but to the divine mercy it provides her.

The Heart Is a Full-Wild Beast is full of such moments of grace, with characters both denying and ac-

cepting it, and adds to L'Heureux's lasting legacy after his death earlier this year at 84. Eight of the stories have been previously published, but the rest are new, leading readers through the unsettling and often joyful and transformative worlds they contain. An unborn baby sings to its comedian mother, but no one else can hear it; a woman writes all over the walls, denying it to her frustrated husband, and stops only when he stops trying to understand why; a man staying with his wife in London battles an evil cat. L'Heureux's stories move, often within a single paragraph, from the ridiculous to the humane to the sublime.

L'Heureux spent 17 years as a Jesuit before leaving that order and marrying. His life was exceptionally literary. He served as an editor at *The Atlantic*, published short stories in the nation's best magazines, wrote 23 novels and short story collections, and for more than 30 years taught and directed the writing program at Stanford University. Catholicism in *The Heart Is a Full-Wild Beast* is more evident in the optics of the stories—characters who pray and seek advice from priests, and of course, the non-believer's stigmata—than in its dogma or worldview. L'Heureux raises questions rather than offering answers. Even the unredeemable can choose whether they will accept the grace offered to them, time and time again.

Ellen O'Connell Whittet teaches at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her ballet memoir, *What You Become in Flight*, is coming out in spring 2020.



Body Leaping Backward
Memoir of a Delinquent Girlhood
By Maureen Stanton
Houghton Mifflin
Harcourt
218p \$26

Reconstructing a lost youth

In 1965, when Maureen Stanton was 4, her family moved to Walpole, Mass., the home of the state's maximum-security prison. Stanton's devout Catholic mother cautioned her seven children, "If you misbehave, you'll end up there."

But the boundaries between right and wrong would blur for Stanton as she grew up. Her required weekly confessions perplexed her. "I was honest once, telling the priest I'd done nothing wrong," but the priest wouldn't let her go until she coughed up something, so she began to lie. Stanton soon realized no one made sure she did her penance. "I must not have believed in God, or else I'd have worried that he was watching. Could I have been agnostic at the age of seven, eight?" *Body Leaping Backward* is full of probing questions like these.

This is a melancholy, atmospheric memoir that reads as a sort of urgent confession. Stanton reconstructs her experience during those lost years with precision through the petulant, posturing entries in her adolescent diary, newspaper accounts, crime statistics, interviews with family members and soul-deep reflection.

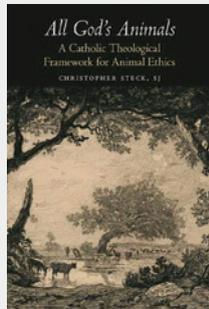
Stanton's research uncovers the depth of the era's societal mal-

aise: “Shoplifting nearly became a national pastime, increasing 221 percent from 1960 to 1973 and then rising 20 percent annually until 1980, when stores installed electromagnetic tags and surveillance cameras.” The “divorce boom,” too, coincided with Stanton’s teenage years. She situates her alarming behavior within this context, traces her deep hurt to her parents’ divorce and charts the shattering of her role models. Her mother, a woman who “lived her faith,” is reduced to shoplifting to sustain a middle-class existence. But Stanton accepts full responsibility for her decisions.

Stanton suggests growing up in the shadow of a prison undermines one’s internal moral compass and sense of justice, given how unfair the punishments can be. She notes several cases of harsh sentences for black people, contrasted with lenient ones for her white peers. These messages encourage privileged teens to believe they are entitled to get away with everything.

Body Leaping Backward is at once a mea culpa, an in-depth work of sociology and an extravagant gesture of forgiveness, toward the adults and institutions that failed to prevent Stanton’s self-destructive behavior and toward herself. Stanton writes with crystalline prose and a storyteller’s verve that makes this memoir linger and reverberate in the reader’s mind.

Jenny Shank’s first novel, *The Ringer*, won the *High Plains Book Award*. She is on the faculty of the *Mile High M.F.A.* in creative writing at *Regis University* in Denver.



All God’s Animals
A Catholic
Theological
Framework for
Animal Ethics
By Christopher
Steck, S.J.
Georgetown
University Press
264p \$39.95

Kinship, not dominion

In a timely way, Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical, “*Laudato Si’*,” addressed questions asked in such books as *Will I See My Dog in Heaven?* by Jack Wintz, O.F.M., and Charles Camosy’s *For Love of Animals: Christian Ethics, Consistent Action*. The pope’s conclusion that “it is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly” won approval from animal rights activists.

Christopher Steck, S.J., teaches in the department of theology and religious studies at Georgetown University, where he also served as a caretaker for Jack and Jack Junior, the university’s former bulldog mascots. The author of *The Ethical Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Steck now mulls over a Catholic theology of animals based upon an exploration of fundamental doctrine.

He suggests that since intensive animal farming or industrial livestock production, also known as factory farming, causes suffering to animals, Christians should avoid eating the products of these methods. Steck refrains from a blanket recommendation of vegetarianism and also admits that despite concerns about animal experimentation, “individual Christians cannot realistically” shun medical treatment connected with

such experimentation.

Instead, we may ponder the possibility of the salvation of some animals:

Some creatures, based on present understanding, do not seem to have the requisites for continuity of life across bodily death and eschatological life...for those creatures with no sense of past or future and no sense of self, it is hard to imagine that a substantive continuity could exist between their lives in the present order and their selves after death and resurrection.

So it is unlikely that we shall meet mosquitoes, tsetse flies or poisonous snakes in the afterlife. Even so, “all creaturely dramas, even predation and prey” may continue in the next world, where predation could continue “in some form unknown to us.”

Apart from such possibilities, Steck makes a more general attempt to show how a Christian community may care for creation. As in “*Laudato Si’*,” Steck recommends a relationship of kinship to animals rather than one of dominion or stewardship.

Steck also cites von Balthasar’s identification of “veiled goodness” in animals, implying that no matter how much study is expended to understand them, living creatures retain their mystery.

Benjamin Ivry has written biographies of Francis Poulenc, Maurice Ravel and Arthur Rimbaud and has translated many books from the French.



The restless Catholics of ‘Heroes of the Fourth Turning’

By Rob Weinert-Kendt

Will Arbery’s new play speaks loudly and clearly to our divided cultural moment. Pictured: Zoë Winters, Jeb Kreager and Julia McDermott.

“I’m not someone who likes arguing,” said the playwright Will Arbery over breakfast recently. Fortunately for theatergoers, he is clearly a writer drawn to people who argue, and he put five choice specimens onstage to hash it out in his hit Off-Broadway play “Heroes of the Fourth Turning,” now closed but sure to have a future life in regional productions. The production garnered some of the most uniformly ecstatic reviews I have seen in years, not only from mainstream theater publications but from a variety of Catholic and conservative publications as well.

That is because the arguers Mr. Arbery placed in a Wyoming backyard in the dim, straggling hours after a party—most of them graduates of a Catholic college there—are all “conservative Catholics” of some variety or other. Their post-collegiate eager-

ness to mix it up proved electrifying, but audiences were also intrigued by how much granular variety Mr. Arbery could inscribe into a worldview many liberal theatergoers are likely to presume is more monolithic.

One man, Justin, is a soft-spoken advocate of the Benedict Option. Another, Teresa, is a strident, snarky conservative pundit with a Steve Bannon-esque eagerness for culture war. Kevin is a lightly bearded lost soul full of pent-up sexual energy. And Emily is a sweet, sensitive woman racked with Lyme’s disease and a possibly more threatening affliction in this hermetic world: a willingness to listen to the “other” side. These students’ former teacher (and Emily’s mother), Gina, shows up late in the play to take stock of their lives. Based on Mr. Arbery’s own mother, Virginia Arbery, a professor at Wyoming Catholic College,

Gina is brilliantly literate and sharply skeptical of Trump-era conservative revanchism, despite her erstwhile support for Pat Buchanan.

The conclusions these five characters reach by the play’s end have a political valence, no question, but they are also deeply personal and individual. As the critic Sara Holdren, of New York magazine, succinctly put it: “It’s not actually about its characters’ talking points at all. It’s about them.”

Mr. Arbery, 30, has written a number of plays, including the stark, surreal “Plano.” But “Heroes of the Fourth Turning” unquestionably feels like the big play he had in him, if not all his life, then for many years of quietly watching and listening to his fellow Catholics and conservatives. The question for many in his audience has been whether he still counts himself among their ranks. It



Joan Marcus

is a question Arbery is “suspicious of,” he told me over breakfast.

“In the response to this play, people are looking for clues—basically clues about my soul, I would say,” said Mr. Arbery. “The question of whether I go to Mass or not, whether I’m lapsed or not—that sort of myopia just immediately sends me back to the feeling I had in high school. In the play I call it the panopticon, the feeling that you’re being watched.”

Mr. Arbery’s stance is in part a version of the “let the art speak for itself” argument. He’s hoping, he said, to “topple some of our dependency” on knowing a creator’s intentions before we respond to their creation.

“Can we get back to a place where we’re experiencing the thing itself on its own terms, rather than looking to the creator for clues about where exactly it stands politically and whether it falls into some sort of party line?”

Of course, playwrights like Tony Kushner or David Mamet seem happy to trumpet their political and personal commitments. But Mr. Arbery insists that his reluctance to pledge allegiance to any side is itself a commitment, not to complacency but to deeper engagement. If his play is making an argument, he said, “it’s an argument for listening. The play was designed to linger in people’s minds long after they saw it. I’m not providing a diagnosis. I’m not providing an answer—you won’t find an easily articulable conclusion.”

In the context of a New York theater production, a plea for “listening”

may be read as a demand that liberal audiences hear conservative views they don’t usually take seriously. But Mr. Arbery means it the other way around, too: “Listening is what I’m offering to everyone, and arguing for. Catholic conservatives ignore that call at their own peril, and that’s how I always felt growing up—there wasn’t enough listening to what the other side was actually saying.” Progressive audiences seemed willing to take “Heroes” seriously; but he wonders, would conservative audiences do the same for a recent production at the same theater of “A Strange Loop,” a musical about a young black gay man in New York City?

Mr. Arbery often paused for long stretches when I asked direct questions, saying he has spent much of his life in what his mother has called “the fissure space. I am in that space right now, and it’s weird—I feel called to deny both sides a full, complete understanding of my soul.”

Speaking of his parents, he reported that both saw and loved the play, though his father, Glenn Arbery, also a professor at Wyoming Catholic College, told his son that he “felt a little soul-scoured.” Mr. Arbery said he thanked them for receiving the “difficult gift” he intended the play to be, adding, “I’m not trying to scour anyone’s soul!”

Neither am I. If I had to guess, I would say that Mr. Arbery is a version of a semi-lapsed believer I recognize (and have occasionally been myself). These are folks who find themselves unwilling or unable to reject a vestigial religious identity outright. But they are also too serious-minded about the grave claims made by that faith to take them simply at face value, or not to test them against equally se-

rious counterclaims.

I would also add that Mr. Arbery’s magnificent, multifaceted play deserves to be taken on its own terms, quite apart from his biography. Among its other merits, “Heroes” speaks loud and clear to our divided cultural moment—a time when, as Mr. Arbery diagnoses it, “There’s a desperately dangerous lack of love happening right now; we love our factions, we love our tribes, but we don’t love each other.” But his play addresses this conflict, not by venturing directly into the debates agitating our headlines, but by portraying, with a full measure of humor and pain, the feelings those debates arouse among some very specific and articulately imagined fellow creatures. Mr. Arbery told me that the play arose in part from his interest in “the animal nature of debate, and the way ideas can take over a body—what talking for a long time very fast does to a body and what listening does to a body.”

It is an exercise uniquely suited to the theater and not easy to pull off. When I praised how well he and Danya Taymor, the director, had balanced the play’s fine-grained specificity with its undercurrents of feeling, Mr. Arbery recalled a sixth-grade history teacher who wrote on the chalkboard his first day of class, “Attention to detail is the key to success.” That became something of a mission statement for Mr. Arbery, he said. When I reminded him of the apocryphal saying, “God is in the details,” he responded. “So that’s the answer to, ‘Do you go to church?’ God is in the details.”

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

Patience, Joy and Healing

Readings: Is 35:1-6, 10; Ps 146; Jas 5:7-10; Mt 11:2-11

The third Sunday of Advent is Gaudete (Rejoice) Sunday. As we are halfway through Advent, this is a good time to reflect on our progress in preparing to receive the Lord.

Although it is the second reading at Mass, the Letter of James is worth considering first, as it adds a different perspective to the Advent season. On the second Sunday of Advent, Matthew depicted Jesus urging the disciples to stay awake, be vigilant and prepare for the *parousia* at the end of days. James offers a different reflection on this event; he calls for patience. Some four times James implores his audience to be patient. As a model of patient waiting for the Lord, he points to the prophets, whose example the Gospel also invokes today.

The Gospel reading from Matthew can help us recognize how joy and rejoicing follow the fulfillment of the promise for which we are waiting. As on the second Sunday of Advent, Matthew situates Jesus in relation to John the Baptist, portraying John as Elijah, the herald for the Messiah whose return would signal a new age. Elijah was a prophet of the Old Testament who lived over 800 years before Jesus. Elijah's prophetic career was filled with healings, wondrous deeds and confrontations with powerful figures. Notably, Elijah did not die; rather, he ascended into heaven in a whirlwind with chariots and horses of fire (2 Kgs 2:11). Because of Elijah's ascension, a tradition developed that his return to earth would signal the coming of the Messiah (Mal 3:1, 4:5-6). In the verses immediately following today's Gospel, Jesus makes this claim explicit, identifying John, "if you are willing to accept it, ...[as] Elijah, the one who is to come" (Mt 11:14).

Another signal that Jesus is the Messiah is that he performs miraculous works. Importantly, these works not only show Jesus' significance but also provide physical and spiritual healing to the world. Jesus gives sight to people who are blind. He empowers lame people to walk, heals lepers, gives hearing to the deaf and restores life to the dead. Likewise, Jesus provides spiritual healing to people who are poor: Jesus proclaims the Gospel directly to them. At this

Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. (Jas 5:7)



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Am I patient with myself and with others?

Do my actions bring joy to the world?

How can I emulate Christ and provide physical and spiritual healing?

point in Matthew, Jesus has performed many healings (see Mt 8:1-4; 9:2-8, 18-26). When John's disciples ask if he is the Messiah, Jesus answers them by referring to his healings, which have echoes in today's Old Testament reading from Isaiah.

Isaiah's oracle describes a period that is exceedingly joyful. People and animals on the earth, even the earth itself, sing joyfully because of the salvation the Lord provides. Isaiah connects physical and spiritual healings with divine salvation. Bodies are strengthened. Physical ailments are healed. People with emotional impairments are given divine reassurance. The earth is healthy and lush, and all dangers are abated. Isaiah describes a joyful moment of redemption in Israel's history. Like Isaiah's community, we too can find joy in salvation from the Lord.

On Gaudete Sunday and always, let us patiently prepare for the Lord and find joy in salvation in Christ. Let us provide healing that is needed in the world and model our lives after Christ.

Jaime L. Waters teaches Scripture at DePaul University in Chicago. She is an associate professor of Catholic studies.

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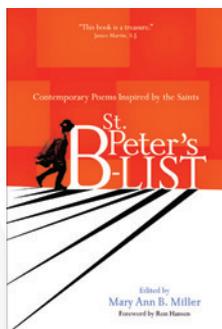
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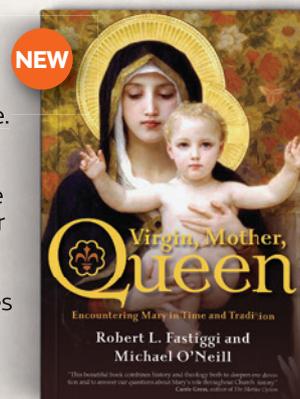
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Increasing Knowledge, Decreasing Uncertainty

Readings: Is 7:10-14, 10; Ps 24; Rom 1:1-7; Mt 1:18-24

In today's readings from the Letter to the Romans and the Gospel of Matthew, we learn about Jesus' human and divine origins. Romans asserts that Jesus is "descended from David according to the flesh" (Rom 1:3), and Matthew traces Jesus' lineage back to David and Abraham through his adopted father, Joseph (Mt 1:1-17). While affirming Jesus' humanity, both Romans and Matthew also proclaim Jesus' divinity, as he is the Son of God (Rom 1:4), conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit (Mt 1:18). Nearly five centuries after Jesus' birth, the ecumenical council of Chalcedon would affirm the doctrine that Jesus was fully human and fully divine. Today's readings influenced that teaching, and it is worthwhile for us to reflect on both aspects of Christ.

The first reading and the Gospel show how biblical texts interact. Isaiah 7 is set during the Syro-Ephramite War of the eighth century B.C.E. With Judah under military pressure, King Ahaz is nervous about the stability of his kingdom and the Davidic dynasty. The prophet Isaiah assures Ahaz of divine protection, and the meanings of his children's Hebrew names, along with the events of their lives, are symbolic signs of God's defense of Ahaz and Judah. Isaiah's children are Shear-jashub (a remnant will return), Emmanuel (God is with us) and Maher-shalal-hash-

baz (quick spoils, speedy plunder). The Hebrew text of Is 7:14 says that Emmanuel will be born of a young woman (*almah*, rendered in Greek as *parthenos*, virgin).

Matthew frequently quotes or alludes to passages in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), and he often depicts Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Matthew reinterprets the Emmanuel child as Jesus born of the virgin Mary (Mt 1:23) rather than Isaiah's son by an unnamed young woman.

How should we interpret the Emmanuel prophecy? As modern readers of the Bible, we should recognize that texts can have different meanings in different contexts. In Ahaz's historical context, the symbolic child is from his time period. The child's name and the milestones of his life are signals of the Lord's protection of Judah during an imminent invasion. In light of later traditions, theological beliefs and revelation, Matthew connects Jesus to the Emmanuel prophecy of old. Over 800 years later, Matthew reinterprets the prophecy and sees its fulfillment in Jesus' birth through the virgin Mary. Matthew's reading does not negate or supersede the Emmanuel prophecy in its original context; instead, Matthew provides a fuller sense (*sensus plenior*) of Isaiah in light of Christ.

Lastly, we should pay attention to God's response to Ahaz and Joseph in today's readings. Ahaz is insecure because of an impending war. Joseph is uncertain about Mary and their forthcoming marriage. In both cases, God responds by offering assurance. Ahaz receives prophetic messages and signs, and Joseph is visited by an angel, who instructs him to marry Mary. Notably, Joseph is informed of what Mary presumably already knows: that she has conceived by the Holy Spirit. We too can benefit from looking for God's guidance, especially when we lack confidence, and can find comfort in knowing that God is active in our lives.

Ask for a sign. (Is 7:11)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How can I increase my knowledge of Christ?

Am I open to biblical texts having multiple meanings?

Do I trust in God, even during difficult moments in my life?

Jaime L. Waters teaches Scripture at DePaul University in Chicago. She is an associate professor of Catholic studies.

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Picking a Side

My journey from in-between Christianity

By Tara Isabella Burton



There was a joke I used to make back before I was Christian: I am the most liberal person in a room full of Oxford theologians—and the most conservative at the goth club. I spent half my year as a graduate student in theology at a university where parties often consisted of drunk-singing madrigals and half my year in New York, where I knew more self-identified witches and “nontheistic Satanists” than I did resurrection-affirming Christians. I was, invariably, a stranger in a strange land.

I grew up in New York, Paris and Rome, the daughter of an ethnically Jewish mother who took me to enough Christmas and Easter services that, come Passover at my cousins’ house, I was asked to play the Pharaoh in the annual puppet show. I grew up with an Algerian last name, *Sidhoum*, and a first name that changed depending on the country we were in. “There isn’t a St. Tara,” my mother told me the first time she called me *Isabella* abroad. “So Italians won’t know how to pronounce it.” *Burton*, which we adopted belatedly, had been my actress grandmother’s stage name.

Religion only contributed to that sense of strangeness. Throughout my childhood, I kept an altar that was a fusion of Roman saints’ icons and Wiccan candles I purchased on the internet. I was a little bit Catholic, a little bit Episcopalian, a little bit Jewish, a little bit pagan. Then, in my late 20s, I discov-

ered I was a Christian.

I do not mean that I realized I believed in God. Nor do I mean that I decided to become a Christian, which would imply more agency on my part than I experienced. I mean only that somewhere, between all the running and the raging, the trans-Atlantic crossings and the reconfiguring of names, I had something to hold fast to. I had something I *had* to hold fast to. For the first time, there was a part of me I could not run away from.

Christians are meant, of course, to be in this world but not of it. Alienation—that feeling of not quite belonging—is integral to Christian identity.

But for me, the most demanding part of embracing Christianity was sacrificing the safety of in-betweenness. I could no longer be a little bit pagan. Halloween parties that ironically-but-not-really celebrated witchcraft, say, or other staples of my at-times aggressively secular New York life were no longer simply curious parts of my spiritual eclecticism. I had to pick a side.

For the first time, I had to ask myself questions not just about what it all meant in an abstract way but what each decision—from posting on Instagram to choosing an outfit to drinking too much to hosting a party to committing to monogamy to planning a wedding—meant for me, as a Christian, in the framework of my Christianity. If God was real, if Christ really did come back from the

dead, then nothing else mattered except insofar as it reflected that one hideous, impossible truth.

At times, I did not think I could stand it. How could I make any decision—hell, even leave the house—so shackled to the moral weight of every choice I made? How could I be a Christian all the time and still have a glass of Prosecco, still go to that goth club, still live in a largely secular, intensely bohemian New York that I both loved and no longer knew how to find my place in?

I have not yet fully reconciled what it means to be a person of faith and what it means to so love a city so associated with sin. But what I do know is that I don’t tell that joke anymore. Wherever I am—be it a theologians’ dinner or a night on the dance floor—I am the same person, with the same faith. I can never *not* be a Christian. And I am always, finally, home.

Tara Isabella Burton is the author of *Social Creature*; her next book is *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless Age*. She is a columnist for *Religion News Service*.



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 gaan kólóku ku en bunuhati. Biga a mbei mi ko ta biibi neen liba, noó hén a toona da mi di lobi di dee sémbe dee nama ku en ta feni. Aai womi, di soni de nóo a bigi da mi e.
 15 Wé Timoteo, mi o taki wan soni da i akl gbelin seei, kijoo. Noó a de wan gaan bambuu taki di hii sémbe musu piki waiwai. Hén da disi: Jesosi Keesitu ko a goonliba u heepi takulibima puu de a hogi basu. Noó mi wé bi da di móon gaan takulibima a hii dee otowan dendu.
 16 Wé nóo feén hedi tu Jesosi Keesitu ko abi tjallhati da mi e. Aai. A hoi pasensi da mi seei, fu mi sa de wan maaka da hiniwan u libima kuma mi di ké ko biibi neen, taa a sa feni di libi u teego tu.
 17 Wé fa i si Masa Gadu sai de, hén wé da di kaba Tiima u muntu fu noómó e. Pa a de feén de, an o dede móonsó. Libisémbe an tjika u si en ku waiwai.

1 Timoteo 1, 2
 19 Noó mi taki e, ta hoi di biibi di i si i ta biibi a Masa Jesosi naandé gingin e. Noó i musu ta piki di hati fii noómó te a ta manda i a wan bambuu soni. Biga wanlo sémbe an bi du só, noó hén wé di biibi u de kaba a sóso gbegedee, leti kuma te i singi a dan tuwe lai fii go fiaa. 20 Wan u dee sémbe dee mi taki de, da Himénéusi, wan da Alekesani. Ma noó mi buta de tu sémbe de a di didibi maun kaa, be de lei taa de an musu ta waka ta mindi soni da Gadu ta poi en né móon. Noó da só.
 Aki Paulosu ta lei fa dee biibima u Masa Jesosi musu ta tjia deseeci.
 2 1 Wé womi Timoteo, awa mi o taki da i fa fii lei dee biibima u Masa Jesosi a i ala fa u de musu libi.
 Sóó. A di fosu kamian, noó un musu ta begi Masa Gaangadu da hii sémbe. Un musu ta tjia dee fidi u de.

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 1 Timoteo 2, 3
 feén, biga de nóo da tuutuu soni a muntu.
 5 Biga wan kodo Gadu to nóo de a muntu e, hén da Masa Gaangadu. Noó wan kodo Sémbe to ta naanpu a u libisémbe ku Gadu mindi fu seeka taki da u. Hén da Jesosi Keesitu di bi tei libisémbe sinkii. 6 Hén wé bi deén seepi kuma wan paima paka puu u a hogi basu a di juu di Gadu buta. Noó fa a du en naandé, ku en hii muntu sa si fa Gadu ké heepi u libisémbe tjika.
 7 Noó fu mi sa ta konda di soni de hedi mbei Gadu tei mi buta tjabukama feén e. Noó fa mi ta fan aki, na mindi mi ta mindi soni e, womi, ma tuutuu soni mi ta taki. Noó Gadu buta mi leima tu, fu mi ta lei dee oto sémbe na u Isaéli dee soni u Gadu. Biga de da dee tuutuu soni fuu musu biibi. Noó só e.
 8 Wé nóo mi taki e womi, taa a hii baka na. An daa biibima ta ba baka na. An feni soni a Gadu tu.

Biga di lo gan de hén fiti dee mujee dee ta mi di né taa de ta dimi Gadu.
 11 Fa mujee ai de, de musu ta lei a wan saap hési ta saka de seei da dee wani. 12 Mi seei ma ta da mujee pasi u de ta lei sémbe waja a lanti dundu ta péé basi a womi sémbe lai e. Nónó. Ma de musu ta hoi deseel a wan saapi fasi. 13 Faandi abei, womi? Biga wé a fosu Gadu mbei Adam, a baka feén u mbei Eva. 14 Hén tu, di sindó na Adam a feni ganjan e. Ma iwa a ganjan, noó hén a ko poi wéti u Masa Gaangadu. 15 Noó hii di de hedi Gadu taa te mujee ojai, noó pai feén o taanga.
 Wé só a ta pasa tuu. Ma nóo tóku di soni u poi. Biga ee wan mujee sémbe ubiibi a Gadu ta hoi go dou ta lobi sémbe ta libi a wan gbelingbelin lai ku saka fasi nóo baka na. An feni soni a Gadu tu.



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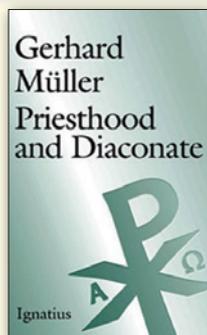
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MAJOR WORKS ON THE PRIESTHOOD, CELIBACY, AND THE DIACONATE

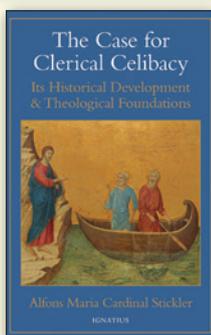


◆ PRIESTHOOD AND DIACONATE

Cardinal Gerhard Müller

The Church's practice of a male priesthood is a matter pertaining to divine revelation and founded upon a theology of the sexes, which is based on the relationship of man and woman originating in creation itself. The spousal relationship between Christ and the Church is reflected in the Sacrament of Holy Orders and the male recipient's relation to the Church, which stands in relation to him as a feminine reality. This book thoughtfully explores the Church's understanding of the ministerial priesthood and the diaconate.

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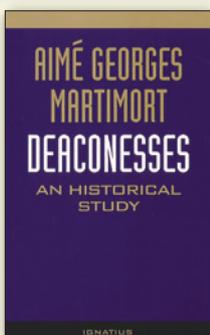


◆ THE CASE FOR CLERICAL CELIBACY

Cardinal Alfons Stickler

A theological expert at Vatican II and an eminent canon lawyer clarifies the concepts of celibacy and sexual continence. He thoroughly examines the development of clerical celibacy in the Latin West, exploding the myth celibacy is a medieval invention or a church-instituted practical discipline. He concludes with a theological reflection on the priesthood of Jesus Christ, which shows why the popular distinction between "doctrine" and "discipline" doesn't fully explain all the important aspects of the requirement of clerical celibacy and continence.

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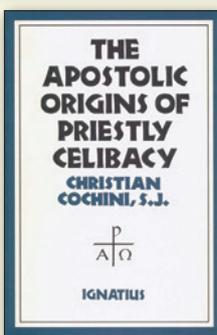


◆ DEACONESSES: An Historical Study

Aime Martimort

Since the 17th century the history of deaconesses in the Church has been the subject of numerous monographs. What is most evident about the history of deaconesses, however, is how complex the whole subject is. In this exhaustive, thoroughly researched work, Martimort presents a very readable analysis that has become the standard study of the role of women deaconesses in the early Church. He presents in as complete and objective fashion as possible the history, who and what these deaconesses were, and what their functions were.

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◆ APOSTOLIC ORIGINS OF PRIESTLY CELIBACY

Christian Cochini, S.J.

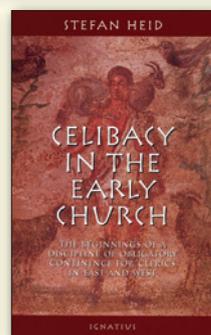
This is the definitive scholarly statement on the discipline of priestly celibacy in the Church East and West. Cochini shows through patristic sources and conciliar documentation that from the beginning of the Church, although married men could be priests, they were required to vow to celibacy before ordination, committing to live a life of continence. He provides extensive documentation, a bibliography and an index.

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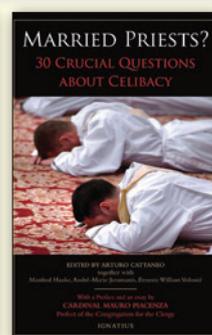


◆ CELIBACY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Stefan Heid

Heid presents a wide-ranging study of the historical data from the early Church on celibacy and clerical continence. He gives a review of recent literature, and then thoroughly examines the writings of the Bible, the early church councils, saints and theologians like Jerome, Augustine, Clement, Tertullian, John Chryostom, Cyril and Gregory Nazianzen. He has gathered formidable data with conclusive arguments regarding obligatory continence in the early Church.

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Edited by Arturo Cattaneo

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