

# America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

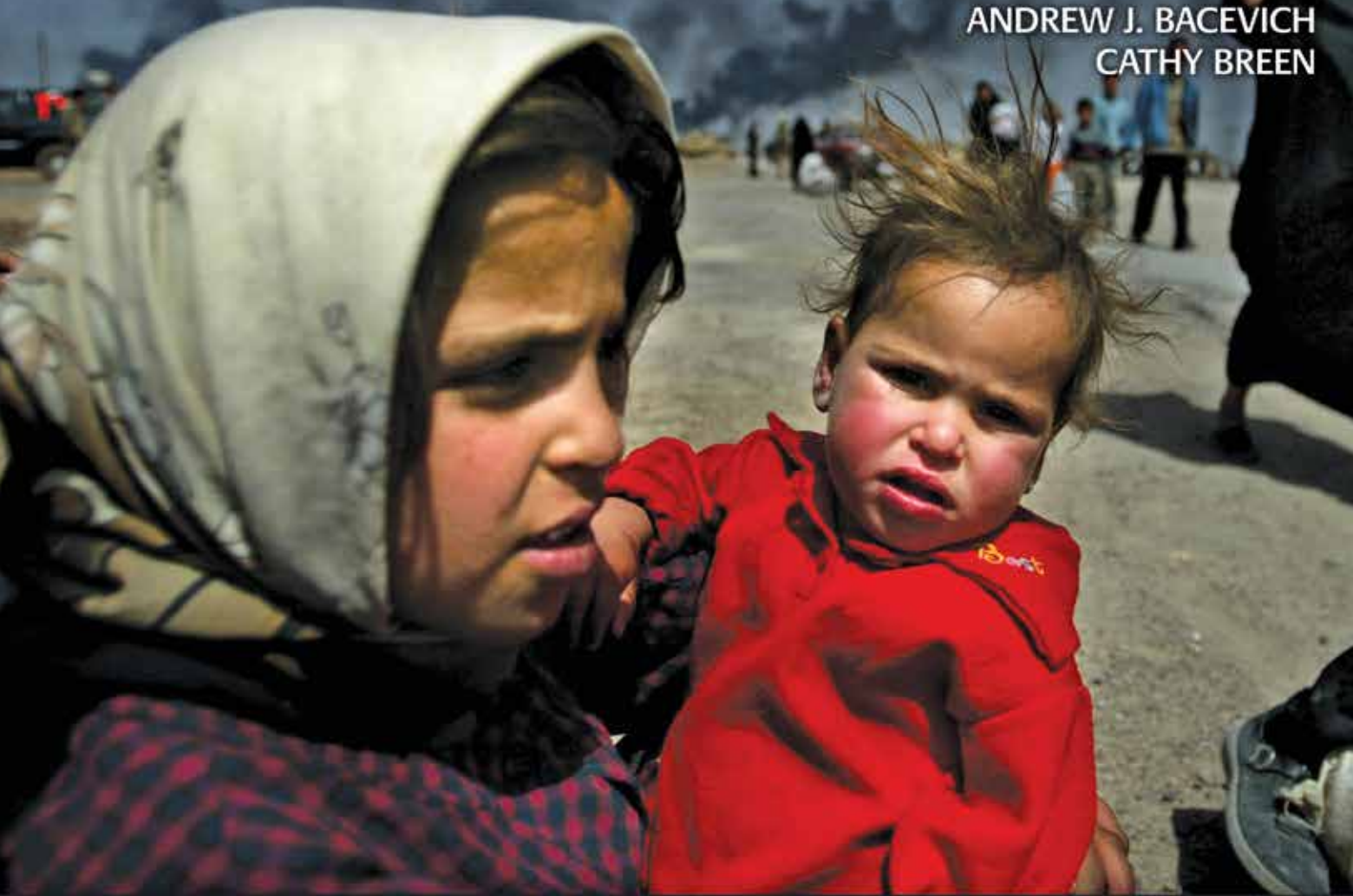
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## A Not-So-Splendid Little War

LESSONS FROM IRAQ

ANDREW J. BACEVICH

CATHY BREEN



Luke Hansen  
Reports From  
Honduras

# OF MANY THINGS

**T**he Honorable John Hay, American statesman, author and diplomat, had a real knack for turning a phrase. He learned from the best. As assistant private secretary to Abraham Lincoln, Mr. Hay spent more than three years watching one of history's greatest wordsmiths in action. Mr. Hay, in fact, was present when the Great Man delivered his then-derided, now universally admired remarks at Gettysburg. (Hay later admitted that he had spent the previous night carousing on the Baltimore Pike and was hung over during the speech.)

It stands to reason, then, that John Hay would produce a memorable phrase or two of his own during the course of his storied career. The most famous of these gems is in a letter to Theodore Roosevelt, penned in 1898, at the conclusion of the Spanish-American War. Writing from London, where he was serving as U.S. ambassador, Mr. Hay was impressed by the speed and totality of the U.S. victory, telling Mr. Roosevelt that it had been "a splendid little war; begun with the highest motives, carried on with magnificent intelligence and spirit, favored by that Fortune which loves the brave."

From a certain point of view the outcome was "splendid" indeed: the Americans had triumphed in just 10 weeks and with relatively few casualties. With a surfeit of new overseas possessions, the United States had stepped onto the global stage as its new leading man, democracy's great protagonist, a light to the nations and, in another of the Great Man's famous phrases, the "last best hope of Earth."

Now one could easily dismiss such a facile and self-serving narrative, if it weren't so omnipresent, even today. Indeed this turn-of-the-century tale is an early, indispensable chapter in the story of American exceptionalism, the persistent and pervasive notion that the United States has a *sui generis* mandate to lead the world. The kind

of hubris that inspired Hay's remark to Roosevelt, in other words, still informs our national self-understanding.

If you think I'm making this up, then pay close attention to what Andrew Bacevich writes in this issue: "Over the past decade," Professor Bacevich says, "ambitions and vanities have led the United States badly astray, nowhere more than in the Islamic world." In theological terms, those "ambitions and vanities" amount to a false messianism, in which the United States claims for itself a role previously reserved for God. Remember President George W. Bush's post-9/11 claim that "we will rid the world of the evildoers"? American exceptionalism at its worst is not just idolatrous, it's dangerous. It actually makes the world less safe. As Cathy Breen writes in this issue, our misadventure in Iraq not only failed to rid the world of evildoers, it unwittingly facilitated their expansion.

Patriotism, love of country, is a good thing. American exceptionalism, though, more often resembles lust, not love, dominance rather than self-gift. And it is not just a feature of right-wing politics; liberals are also susceptible to its self-serving charms. What we need then is a collective examination of conscience. We must honestly evaluate and re-envision America's role in the world.

I'm not necessarily suggesting retreat. Isolationism is not only self-indulgent but impractical in a globalized world. On the contrary, I hope that America might assume a more robust presence in the world, albeit one that is humbler and more generous. With any luck and with a lot of soul searching, we will then realize anew those words that John Hay heard through his self-induced haze on a chilly November morn: "These dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." **MATT MALONE, S.J.**

# America

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Kevin Spinale, S.J.

**EDITORIAL E-MAIL**  
[america@americamagazine.org](mailto:america@americamagazine.org)

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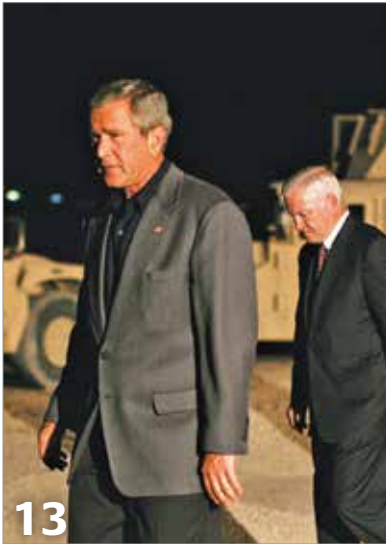
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*Cover:* An Iraqi girl holds her sister as she waits for her mother (R) to bring over food bought in Basra, March 29, 2003. Photo: Jerry Lampen/Reuters

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## ON THE WEB

A photo journal from **Honduras** by Luke Hansen, S.J., and a podcast conversation with **Shaina Aber**, right, the leader of the Jesuit delegation to the country. Plus, reviews of the **Oscar-nominated films**. All at [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org).





### Cruel Means and Ends

It is a cruel irony that people debate about the “most humane” way to kill a person, yet this conversation persists in some of the 32 states that still allow the death penalty. Is lethal injection morally preferable to the electric chair? Does a firing squad provide a more efficient execution than a gas chamber?

In recent years, European pharmaceutical companies have helped reignite this debate by refusing to sell drugs to American states for use in executions, making it more difficult for them to employ lethal injections. As a result, officials in Ohio relied on a new and untested concoction of drugs in the execution of Dennis B. McGuire, a convicted rapist and murderer, on Jan. 16. It took 25 agonizing minutes for Mr. McGuire to die. Witnesses heard gasping, snorting and choking sounds. Amber McGuire, his daughter, later said she heard “horrible noises” and covered her eyes and ears.

The family of the victim, understandably, was less sympathetic. “He is being treated far more humanely than he treated her,” they said in a statement. True. But is this the right standard for judging the means of execution?

Arguments about the relative humaneness of different methods of execution miss the essential point: When the state applies the death penalty, it deliberately ends the life of a human being. Whatever method it uses, the state perpetuates the cycle of violence.

The McGuire family plans to file a lawsuit in federal court. They claim the prolonged execution violated the provision of the Eighth Amendment that prohibits “cruel and unusual punishment.” Instead of continuing the futile search for more “civilized” instruments of death, lawmakers in the United States should finally recognize that capital punishment itself is unjust and unnecessary.

### Saving Syria

Every civil war is a tragedy, a unique sadness, for it turns brothers and sisters against each other. The human cost of the civil war in Syria—at least 100,000 dead, 6.5 million internally displaced and 2.5 million refugees who have fled to another country—is stunning. A third of the nation’s houses have been destroyed, 40 percent of the hospitals ruined; and two million children have been forced out of school. The government lays siege to rebel cities and suburbs, rebel forces fight one another, snipers shoot women and target doctors, people burn their clothes to keep warm.

Only a unified adherence to international humanitarian law can save Syria. All permanent members of the U.N. Security Council supported the council’s statement calling for all parties to allow the flow of aid and medical help. But some

on the council, including Russia and China, have hindered its enforcement. Two other voices have called for a settlement and laid down requirements for successful peace talks: Human Rights Watch, in its “World Report 2014,” and a Vatican study group that included seven international experts and leaders.

The requirements include the participation of all parties to the conflict, an immediate cease-fire, an end to the funding and supplying of weapons by foreign countries and an immediate start of humanitarian assistance and reconstruction. “The test of progress,” according to David Milliband, president of the International Rescue Committee, is “the fate of Aleppo.” The international community must fully invest in stabilizing the divided city of 2.2 million. “If Syria is ever to recover its tranquility and beauty,” Mr. Milliband said, “this city must be saved from descending into hell.”

### Fairness in Football

This should be the high point of the year for fans of the National Football League, and it surely was for followers of the Denver Broncos and Seattle Seahawks, who squared off in Super Bowl XLVIII. Yet the early days of 2014 were shadowed by the ongoing legal dispute over compensation for former players who suffer from the long-term effects of repeated concussions. The sport was further criticized by President Obama, who again remarked that if he had a son, he would not permit him to play professional football because of the hazards involved.

Football fans need to pay attention to these issues. Football is the most popular sport in America, so it would carry special significance if the fans support efforts to provide fair compensation for former players with health issues. The N.F.L. should also continue to alter the rules of the game in order to limit the most severe blows to the head. Players should be given the best available equipment, like the special helmet worn by Wes Welker in the A.F.C. championship game, to help prevent further concussions.

Long-term questions also remain. Should other sporting activities, like boxing, mixed martial arts and even the particular move in soccer called heading, receive more scrutiny? Head injuries, after all, are not unique to football. Should we begin to discourage participation in the most dangerous sports? There are many other sports that provide recreation and entertainment without the same risk of damage to the players’ health. These are admittedly heavy questions for the Sunday fan looking to relax and enjoy the big game, but we cannot in good conscience ignore them.

# A State of Their Own

The Treaty of Westphalia, signed in 1648, signaled the beginning of the end of more than a century of conflict between Europe's Catholics and Protestants. While it did not create a complete peace, much less produce broad religious harmony, it at least began an accommodation that allowed Europe's Christians—and the nation-states that emerged from the treaty—to coexist more or less without open conflict.

The world awaits a gathering of the Sunni and Shiite branches of the Islamic world that may someday similarly lead, if not to total peace, then at a minimum to a period of reduced conflict. That would offer breathing room for dialogue that could lead to long-term rapprochement. In the meantime, these Islamic communities continue a historic collision that heedlessly devours combatant and noncombatant alike in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Exploding cars and human bombs steal lives on the streets of Baghdad. Terrified, trembling children emerge from among the dust clouds and broken cinder blocks of homes devastated by air strikes in Aleppo. Some means of establishing a circuit breaker for the region's accelerating cycle of sectarian violence has to be found.

One such breaker may be to hold up a model of democratic governance and multicultural tolerance. The region most likely to provide that example today is the Kurd-administered provinces of northern Iraq. The Kurdistan Regional Government has functioned as a more or less independent state since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 (or, arguably, since the creation of the Iraq no-fly zone in 1991). The regional government brokers its own oil deals with multinational corporations, invests in regional infrastructure, maintains an independent defense force and protects its borders with Syria and its confederated regions in southern Iraq. Full independence for Kurdistan has long been considered an impossible dream because of opposition from Turkey, a nation with a large and restive Kurdish minority of its own. But in recent years, Turkey has been one of the largest political and economic collaborators with Northern Iraq/Kurdistan, a mutually beneficial arrangement that has diminished Turkish resistance to the evolution of northern Iraq from de facto to de jure nationhood.

An independent Kurdistan would face many obstacles, many of them self-imposed. Political cronyism, petty corruption and discrimination against other minorities within northern Iraq are already a problem. The legitimacy of nationalistic claims on oil-rich southern regions of a presumed Kurdistan, particularly around the contested city of Kirkuk, would remain to be resolved.

Iraq's Kurds have good reason to distrust the intentions of the United States. Historically, American enthusiasm for Kurdish independence has been only as reliable as the prevailing U.S. strategic



interest. But just now in Kurdistan the United States is enjoying wide acclaim, perceived as a liberator from the hated Saddam Hussein. The United States should seize the opportunity to help nurture Kurdistan statehood. Under benevolent U.S. guidance or at the sharp point of aid-dangling U.S. insistence, Kurds could develop political institutions that would demonstrate what a pluralistic Middle Eastern society might look like. A peaceful and tolerant Kurdistan could offer an oasis of security for the vulnerable Christians of the region.

An outbreak of micro-states in the region based on cultural and religious distinctiveness is surely not the best of all possible political outcomes, but it would certainly be preferable to the vicious, pointless brutality that currently reigns, especially as the violence seems likely to spread elsewhere soon unless there is some dramatic change.

The United States carries a heavy responsibility for unleashing the maelstrom of sectarian conflict that now threatens the entire region. It must therefore assume the heaviest burden for diminishing it. It must maintain a patient, persistent diplomacy and devote its vast capabilities to humanitarian relief for the victims of conflict. And while the world waits in hope for the combatants in Syria to come to their senses, the other international players in this drama could contribute, as Pope Francis regularly implores, by halting the flow of arms. They could begin this disengagement by forswearing further arms shipments until indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas by either side are halted.

Kurdish independence is already a reality on the ground in northern Iraq; it is reasonable for it to become a reality on the world map. Beyond its importance as a regional laboratory of self-directed nation-building, the creation of an independent Kurdistan responds to a simple demand of justice and a long-recognized and revered right to self-determination. Suppressed by Ottoman, Persian and Arab alike, betrayed by "allies," brutalized and gassed by dictators, it is hard to imagine another people who have as legitimate a moral and geopolitical claim on nationhood than the long-suffering, somehow still unvanquished Kurds.

## REPLY ALL

### A.D.A. Writ Large

Re “Dignity of the Disabled” (Editorial, 1/20): I offer my sincere thanks to **America** for addressing the needs and rights of people with disabilities, and exhorting U.S. legislators to rectify the wrong and bring the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to the Senate floor for a vote now.

As a former congressman who authored the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, I am encouraged by Pope Francis’ stance on including those with disabilities into the conversation about justice—that is, a faith that seeks justice. The treaty can and should be an act of American justice and leadership at a time when it is most needed. Indeed, the treaty is the A.D.A. writ large.

Already, 139 nations have ratified the treaty, but not the United States. Most of the world is clamoring for the justice the treaty will provide, yet our lawmakers take a stingy stance with the expertise Americans have devel-

oped in implementing the inclusiveness of the A.D.A. over the last quarter century. Yes, Pope Francis reminds us that it is our responsibility to welcome those with disabilities into the light. Senators must listen to him and ratify the treaty and give it as a gift to the world.

TONY COELHO  
Philadelphia, Pa.

*The writer is a board member of the U.S. International Council on Disabilities.*

### People First

Re “Dignity of the Disabled”: Thank you for your overall excellent editorial. I would like to emphasize the importance of avoiding the term “disabled” whenever possible and to use people-first language (“people with disabilities”), which can help center us on what is most important: the human person, rather than the exclusionary category.

I work as a lawyer at the American Diabetes Association. It is the person whose dignity we seek to defend: the student transferred away from her siblings upon diagnosis because of an unwillingness to provide basic care at

the neighborhood school, the consummate professional fired because of the results of a blood glucose test or the daughter who died in prison because the guards ignored her pleas for medication.

*Diabetic* or *disabled* are not appropriate terms because they so often reduce our constituents to one characteristic, making them one dimensional and ignoring all of the other strengths and talents they possess. I hope that you change your editorial guidelines, and I look forward to expanded coverage of this critical topic in the years to come.

KATHARINE GORDON  
Washington, D.C.

### Secular Prejudice

Re “Goodbye to the Catholic Writer?” by Angela Alaimo O’Donnell (1/20): The reading group Professor O’Donnell describes allowed its bigotry against Catholics to deprive its members of the wonderful experience of reading *Mariette in Ecstasy*, by Ron Hansen—a book that, since it describes a fabricated miracle, is hardly one that lends itself to simple piety.

Sometimes one has to stand up to the prejudices of the secular intellectual. Perhaps the objecting members should have been asked what other books they would refuse to read because they describe people who believe things they do not or do things they think wrong. Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, which laments the loss of a society where twins are murdered, wives are beaten and masked gods rule the community? Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which shows a woman happy, even proud, that her man cares enough to beat her? Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, whose sweet and admirable heroine lives in a house that owes it comfort to the labor of slaves?

Are Catholics alone beyond the bounds of human sympathy? Sometimes we have to defend our

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co-religionists out of simple justice—and also so that people do not cut themselves off from a great part of our common cultural heritage.

BRIAN RAGEN  
*Online comment*

## A Moral Claim

In “Pension Pinching” (Current Comment, 1/6), the editors could have noted also that among the creditors of Detroit, the pensioners have the highest moral claim.

City vendors can refuse to supply goods and services unless paid on delivery. Banks and underwriters can make prudent assessments before their financial commitments and monitor their loans. But city employees had no such opportunity. They were required to pay into a pension plan but had no opportunity to examine the solvency of the plan or monitor it. This disadvantageous bargaining and monitoring position should provide the pensioners a higher moral ground in the distribution of city resources than other claimants.

When pensions are terminated in the private sector, pensioners are protected by the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation and still have access to Social Security. However, this is generally not the case for public employees. Faced with the likelihood of future municipal insolvencies, Congress should either expand the scope of the PBGC or establish a federal agency to protect public pensioners. In the meantime, a bankruptcy court, as a court of equity, should consider the moral status of the claim of the pensioners in Detroit.

JOHN J. DILENSCHNEIDER  
*Columbus, Ohio*

*The writer served as a U.S. bankruptcy judge for the Southern District of Ohio from 1967 to 1976.*

## Pensions at Home

“Pension Pinching” is well taken, as far as it went. In May 1998 I published an article in *America* on the problems in pension plans of the Catholic

Church. Fifteen years later I can report that the archbishop of St. Paul and Minneapolis, two years ago without consultation and against the advice of the chief financial officer of the diocese, froze the very modest lay pension plan.

Last September the new chief financial officer announced that the priest pension plan has 10 to 15 years of solvency. Unlike most private pension plans, church plans do not have legal protections under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act.

Perhaps *America* could work with the Jesuit-sponsored Center for Retirement Research at Boston College on these issues related to church pensions. It is good to be concerned over public pensions, but too often the shoemaker’s children also lack shoes.

(REV.) MICHAEL TEGEDER  
*Minneapolis, Minn.*

## Look to Lay People

When I read “The First Five Years,” by Monsignor Stephen J. Rossetti (1/6), I thought something was out of sync with my experience as a diocesan priest for 44 years. First of all, the picture of

## f STATUS UPDATE

*In “Goodbye to the Catholic Writer?” (1/20), America’s columnist Angela Alaimo O’Donnell reflected on Catholic writing today. James Martin, S.J., asked, “Is the Catholic writer going the way of the Dodo?” Readers responded:*

My favorite Catholic writer is Graham Greene. Maybe the tight rope a Catholic writer would walk is depicting their characters’ faith (or lack of it) without being didactic or pedantic. It’s a huge challenge.

DAVANNA CIMINO

I’m not really convinced. What about Helena Maria Viramontes? Mary Karr? Demetria Martinez? Carmen Tafolla? Also, nonfiction writers like Richard Rodriguez? The idea that Catholic writers are somehow margin-

the priest walking the beach in his black cassock and collar, reading the Liturgy of the Hours and waiting for the pope, while the other young people appear to be enjoying each other, tells volumes.

If young priests need challenge and support, they should look to lay people who have directed people, balanced budgets, hired and let people go, worked with staffs, planned futures and worked cooperatively with others. These lay people have much to offer young priests who lack skills, experience and, at times, maturity. Isolated priests’ groups lack the depth necessary for complete support.

Evangelism is certainly the buzz word today. If a young priest wants to evangelize, he should work with the poor, the elderly and the disenfranchised, and he should challenge congregations to do the same. They can make a difference and will feel their faith coming alive. Maybe the challenge is not secularism, but rather the unwillingness of young clergy to engage the world.

(REV.) PATRICK CAWLEY  
*Vanderbilt, Mich.*

alized in some way mysteriously related to a history of anti-Catholicism doesn’t really ring true for me.

RACHEL JENNINGS

Walker Percy is my personal favorite, but perhaps the Catholic filmmaker is replacing him and his ilk? I’ve heard Martin Scorsese’s films characterized as quintessentially Catholic.

PHILLIP RATLIFF

Ms. O’Donnell should ask her reading group to consider reading *Lying Awake*, by Mark Salzman, a beautiful little novel about a nun and her faith, but written by an atheist. Non-religious readers wouldn’t be able to push back as much, at least not on the same grounds.

ISABEL C. LEGARDA

EGYPT

## Despite Terror Strikes in Cairo, New Constitution Offers Hope

A series of bomb attacks rocked Cairo, Egypt, on Jan. 23, the day before the third anniversary of the street revolution in 2011 that toppled the Hosni Mubarak regime. Six people were killed, hundreds were injured, and the city's police headquarters, strafed and scored in the aftermath of a massive explosion, was badly damaged. Violence continued over the weekend, and 49 people were killed in clashes between pro- and anti-government mobs.

The suicide car bombing of the police building was by far the most serious terrorist attack, a demonstration of the boldness and the reach of those Egyptians willing to pursue a campaign of violence to achieve their political goals.

"These attacks will hit back at those who committed them," said the Rev. Rafic Greiche, a spokesperson for the Catholic bishops of Egypt. "I am convinced that the violence committed by those who want to throw Egypt into chaos will have an impact against its authors because the Egyptians want peace." Father Greiche noted that the only demonstrations in the streets of Cairo in the aftermath of the bomb attacks were conducted by Egyptians spontaneously denouncing the Muslim Brotherhood, considered responsible for these and other acts of terrorism. "People are fed up," he said.

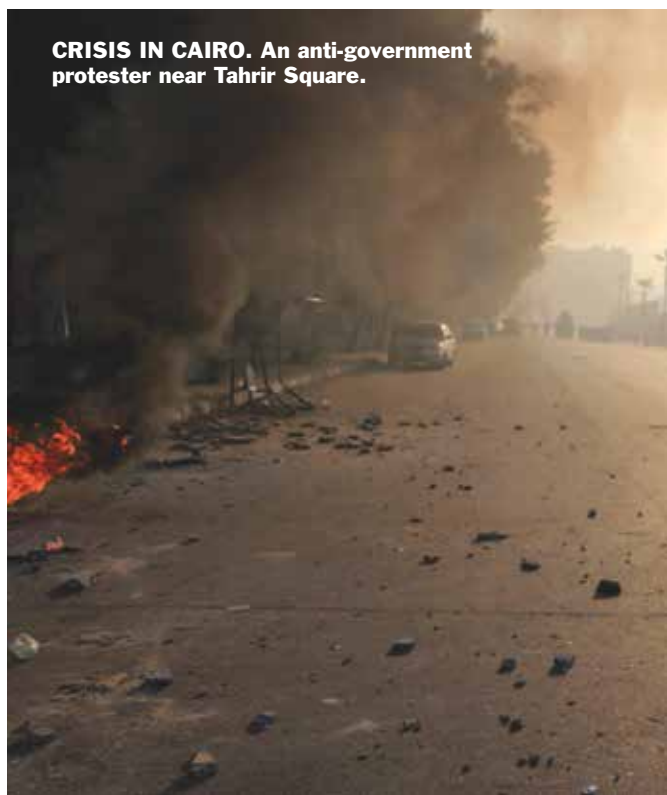
No group claimed responsibility for the bombings, and representatives from the Muslim Brotherhood denied that the organization was involved. The brotherhood has been under increasing pressure since the Egyptian military deposed its candidate, Mohammed Morsi, the only democratically elected president of Egypt, in July last year. Denounced as a terrorist organization by the government that replaced Morsi, the brotherhood was outlawed in September by an Egyptian court.

Despite the latest violence, Egypt's Christians remain cautiously hopeful about their nation's future, especially since the approval of a new constitution more amenable to the viability of Egypt's minority Christian community. Christians make up about 10 percent of the nation's mostly Sunni

Muslim population of more than 85 million.

Moneer Fawzy, a Coptic Christian, has been the target of insults and abuse throughout his life from his Muslim neighbors. A Cairo house painter, Fawzy said anti-Christian speech is often blasted on mosque speakers during Muslim prayer sermons. He voted in favor of Egypt's new constitution in mid-January because it promised equality for minorities and "laws banning hate speech."

The new constitution is a heavily amended version of the one adopted in 2012 during Morsi's brief tenure. Stripped of many of the Islamic-inspired provisions of the Morsi constitution, the new constitution bans the formation of political parties based on religion and makes discrimination and inciting hatred crimes. It also strengthens civilian controls of the country's military.



**CRISIS IN CAIRO.** An anti-government protester near Tahrir Square.

The new constitution retains the stipulation that Islamic Shariah law is "the main source" of the country's legislation, but it adds that all citizens "are equal before the law" and offers more civil liberties to women and to minority groups. The "emphasis on citizenship, and on all citizens having equal rights, is positive for everyone in Egypt, not just Christians," said the Rev. Kamil William, a Coptic Catholic priest.

Egypt's election officials reported that nearly 40 percent of registered voters turned out for the constitutional referendum and that more than 98 percent of voters backed the new document. But local and international rights groups say a widespread clamp-down on dissent and a mass media campaign urging people to vote for the constitution as the only solution to Egypt's economic and social woes made it difficult to oppose the amended document openly.





PHOTO: REUTERS/AMR ABDALLAH DALSH

## VATICAN

### ‘New Era’ Under Pope Francis?

**T**he cardinal who heads Pope Francis’ Council of Cardinals said the Catholic Church is entering a “new era” and accused critics of the pope’s statements on economic injustice of failing to “understand reality.”

“Francis wants to lead the church in the same direction that he himself is moved by the Holy Spirit,” said Cardinal Óscar Rodríguez Maradiaga of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in an interview with the *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* of Cologne, Germany, on Jan. 20. “This means closer to the people, not enthroned above them, but alive in them,” said the cardinal, who leads the council appointed by Pope Francis to work on reform in the Roman Curia and advise

him on church governance. “I’m firmly convinced we are at the dawn of a new era in the church, just as when Pope John XXIII opened its windows 50 years [ago] and made it let in fresh air,” he said.

Cardinal Rodríguez said the pope favored “above all, a simpler life and leadership” from priests and bishops in line with the “sometimes forgotten message of Jesus.” According to the cardinal, Pope Francis believes church leaders should go out to people, rather than “sitting in our administrative offices and waiting for people to come.”

He said most Catholics were “behind the pope” and suggested that Cardinal-designate Gerhard L. Müller, prefect of the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, could be less absolute in his defense of authority in the church. “I understand it. He’s German and a German professor of theology on top of it. In his mentality, there is only right or wrong, that’s it,” said Cardinal Rodríguez. “But I say: The world, my brother, isn’t like that. You should be slightly flexible when you hear other voices, instead of just listening and saying, no, here this is the wall.”

The cardinal’s remarks follow recent criticisms of Cardinal-designate Müller, formerly bishop of Regensburg, Germany, for a perceived rigidity on church teaching. The archbishop was appointed by Pope Benedict XVI to head the doctrinal congregation in July 2012 and named a cardinal by Pope Francis on Jan. 12.

Speaking on Jan. 21 at a Catholic university symposium in Venice, Cardinal-designate Müller said he believed church life should not be “so much concentrated on the pope and his curia.” He said the pope’s apostolic exhortation in November, “*Evangelii Gaudium*” (“The Joy of the Gospel”), did not, “contrary to superficial interpre-

tations, contain any instructions for a change of direction or revolution.”

Cardinal Rodríguez said, however, that the pope’s priority was that the church should “reach the common people” and show compassion through “a different kind of care for the world, especially the needy.” He added that there had been “a lot of shouting” against the pope’s “critique of capitalism” in “*Evangelii Gaudium*,” especially in “U.S. business circles” who did not “understand reality.” “Who says capitalism is perfect, especially since the recent financial market crisis?” the cardinal asked.

Asked about calls for the church to change its attitude toward divorced and remarried Catholics, Cardinal Rodríguez said the church was “bound by God’s commandment” that “what God has joined together, man must not divide.” But he explained that there were “many ways to interpret” the commandment, and “still much room for a deeper interpretation” without reversing the teaching.

The cardinal said the next Synod of Bishops, planned for October, would tackle new social issues like surrogate parenthood, childless marriages and same-sex partnerships, which were “not even visible on the horizon” at the last synod on the family in 1980.



Óscar Rodríguez Maradiaga

## Millennials Join March for Life

Despite single-digit temperatures, thousands descended on Washington on Jan. 22 to declare their opposition to abortion. Most of the red noses and chapped lips belonged to faces under 25. “We are the pro-life generation,” read signs carried by the marchers. The president of the March for Life, Jeanne Monahan, echoed that opinion. In her opening remarks, Monahan thanked millennials “more than any group” for understanding the devastation caused by abortion. Mary Peters, 16, traveled for 11 hours with her classmates from St. Catherine of Siena Academy in Michigan. “It’s amazing to be here with your peers, pepped up about something you believe in,” she said. According to a Gallup poll in 2013, millennials are the group most likely to believe that abortion should be outlawed in all circumstances, and a majority believe in placing restrictions on abortion. Some believe technology may be responsible for the shift in perspective. Clara Milligan, a senior at Morris Hill Academy in Cincinnati, said that “we see the ultrasounds and know that life begins in the womb.”

## College Debt and Religious Life

Debt from college loans makes some men and women postpone joining a religious community, according to a survey of men and women professing final vows as members of a religious order. Ten percent of those who professed final vows in 2013 had an average amount of \$31,000 in college debt and the average length of postponement was two years, according to “New Sisters and Brothers Professing Perpetual Vows in Religious Life: The Profession Class of 2013.” The annual survey was conducted by

## NEWS BRIEFS

Sporadic violence between Christian and Muslim gangs continued throughout the Central African Republic as leaders of the **Muslim Seleka militia** appeared to flee Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic on Jan. 26. + The Vatican spokesperson Federico Lombardi, S.J., confirmed on Jan. 24 that Pope Francis has begun work on a **text on ecology** that could become an encyclical, but he said it was too early to say when it might be published. + Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin welcomed an Irish government decision on Jan. 21 to **reopen its embassy** at the Vatican just over three years after it was closed as a cost-saving measure. + The prelatore of Opus Dei announced on Jan. 21 that **Bishop Álvaro del Portillo**, the successor to Opus Dei’s founder, St. Josemaría Escrivá, will be beatified on Sept. 27 in Madrid. + On Jan. 20 Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto, Nigeria, commended the country’s President Goodluck Jonathan for signing a law making **same-sex marriage and same-sex relationships** punishable offenses. + Vatican officials announced on Jan. 21 that the first-ever meeting between **Pope Francis and President Obama** has been scheduled for March 27 in Rome.



**Violence continues in Central African Republic**

the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, based at Georgetown University. None of the male religious reported receiving assistance in paying down their educational debt, but among women religious, several reported assistance from family and friends, their religious institute, their parish or various funds designated to support vocations. The survey also found that 65 percent of the respondents entered their religious institute with at least a bachelor’s degree or more, and almost two-thirds (62 percent) reported that they were discouraged from considering a vocation by one or more persons.

## In Jordan Little Hope For ‘Geneva II’ Success

In Jordan’s capital city, Amman, prayers for peace were being offered by refugee Syrian Christians as talks between

the warring sides in Syria’s civil war opened in the Swiss town of Montreux. Dubbed Geneva II, the talks aim for a transitional government, an end to the violence and the delivery of badly needed humanitarian aid. Expectations among displaced Syrians for a peaceful outcome in Geneva were low, however. “Of course, the Geneva II talks must happen. But how will the extremist groups threatening Christians and other Syrians inside the country be dealt with?” asked Abu Reda, a Syrian Catholic. Church officials and rights groups say that many Christians have tried to remain neutral in Syria’s conflict. But fighting continues to put pressure on the small Christian population, leading to fears that more Syrian Christians will join those who have already left the Middle East.

From CNS and other sources.



# Beyond Red and Blue

The silence has been broken. I have often deplored lack of public discussion of U.S. poverty. Prodded by Pope Francis and the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty, leaders are responding to the pope's indictment of an "economy of exclusion and inequality." With his words and example, Pope Francis has started conversations on the airways and the Web, in politics and our homes, about "people [who] find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape."

President Obama and Representative Paul Ryan, Republican of Wisconsin, responded by addressing too much poverty and too little mobility in our nation.

President Obama said, "The basic bargain at the heart of our economy has frayed.... The pope himself spoke about this. 'How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?' This increasing inequality... challenges the very essence of who we are as a people."

Representative Ryan said, "What I love about the pope is he is triggering the exact kind of dialogue we ought to be having."

Some discussion on teleprompters and talk shows is a rehash of old talking points or presumptuous comments on what the commentator thinks Pope Francis should have said, but much is informed, insightful and eloquent. The good news is that the silence has ended with agreement that the current situ-

ation—one of five children grows up poor in our rich nation—is intolerable. The bad news is that partisan polarization blocks effective action. There are unreal, unhelpful divisions between those who focus mostly on family factors as causes and remedies for poverty and those who look to economic forces as primary contributors and solutions. These partisan and ideological walls must come down. A child's future is shaped by both the choices of the parents and the policies of government, by both the strength of the child's family and the strength of the economy. These false alternatives, narrow agendas and ideological boundaries are bad policy and bad politics and are bad for poor people.

The social scientist Robert Putnam of Harvard University, author of *Bowling Alone*, warns that economic stagnation and family dysfunction are pushing more children into poverty. His research shows white working class families increasingly undermined by economic, social and moral pressures. Professor Putnam insists this is the "ultimate purple problem"—that is, the combination of red and blue—and that Catholic and evangelical communities have particular responsibilities to act because of where they are and who they serve.

The Catholic social tradition of thought and action offers alternatives to the paralyzed status quo. Our principles and experience point to the moral, political and policy imperative of *both/and*, making connections between family and economic factors, human life and dignity, rights and responsibil-

ities, solidarity and subsidiarity, dignity of work and rights of workers, race and class, discrimination and dependency, personal and social responsibility. These are not slogans but nuanced guides to policy. They focus more on overcoming poverty than achieving equality, require policy participation of poor people themselves, support a genuine safety net and insist on decent work at decent wages for all who can work.

These  
partisan  
and  
ideological  
walls  
must come  
down.

The U.S. bishops have offered a four-part framework: 1. The responsibilities of individuals and families to make wise choices, marry before having children, pursue education and work. 2. The supporting roles of community and religious groups (including unions and

community organizations). 3. The necessary contributions of a growing economy and the market: decent jobs, wages and benefits. 4. The obligations of government to provide a genuine safety net, promote economic vitality and act when other institutions fail to protect human life, dignity and rights. In Washington, many embrace one of these priorities and neglect the others. The complexity of poverty requires that all these institutions work together to help the poor build better lives.

In addition to ethical principles and everyday experience, the Catholic community brings the leadership of Pope Francis and his moral criteria: "the greatness of a society is found in the way it treats those most in need, those who have nothing apart from their poverty."

**JOHN CARR**

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



“Let us try also to be a church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself.”

—Pope Francis



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**America**

## U.S. MISADVENTURES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

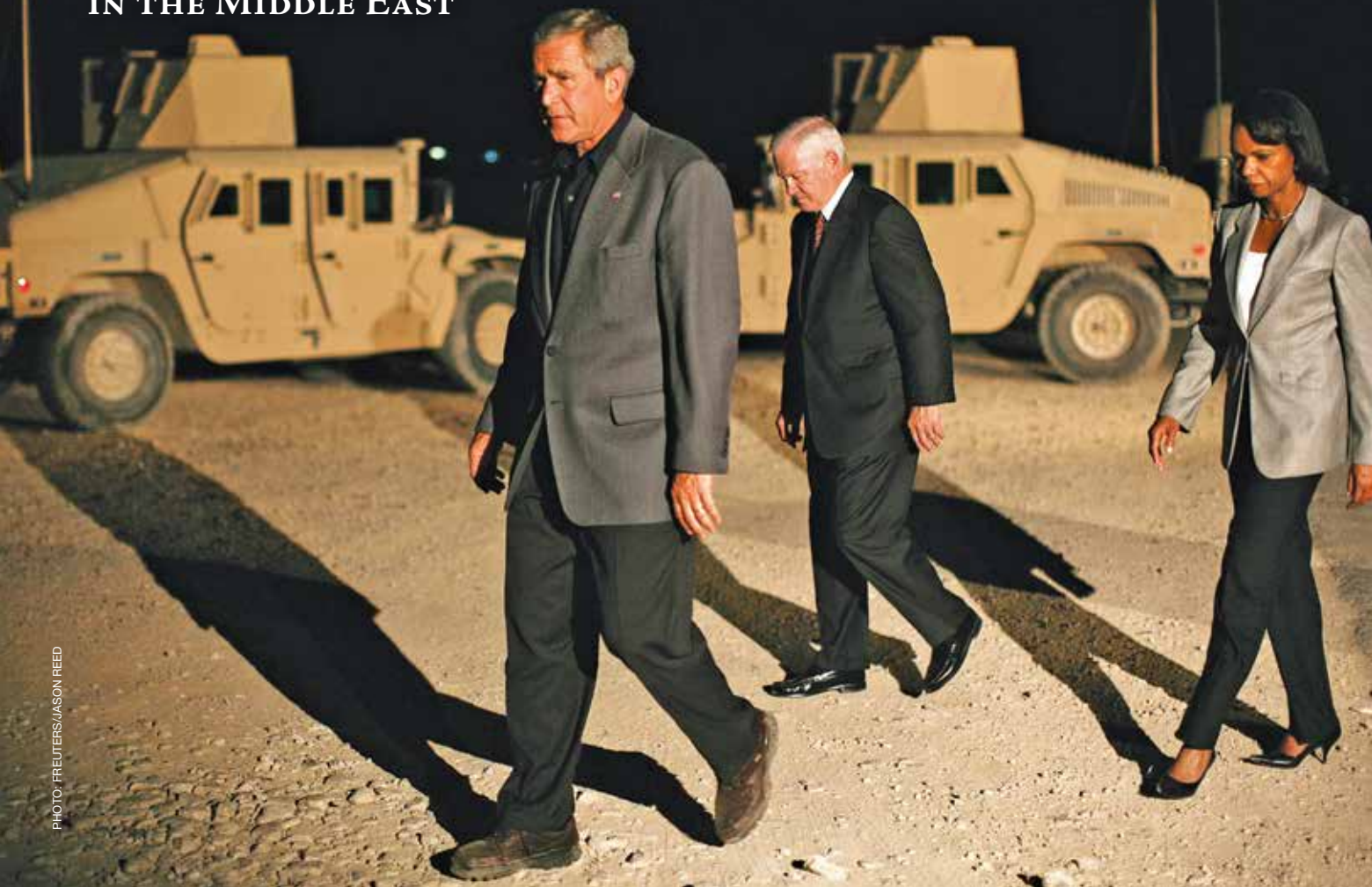


PHOTO: FREUTERS/JASON REED

# A War of Ambition

BY ANDREW J. BACEVICH

**H**istory, wrote T. S. Eliot in 1920, “deceives with whispering ambitions” and “guides us by vanities.” Over the past decade, ambitions and vanities have led the United States badly astray, nowhere more than in the Islamic world. Let us tally up the damage.

Among most Americans, the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, prompted a response combining fear, anger and mourning. Yet in Washington, in circles where ambition and vanity held sway, those events also represented a signal opportunity. In a twinkling, action had become the order of the day. Existing restraints on the use of U.S. power suddenly fell away. A radical reorientation of American statecraft suddenly appeared possible. Overnight, the previously implausible had become not only necessary, but also alluring.

**WALK OF SHAME?** President George W. Bush with Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at Al-Asad airbase in Anbar Province, September 2007.

ANDREW J. BACEVICH is a professor of history and international relations at Boston University. His most recent book is *Breach of Trust: How Americans Failed Their Soldiers and Their Country*.

For decades, U.S. policy in the Middle East had sought to shore up that region's precarious stability. In a part of the world always teetering on the brink of chaos, averting war had formed the centerpiece of U.S. policy.

Now, however, the administration of George W. Bush contrived a different approach. Through war, the United States would destabilize the region and then remake it to the benefit of all. "The United States may not be able to lead countries through the door of democracy," Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz remarked, "but where that door is locked shut by a totalitarian deadbolt, American power may be the only way to open it up."

### The 'Democratic Domino Theory'

Where then to begin this process of creative destruction? On the first weekend after Sept. 11, at a war council meeting at Camp David, according to the 9/11 Commission Report, Mr. Wolfowitz made the case for striking Iran. Then, in late November 2001, a small study group of Washington insiders convened at Wolfowitz's behest. Christopher DeMuth, then president of the American Enterprise Institute, recruited the group's members and later shared its conclusions with Bob Woodward. The group identified Saddam Hussein's Iraq as the best place for blowing that door off its hinges. Although most of the 9/11 hijackers had come from Saudi

Arabia and Egypt, "the problems there [were] intractable." Iraq was seen as "different, weaker, more vulnerable," Mr. Woodward reported in his book *State of Denial* (2006). Here was the place to implement America's new "democratic domino theory." As President Bush himself proclaimed, toppling Saddam "would serve as a dramatic and inspiring example for freedom for other nations in the region."

The point is crucial. Only by appreciating the magnitude of the Bush administration's post-9/11, vanity-saturated ambitions does it become possible to gauge their unforeseen consequences. Only then can we fully appreciate the deeply ironic outcome that those ambitions yielded.

Put simply, invading Iraq was never itself the end. Doing so pointed toward a much larger objective. Writing months

before the United States launched Operation Iraqi Freedom, the journalist Mark Danner accurately characterized President Bush's post-9/11 strategy as "comprehensive, prophetic, [and] evangelical." That strategy was nothing if not bold and brazen.

Washington, Mr. Danner observed, had jettisoned "the ideology of a status quo power" that had largely shaped U.S. policy since World War II. Containing evil no longer sufficed. "The transformation of the Middle East," insisted Condoleezza Rice, Mr. Bush's national security advisor, offered "the only guarantee that it will no longer produce ideologies of hatred that lead men to fly airplanes into buildings in New York or Washington."

*Transformation*—there was a word redolent with ambition and vanity. By invading Iraq and overthrowing a dictator, an administration disdainful of mere stability would make a start at transforming the entire Islamic world. In the first decade of the 21st century, the United States intended to reprise the role it credited itself with playing during the second half of the 20th century. Across the Middle East, ideologies of hatred would give way to the ideology of freedom.

Unfortunately, this preening liberation narrative, that hardy perennial of American political discourse, did not describe the 20th century that the peoples of the Middle East had actually experienced. Arabs, Iranians and other Muslims had little reason

to look to the United States (or any other Western nation) for liberation. Nor did the freedom to which they aspired necessarily accord with Washington's tacit understanding of the term: "friendly" governments that on matters ranging from oil to Israel to terrorism obligingly deferred to U.S. policy preferences.

Much to its chagrin, the Bush administration soon learned that the dyad pitting hatred against freedom did not exhaust the full range of possible outcomes. The

United States dispatched Saddam Hussein, but the results confidently predicted by the war's architects failed to materialize. The blown-open door admitted not democracy, but endemic violence. Even today, a decade into the post-Saddam era and two years after the last American soldier departed, the Iraq War continues. In October 2013 alone, that war

Among most Americans, the events of 9/11 prompted a response combining fear, anger and mourning. Yet in Washington, those events represented a signal opportunity. In a twinkling, action had become the order of the day.

#### ON THE WEB

Video reports from  
Catholic News Service.  
[americamagazine.org/video](http://americamagazine.org/video)



claimed the lives of nearly 1,000 Iraqis.

Nor did that violence confine itself to Iraq. Following in the wake of the U. S. invasion of Iraq came not transformation, but disorder that enveloped large swaths of the Middle East. In Tunisia, Libya and Egypt popular uprisings overthrew dictators. Nowhere, however, did this so-called Arab Spring yield effective governments, much less liberal democracy. Nowhere did upheaval enhance American stature, standing or influence.

### Intervention's End?

Then came Syria. There indigenous efforts to overthrow another dictator led to an immensely bloody civil war. Declaring that Syria's President Bashar al-Assad "must go," while drawing never-to-be-crossed "red lines," President Barack Obama still nursed the fancy that it was incumbent upon the United States to sort matters out.


Only on the eve of ordering another armed intervention did Mr. Obama pause long enough to notice that he was pretty much on his own. In the White House, illusions that U.S. bombs and rockets could deliver Syrians from evil still lingered. Others—including a clear majority of the American people, both chambers of Congress and even the British Parliament—had concluded otherwise. With the stores of 9/11-induced vanity and ambition (not to mention the U.S. Treasury) now depleted, faith in the transformative power of American military might had waned. The president prudently pulled back from the brink.

Whether Mr. Obama's about-face in Syria marks a decisive turn in overall U.S. policy in the Middle East remains to be seen. Senior officials like National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice have hinted that the administration would like to turn its attention elsewhere. Even if it does, this much seems certain: The instability that U.S. policymakers a decade ago so heedlessly sought will persist.

Scholars will long debate whether the misuse of American power caused or merely catalyzed this instability—or indeed whether the disorder roiling the Middle East derives from factors to which decisions made in Washington are largely irrelevant. What they will not debate is the outcome, best captured in the words of another poet, Robert Lowell. "Pity the planet," he wrote, "all joy gone." And "peace to our children when they fall/ in small war on the heels of small/ war—until the end of time."

Of course, the vast majority of those felled by the violence rippling through the Islamic world are not the offspring of Americans. They are someone else's children. Although this makes their fate that much easier for present-day Americans to stomach—and even ignore—it is unlikely to affect the judgment that history will render. Mindless policies conceived by an arrogant and ignorant elite have produced shameful results. ▲

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# What We Wrought

## Taking responsibility for Iraq's cycle of violence

BY CATHY BREEN

**W**e are living in a time of great extremity. The recent typhoon that tore through the Philippines left thousands dead. Countless people desperately need water, food and shelter, and many storm victims still cannot be reached. In Iraq, people live with bombs and explosions every day, but we hear almost nothing of it in the news. How can people respond if they never hear about this suffering?

In the last year almost 1,000 people have been killed in Iraq each month. "Strewn body parts everywhere," a friend from Baghdad described the situation recently over the phone. Children are seeing things they should never witness. Their minds, their psyches are changed forever. They have been living in extremity for over a decade now—and even longer if you go back to the Persian Gulf War in 1991 and the subsequent sanctions that had fatal consequences. Young people in Iraq have known only disaster.

Admittedly, I am a bearer of bad news. I have been for over a decade now. I first went to Iraq in the fall of 2002 as a member of Voices in the Wilderness. At that time the U.S. invasion of Iraq seemed inevitable, and Voices—founded in 1996 to draw attention to the draconian effects of U.S. economic sanctions on ordinary people—formed a small project, called the Iraq Peace Team. Many team members traveled to Iraq, planning to remain in the country in the event of a U.S. invasion. We were there because we believe all life is sacred. This belief has always been fundamental to Voices and to my own Catholic Worker community.

In January 2004, Voices decided to no longer travel to central or southern Iraq for fear of risking the lives of Iraqis who associated with us. The United States not only occupied their country; it also created a path for terrorist groups to enter Iraq. The United States had dismantled the Iraqi police and army and opened up the nation's borders. After the fall of the regime, I saw firsthand groups from surrounding countries descend on Baghdad. Last fall, former Representative Ron Paul, Republican of Texas, wrote about the pledge of

President Obama to provide additional U.S. military aid to Iraq to combat the growing influence of Al Qaeda. Mr. Paul lamented that no one bothered to mention that Al Qaeda was not even in Iraq before the U.S. invasion in 2003. "What a disaster," he wrote.

Between 2005 and 2011 I lived for a total of four years in Jordan and Syria as part of Voices for Creative Nonviolence (formerly Voices in the Wilderness) to witness and call attention to the dire situation of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees who were forced to flee the violence and death threats and, far too often, the tragic deaths and/or kidnapping of family members. Late in 2011, I was finally able to return to Iraq after a nine-year absence. I find it impossible to convey my feelings upon returning to this country, whose people have shown me great hospitality and warmth. It was like coming home. My latest trip was in May of last year.

### No Place To Go

Back in the United States, I open my e-mail messages with dread, wondering if I can take more bad news from Iraq, more stories of explosions and killings. What I fear most, however, is not hearing from friends in Iraq and wondering if they are still alive. One friend writes, "We cannot leave our house to go to work." Another friend tells me: "It is too dangerous for our children to go to school, but the children insist on going. No one is safe." There is no safe space in Iraq, not in schools, buses, mosques, youth soccer fields, soccer stadiums, barber shops, restaurants or open-air markets. There is no place to go, and no country wants to take Iraqi refugees.

I receive report after report of kidnappings, assassinations and suicide bombings. During my last visit to Iraq, everyone I met—except for one person—said they would leave the country if they had a place to go. The exception was a gifted and beloved artist. He told me his decision to stay in Iraq is a form of "resistance against a dirty war."

As mind-boggling as it seems, 10 years after the war there is still no national electrical grid or potable water. Even more devastating for Iraqis is the total lack of security and the corruption that runs through every sector of government.

**The United States not only occupied Iraq; it also created a path for terrorist groups to enter the country.**

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CATHY BREEN is a member of Maryhouse Catholic Worker in New York City.



**DYING EVERY DAY.** Women wait to claim the bodies of relatives killed by gunmen in Mahmudiya, Iraq, Sept. 4, 2013.

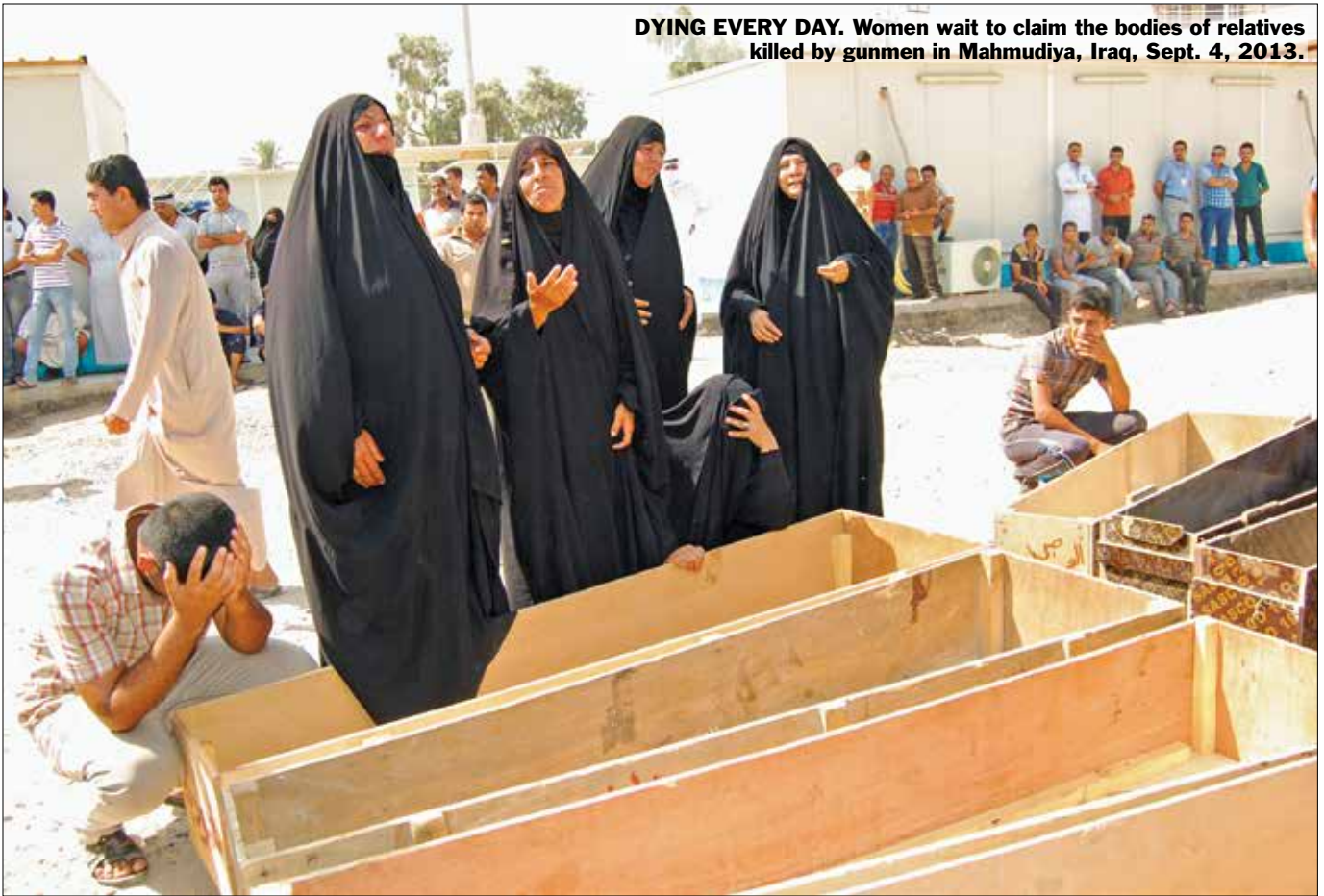


PHOTO: REUTERS/IBRAHIM JASSAM

People feel helpless and hopeless. “You destroyed our country,” one student told me. Another Iraqi said, “You destroyed our ancient civilization. You took our childhood. You took our dreams. What can you do? You drop bombs, commit war crimes and then send research teams to investigate what is in the bombs. What can you do? We will not forget. It is not written in our hearts, it is carved in our hearts.”

When I give a presentation about Iraq, it has always been important for me to put a face to the story. I want everyone to see photos of the beautiful people I have met. But the violence has escalated to such an extent in Iraq that, for fear of repercussions, I now hesitate to show anyone’s face. I never know who among the audience members might be filming or what their intentions might be.

### **Holding on to the Human**

I am an activist by nature. Whenever I speak publicly about Iraq, I want to end with concrete suggestions for possible actions. People of goodwill want to know what they can do.

On one level, I do not know what to tell them. The damage has already been done. In Iraq I was jolted upright in the middle of the night by explosions. I heard gunshots. I

saw cars burning. We had to check our car for sticky bombs. There was little we could do about fake checkpoints, extrajudicial killings and kidnappings—except trust God.

John O’Donohue, the late Irish poet and mystic, spoke in an interview in 2007 about how difficult it is for people to reach and sustain gentleness when they are surrounded by ugly landscapes. He comes from western Ireland, which is exceptionally beautiful. He explained, “There are individuals holding out on frontlines, holding the humane tissue alive in areas of ultimate barbarity, where things are visible that the human eye should never see.” They are able to sustain extreme suffering, he said, because “there is in them some sense of

beauty that knows the horizon that we are really called to in some way.” Mr. O’Donohue referred to Pascal, who said you should always “keep something beautiful in your mind.” If we can do this, he said, we can “endure great bleakness.”

A while back a trusted friend in Iraq, a doctor, sent me an e-mail message that said: “Still alive but with poor quality, doing the routine work. We are living, but we want to die once, not every day.” Doctors like my friend, who have remained in the country even when most doctors had to flee because of threats, are among my heroes. They are the ones “holding out

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on the front lines," able to withstand barbarity and extreme suffering.

An estimated 118 Iraqis were killed in clashes across the country on Jan. 3. It takes a good deal of work to get news about Iraq, and we surely do not get enough through mainstream media. In an article in *The Huffington Post* (12/17/13), Joshua Hersh wrote: "The sheer numbers [of dead] are so overwhelming that they can become numbing...in ways that are shocking."

More recently, I received a message from a friend in Baghdad who wanted me to know that he might not be able to remain in contact. He has to flee, leaving his wife and children unprotected, as his area is being targeted. I cannot imagine how he and they must be suffering—the youngest just an infant! All of their frightened faces are in front of me.

As I contemplate the possibility of future travels to Iraq, I wonder how to justify such journeys. Maybe to help carry the weight of others who are suffering; maybe to assure them that they are not alone. It is beyond me. We can only trust God that we will be shown the way. If it is not to be, may God intervene.

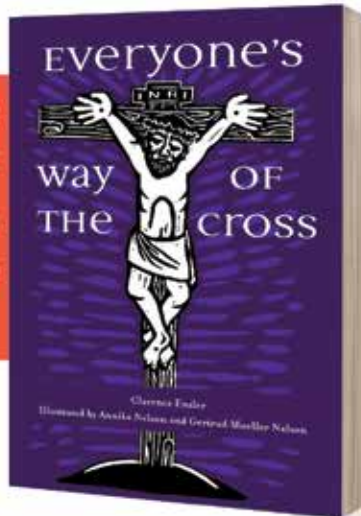
I believe there is something we can do as a country, as individuals, as people of conscience, as people of faith, for the people of Iraq. In his preface to *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis writes: "I do not think that all who choose wrong roads perish; but their rescue consists in being put back on the right road. A wrong sum can be put right; but only by going back till you find the error and working it afresh from that point, never by simply going on. Evil can be undone, but it cannot 'develop' into good. Time does not heal it."

We must go back to where we made the wrong turn in the road. We must acknowledge and take responsibility for the horrific destruction, violence and death we have wrought in Iraq. We must turn aside from the preparation of war and the waging of wars. Evil can be undone, but it is not going to turn into good by simply going on. 

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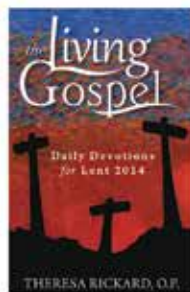
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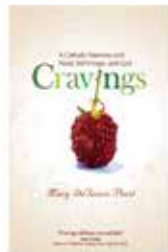
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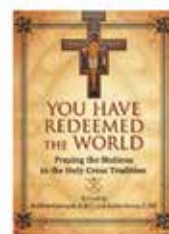
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# Down to Earth

A struggle over land and power in Honduras

BY LUKE HANSEN



A neighborhood in Tegucigalpa, Honduras

**E**nrique, an older *campesino* with a graying mustache, spoke calmly, but he conveyed a deep sense of urgency. “We have been threatened,” he told us through an interpreter, “because we have defended the poorest people, the land and the water.” On Feb. 13, 2013, members of his village in northern Honduras helped hang a chain in front of his house to block access and to send a clear message to the mining companies: We are not selling; stay away from our land. The next day, he said, the police broke the chain, asked for their names and promised to return.

This sort of intimidation, sadly, is not an anomaly; it is just one instance of a systemic threat faced by farming communities throughout the country. Our delegation listened to many stories like Enrique’s as we made our way across Honduras, seeking to learn more about the breakdown of civil institutions that followed the military coup in 2009 and about the response of the Catholic Church and the U.S. government to the country’s unique challenges. The delegation, representing Jesuit ministries in the United States and Canada, also wanted to learn how to be in greater solidarity with Jesuits in Honduras and the communities they work with.

As our delegation traveled along the Caribbean coast—the most violent region of the country—we encountered *campesinos* struggling to defend or regain their land from mining companies. We met with a variety of community leaders involved in research, organizing and advocacy: Jesuits

engaged in ministries ranging from parish work to directing theater productions, a political sociologist who studies the increasing militarization of Honduran society, the female chancellor of the country’s most prestigious university and church leaders who have spoken forcefully about the human rights of their people and the urgent need to protect the environment.

## National Challenges

These groups have developed a deep understanding of the root causes of the problems that plague the country and have seen firsthand the human and environmental toll. In the testimony and analysis shared by dozens of individuals with whom we spoke, three interrelated groups of issues stand out as the most pressing:

*Drugs, violence and migration.* An astonishing 80 percent of the drugs transported by air to the United States pass through Honduras. The murder rate in Honduras (86 per 100,000 inhabitants) has climbed to the highest in the world, in part because of the relationship between drug traffickers and organized crime in the country. An official at the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa called the murder rate “catastrophic” and “historic.” In some cities as many as 230 out of every 100,000 residents are murdered each year. In 2012 alone, there were 7,172 murders, roughly the same as the number of police in the country.

In some cases, journalists have been specifically targeted. Ismael Moreno Coto, S.J., popularly known as Padre Melo, director of Radio Progreso and of ERIC, a social research

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LUKE HANSEN, S.J., an associate editor of *America*, traveled to Honduras from Sept. 7 to 15, 2013, with a delegation representing Jesuit ministries in the United States and Canada.

PHOTOS: LUKE HANSEN



and advocacy organization, spoke before the Human Rights Commission of the U.S. House of Representatives in July 2012. In the preceding three years, 25 journalists had been murdered, Padre Melo reported, adding that these deaths represented “the most sophisticated of all political crimes in Honduras today.” In recent years, 16 associates of Jesuit ministries have received credible death threats. Radio Progreso, which has about 1.5 million listeners, continues to receive threats for its reporting and analysis of social problems, and one of its correspondents was forced to leave the country.

Frank La Rue, the U.N. special rapporteur for freedom of expression and opinion, has said that “in proportion to its population, Honduras has the most alarming violation of the freedom of expression in the world.” This level of violence—combined with high unemployment—drives migration to the north. “It is remarkable that so many people in Honduras recognize the dangers of that journey and still choose to journey north because their lives at home are so untenable,” said Shaina Aber, the policy director for the U.S. Jesuits’ office of social and international ministries, who has made several trips to Honduras.

*Militarization and impunity.* In the face of such endemic violence, international partners like the United States tend to have a simplistic response: increase the strength of state institutions like the military and police. This strategy, however, fails to account for the depth of corruption in the military and police forces. Organized crime has penetrated a weak police force in Honduras, leaving people vulnerable. The most powerful individuals in the country have essentially taken the government hostage; corrupt police, prosecutors and judges do not serve the people they have the responsibility to protect, especially those in poorer communities. Hondurans who can afford it have come to rely on private companies for security.

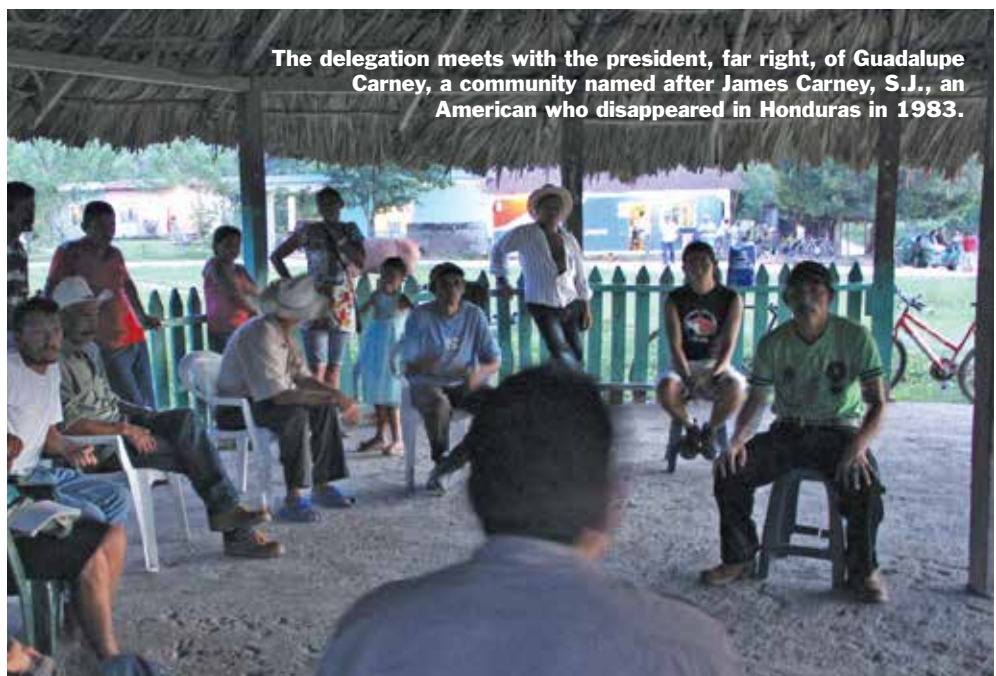
People are demanding greater security, and Juan Orlando Hernández, the newly elected president of Honduras, favors a further militarization of the police force. But this strategy has a downside. “One of the most troubling things about the military police law and generally the militarization of society is the lack of accountability this generates,” explained Ms. Aber. “In the name of security, the military has been given free rein to stop public protests, further corporate interests, investigate and detain activists. The mili-

tarization of society is compounding the levels of impunity.”

*The mining industry.* A year ago a new law opened the door to further exploration of mining sites throughout the country. Multinational mining companies are increasingly exploiting land that *campesinos* have lived on and farmed for decades. Bishop Michael Lenihan, O.F.M., of La Ceiba, told our delegation that armed people have pressured *campesinos* in his diocese to sell their land to mining companies. (See interview on p. 24.)

The aggressive tactics of the mining companies have caused division within families and parishes. Some decide, out of economic necessity, to sell their land. Young people from other regions are recruited to clear the land for the miners. There is too much money at stake and too few economic alternatives. Others decide to resist. When people expressed their concerns about the mining companies to their Claretian pastor, Father César Espinoza, he was hesitant but willing to go along with what the community wanted. Later, a mine owner complained to the bishop about Father Espinoza. “When I found out why the bishop wanted to meet with me,” Father Espinoza explained through an interpreter, “we invited him to visit our community. We wanted him to see that I was not influencing the community, but the community was influencing me.” When the bishop came, people filled the church and made it clear that they did not want the mines. This spurred church leadership to greater action.

In June, the diocese issued a pastoral letter, signed by Bishop Lenihan. The statement laid out a theology of care for creation, an option for the poor and the common good. It voiced opposition to the “avalanche” of environmentally devastating mining projects in the state of Atlántida and the militarization of the region, and decried the defamation



The delegation meets with the president, far right, of Guadalupe Carney, a community named after James Carney, S.J., an American who disappeared in Honduras in 1983.

and threats directed toward Father Espinoza and his colleagues. It called the imposition of mining projects without the consent of local communities an “outrage to personal and collective human rights” and requested consultation as well as trustworthy studies of the environmental impact of such endeavors.

Exploitative mining is a problem not only in Honduras but in all of Central America. “Every country in the region—with the exception of Costa Rica—appears to be experiencing many of the same issues,” explained Ms. Aber, “including environmental and public health issues, to false criminal charges filed against leaders, to intimidation, threats and violence by mining company representatives or government collaborators.” In Costa Rica, the government has banned open-pit mining, a precedent that other countries should follow.

### International Solidarity

Many organizations in Honduras are making a difference through popular education, community organizing and spiritual formation; they not only respond to the immediate needs of the vulnerable but also attempt to hold public officials responsible. Yet the major structural changes needed to reverse the breakdown of civil institutions and stem the increasing levels of violence remain elusive. There is a sense among some that the country has been lost. How is it possible to effectively root corruption out of politics and the police force and rebuild


social institutions? Padre Melo was asked if he was optimistic that conditions in the country would improve. He responded through an interpreter, “In this current situation, being optimistic means not having the facts.” When I asked another Jesuit about this statement, he acknowledged the limited capacity of the Jesuits to respond to the violence. “It is humiliating, frustrating,” he explained. “We are in desolation. Each of us has a creative ministry, but we are overwhelmed by the violence.”

Whenever we met with individuals or groups, we always asked them what solidarity looked like from their perspective. Many responded that the delegation itself was a significant gesture of solidarity. They can feel isolated and ignored, so it meant a great deal to them that an international group, especially one connected with an even larger network of institutions, visited them and listened to their stories.


Catholics in the United States have long had a special relationship with Central America, but it has been centered mostly on El Salvador, where government-backed death squads murdered Archbishop Oscar Romero, four U.S. churchwomen, six Jesuits and many others in the 1980s. The situation in Honduras today provides incentive and opportunity for a renewed commitment to dialogue and collaboration with the country. Catholic institutions in the United States can support the people of Honduras through advocacy and with human, technical, investigative and monetary resources.

It is important to keep open a line of communication with the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa. The delegation brought the testimony of *campesinos* and community leaders to the embassy on Sept. 12, 2013, and the officials asked that we continue to share our human rights concerns with them. While U.S. companies are not currently mining in Honduras, some have expressed interest, which makes it essential that U.S. officials have a clear understanding of concerns raised by local communities related to forced displacement, the natural environment and public health. The officer in the embassy acknowledged that human rights abuses in Honduras are a “fundamental, systemic problem,” but she said “we are only two people” in the human rights office, and “we are doing what we can.” Americans should call upon public officials in Washington to provide additional staff to help monitor and address human rights concerns in Honduras.

There is an ally in Congress with personal experience of Honduras. Senator



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Tim Kaine, Democrat of Virginia, took a year off from law school in 1980 to volunteer with the Jesuits in El Progreso. He has stayed in touch with them over the years, and he visited their community in 2004. In July 2013, Senator Kaine testified before the Human Rights Commission about the “significant human rights challenges” facing Honduras today. He described attacks on members of the media, extrajudicial killings, corruption in many sectors and a general lack of accountability in the country.

He explained that the United States has allocated approximately \$60 million to Honduras—some of it for police reform—but “progress has stalled.” In the first half of 2013, the Human Rights Special Prosecutor in Honduras had already received 500 specific complaints about human rights violations, the “overwhelming majority” related to police action. Yet there is only one man responsible for investigating allegations, and he is not independent of the police.

Commenting on the role of the United States in responding to the crises in Honduras, Leticia Salomón, a political sociologist at the National Autonomous University of Honduras, told the delegation through an interpreter: “We are in a situation where if the United States helps, it is bad. And if they do not, it is worse.” She said, “We need a strong civil society that

can act as a check on political and military power.” Therefore, it is important to create forces independent of a corrupt system, subject to public accountability. “We must stop the advancement of the military apparatus,” she explained. “People feel safe with it, but there is a danger of a militarized state.”

Another possible step for addressing these concerns is the presence of an international group like the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, which could help deter the culture of impunity that currently exists in the country. A similar strategy worked in other Latin

American countries like Colombia and Guatemala, and it could bring much-needed relief to those suffering the most in Honduras today.

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In November, tensions returned to Enrique’s community in Atlántida. The mining company resumed its “exploration” of the land by removing trees and digging, in complete disregard for the land rights of the community. Father Espinoza took photos of the damage, and the community has petitioned the district attorney to intervene. When the delegation spoke with Father Espinoza, he told us, “This situation is grave for all defenders of human rights. You live in Honduras without knowing whether you will see the next day.” Yet the community continues its courageous struggle for justice. **A**

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# Mining Justice

## Defending the environment and stopping violence in Honduras

BY LUKE HANSEN

**A** delegation representing Jesuit ministries in the United States and Canada met with Bishop Michael Lenihan, O.F.M., of La Ceiba, Honduras, on Sept. 10, 2013. Bishop Lenihan worked in Honduras from 2000 to 2009 and then returned in 2012, when he was made a bishop. Luke Hansen, S.J., participated in the group conversation and edited the transcript for clarity and length.

*What can you tell us about the expansion of mining interests in Honduras?*

The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace recently published a document on the love of creation and the need to protect mother earth and not to abuse and exploit it. There has to be dialogue and respect for the people. In this region there has not been any respect or dialogue with the people. Armed people pressure the landowners to sell their land. That is the big problem here.

We entered into dialogue with some of the miners in [the state of] La Atlántida. We brought the community together and had two meetings, but we did not succeed in stopping a prominent miner in the region. At one stage, he told us that if he could not win peacefully, he would bring people to help him enter by force. He said that to us privately at the meeting, but I think it is publicly known now. There is a lot of tension in the area. It is a very difficult situation. We have spoken with the people and tried to show solidarity with them. At times, in the face of the machinery of the state, it is hard to succeed and convince them not to exploit the land.

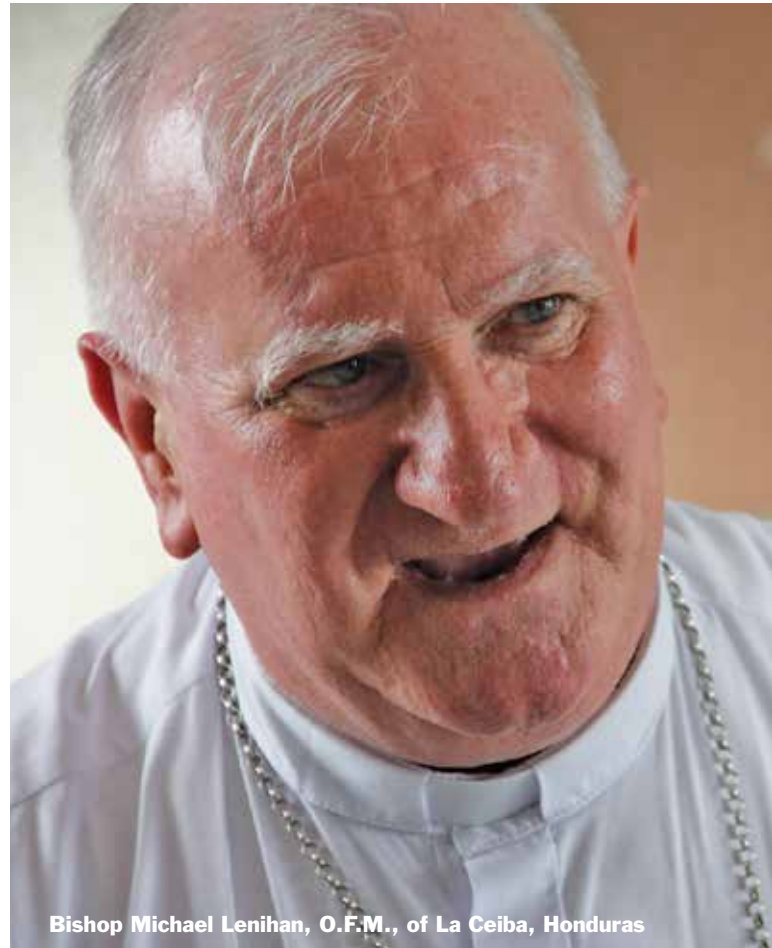
*Could there be an independent environmental assessment?*

We offered to have the universities do a detailed environmental impact study, but the mining companies produced a huge document saying they have already done this. But it is not very detailed. I would not trust the studies they have done.

The people are very, very worried because there are places where mining has already taken place, and they have done certain studies about the damage the mines have done to the water and the people. There certainly is a connection between the mining and the sicknesses the people have, but all of that is very, very quiet; it is not published. Obviously, if it

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LUKE HANSEN, S.J., is an associate editor of *America*.



Bishop Michael Lenihan, O.F.M., of La Ceiba, Honduras

were published, it would be very damaging for the mining company.

*We have heard that the police have been very aggressive.*

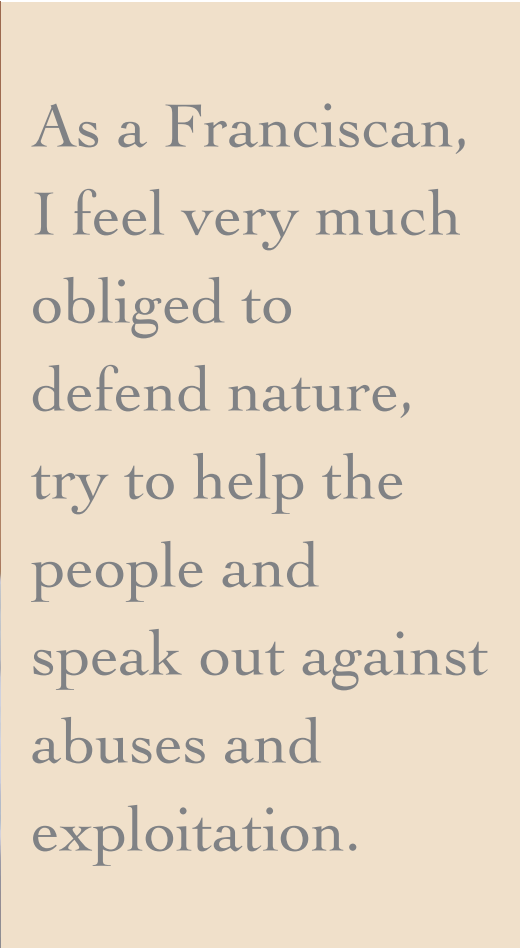
Yes. There were never police in that area and then, all of a sudden, the police came there. They said they were there to protect the people, but really their interest is very much against the people; it is protecting the interest of the miners. From what we can gather, there has been aggression, and they have treated people badly.

*How did the diocesan statement about mining come about? Have you had any positive response from the average Catholic about this?*

The letter came after a lot of debate. We let the ideas mature. We took out certain things, added certain things, and in the

end we felt it was the right moment to publish something. We decided that we will do something to support Father César [Espinoza] and denounce what we believe is unjust and support the people and be a sign of solidarity to the people who are suffering in the midst of that.

Overall, the response was quite positive and a lot of peo-



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try to help the  
people and  
speak out against  
abuses and  
exploitation.

ple congratulated us on the letter. One of the bishops down in Choluteca said he had a meeting with antimining groups, and he used some of our thoughts and reflections to speak to the people. The politicians, however, would be negative because they do not want the church getting involved on that level. There have not been threats to our lives or anything because I believe it was very balanced, very much based in the Gospel, church teaching and the Franciscan charism of love for creation. But when you touch people's interest, there will be a negative response.

*Have the church-sponsored political forums made a difference?* They have been very, very successful. We had a diocesan synod where we invited politicians and listened to them and also presented the voice of the church. We also asked them as party leaders whether they were willing to respect and

work for the defense of the environment. Afterward we got them to sign a pact. The signing is one thing; in the end, it depends on who wins the election.

The politicians are very much aware of what the church thinks, so what has happened has been very, very good, because the church and other groups have spoken out and opposed the mining concessions. We need more and more groups to do the same. We are one voice in the midst of a very powerful group, so what can we do? But we do not give up hope. The hope is that the struggle to defend nature continues. As a Franciscan, I feel very much obliged to defend nature. St. Francis was a lover of nature. He is the patron of ecology, so I would be a traitor if I did not try to help the people and speak out against abuses and exploitation. This is why we went ahead with the letter. We hope the reaction will be positive at the end.

*Is there any way that people in the United States can be in solidarity?*

The main thing is to come and see and have an interest, to visit the people and listen to the people and see how they feel and how they think at the moment. I don't really know, politically or diplomatically, how we can convince the government. The government says China has already given money in advance, so legally the country has to say, "This is yours," and there is no way of stopping it at the moment. It was frightening and alarming when a person said "a thousand acres here and a thousand acres there." The whole of Atlántida will become a mine. I don't want to be a pessimist about everything. We don't lose hope, and the fight continues to try to prevent them.

*Why does Honduras have the highest murder rate in the world?*

A lot of the violence would be related to drugs and gangs, though there is also common delinquency. Extortion is very strong in Honduras, and it results in a lot of businesses closing down. It is not good for the country. Another big factor is the lack of employment. There are two million unemployed people. When you have this many unemployed, they can use different methods to try to survive and live.

There has also been a lack of effort on the part of the government to improve the security of the country. There doesn't seem to be any desire. Or is the government simply incapable? Has it gotten to the stage where it is out of control and nothing can be done? The police force is very, very corrupt. Are they part of the problem instead of being part of the solution? All of these factors do not help.

I just share from my experience of what I have lived and what I hear and see. I hope something can be done to stem the tide, because it seems that Honduras has been completely sold over to the miners. We hope this is not the case. ■



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# Room at the Table

## Hearing all sides on the future of Catholic education

BY RODGER VAN ALLEN

**R**ound tables have advantages. A round table has no head and confers a respectfully equal status on those who sit around it. The presence of a round table at the Paris Peace Talks helped end the Vietnam War in 1973. The legendary round table of King Arthur helped bring peace. And since it was easy to pull up an additional chair, Arthur reportedly invited those from distant kingdoms to join him at it.

Catholic education today does not face Arthur's problem of feuding nobles, but gathering Catholic educators and those who care about Catholic education into respectful and inclusive dialogue is an important step toward the bright and creative future that all desire.

While researching Catholic education in Philadelphia since the Second Vatican Council for a chapter in a forthcoming book on urban Catholic education, I was granted observer status at an admirable series of roundtable discussions convened by the Center for Catholic Urban Education at Saint Joseph's University. These meetings have brought together some 50 or more interested parties, including leaders of the office of Catholic education in the dioceses of Philadelphia and Camden; leaders of other Catholic school models, including the Gesu School, LaSalle Academy, Cristo Rey and others; Business Leaders Organized for Catholic Schools; the Connelly Foundation; the Maguire Foundation; leaders of the Philadelphia School Partnership; the Catholic School Development Program; several other Philadelphia foundations; and administrators from 11 area Catholic colleges and universities.

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RODGER VAN ALLEN is a professor of theology and religious studies at Villanova University, Philadelphia, and co-editor of the quarterly journal *American Catholic Studies*.

### What Does a Roundtable Do?

One of the roundtable's first actions was to welcome the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools. Another session dealt with issues of sustainability and competitiveness following the release of the Blue Ribbon Commission Report "Faith in the Future: Sustainable Catholic Education for All Who



ART: BOB ECKSTEIN

Desire It," which proposed the closure of 48 schools in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Another meeting featured working groups on the future of teaching in Catholic schools and on early childhood education.

The concrete achievements of the roundtable thus far are modest, but the spirit of dialogue, trust, openness and creativity I experienced make this model, advanced by Daniel Joyce, S.J., and his colleagues at Saint Joseph's, worthy of imitation elsewhere. Its genius lies in its inclusiveness and mutual respect.

As this promising initiative goes forward, I recommend even broader inclusiveness. The gatherings of what are called "stakeholders" at Saint Joseph's do not include an important community that cares about the future of Catholic schools—namely, the Association of Catholic Teachers. This is a cu-

rious omission. Why is it, I wonder, that young, post-collegiate volunteers from the Alliance for Catholic Education are appropriately celebrated, but the community of similarly inspired teachers who are investing their whole careers do not have a chair at the table? The most significant business reform of Catholic education in Philadelphia resulted from an extensive study by Coopers & Lybrand in 1991, which included a recommendation for a closer working relationship between the diocese and the Association of Catholic Teachers. This organization includes teachers whose union disaffiliated with the American Federation of Teachers in 1978 because of the A.F.T.'s all-out campaign against tuition tax credits. Members of the association are allies, who have aired their own advertisements championing Catholic schools.

A further suggestion is that such roundtables should concern Catholic education and not just Catholic schools. Catholic religious education programs need representation, too. In Philadelphia fewer than one-third of prima-

ry-school-age Catholics are in Catholic schools; 36 percent are in religious education programs; and the rest are in neither. Quality religious education programs are needed for those who are enrolled and for those who could be.

As a college teacher of theology, I frequently encounter students who are aware of their own religious illiteracy and now, as young adult collegians, regret this. They wish they had experienced top quality religious education. On the other hand, Catholic universities are producing professional religious educators with graduate degrees who cannot find decent employment. To its credit, the Philadelphia 2012 Blue Ribbon Commission Report has made a good first step by specifying that "all parishes should assume the responsibility for hiring a director of religious education who is a qualified and salaried professional along with staff support as deemed necessary to administer a successful and effective religious education program."

Finally, I would include the experience of Catholic schools that have become charter schools. In the view of some, they have forfeited their right to a place at the table of Catholic education. My research has led me to believe that the matter is more complicated than may initially appear. I am impressed by what the Christian Brothers have done in Chicago with this transition and with the experience of the Archdiocese of Washington and their schools that have made that transition. A key element in success seems to be timing the transition correctly, closing the Catholic school in June and reopening in September as a charter school.

### Signs of Creativity

The Catholic school news in Philadelphia is not so dire as some might believe. A review process following the Blue Ribbon Commission Report resulted in the closure of far fewer than the 48 schools that were recommended. All four Catholic high schools slated for closure have continued, and the management of Catholic secondary schools has been capably assumed by the Faith in the Future Foundation, under the leadership of Edward Hanway, the former chief executive officer of Cigna. He explained this development at the most recent roundtable meeting. Mr. Hanway also helped to save Drexel Neumann Academy when it was the lone surviving Catholic school in the low-income city of Chester and was

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threatened with closure.

Furthermore, Independence Mission Schools, a non-profit, was formed in 2012 to support 16 Catholic mission elementary schools in low income communities in Philadelphia. These schools feature independent governance, transparent operations and have the advantages that come from being part of a network. The pioneering urban Catholic ministry work of priests like the Rev. John McNamee and Msgr. Wilfred Pashley is implicitly recognized in this mission school initiative. I.M.S. was formed by John F. Donnelly, chief executive officer of L. P. Driscoll Co., a construction-management firm, and other business leaders who initially worked together as founding board members of St. Martin de Porres School in north Philadelphia.

In addition, Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M.Cap., signed a Great Schools Compact in April 2012 that commits Catholic, public and charter schools to providing high-quality education to all children in Philadelphia. An immediate goal of the compact is to identify higher performing schools, whether they are public, charter, parochial or private and to make that information available to parents so they can choose what is best for their families.

The Saint Joseph's University roundtables are a special story in a time of challenge and creativity for Catholicism in Philadelphia and elsewhere. I laud the initiative and recommend it to others and am grateful for it, even while I encourage the group to make space for a few more chairs around the table. To parish churches I recommend what I experienced in my own Augustinian parish of Saint Thomas of Villanova, where the tradition of Catholic Schools Week was celebrated as Catholic Education Week. A special liturgy was held, and children came forward for a communal blessing. This group included children from Catholic schools, religious education programs and home-schooled religion programs—a local roundtable of sorts. The church was filled and the crowd was happy. ■

# Science & Religion

IN MODERN AMERICA

The McDevitt Center for Creativity and Innovation at Le Moyne College announces the continuation of its major initiative devoted to “Science and Religion in Modern America.” The initiative brings eminent scholars from the sciences and the humanities to Le Moyne to offer their reflections on central aspects of the dynamic relationship between science and religion. Embodying Le Moyne’s Catholic and Jesuit commitment to seek the unity of all knowledge, “Science and Religion in Modern America” represents a compelling model for informed and respectful conversation about these critically important issues.



## Schedule of Talks for Spring 2014:

### Thursday, Feb. 6 Christ and the Pelican Chick

Elizabeth Johnson, Ph.D., C.S.J., Distinguished Professor of Theology, Fordham University

### Tuesday, March 11 Multiverse Cosmologies at the Limits of Modern Science

Mary-Jane Rubenstein, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Religion, Wesleyan University

### Tuesday, April 22 Buddhism and Science: Past, Present and Future

Donald Lopez, Ph.D., A.E. Link Distinguished University Professor of Buddhist Studies, University of Michigan

These events are free and open to the public. They will begin at 7 p.m. and will be held in the Panasci Family Chapel on the Le Moyne College campus.

For more information, contact the McDevitt Center for Creativity and Innovation at (315) 445-6200 or [mcdevittcenter@lemoyne.edu](mailto:mcdevittcenter@lemoyne.edu), or visit the center online at [www.lemoyne.edu/mcdevitt](http://www.lemoyne.edu/mcdevitt).

Previous talks in the series – by Francisco Ayala, Roger Haight, Thomas Tracy, J. Matthew Ashley, Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, Michael Ruse, and Anne Clifford – are available for viewing at the McDevitt Center website at [www.lemoyne.edu/mcdevitt](http://www.lemoyne.edu/mcdevitt).

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## A GOD-SHAPED HOLE

*A new 'Godot' on Broadway affirms Beckett's brilliance*

**I**t has four main characters, little set to speak of and even less in the way of stage action: “Nothing happens, twice,” as one critic wrote of an early production, is not an unjust plot summary. So how does Samuel Beckett’s bleak 1953 tragicomedy *Waiting for Godot* manage to seem so capacious, so rich, so—occasionally, at least—rip-roaringly fun? It helps to have two expert, crowd-pleasing performers in the lead roles of tramps Vladimir and Estragon, as Broadway currently does with Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart, who are performing it in rotating repertory with

Harold Pinter’s similarly sere, gnomic head-scratcher, *No Man’s Land* (1975).

As good as these starry knights are, though, the play’s enduring allure is not about celebrity. Indeed, I happened to realize on my way to the theater that this would be my fifth “Godot,” and I’ve never seen a bad one, stars or no. Perhaps because the play is a kind of literary monument, a required-reading-list staple, it had never occurred to me to claim it as a personal favorite. What the splendid new Broadway “Godot” affirms, among other salutary things, is that I’ve come to know and love this thorny old

masterpiece as dearly as any of the last century’s defining works, from “The Rite of Spring” to “The Godfather Part II.”

So what is it about Beckett’s weird, apocalyptic clown show that gives it such remarkable resonance, soulfulness—even, dare I say, flat-out entertainment value? Like every great work, it has surface pleasures as well as subterranean depths, but these are seldom as inextricably bound together as in “Godot.” The play’s linguistic japey, desperate slapstick and circadian ebb-and-flow supply a music of their own, but these are not diversions or feints mapped over the thrust of a larger drama. Instead, in the two hoboes’ pathetic attempt to fill their squalid, forgetful days with assorted chatter and shenanigans, to grope for significance in a thankless void, the play finds its thematic concern as well as its central action. The scene-breaking re-



**A LITERARY MONUMENT.** Shuler Hensley, Patrick Stewart, Billy Crudup and Ian McKellen in “Waiting for Godot”

PHOTOS ON PAGES 30 AND 31: JOAN MARCUS

frain of “What do we do now?” echoes throughout, first as a kind of meta-theatrical gambit but before long as an increasingly urgent, and all too human, cry.

If that refrain has an extra song-and-dance panache in the current production, it is owing in part to the crack music-hall timing of McKellen and Stewart, and in part to Stephen Brimson Lewis’s set, which seems fused to the Cort Theater’s proscenium itself. The rubble in which Vladimir and Estragon strut and fret looks more like the ruins of a theater than the “country road” Beckett prescribed. But even pitched at such a stagy, near-farcical level, the play’s brilliant, coal-black gloom shines through.

How could it not? For “Godot” remains—there’s no use denying it—a profoundly atheist work, though we must not overlook the profundity for the godlessness. Beckett’s is not the blithe, hyperconfident, 21st-century atheism of Richard Dawkins, or the bland, self-satisfied scientism that constitutes a kind of default worldview in the educated West. It is instead the 20th century’s wounded, elegiac brand of letting-go-of-God—the entirely comprehensible incomprehension of intellectuals who felt poised between the Stygian maw of the Holocaust

and the real probability of nuclear annihilation. For all its impish gallows humor, “Waiting for Godot” has, to my

ears at least, an unmistakably valedictory timbre; it sounds like the lament of a one-time believer who once took the promise of faith seriously, or at the very least understood its high stakes. Put another way: Beckett’s is a voice that anyone conversant with the stark desert landscape of the Bible—anyone

who has, so to speak, sat picking scabs with Job or eaten locusts with John the Baptist—will recognize in a heartbeat.

Our Christian faith, of course, tells us that the bottomless emptiness we may often feel is never truly a void—that God is always with us, never more,



**Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart in “No Man’s Land”**

in fact, than at our lowest moments. Perhaps, if I’m reaching a bit, I glimpse a reflection of divine love in the genuine sweetness and comfort that Vladimir and Estragon bring to each other, at least fitfully; indeed, McKellen and Stewart’s tramps often seem like a dotting old couple. But what mostly endears “Waiting for Godot” to me is that the God-shaped hole at its center is a shape I know well. Beckett pointedly leaves it unfilled, while I (on my better days) try to see existential doubt and suffering as spiritual guideposts, but this difference in our conclusions does not diminish

#### ON THE WEB

Michael V. Tueth, S.J., reviews  
“August: Osage County.”  
[americamagazine.org/film](http://americamagazine.org/film)

my empathy with his vision. The abyss his tramps are dancing at the edge of? I’ve been there, and over it

but for the grace of God go I.

It is quite a different matter with Pinter’s “No Man’s Land,” a queasy parlor game that owes much to Beckett’s dramaturgy but lacks his theology. Here McKellen plays Spooner, a shambling, glad-handing poet invited, apparently by chance, to the forbiddingly cold estate of

Hirst, a stiff drinker played by Stewart. Do the two men know each other, as they suddenly seem to in Act Two, after an alcohol-befogged first act in which they test the conversational waters to little avail? And what exactly are Hirst’s leather-clad hired men, Foster and Briggs, up to?

The only thing that is clear, actually, is that we are not meant to be clear about what these strange, imbalanced relationships are fundamentally about. Power, sex, money, age, class—all these factors come up for consideration, but Pinter, more puppetmaster than dramatist here, keeps reshuffling the deck. Truth to tell, despite director Sean Mathias’s admirably clear-eyed production (he also directed

“Godot”), and the lucid supporting performances of Billy Crudup and Shuler Hensley (who likewise contribute fine, idiosyncratic work in “Godot”), “No Man’s Land” feels dated in a way that “Godot,” its elder, likely never will. While it is amusing to imagine how jolting, even menacing, the play’s shocks and non sequiturs must have seemed in the mid-1970s, such imaginings are not quite enough amusement to sustain an evening.

The piercing earthquake set off by “Godot,” on the other hand, has made a beautiful crevasse that only seems to acquire more beauty and depth as the years go on, and which invites fresh inspection. Much as we believers might take some comfort in the way atheism persists as faith’s loyal opposition, while neither quite extinguishes the other, the unlikely staying power of Beckett’s end-of-the-world play almost constitutes grounds for hope.

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**ROB WEINERT-KENDT**, an arts journalist and associate editor of *American Theater magazine*, has written for *The New York Times* and *Time Out New York*. He writes a blog called *The Wicked Stage*.

# SLUMMING

As much as Nelson Mandela unified the country of South Africa and helped to advance political justice, many recent articles have highlighted the country's continued social inequality and economic stratification based on race.

Governments and other institutions can take action to reduce economic inequality and societal division, though recent stories about individuals' responses to such realities in South Africa raise questions for any of us who are isolated from others in our society.

The story of Julian and Ena Hewitt, featured in *The New York Times* last September, raised both an outpouring of support and a hailstorm of criticism for their actions. This white middle-class South African couple, along with their two young children, left their large home in a gated community in Pretoria to live for a month in a 100-square-foot shack with no electricity or running water in an informal settlement. They brought only a few possessions and lived on a limited budget, wanting to experience the reality of fellow citizens who were geographically near but economically far from their world.

Another story from South Africa that has attracted attention covered a luxury hotel's development of a "shanty town." In an attempt to recreate the experience of living in a slum, the hotel offered shacks made from simple wood and metal and the opportunity to use an outhouse and an outdoor fire. These so-called shacks, however, have under-floor heating and wireless Internet access and rent for more than \$80 a night—about half the monthly income of an average South African.

**MICHAEL ROSSMANN, S.J.**, teaches at Loyola High School in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

The Hewitt family and those who pay to stay at the artificial shanty town represent two different responses to a situation of inequality and isolation. While Shanty Town guests might have a greater experience of a different reality than someone who never leaves the gated community, paying considerable money to experience a "slum" strikes many as strange or even "poverty pornography."

Critics have similarly accused the Hewitt family of gawking at black poverty, and many have justifiably noted that the daily struggle experienced by those in the settlement where the Hewitts stayed received no attention until a white outsider visited.

On the other hand, instead of visiting a settlement just to have a story to write home about—like staying a night at Shanty Town—the Hewitts built relationships with people who could teach them about a different reality. They continue to visit friends they made and attend a church they discovered, even after returning to their regular home.

Whether one believes the Hewitt family experiment was a good thing or not, it is hard not to admire their desire to break out of their comfort zone. When asked why they were doing this by the *Times* reporter, Mr. Hewitt responded, "It's very simple. We're doing it for ourselves. We're doing it to change ourselves."

This need for personal conversion is not limited, of course, to the Hewitts or to South Africa.

All too frequently in my own experience, I have stopped myself from engaging in different experiences that could produce needed personal conversion out of fear that others would not understand. I've thought that if I go to a certain place or event where I am clearly an outsider, people might wonder, "What is he doing here?" By my sticking to what is comfortable, however, my fear prevents my mind and heart from expanding.

When I travel around the world or even to another part of my own city where I feel out of place, new relationships often kindle needed personal conversion. The presence of an outsider may create confusion or raise doubts about motives, but like the Hewitts, I have often found that people are far more welcoming than I could have imagined.

Being an educated white male affords me the privilege of comfortably walking into many situations that others might not be able to explore, and while I am uncomfortable with my privileged reality, it indicates the particular need to see that my world is not the only world.

The Hewitts did not want to remain isolated from their fellow citizens, and they wanted their children to learn to interact comfortably with all people.

While they may not have changed entrenched inequality, they started to change themselves. That challenges me to do the same.

New relationships often kindle needed personal conversion.





# LIKE A GOOD NEIGHBOR

## SMALL TOWN AMERICA Finding Community, Shaping the Future

By Robert Wuthnow  
Princeton University Press. 520p \$35

Robert Wuthnow of Princeton University is now pretty much the dean of American sociologists of religion. Much like the late Rev. Andrew Greeley, Wuthnow is a very prolific author, penning a book about once a year. All of Wuthnow's books show a sophisticated methodology that combines careful census and other polling data, standard questionnaires, with more nuanced open-ended interviews to yield a truly balanced view of his topic. Wuthnow is also a very gifted writer.

*Small Town America* stands out for several reasons. Not much research has looked at the topic since the 1950s. Over a five year period, Wuthnow and his associates conducted hundreds of in-depth qualitative interviews to probe what it means to be a small town resident and to limn the attractions and limitations of living in small towns of under 25,000 inhabitants that are not suburbs or part of larger metropolitan areas. They included samples of towns of under 1,000 inhabitants, of towns ranging from 1,000 to 5,000 and then some larger small towns of 10,000 or more. In all there are about 14,000 towns in the United States with under 25,000 inhabitants that are not part of a more urbanized America. In total, about 30 million Americans live in these small towns. Why do they choose to do so, and what do they find about community living in small towns?

Wuthnow grew up in one small town in Kansas and has lived much of his life in a small town in New Jersey (admittedly, however, a small town in a larger more urban county). I have never lived in a small town and, perhaps, have

shared some of the biases against small towns: that in them everybody knows everyone else's business; they lack the cultural amenities of a larger metropolis; they present fewer opportunities for work and professions. I am always mindful of a friend of mine who lives in Washington, D.C., who told me that growing up in a lovely small town in Montana called Red Lodge, he speculated from about age 8 about where he would end up living. It was clear to him that his hometown had limited opportunities for what he wanted to do: be a psychologist.

Many small towns in America (especially those under 1,000 population) are losing population. Sixty-two percent of towns in America with fewer than a 1,000 residents lost population since 1980. Forty-two percent of towns ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 residents declined in population between 1980 and 2010. One factor in this decline is the decrease in the number of smaller farms in America. There has been a 50 percent decrease in the number of farmers since 1969, and the median age of farmers has been rising.

Wuthnow argues that a sense of community has specific meanings in different sized places. In one sense, in small towns you have to deal with everybody. Two thirds of the people living in a small town have incomes above the national average; some 16 percent live in poverty. Small towns provide feelings of solidarity despite real differences of income and occupational status. Perhaps, if nothing else, all must share the one café in town. The more wealthy

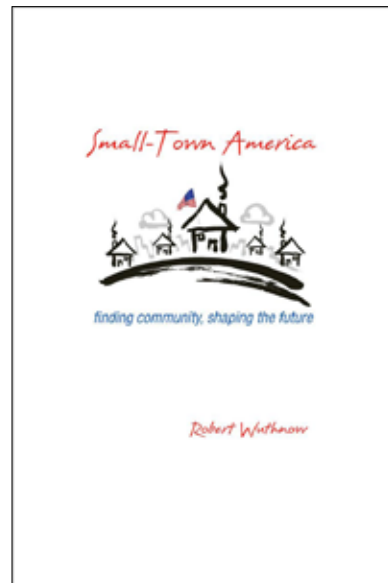
are less likely to engage in conspicuous consumption.

One in five residents of small town America have lived in their small towns for fewer than five years (but they may have moved from another small town). Four fifths of people living in small towns grew up in one. People choose to move to small towns for a variety of reasons. Some like the comparative stability they afford, the slower pace, the absence of heavy traffic, the greater intergenerational mixing. For many, small towns are ideal places to raise children.

Many also like the fresh air and open spaces. Forty-four percent of people in non-urban America said they knew almost all their neighbors, versus only 14 percent in metropolitan areas. Two thirds said they could count on their neighbors to help them in a crisis (twice the rate found in larger cities).

To be sure, many end up in small towns through unexpected circumstances: financial failure, the illness of an aged parent, lower cost housing that can make small towns a kind of refuge. Small towns are not places to make a lot of money or fulfill certain specific aspirations (e.g., to be a ballerina). Small town residents look for a more balanced life. They may earn less money on average than if they lived in larger cities but trade that off for a focus on families and community.

Churches are more abundant, relative to population, in smaller areas than larger ones in the United States. Membership in churches is 50 percent in counties with fewer than 5,000 residents; while only 34 percent in counties over 50,000. Church attendance is noticed, and it is expected of leaders in small communities, who earn respect



by their volunteer activities. Churches provide community but also links to the wider community through mission trips. Many cater to mostly older members, and closing churches in small towns is hard.

People in small towns nurture a vivid sense of decline (they may have lost their own school through consolidation efforts). They see themselves as people who work for strong families, who raise their children properly, who work hard and who support one another. They see these values declining in America. They also see themselves as survivors. Pro-life majorities abound in small towns, but there is an ambiguity about government telling people what to do or about overly aggressive pro-life activities. Ninety percent of those Wuthnow interviewed said they knew a gay person; 50 percent pointed to a family member or close friend. They could be tolerant if the gays did not “flaunt it.” Small towns also engage in controversies over evolution versus creationism or the teaching of religion in public schools; but by and large, the people want to be commonsensical, pragmatic, open-minded.

Small town people are against big government bureaucracy and favor local control. They feel they can trust their local leaders (whom Wuthnow finds to be very professional and well educated). Not surprisingly, small towns tend to vote Republican. Yet for all their affection for small town values, parents in small towns are reluctant to force their children to stay. They know, also, some of the shadow side of small towns (like schools lacking in music education or specialized topics).

In the end, Wuthnow argues, small towns are not really a useful general model for community in the United States. Their own communities have a special sense of place, a stronger sense of who belongs and who doesn't, perhaps more social networks. (Interestingly there are more non-profit volunteer groups in small towns, per capita, than there are in large metropolitan are-

nas.) Small towns have a viable future but lack the kind of infrastructure that would allow them to coalesce into a larger populist movement. It is unlikely that city folks will heavily repopulate our small towns.

I learned a great deal about small-town America from this book. In a

sense, there is no other sociological study of small-town America to equal it. It fills a significant gap in the sociological literature.

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JOHN A. COLEMAN, S.J., a sociologist, is associate pastor of St. Ignatius Church in San Francisco.

NATHANIEL PETERS

## BREAD OF SORROW

### THE LAST YEARS OF SAINT THÉRÈSE Doubt and Darkness, 1895–1897

By Thomas R. Nevin  
Oxford University Press. 320 pages \$35

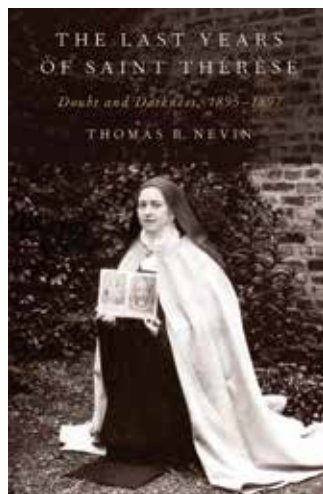
Thomas Nevin's *The Last Years of Saint Thérèse*, the sequel to his *Thérèse of Lisieux: God's Gentle Warrior*, is at once beautiful and maddening. It describes the final years of Thérèse's life in great detail and with helpful insights, but does it in blustery and reductive prose.

Nevin's guiding image throughout is the table of sinners, a metaphor Thérèse uses at the beginning of Manuscript C—the final part of *The Story of a Soul*, the most popular collection of her writings. She describes herself as joined in doubt and darkness with those who have rejected God. She is seated at their table, serves them their bread of sorrow and eats it with them. As Nevin notes, this image is the goal of her adolescent desires to be a warrior, missionary and martyr. She longed to spend herself lavishly out of love for Christ, but ended up doing so along an unexpected way of spiritual pain. Elsewhere Thérèse described her spiritual state as a *sécheresse*, a dryness

or tunnel—a long darkness, perhaps like the tunnel she traveled through in Switzerland on her way to Rome when she was 14.

Nevin's strength lies in illuminating Thérèse's writing with biographical details like this. He writes of her relationship with Sister Marie de Saint-Joseph, whose mood swings and rages led her to be expelled from the community after nearly 30 years. Though Sister Marie was difficult to deal with and isolated from the rest of the community, Thérèse volunteered to work with her in the laundry and exchanged notes and poetry with her. She cast herself in the role of an older sibling, making Sr. Marie the small child who scattered flowers before Jesus, a role that Thérèse so loved herself.

Nevin's strength also lies in corrections of our common understanding of Thérèse. Thérèse is famous for her littleness, usually understood in the form of a “little way,” pursuing sanctity through small acts of great love. But, Nevin reminds us, the heart of the little way is a deep humility. Thérèse studied herself and became well acquainted with her own imperfections: “Her way of imperfection marked the path of trustfulness she wished to give to God.” Whereas Teresa of Avila—also well acquainted with her own sinfulness—mapped a path of as-



ending spiritual perfection, Nevin concludes, Thérèse wrote of our inadequacy and dependence “ensnaring God’s compassion.”

But the book suffers from many weaknesses. First, it is not clear exactly what kind of book it is. It does not weigh in on scholarly debates or take up many secondary sources and it seems to be written for a popular audience. But Nevin’s prose has many ticks that are out of place in popular writing,—repeatedly referring to the works of St. John of the Cross, for example, by their original Spanish titles. This practice insists and demands, perhaps unintentionally, that we acknowledge his erudition.

Then there is the question of genre. Nevin is a Roman historian by training, but his work delves so deeply into spiritual psychology and the nature of Christian doctrine that it would seem to be more than a work of history. Yet its theological analysis is weak in many respects.

At certain points Nevin argues that Thérèse finally located herself outside

the church and Catholicism and that she is heterodox, though he does not spell out exactly what heresy she has embraced. Elsewhere, however, he writes that while Thérèse sees herself at table with those outside the church, she did not fully join them in unbelief—a more credible analysis of the texts. Which does he really mean?

Nevin argues that Thérèse did not hold onto her faith and hope through the darkness. To say that she believed, when she did not believe that she believed, is “nonsense” that “monstrously cheats the very nature of her trial and all her years spent at Carmel in profound aridity and anguish.”

Nevin also underlines her immense charity in that darkness—which becomes theologically incomprehensible if she had lost her faith and hope. For faith, hope and love are gifts of grace and acts of the will. They are not feelings. Without faith, her charity would have

been impossible or a sham. Compared to the shams of Catholic history, Thérèse’s love was the real thing. It is difficult to see how Thérèse could have prayed unless she had faith that somewhere behind the aridity was a God to whom one could pray.

Nevin is at his worst when combating “triumphalism,” a term he never quite defines, though assertions of righteousness or orthodoxy seem to be his primary candidates. Nevin finds the most egregious triumphalism in the Psalms: “It is hard to proceed very far through

them without dismay and even repugnance.”

He contrasts Thérèse’s prayers from the table of sinners to the “near psychosis” of Psalm 23 (“You have prepared

a table before me in the presence of my enemies”), an exegesis Thérèse herself would have rejected.

In other places, Nevin tries to tailor his evidence to his analysis, with unconvincing results. He rejects the image

### ON THE WEB

The Catholic Book Club discusses a history of the North American martyrs. [americamagazine.org/cbc](http://americamagazine.org/cbc)



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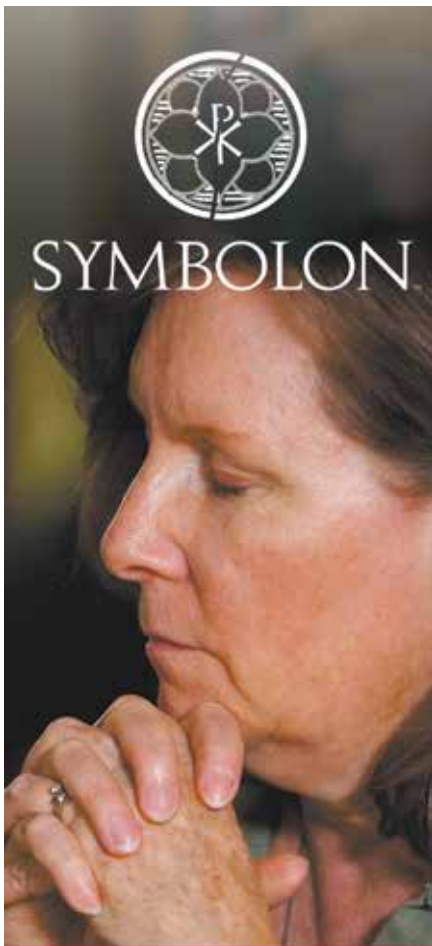
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of Thérèse showering rose petals from heaven because it seems to conflict with the most important image, the table of sinners. In so doing, Nevin is guilty of the offense of which he accuses others. His book works to counteract an excessive focus on the one image, but does so by excessively focusing on the other. In truth, Thérèse's greatness and mystery lie in the middle. She sat in darkness at

the table of sinners, but she also longed to shower roses and be lifted to God on the elevator of his love. We cannot dismiss any of her images, for her constant love for Jesus and the souls who most need him is a mystery we can only begin to fathom.

**NATHANIEL PETERS** is a doctoral student in theology at Boston College.

ALFRED LAWRENCE LORENZ

## NO JOKE

### THE ART OF CONTROVERSY Political Cartoons and their Enduring Power

By Victor S. Navasky  
Knopf. 256p \$27.95

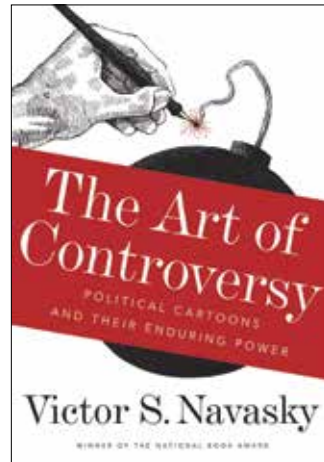
Newspaper editorial writers labor long and hard and in relative obscurity to craft persuasive arguments to win readers to the publication's point of view on an issue. But most readers, surveys tell us, give little more than a glance to the columns of black ink that carry those arguments. The editorial cartoon, however, is much more likely to draw readers' attention and win approving guffaws or oaths whispered through clenched teeth, or even irate telephone calls and letters to the editor. In extreme instances, it can spark violence, as Victor S. Navasky tells us in *The Art of Controversy: Political Cartoons and Their Enduring Power*.

The political cartoon we know today was born in the 16th century amid religious controversy. Citing the anthropologist David Thorn, Navasky says that Martin Luther, in seeking adherents among the peasantry, created prints that showed easily recognizable

biblical scenes with members of the Catholic clergy as antagonists. Hans Holbein the Younger depicted Luther as "the German Hercules" wielding a club to beat Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas into submission. From then until our own time, cartoons have often been powerful and controversial, sometimes more than print. King Louis Philippe of France believed he had been defamed by Charles Philipon, who depicted him as a pear. When Philipon showed the court drawings in which the king did, in fact, look like a pear, he was freed. Subsequently, Louis Philippe banned drawings of pears, saying that political writing "is no more than a violation of opinion; caricature amounts to an act of violence."

Many other rulers as well were affronted by cartoons, and not all cartoonists were as fortunate as Philipon. Navasky includes a long list of cartoonists who suffered legal or physical reprisals for work that offended the powerful.

Navasky spent many years as editor and publisher of *The Nation* and in that role selected cartoons and defended his choices to readers when he had



to and, occasionally, as he describes in detail, to irate staff members. Now a member of the faculty of Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, he has given a good deal of thought to what it is in political cartoons, and in us, that leads to the powerful effects they can have. He has settled on three reasons—"theories" he calls them—content, image and neuroscience.

Content is the political message or rational aspect of the cartoon. Of greater importance, however, is the image, or "the cartoon as totem," and especially a caricature, a weapon in the cartoonist's arsenal that Navasky examines in detail. While we see events depicted in a photographs as objective, Navasky contends, we see and react to the cartoon as embodying what it depicts. The depiction, of course, is manipulated by the cartoonist, who increases and distorts a subject's physical characteristics to provide insight into the target's character. Consider Philipon's depiction of Louis Phillipe as a pear, Thomas Nast's late 19th-century Boss Tweed with dark, glowering face and swollen belly, or Herblock's Richard Nixon with exaggerated ski-nose and five o'clock shadow. "The more powerful the caricature," he writes. "the more outraged the protest."

Navasky's third theory, the neuroscience or brain theory, examines how and why the brain responds to cartoons. Different neuroscientists and psychologists have various explanations for how the stimulus of a cartoon has its effect, Navasky notes inconclusively. His view is that his three theories complement each other. But one must also consider, where relevant, "anthropology, sociology, race, and religion.—and other disciplines and factors too fierce to mention."

Navasky makes only glancing reference to another element essential to the effect of a cartoon, the reader's knowledge and understanding of the

political situation that is its subject and his familiarity with the individuals depicted. An American can be expected to recognize that familiar stick figure with saucer-sized ears, Barack Obama, or the caricatured basset-hound face of John Boehner. But, as a traveler, that same individual will likely be baffled when he or she studies a political cartoon in a newspaper in Mexico City, Berlin or Tokyo, or even in an unfamiliar American city on a brief visit.

The point is obvious as the reader goes through Navasky's gallery of representative political cartoons from the 18th century to the 21st. Biographical sketches of the cartoonists, critics' comments on their work and notes on the times in which the works were produced are all essential to our understanding of the cartoons and the reactions they provoked.

Navasky lets his readers know up front that he is an absolutist about freedom of expression, and he reproduces and defends cartoons on hair-trigger subjects like politics, sex, race and religion that have brought some readers to full boil. He maintains that they ought to be printed, if they have merit. He shied away, however, from reprinting in this book cartoons depicting Muhammad as a terrorist that

appeared in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* depicting Muhammad as a terrorist. Every printing of them had led to protests by thousands of Muslims, even by many who had not seen them. Even though Navasky had disagreed with *The New York Times's* decision not to reprint them, he did not include them in his book. His reasoning: Given the violent reaction to their first publication, he was reluctant to put the lives and property of others—presumably his publisher—at risk. Moreover, he believed the cartoons "lack distinction." Besides, he writes, they are only a Google search away on the Internet.

Navasky's approach throughout is somewhat like that of a memoirist. He relates his own experiences and those of cartoonists and other journalists he has known. His writing is personal, even chatty, and Navasky himself is rarely out of the reader's view.

All told, *The Art of Controversy* is a readable introduction to its subject. Unfortunately, the author does not provide footnotes or a bibliography. But for more depth, readers can turn to works occasionally mentioned parenthetically in the text.

ALFRED LAWRENCE LORENZ is A. Louis Read distinguished professor emeritus at Loyola University New Orleans.



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# Transforming Law

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), FEB. 16, 2014

Readings: Sir 15:15–20; Ps 119:1–34; 1 Cor 2:6–10; Mt 5:17–37

*“I have come not to abolish but to fulfill” (Mt 5:17)*

Christians in general and Catholics in particular sometimes have an uneasy relationship with the notion of law. This uneasiness can be traced back to Jesus’ own confrontations with Jewish authorities regarding his interpretation of the law of Moses, and later to the Apostle Paul’s antithesis between the law and faith, as seen in Gal 2:16: “yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.”

Yet, it is demonstrably the case that Christians still follow the law of Moses in some respects—the Ten Commandments, for example—and accept its dictates as perennially valid. It is also true that the church has law, the Code of Canon Law, which Blessed John Paul II said “is extremely necessary for the church. Since the church is organized as a social and visible structure, it must also have norms.” Law is necessary for civil and religious life, so that we can live together (somewhat harmoniously) on earth and to aid our preparation for the life to come.

Still, there were distinct challenges Jesus made to certain religious lawyers of his own day, accusing them of preferring the minutiae of law over the broader concerns of God’s love and mercy, a concern that reverberates in the church even today. As Pope Francis said in the interview published in *America* (9/30/13): “There are ecclesiastical rules and precepts that were once effective, but now they have

lost value or meaning. The view of the church’s teaching as a monolith to defend without nuance or different understandings is wrong.” This gets to the heart of Jesus’ response to the religious lawyers, in which laws are not the goal but guides that point to our ultimate end.

When Jesus says, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill,” both verbs are essential: the law of Moses for the Christian is not abolished but brought to fulfillment by the Messiah. It is fairly straightforward to understand “not to abolish,” but what does it mean for Christian life that Christ has “fulfilled” the law?

The verses that follow immediately in the Sermon on the Mount supply our best clues. Jesus gives us six antitheses. Each begins with, “You have heard that it was said,” and follows with, “But I tell you.” But these things that Jesus says were “heard,” were not quips uttered in the marketplace, or wise words spoken in the synagogue, but God’s law given to Moses on Mount Sinai. In stating with respect to God’s law “But I tell you,” Jesus is claiming authority over God’s law, an authority that can only be divine.

This divine, Messianic authority fulfills the law not by abolishing it or making it easier but by transforming it. “Notice that in every instance Jesus has radicalized the Law of Moses, making it more demanding,” wrote Ben F.

Meyer in *Five Speeches That Changed the World*. If people were having trouble following the law before Jesus, how does making it more demanding allow Jesus’ disciples to follow this fulfilled law? The unstated supposition here is not only that the law of Moses has been transformed, but that the disciples of Jesus are transformed by the Messiah. It is not just murder that is prohibited, but the anger that leads to it; not just adultery, but the lust that leads to it. This is not a law that leads us to boast because



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Reflect on Jesus’ words regarding the law. Where do you need to allow Jesus to transform speech or behavior with respect to the law?

we have not broken one of the Ten Commandments (like some people we know!) or because we have minutely followed a code in each and every respect (unlike some people we know!). This is a law that makes known our utter dependence on the Messiah, who has transformed our crooked hearts and rebellious spirits. Jesus recreates the law not as a list of rules and regulations but as the evidence of our deepest yearnings for God’s way, rejecting any thoughts or behaviors that draw us away from right relationship to God and neighbor. When we stumble in word or deed, the law fulfilled by Jesus is a sure sign of God’s constant presence on our journey, a path to follow along the way to God’s kingdom.

JOHN W. MARTENS

JOHN W. MARTENS is an associate professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn.

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