

A close-up, profile photograph of Barack Obama, looking towards the right. He is wearing a white shirt. The background is a light blue gradient.

America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC REVIEW

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Steering the Ship of State

15 WAYS PRESIDENT
OBAMA HAS CHANGED
AMERICA'S COURSE

ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN

2016 FOLEY POETRY AWARD

SHANNON C. WARD

OF MANY THINGS

The legislative overreach exemplified by the North Carolina Legislature's recent decision to require citizens to use the bathrooms, locker rooms and changing rooms that correspond to the gender of their births is surpassed only by the executive overreach of the U.S. Justice Department's subsequent announcement that every school district in the country should do precisely the opposite. The Obama administration's directive, *The New York Times* reported, "does not have the force of law, but it contains an implicit threat: Schools that do not abide by the Obama administration's interpretation of the law could face lawsuits or a loss of federal aid."

For the record, federal aid to education in North Carolina is about \$4 billion, an amount that if withdrawn would cripple critical programs for the very people that both sides say they are seeking to protect. As Mark Shields, the syndicated columnist and PBS commentator, put it, the administration's announcement is the equivalent of threatening to drop a financial "federal atom bomb" on North Carolina in order to deal with a situation that involves less than one half of 1 percent of the state's population. By comparison, about 6 percent of North Carolinians are unemployed and about one in five are living in poverty.

Is all of this really necessary? Don't get me wrong: I'm of the opinion that, generally speaking, people should be treated in the way they want to be treated and that reasonable accommodations should be made to see that they are. But do we really need the federal government to extort a solution from the more than 300 million of us who, until very recently, were not even aware that this was a problem and are perhaps still struggling to understand why it might be?

"This is the kind of issue that is normally handled with culture norms, and people making compromises," said Michael Gerson of *The Washington*

Post on "PBS Newshour," "but now we have both sides politicizing this." We have reached a point, in other words, where we apparently need to legislate or litigate every social disagreement among us, resolving even relatively minor disputes by heavy-handed legislation or judicial fiat.

This, of course, is part and parcel of the cultural warfare we have come to expect in this golden era of ideological partisanship: "We take issues like this that maybe people of good will could come to some agreement on," said Mr. Gerson, "and run them through this culture war machine of our politics, when, in fact, I think, on this type of issue, we have a long history of reasonable people reaching accommodations in their own community."

Admittedly, there is also a long history of people not reaching accommodations in their own communities on some important issues. But Mr. Gerson is onto something, which we will need to bear in mind if our Madisonian experiment in republican government is going to survive the 21st century: "The cool and deliberate sense of the community," wrote Publius in *Federalist Paper 63*, "ought, in all governments, and actually will, in all free governments, ultimately prevail over the views of its rulers." In other words, appeal to the common sense and decency of our neighbors should be our first resort in times of conflict. In a democracy worthy of the name, law is a sober compromise of last resort, not a blunt instrument wielded with self-righteous alacrity by alternating factions.

I have a feeling that if the good people of North Carolina had been given a little more time and space, they would have found ways to treat all their fellow citizens with the respect that most people think most people deserve. Then again, maybe not. Regrettably, we will never know.

MATT MALONE, S.J.

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ON THE WEB

Elias D. Mallon, S.A., writes on the 100th anniversary of the **Sykes-Picot Agreement**, and **David T. Buckley** looks at church-state relations in the Philippines following the **election of Rodrigo Duterte**, right. Full digital highlights on page 18 and at americamagazine.org/webfeatures.



Studying Women Deacons

“What prevents the church from including women among the permanent deacons, just as happened in the early church? Why not set up an official commission to study the question?” Good question. It was asked by a woman religious to Pope Francis on May 12, in a conversation with the superiors of 800 women’s religious orders at the Vatican. Pope Francis’ comments caused quite a few people to take notice.

“I would like to set up an official commission to study the issue. I think that it will be good for the church to clarify this point.” The pope’s remarks were, in a few quarters, taken to mean that he had approved of women deacons. He had not. But in other quarters they were interpreted to mean he had no real intention to study the matter further. Let us take the pope at his word. He plans to convene a commission to clarify the matter, particularly the questions he posed about the women deacons in the New Testament, like Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2): “But what are these deaconesses? Were they ordained or not?”

We support such a papal commission and hope it helps us further understand the possibility of the female diaconate. The church could be greatly enriched if women could preside at weddings, funerals and homilies, as well as break open the word in those liturgical settings. But this is far from the only kind of leadership that women could exercise. Even without being deacons, women can and should be included in positions of real leadership and influence in a more, to quote Francis again, “incisive” way. Promoting women within the church should not have to wait on a clerical designation.

The Web We Weave

In recent years some Catholic watchdog groups have led campaigns against church institutions and individuals who work within them that have had the effect of ruining careers, disrupting lives and generating unjustified tension within the Catholic community. Catholic service entities have been the frequent but not the only targets of these critics. These efforts have been typified by extreme rhetoric and relentless bullying on social media—ignoring beams, compulsively seeking splinters—and church bureaucracies have in some cases acceded to their pressure tactics.

Thomas Rosica, C.S.B., founding chief executive officer of Canada’s Salt and Light Media Foundation, delivered the keynote address during the Brooklyn Diocese’s observance of World Communications Day on May 11. He pulled no punches in condemning this unfortunate phenomenon

and the broader problem of a Catholic web of anger and accusation. “The character assassination on the Internet by those claiming to be Catholic and Christian has turned it into a graveyard of corpses strewn all around,” he said. Father Rosica deplored “the obsessed, scrupulous, self-appointed, nostalgia-hankering virtual guardians of faith” who “resort to the Internet and become trolling pontiffs and holy executioners.”

His words will no doubt only provoke those he is criticizing. He should not have to stand alone in doing so. In this Year of Mercy, Catholic communicators have a special responsibility to model the merciful relationships they seek to encourage in others. Debate, even fierce debate, in the church should not be unwelcome; but charity and esteem for the person—not rhetorical stratagems bent on personal destruction—should typify our dialogue.

A Bicentennial to Bibles

On May 12, the American Bible Society celebrated 200 years of work to bring the Bible not only into every American home but also to every corner of the world. A.B.S. leaders described in detail their plans to increase access to Scripture by investing in translation efforts as well as by working to help people who have experienced trauma, especially in war-torn countries, find comfort and healing in the word of God.

In 1916, when A.B.S. celebrated its centenary, **America’s** editors explained that the Catholic Church could not join in the widespread congratulations because it could not endorse the distribution of Scripture outside the church’s interpretive authority. One hundred years later, the A.B.S. bicentennial celebration opened with Archbishop Bernardito Auza, the Holy See’s permanent observer to the United Nations, reading a message of congratulations from the Vatican secretary of state. He then introduced Cardinal John Onaiyekan of Abuja, Nigeria, who read a personal message from Pope Francis to the international delegates to the United Bible Societies’ World Assembly, which coincided with the A.B.S. celebration. To say that this would have been unimaginable a century ago is to understate the case dramatically.

For our part, **America** is happy, finally, to add its editorial voice in congratulations, and more than that, in gratitude. We have partnered with the American Bible Society in our “Living Word” series and also in the ongoing sponsorship of the Word column in every issue of the magazine. The project of bringing the word of God to a world in need is large enough to demand all we have to offer, and finding companions for the work is a gift and a grace.

The Right to Roam

Walking is a human right. There are physical, psychological and spiritual benefits to exploring our world on foot. The activity invites wonder at our world and contemplation about our place in it. In “Laudato Si,” published just over a year ago, Pope Francis stresses the importance of “landscapes which increase our sense of belonging” and provide “a coherent and meaningful framework for [our] lives.” These landscapes do not have the same effect upon motorists and passengers who might see unplanned stops as irritations and other people on the road as adversaries.

But over the past century, many have come to see pedestrians as suspect, even dangerous, and walking has been criminalized in many circumstances. Ken Ilgunas, the author of *Trespassing Across America*, recently wrote in *The New York Times* about his experiences hiking in the United States and encountering “No Trespassing” and “Private Property” signs at every turn, even in uninhabited areas. He says that what the Scottish call “the right to roam” has been steadily eroded in the United States in both urban and rural settings.

This hostility toward walkers is a public health issue. Not only does it discourage physical exercise when the United States is coping with rising obesity rates and related health problems; it literally kills people. Mr. Ilgunas, citing the advocacy group Smart Growth America, writes that more than 47,000 pedestrians were killed between 2003 and 2012 along roads, often because there was no safe and legal place for them to walk.

There are efforts to restore the right to roam in the United States. For example, New Jersey legislators are now working on a proposal to guarantee access to the shoreline; this could include requiring towns to maintain public sidewalks near beaches. While even well-off people may benefit from being able to walk barefoot through the sand, the everyday burdens of hostility and indifference to walkers fall disproportionately on lower-income families, especially those who cannot afford cars. In 2011, a Georgia woman was convicted of vehicular manslaughter after she crossed a highway on foot with her four children and a drunk driver killed one of them. (After a public outcry, her sentence was reduced to probation.) In her case, there was no crosswalk or traffic signal near the bus stop she used, a situation increasingly common in our sprawling suburbs.

This spring, the city council of St. Louis Park, Minn., voted to add sidewalks to three suburban neighborhoods, but some residents protested. One wrote that the sidewalks would create an “inner-city wasteland” with “hoodlums standing around on the corner.” A fight over installing sidewalks on a road in Clifton, N.J., (used by Orthodox Jews to reach synagogues by foot on the Sabbath) has been going on for 16 years.



While some neighborhoods fight against sidewalks, others ask for them but are ignored. According to a recent *Washington Post* story, a mostly black neighborhood in Potomac, Md., just 10 miles from the nation’s capital, has no sidewalks leading to the nearest bus stop—which is 2.8 miles away. Since many residents cannot afford cars, this asphalt isolation only makes it more difficult for them to find and hold jobs.

Pedestrian activists often quote the anthropologist Margaret Mead: “Any town that doesn’t have sidewalks doesn’t love its children.” Or it does not want them in the first place. Young adults ready to start families show a preference for walkable communities, but many local governments do not want the financial burden of public educational systems, so they use zoning laws and onerous permitting processes to keep out all but low-density housing, which is both less walkable and harder to connect to schools and downtowns. (According to the Safe Schools Partnership, only 13 percent of children walked or bicycled to school in 2009, down from 50 percent in 1969.)

Many new families can afford only to rent in apartment buildings or to buy small-lot homes, so suburbs fight development of such housing—unless assured that only childless people will move in. Teenagers on sidewalks seem to be a particularly nightmarish vision in more orderly and exclusive towns. If you are not in a car, you are not welcome.

We need to fight the perception that walking in public is a sinister activity, and we need to preserve common space where all can encounter nature and meet their neighbors. As Pope Francis reminds us in “Laudato Si,” “Others will then no longer be seen as strangers, but as part of a ‘we’ which all of us are working to create.” To rephrase the pope’s words in another context, we do not need more walls, we need more sidewalks.

REPLY ALL

Corporate Morals

Re “Corporate Tax Conversion” (Current Comment, 5/9): The editors write: “There are moral reasons for corporations to pay their fair share of taxes. We should also reform the tax code to give them an economic incentive to do so.” This prompts another thought. A corporation is an association of people. So moral law no doubt applies to decisions made by corporations (actually by their board or officers). But the logic here is very close to the logic of the Supreme Court in *Citizens United*. Do the editors really want to go there?

Maybe Robert Reich, who served as President Bill Clinton’s secretary of labor, has a better idea, which he sets out in his book *Supercapitalism*. He suggests abolishing the corporate tax system altogether. Radical, but worth considering.

JOSEPH J. DUNN
Online Comment

Safe Energy

“High Pressure at Indian Point,” by Kevin Clarke (5/2), is an unbalanced and poorly researched analysis of a complex issue. Indian Point is safe. I worked there for over 30 years, living and rais-

ing my family less than four miles from the plant. I was at Indian Point when the concrete was poured for the six-foot-thick containment structure with reinforcing bars as thick as my forearm, designed to contain a steam explosion. Neither the Chernobyl reactor nor the Fukushima plants had such a containment structure. Indian Point’s containment was not designed to withstand a direct hit by a large airplane, but subsequent tests have demonstrated that such an attack would be unsuccessful.

Each year operations at Indian Point prevent the release of over 10 million tons of greenhouse gas and thousands of tons of other combustion gases from fossil-fired plants. These gasses would contribute to global warming and increase air pollution, which causes respiratory problems and deaths, in an area already suffering its effects. I still live less than four miles from the plant some 12 years after my retirement from my job as director of licensing for Entergy Nuclear Northeast in support of Indian Point and other nuclear plants in the northeast.

(DEACON) JOHN KELLY
Garnerville, N.Y.

Rising Bias

I was surprised and disappointed

that **America** published “Imposing Independence,” by Séamus Murphy, S.J. (4/25), about the centenary celebration of the Easter Rising of 1916 in Ireland. The article’s major bias is one of present-mindedness. Because today Ireland and Great Britain are allies of a sort, and because today a tenuous peace holds in Northern Ireland, Father Murphy imposes those conditions on 1916.

In his retelling of the era, no mention is made of the hundreds of years of English oppression of the Irish, of the ferocious anti-Catholicism that not only accompanied but defined that oppression and of the bitter hostility of the Unionists toward Catholics in Ulster. Nothing is said about the deep Irish resentment that a war for freedom was being fought on the European continent, shedding the blood of Irishmen fighting in the British army, while Ireland still lacked its own independence.

In short, Father Murphy condemns the Rising’s centenary for celebrating an “anti-British, anti-unionist, violent” event without even pretending to explore the reasons Irishmen and Irishwomen might have had in 1916 to so vehemently oppose English rule in Ireland.

MICHAEL CAHILL
Chicago, Ill.

Christ Before Tribe

This piece certainly brought out Irish nationalism and pride. In context, **America** has been presenting a variety of views of the topic of the Easter Rising centennial. It is a challenging article. As one whose ancestors are from both Ireland and England (both Catholics who were no doubt oppressed and came to the United States, and Protestants, including one who died from injuries suffered in war) and who has visited Belfast several times and seen the still existing walls, I know it is important to look at this from a Christian perspective and not a tribal one.

STEVEN REYNOLDS
North Attleboro, Mass.

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Power From the People

Re “Presidential Powers” (Editorial, 4/18): There has never been a president who did not abuse the powers of the office. The ongoing trouble is that the people are too ready to accept the abuses of power of one president as the “new normal” under the next president and never mention them again. We know that executive officers will abuse the power that is given them; it is the inevitable human condition, which is why we established a system of checks and balances. But those checks and balances fail when we decline to enforce them simply because a certain abuse of power has come to be seen as merely routine.

For example, the fact that every president since Theodore Roosevelt has claimed the authority to send soldiers into combat when and where they please—without the consent of, or even notification to, Congress—does not mean that authority is lawful. The authority to declare war rests solely with Congress. But because we have chosen to continually disregard this essential check on abuse of executive power, we have degraded it to a point where members of the current Congress actively encouraged the president to go to war without even asking Congress in its official capacity to comment just so that they could avoid “going on the record” with votes for which they could be held accountable.

MICHAEL DONNELLY
Online Comment

A Baseless Charge

On Dec. 2, 1980, the lay missionary Jean Donovan, the Ursuline sister Dorothy Kazel and the Maryknoll sisters Maura Clarke and Ita Ford were tortured, raped and murdered on a dirt road in El Salvador. One May 24, 1984, five former members of El Salvador’s national guard were convicted of these heinous crimes.

In “A Washington Dramatist” (4/18), Tom Fox’s review of John Norris’s biography of Mary McGrory,

we read of “U.S. complicity in the death of the four missionary women in El Salvador.” In the 36 years that have elapsed since the tragic homicide of these four heroic women, I have never heard, nor read, nor has anyone ever hinted that the United States was complicit in their killings. What a horrendous charge to advance against this great nation of ours.

Mr. Fox attributes this accusation to Mr. Norris and Ms. McGrory. What proof, what documentation was offered to support this charge? Shame on Tom Fox, John Norris and Mary McGrory. This the height of yellow journalism!

JAMES J. CLEARY
East Northport, N.Y.

The Stigma of Sin

In “Don’t Be a Jerk” (4/18), James Martin, S.J., admonishes Catholics who call another person a “bad Catholic.” “Don’t be a jerk,” he writes. Father Martin’s advice is flawed because it obscures the truth. It is right to call unrepentant sinners adulterers, liars, thieves or bad Catholics—if the shoe fits. Modern culture is rapidly undermining the morality established by our creator with a combination of silence and deceptive language that is removing the stigma of sin.

GEORGE KOENIG
St. Francis, Wis.

Example of Service

In “Aging With Ignatius” (3/28), Barbara A. Lee expressed in a rich way how Ignatian Volunteers find that the tenets of Ignatian spirituality combined with their service to people in need are a powerful transformational experience. Many volunteers find this to be a uniquely powerful experience of what it really means to love and to live with Christ. They grow personally and spiritually, see their impact on people struggling to overcome poverty and witness the healing effect of their service. Ms. Lee is a won-

derful witness to us of selfless service. Anyone interested in learning more about the Ignatian Volunteer Corps can visit www.ivcusa.org.

MARY MCGINNITY
Washington, D.C.

The writer is the executive director of the Ignatian Volunteer Corps.

A Broken Strand

In “A Sacred Calling” (3/28), Steven P. Millies describes “the healthy secularism we enjoy in the United States” as an “important strand in our political tradition.” I think that a “sturdy division between spiritual and temporal realms” would, in many areas of daily life, be hard to identify today. I first noticed this right after World War II when the Catholic university that I attended started to grow and develop with astonishing rapidity thanks to the influx of veterans using the G.I. Bill. The transactional relationship between the school and the government was very nearly that of a contracting entity and a contractor supplying goods and services.

Likewise, Catholic hospitals and other health and social service providers essentially became government contractors paid through Medicare, Medicaid and a variety of state and federal social service programs. These and many similar relationships continue.

CHARLES ERLINGER
Online Comment



CARTOON: HARLEY SCHWADRON

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

VENEZUELA

Oil Collapse Leads to Food Lines, Blackouts and Rising Tension

Under other circumstances, Jonny Lopez might have been happy that he was losing weight. “I’ve been running around the city so much, looking for food, that I’ve lost 20 pounds,” said the father of two.

Standing in line has become a routine as he tries to buy food for his family and supply a fast-food stand that he runs in their neighborhood. “The longest line was 11 hours once, to buy a package of cornmeal, a little milk, rice and meat,” he said, adding that the money he and his wife earn does not cover necessities. “The money we used to spend on a week’s groceries now buys just a small bag of things,” Lopez said. “The Venezuelan people are dying of hunger.”

The downturn in global oil prices in 2015 sent Venezuela’s oil-dependent economy into free fall, immersing the country in an unprecedented crisis marked by shortages of food and medicine and now growing social unrest. Embattled President Nicolás Maduro has blocked opposition efforts to force a recall election and has called out the military to help maintain control.

Barquisimeto, the city where Lopez and his wife, Aura Gallardo, live with their two daughters, Aurimar, 13, and Marijose, 3, is the fourth-largest in Venezuela. In their parish and within their own families, they feel the sharp polarization between Chavistas—Maduro supporters who take their name from former President Hugo Chavez—and opponents of the government.

“We never talk about politics in the parish because there are people on both sides, and I have seen families destroyed by the conflict,” said Gallardo. She and Lopez said they are disillusioned with the government but have little enthusiasm for the political opposition, which claims to have collected more than a million signatures to recall Maduro.

Fear is palpable everywhere.

Besides hunger, violence has increased throughout the country, especially in her family’s neighborhood.

“In the Venezuelan Caritas offices, we survive on what the faith-

ful and some companies donate, but we’re receiving almost nothing now,” said Yaneth Marquez, coordinator of Caritas Venezuela. “We’ve had to cut our nutrition and health care programs in half.”

She said she hopes the government will grant the Venezuelan bishops’ request to allow the church to bring donations of food and medicine into the country. So far, however, there has been no response.

Other necessities are also scarce. Venezuelans must wait in long lines to buy the few staples available. Throughout Venezuela, businesses are empty and many stores in shopping centers have closed. There is a lack of health care supplies, even in hospitals, and an energy crisis is causing rolling blackouts. Pharmacies sell soft drinks and snacks instead of medicines, and in cities in the interior of the country, electricity is cut off for four hours a day.



NO CLOSER. Protestors seeking the recall of President Nicolás Maduro are stopped by police before reaching the headquarters of the National Electoral Council in Caracas, Venezuela, on May 18.

There is talk that the Vatican could mediate between the government and the opposition. In early May, Pope Francis publicly expressed his concern about the situation in Venezuela and sent a personal letter to Maduro. When a top Vatican official was scheduled to visit Venezuela for the ordination of a priest set to become the Vatican nuncio to Congo, rumors grew that the Vatican was taking on the role of mediator, even though the Vatican denied it. In the end, though, the scheduled trip of Archbishop Paul Gallagher, Vatican secretary for relations with states, was canceled “for reasons not depending on the Holy See.”

Meanwhile, as Lopez scrounges for food for his family and his corner stand, he fears the worst.

“For the past 15 years,” he said, “I’ve been afraid that we would face armed social upheaval.”



AP PHOTO/FERNANDO LLANO

FAMILY LIFE

Paid Parental Leave Offered In Chicago

The Archdiocese of Chicago will begin offering 12 weeks of paid parental leave to its staff beginning on July 1. The new policy is open to fathers and mothers who just had children or adopted children. Staff who are eligible for benefits—those who work at least 26 hours a week—and who have worked at the archdiocese at least one month qualify for parental leave.

Under the previous policy, female staff who gave birth or adopted used paid sick time and vacation time during their parental leave. When Archbishop Blase J. Cupich came on board as Chicago's new archbishop in

the fall of 2014, he wanted to ensure that the personnel policies were in line with church teaching.

"Obviously, we do want to be a voice for pro-life, family-friendly kinds of policies," Betsy Bohlen, the archdiocese's chief operating officer, told *The Catholic New World*, Chicago's archdiocesan newspaper. "The idea was to make sure that we have something that can work for all staff."

The archdiocese is trying to be on the "leading edge" of family-friendly policies, Bohlen said.

The new policy is expected to cost up to \$1 million a year and could be used by as many as 200 employees. "The other reason to do this is that we want to be able to attract strong talent, and we think this is an attractive feature," she said.

Bohlen is a mother of two children and said she can appreciate the changes as a parent. "I do think the time soon after birth or adoption is a very important time for young families. The church can be viewed as a very attractive place to work if we're seen to be more family-friendly than other organizations might be."

Few other U.S. dioceses offer 12 weeks of paid parental leave, said the Rev. Peter Wojcik, co-director of the archdiocese's Department of Parish

Life and Formation. He quoted Pope Francis' recently released apostolic exhortation, "The Joy of Love," in explaining why the archdiocese changed its policy. Pope Francis writes: "At times we have also proposed a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families. This excessive idealization, especially when we have failed to inspire trust in God's grace, has not helped to make marriage more desirable and attractive, but quite the opposite."

Archbishop Cupich is especially sensitive to family issues after participating last year in the gathering of the Synod of Bishops on the family at the Vatican, Father Wojcik said. The church shouldn't just write about or talk about families but also must accompany them on their journey, said archdiocesan officials.

"It's hard to have a relationship as a family if you have to go back to work right after having a small child. Or if as a father you cannot be part of this because you can't afford to take unpaid leave and don't have a lot of time off," Father Wojcik said. "I think it's a practical way of saying yes, the families are at the center of the church, the church is built on the families and families



FAMILY TIME. Church employers maintain a patchwork of often minimal offerings for paid parental leave.

need time to be with each other and accompany each other.”

Through time together, families become stronger and ultimately the church becomes stronger, the priest added.

Synod in San Diego

Bishop Robert McElroy of the Diocese of San Diego has convened a diocesan synod to meet on Oct. 28-29 to reflect on the major themes of the recent apostolic exhortation “The Joy of Love.” The bishop believes the synod will not only help San Diego Catholics grapple with the modern challenges to family life and the church as they are explored in the exhortation; it will also offer the diocese a new model for “being church.” Bishop McElroy proposes turning the diocesan synod into a bi-annual, theme-driven event, an opportunity for spiritual renewal, reflection and “meaningful lay input into important sets of decisions within the governance of the diocese.” The San Diego synod may be the first such structured diocesan-wide response to “The Joy of Love” worldwide.

Education a Necessity in Humanitarian Aid

In a new report, researchers from the Jesuit Refugee Service argue that education is a life-saving intervention for children and adolescents who are forcibly displaced from their homes. “This report highlights the need to prioritize education for refugees and those displaced by conflict and crisis and ensure that these important programs receive the resources and political support they deserve,” said Giulia McPherson, JRS/USA’s assistant policy director and the author of “Providing Hope, Investing in the Future: Education in Emergencies

NEWS BRIEFS

Egyptian authorities on May 19 arrested **Mina Thabet**, a well-known advocate for the rights of Egypt’s Coptic Christians, the latest move in the government’s crackdown on rights activists and dissidents. • Francesco Patton, an Italian Franciscan priest named on May 20 **Custos of the Holy Land**, says he is committed to building bridges, dialogue and peace. • Veronika Terezia Rackova, a Holy Spirit Missionary from Slovakia, director of St. Bakhita Medical Center in Yei, South Sudan, **died on May 20**, three days after being shot by government soldiers. • Israel’s defense minister **Moshe Yaalon**, considered a voice of moderation, announced his resignation on May 20, saying the governing party had been taken over by “extremist and dangerous elements.” • The Catholic archdiocese of the central city of Hue reported on May 20 that Vietnamese officials had **released the imprisoned dissident priest** Nguyen Van Ly in what was perceived as a goodwill gesture before President Obama’s visit to Vietnam.



Sister Veronika Terezia Rackova

& Protracted Crises.” Today, more than 75 million children and young people have their education disrupted or destroyed by emergencies and prolonged crises. Attacks on schools, wars, natural disasters and the largest refugee crisis since World War II have increased the need for education in emergencies. Despite this need, less than 2 percent of all humanitarian funding has gone to education every year since 2010, according to the report. JRS officials hope that during the World Humanitarian Summit, convening in Istanbul in May to tackle the most significant challenges facing the global humanitarian sector, those funding levels can be re-evaluated.

Fighting Complacency

The annual report on the implementation of the U.S. bishops’ “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People” warns against complacency in dioceses. The new report said that be-

tween July 1, 2014, and June 30, 2015, 26 allegations of clerical sexual abuse were made by minors; seven had been substantiated. All allegations were reported to civil authorities. The previous year, 37 allegations had been made, and 43 in the year before that. Francesco C. Cesareo, chairman of the National Review Board, the all-lay group that tracks for the bishops how dioceses address clergy sexual abuse, said this year’s audit results “continue to demonstrate the progress that has been made in ensuring safe environments for children in the church.” However, he also warned that the U.S. church’s progress can “foster a false sense of security” that can “lead to complacency.” One example Cesareo gave was that “while every diocese has a diocesan review board, thereby complying with the charter’s requirement, in some cases the diocesan review board rarely meets or had not met in several years.”

From America Media, CNS, RNS, AP and other sources.

Post-Apartheid Brain Drain?

There are elements in South Africa today, no doubt, who are pleased that Professor Jonathan Jansen, vice chancellor and rector of the University of the Free State, will be taking up a fellowship at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University in California. His departure should delight those who want him gone because of his tough, no-nonsense approach to education in general and at universities in particular.

Others will be saddened to see him go, perhaps even feeling that this is a harbinger of a perilous “brain drain” for South Africa.

Raised in the small town of Montagu, Western Cape, Jansen moved as a child to Cape Town. Growing up in a tough neighborhood in a “colored” (a designation for people of mixed-race ancestry) community that had suffered forced removals under apartheid, Jansen trained as a biology teacher before specializing in education at Cornell and then Stanford, where he gained his doctorate. He was also a Fulbright scholar in education at the latter in 2007.

A world-class educator, Jansen served as dean of education at the University of Pretoria from 2001 to 2007 and was appointed to his leadership position at U.F.S. in 2009. Both universities were rooted in an almost all white, Afrikaans-speaking culture, often marked by racism and support for apartheid by many students and staff alike; both were attempting to trans-

form themselves into nonracial institutions committed to being more representative of the population and ethos of the new South Africa.

Jansen’s conviction, driven by a realization that even among young people growing up in the post-apartheid era racial attitudes remained fixed, was that those goals could only be achieved by facilitating encounters between black and white students. At both U.P. and

Is Professor Jansen’s imminent departure a sign of academic and intellectual flight?

U.F.S. he organized meetings that were jointly presided over by black and white students, creating the space for them to talk about their fears, prejudices, hopes and aspirations, encouraging them to see common ground and to grow together as a community.

A scholar as well as administrator, he wrote a number of highly regarded books and academic articles on education, as well as a weekly syndicated newspaper column. He also advised a number of countries on curriculum reform. He insisted that his university colleagues research and publish regularly. The academic status of both U.P. and U.F.S. grew under his leadership.

Throughout his academic and popular writings he dealt with education and racism and the need for excellence in education at every level as a prerequisite for a democratic and prosperous South Africa. He regularly slammed teachers’ unions driven by self-interest over the interests of students and in-

creasingly took on the government for its incompetence and corruption, especially in education policies and practice. Surprise, surprise: He was not well-liked in the corridors of power.

When he came to U.F.S., he found himself managing new crises, dealing with racist incidents in a student residence, while carrying on the group encounter program he had started at U.P. He tried to be a reconciling voice in the student fees protests at U.F.S. over the last few years, protests that often led to racialized confrontations between students. A pragmatic realist, he acknowledged the justification of student grievances over fees but would not tolerate violent confrontation, racism or destruction of property. This made him unpopular with some students, particularly among hardline student groups, who demanded his removal.

Both radical students and government officials who were the objects of his fierce criticism and objected to his forthright approach to education are no doubt pleased to learn that he is heading to the United States. Others, myself included, are saddened that we are losing Professor Jansen, much as one understands the many good professional reasons he has for going. Stanford’s gain (and it will be a big gain) is South Africa’s loss. To many of us he is the best minister of education South Africa never had.

I cannot but also ask a question: Is Jansen’s imminent departure a sign of things to come, an academic and intellectual flight of the sort last seen during the apartheid era? Given the current climate—mismanagement at every level of education, party political interference in universities, increasingly violent student activism driven by blind ideology—the potential intellectual and leadership void could be devastating for the new South Africa.

ANTHONY EGAN, S.J., a member of the Jesuit Institute South Africa, is one of America’s Johannesburg correspondents.



Acts of Penance

How should we treat the illustrious figures from our country's past who have lost their shine? That was a question that roiled universities this past school year as students protested the relics of racism on campus and sought to obliterate the names of men whose deeds now seem objectionable or even heinous.

Inside and outside academia, the protests at Yale, Princeton and other colleges spurred controversy and often criticism. "Too P.C." was one charge. "You can't revise history" was another.

It's true; you can't change history. But you can study it, reflect on it, discuss it and learn from it. That's what's been going on at Georgetown University this past year, where the university has been conducting a remarkably thorough and thoughtful examination of its participation in the dark history of racism in the United States. Learning about it provides a hopeful view of what Americans can do to reconcile divergent perspectives rooted in injustice and experience.

In September, John DeGioia, president of Georgetown University, convened the Georgetown Working Group on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation. The university was repurposing a building named after Thomas Mulledy, S.J., the college president who sold the university's 272 slaves in 1838 to pay off college debt. Even in its own time, that was controversial. With the formerly unused Mulledy Hall opening as a student residence, DeGioia wanted the university to address its slave-owning past.

A group of 12 faculty members and

students was appointed to raise awareness of that past, promote discussion and dialogue about it and prepare a report on how the university could make amends. Unlike at other universities, it was the committee that alerted activists to a problem, not the other way around. Even before a wave of student protests swept the country in November, including at Georgetown, the committee had decided that Mulledy and another hall associated with slavery should be rechristened.

The committee will soon submit its final report. Beginning with a 1,000-page reading assignment, it has had a busy year. An initial focus was to put some of the documentary material on Georgetown's ownership of slaves in a digital archive open to the public. The committee also sponsored conversation circles, teach-ins, research grants, a dance performance and a series of intensive symposia held in April on Georgetown's history of slave-owning that drew hundreds of students. "What we've been doing at Georgetown this year is pretty extraordinary," said Adam Rothman, a historian who is a member of the working group.

Thoughtful reflection on the flawed figures of the past requires both knowledge of the times in which they lived and some humility. They were men and women of their time, as we are of ours, and it seems only fair to acknowledge that just as they shared the prejudices of their era, so too do many of us alive today. Most people I know are concerned, caring citizens who take an interest in their community and country. Few get involved in politics. Yet slavery was po-

litical. So was the ethnic cleansing of American Indians from their land.

It seems to take about a century or more before a country can acknowledge its dark deeds, and sometimes not even then. Americans visit the Holocaust Museum in Washington to read about the genocide of Jews in Europe, but there is no U.S. museum that examines the extermination of Native Americans or the enslavement of African Americans. President Obama's plan to

visit Hiroshima in May raised talk—quickly quashed by the White House—of a U.S. apology for the atomic bombing of Japan.

Bringing scrutiny to bear on the slave labor that sustained it, Georgetown has been claiming its own sinful history. A wealth of information in its archives

has drawn wide attention, but it's the willingness to acknowledge wrong and deeply engage with history in pursuit of truth and reconciliation that seems so promising. In so doing, Georgetown and a few other universities contending with their slave-owning history are blazing a trail for American society to follow.

Transformative may be too grandiose a word to apply to the process of the working group, but it's what comes to mind listening to David Collins, S.J., the chair of the group, talk about its work.

"None of us could have anticipated in September that we'd be where we are in May—how much we've accomplished, how comprehensive we are in our thinking and our future directions," Collins said.

Georgetown
has been
claiming its
own sinful
history.

MARGOT PATTERSON is a writer who lives in Kansas City, Mo.

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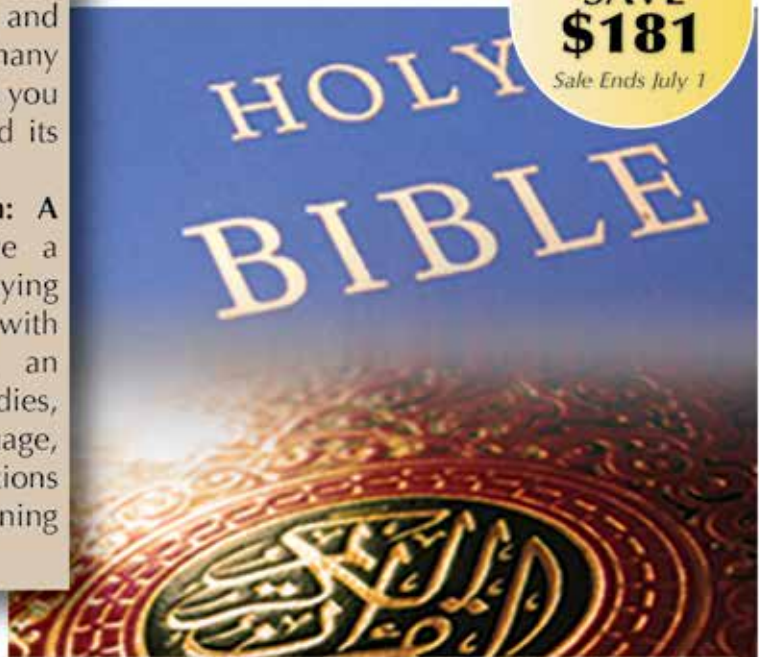
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Steering the Ship of State

15 ways President Obama has changed America's course

BY ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN

With less than nine months left in his term, President Obama must be thinking about how his presidency will be assessed by history. The 44th president had an unusually ambitious agenda upon taking office, but economic and political realities forced him to put aside some goals and compromise on others. Mr. Obama himself, in a 2015 interview on the podcast “WTF With Marc Maron,” said, “Sometimes the task of the government is to make incremental improvements or try to steer the ocean liner two degrees north or south so that 10 years from now, we’re in a very different place than we were.” He sympathized with those hoping for more sweeping changes during his administration but said, “you can’t turn 50 degrees.”

Here are some of the ways in which President Obama has steered an ocean liner—assuming the United States has a fleet of them—by at least a few degrees.

1. *The Affordable Care Act* (“Obamacare”). Perhaps the most important law of the past half-century, the A.C.A. cemented several new principles in American health care. Health insurance is now mandatory for all citizens, part of a grand bargain that prohibits insurance companies from denying coverage on the basis of pre-existing conditions and that subsidizes premiums for those who cannot afford them. Obamacare also prohibits insurance plans that charge women higher premiums, and it requires that mental health be covered as comprehensively as physical conditions.

A poll by National Public Radio this February found that perceptions of the law are mixed, with only 35 percent saying it has directly helped the people of their state and 27 percent saying it has hurt people. Still, by many measures the law has been a success, with 20 million more Americans now insured, the uninsured rate dropping from 20 percent to about 12 percent and a lower rate of health care cost inflation than in recent decades. The Republican Party can still rouse its base by calling for Obamacare’s complete repeal, but with each year it becomes more unlikely that a president of either party will do anything to yank coverage from the newly insured.

2. *The 2009 economic stimulus package*. Mr. Obama’s first order of business was to deal with the economic crash of 2008, and he did it by reaffirming Keynesian economics and

turning away from the “government is the problem” mantra made popular by President Ronald Reagan. He proposed new federal spending on infrastructure and health programs, as well as an expansion of unemployment benefits and funds for other social welfare programs. Michael Grunwald of Time magazine writes that the stimulus also “jump-started clean energy in America, financing unprecedented investments in wind, solar, geothermal and other renewable sources of electricity.... It improved more than 110,000 miles of broadband infrastructure. It launched Race to the Top, the most ambitious national education reform in decades.”

Many Democrats wanted a much larger stimulus, but conservatives argued that any deficit spending would only worsen long-term economic security, and a \$787 billion package passed with only three Republican votes in the Senate and zero Republican votes in the House. Five years after its passage, the White House estimated that the stimulus added six million jobs, and avoided a “double-dip” recession. Republicans called this guesswork and countered that the stimulus did not bring down the unemployment rate as fast or as far as promised.

3. *The auto industry “bailout.”* With General Motors and Chrysler near bankruptcy in late 2008, the incoming Obama administration feared a total job loss near one million, plus a collapse of parts suppliers that would have affected even the relatively healthy Ford Motor Company. Mr. Obama created a task force that gave \$80.7 billion in federal funds to G.M. and Chrysler but on the condition that the companies formally file for bankruptcy, streamline their operations and shift the administration of retirement benefits to an independent trust. After these reforms, the auto industry became more stabilized and restored jobs (though not to the pre-recession level), and the Obama administration later claimed to have recouped \$70.5 billion, or almost all its investment. The Obama administration calls the revival of the industry an unqualified success; libertarians object that the bailout simply preserved the industry’s high labor costs (i.e., wages) and perpetuated the power of labor unions.

4. *The Dodd-Frank Act*. Mr. Obama proposed reforms to the finance industry in 2009; the following year, Congress passed and he signed this legislation. It creates multiple agencies to monitor financial markets, regulate hedge funds and intervene to avoid a repeat of the 2008 crisis—for example, by dissolving large banks without government bailouts.

ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN is an associate editor of *America*.



FINAL MANEUVERS. U.S. President Barack Obama speaks at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C., Feb. 4.

Banks are now required to make less risky investments and to keep more capital on hand to cover potential losses. The law also created the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to write and advocate regulations on behalf of the borrowers of mortgages, credit cards and student loans.

Because of its complexity, the effectiveness of the Dodd-Frank Act is hard to measure and something of a moving target. Adam Davidson of the *New York Times Magazine* wrote last year that the finance industry has used hundreds of meetings with banking regulators, along with lawsuits over “every tiny detail” of Dodd-Frank “to change the letter of the law so as to alter its spirit.” But a *New York Times* financial reporter, Peter Eavis, concluded this April that “Dodd-Frank is mostly intact—and exacting slow, steady results. The act has stamped out many risky practices.... The largest banks appear to be slowly shrinking.”

5. *Tax and budget compromises.* In 2010, the Republicans won control of the House of Representatives, ending any hope of a second economic stimulus package and forcing Mr. Obama to govern according to smaller-government principles. In December, he agreed to a compromise that extended by two years the income tax cuts signed into law in 2001 by President George W. Bush but also targeted additional tax relief to middle- and working-class families and provided new funds for unemployment insurance.

In 2011, Republicans demanded deep cuts in government spending as a condition for raising the federal government’s debt ceiling. Mr. Obama signed the Budget Control Act, which mandated a “sequester,” or across-the-board cuts, of \$1.2 trillion in domestic and defense spending over nine years, unless or until the passage of a deficit-reduction package that saved the same amount of money; the sequester took effect in 2012. Since then Congress has softened the spending cuts in various ways, but using the debt ceiling as a bargaining chip in budget negotiations has become commonplace, and Mr. Obama has presided over a slowdown in federal spending. Critics say that spending is still high by historical measures and that we have failed to address the soaring costs of entitlement programs like Social Security, but Mr. Obama’s deals with the Republican Congress will make it difficult for any future Democratic president to increase federal spending greatly.

6. *The “net neutrality” rule.* Net neutrality pitted content generators (such as YouTube and Netflix) against cable companies and other Internet service providers; the latter wanted the ability to block content or to charge websites more to stream content that takes up more bandwidth. Mr. Obama eventually came down against different pricing for different content, saying “companies who connect you to the world have special obligations not to exploit the monopoly they

enjoy over access into and out of your home or business,” and the Federal Communications Commission followed his lead by adopting net neutrality rules in 2015—over the protests of Internet service providers who argued that the rules discouraged technological innovation. In this case, Mr. Obama made his mark by staying the course and leaving things alone; no one knows how much the Internet as we know it would be different if your service provider could, say, make it more expensive to watch a video than to read text.

7. *Rejecting the Keystone Pipeline.* One of the bigger disappointments for Mr. Obama has been the lack of progress in addressing climate change during his administration. But he did catch the world’s attention in late 2015 by blocking the construction of the 1,179-mile Keystone XL pipeline, which would have carried 800,000 barrels of carbon-heavy petroleum from Canada to the Gulf Coast. The move may not have much of an impact on the emission of greenhouse gases that are warming the planet, as the oil is already being transported by rail and other pipelines. (New E.P.A. rules limiting carbon-dioxide emissions from power plants would have a more direct impact—if they survive court scrutiny.) However, nixing Keystone and coming down against those who said the project would provide jobs and other benefits was a moral decision that put the long-term health of the planet over short-term economic growth.

8. *The appointment of (at least) two Supreme Court justices.* Mr. Obama has named two members of the nine-person Supreme Court; Republican leaders in the Senate are determined not to let him name a third, despite the vacancy caused by the death of Justice Antonin Scalia in February. In 2009, Mr. Obama nominated the federal appeals court judge Sonia Sotomayor to replace the retired David Souter; she became the first Hispanic and the third woman ever to serve on the court. With her confirmation, six of the nine members of the court were Catholic. In 2010, the president named Elena Kagan, U.S. solicitor general, to replace the retired John Paul Stevens. Because both women replaced justices in the more liberal bloc, Mr. Obama’s appointments preserved rather than upset the court’s ideological balance, but he has continued its evolution into a more diverse, and thus more representative body.

9. *Speaking frankly about racism.* In July 2009, Mr. Obama weighed in on the case of a black Harvard University professor, Henry Louis Gates, arrested for “disorderly conduct” after he protested being questioned by the police while

trying to enter his own home. The police acted “stupidly,” the president said at a press conference, adding, “there’s a long history in this country of African-Americans and Latinos being stopped by law enforcement disproportionately. That’s just a fact.” This was only one of several times when Mr. Obama reminded Americans that his own election did not mean that racism had ceased to exist. After Trayvon Martin,

an unarmed black teenager, was shot to death by a neighborhood watchman in Florida in 2012, Mr. Obama pointedly said, “If I had a son, he’d look like Trayvon.” And just a couple of months ago, the president invited leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement to the White House to talk about the often-tense relations between police and racial minorities.

10. *Criminal-justice reform.* The United States is rethinking policies that have led to the in-

carceration of more than two million citizens, or four times the number in 1980. We now have 5 percent of the population and 25 percent of the world’s prisoners. Many of the attempts to reduce mass incarceration and to reclaim human potential are taking place at the state level, but Mr. Obama has helped to steer the public conversation away from the “tough on crime” approach that peaked in the 1990s. Last July, he met with inmates at a federal prison in Oklahoma, focusing media attention on excessive sentences for nonviolent, drug-related crimes. The president has also commuted the prison sentences of 248 individuals, convicted mostly for nonviolent drug crimes—more than the past six presidents combined. Criminal justice reform is the rare initiative with bipartisan support, and there is good reason to hope that the next president, whether a Democrat or Republican, will continue moving in this direction.

11. *Civil rights for gays and lesbians.* PolitiFact called it a “full flop.” In 2012, Mr. Obama declared his support for same-sex marriage, telling ABC News, “I’ve been going through an evolution on this issue.” As recently as 2008, in the closing days of his first presidential campaign, he told MTV viewers, “I believe marriage is between a man and a woman. I am not in favor of gay marriage.” But public opinion was rapidly changing as more states instituted same-sex marriage, and Mr. Obama adopted a more inclusionary definition, at least in the civil sphere. This spirit of inclusion also led Mr. Obama to issue an executive order in 2014 protecting federal workers and contractors from discrimination based on sexual orientation.

12. *Immigration policy.* In 2014, the head of the National Council of La Raza, the largest Hispanic advocacy group in

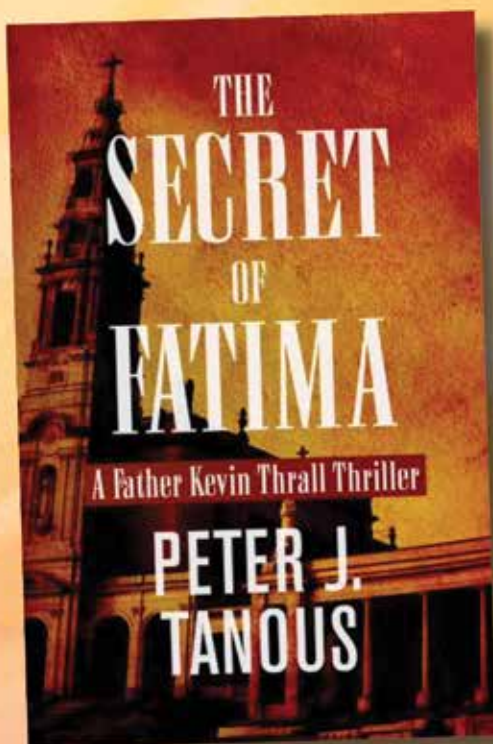
Mr. Obama’s appointments preserved rather than upset the court’s ideological balance, but he has continued its evolution into a more diverse and representative body.

the United States, called Mr. Obama “the deporter-in-chief” for overseeing more than two million deportations of undocumented migrants, more than any previous president. Such aggressive enforcement of the law may have seemed necessary while the president lobbied for an immigration reform law that would have provided a pathway to citizenship for law-abiding residents, but that legislation died in Congress in 2013. So Mr. Obama, as he has done on several major issues, turned to “executive action,” announcing just after the 2014 midterm elections that some four million undocumented residents would be eligible for a new legal status protecting them from deportations and allowing them to work here legally. Republicans denounced the new policy as “lawless” and initiated a lawsuit against the president; the Supreme Court has said it will rule on the legality of the executive action before this summer. Immigration has become an ever-more partisan issue over the course of the Obama administration; as on other issues, Mr. Obama has positioned his party firmly on the side of pluralism and social change—and may have made the Republicans more popular among Americans uncomfortable with the speed and the scope of such change.

13. “No-drama” foreign-policy. In March, the New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman summed up Mr. Obama’s foreign-policy agenda as “to get out of office being able to say that he had shrunk America’s involvement in Iraq

and Afghanistan, prevented our involvement on the ground in Syria and Libya, and taught Americans the limits of our ability to fix things we don’t understand.” Not everyone is happy with Mr. Obama’s aversion to tough language. The Republican presidential candidates argue that his low-key manner only encourages terrorism and instability. In the column cited above, Mr. Friedman also says the president underestimates “the dangers of his passivity,” and some Republicans argue that “no-drama” Obama is responsible for the popularity of Donald J. Trump. It is not surprising that presidential candidates (even Hillary Clinton, his former secretary of state) are promising a tougher foreign policy, even if it means putting more American troops in combat.

14. *Drone warfare.* As a candidate, Mr. Obama criticized President George W. Bush for bringing “more and more power into the executive branch” and for extending the “war on terror” to include torture and the mass surveillance of American citizens. As president, he has scaled back some of the worst excesses of his predecessor (see “Presidential Powers,” by *America’s* editors, 4/18), but he has also approved the routine use of drone warfare, killing as many as 5,000 people, enemy combatants and civilians alike, with no record or accountability. Mr. Obama’s countenancing of what is essentially a death penalty without trial or appeal is in stark contrast to his support for a more humane criminal justice system within American borders.



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15. *Normalization of U.S. relations with Cuba.* In December 2014, Mr. Obama restored full diplomatic relations with Cuba and opened an embassy in Havana after more than 50 years of sanctions against the island nation, promising to “cut loose the shackles of the past.” He had been moving toward normalized relations since the first days of his administration, when he repealed some of the most punitive rules against travel and cash remissions to Cuba. At the time, **America’s** editors hoped (5/18/09) this was part of a move against the “approach of all stick and no carrot, which has characterized much of foreign policy in recent years, [and] has yielded little more than a world full of enemies.” Improved relations with Cuba, along with the negotiations leading to the nuclear nonproliferation deal with Iran, also fits Pope Francis’ prescription to build more bridges rather than walls.

The Status Quo



In some ways, such as the advancement of the “free trade” Trans-Pacific Partnership, Mr. Obama has followed the course of his predecessors. There are many other areas where he has not changed direction as much as he had hoped to do. He has expressed regret that he has not been able to reduce partisanship in Washington. Mr. Obama got the Affordable Care Act through Congress without a single Republican vote, but that kind of victory became impossible to repeat after the G.O.P. won control of the House of Representatives in 2010. With divided government, there has been little or no movement on major legislation to reform immigration, reduce gun violence or change the way elections are financed, and there is little reason to expect progress during an election year. Some course corrections have to be left to the next president. **A**



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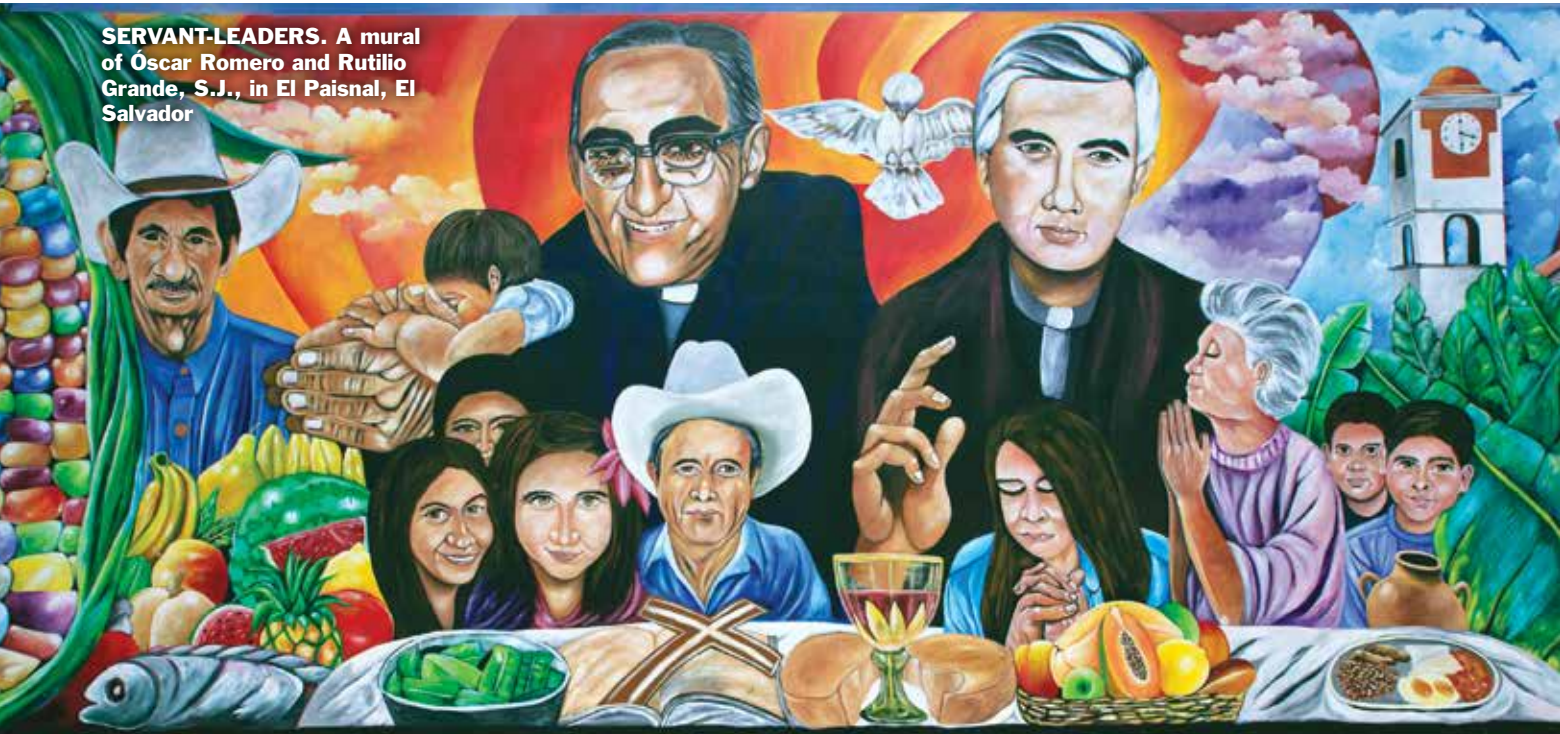
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'A Priest With His People'

The grounded Gospel of Rutilio Grande

BY THOMAS M. KELLY



SERVANT-LEADERS. A mural of Óscar Romero and Rutilio Grande, S.J., in El Paisnal, El Salvador

In May 2015, amid throngs of cheering Central American Catholics, Pope Francis beatified Archbishop Óscar Romero of San Salvador 35 years after his assassination. It was a clear signal to all that the church of Francis was to be a church for the poor. It was also a clear sign that the theology centered on the liberation of the poor, which the archbishop espoused and for which he died, was not only to be respected but would be the cornerstone of this pope's leadership.

Before the incense had faded away after Archbishop Romero's beatification Mass, Francis was heard to say, "Next comes Rutilio." The story of Rutilio Grande, S.J., is unknown to many Catholics even today—but not to Jorge Bergoglio, who had met his fellow Jesuit when the future pope was a young priest.

"It is impossible to understand Romero without under-

standing Rutilio Grande, S.J.," Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, postulator of Archbishop Romero's cause for sainthood, has noted. He might have said as well that it is impossible to understand Pope Francis without understanding Father Grande.

As a bishop, Óscar Romero had not always advocated for the marginalized in strong social and political terms. That changed on March 12, 1977, when Salvadoran government forces assassinated his confidant and friend Father Grande on a dusty road near the small village of El Paisnal. In promoting Father Grande for sainthood, the pope is lifting up a model of the servant-leader priest, one who freed himself from the trappings of the elite clergy and served among the marginalized in their struggle against systemic evil. For Francis, it is not only Father Grande's horrific martyrdom that motivates his elevation to sainthood but a lifetime of living in solidarity with the poor and challenging the forces of oppression that damage their humanity.

A Servant-Leader

Father Grande was born into a family of rural farmers near the same Salvadoran village where he would be killed by

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his own government 47 years later. He was raised by his grandmother and older brother in a pre-Vatican II church that preached pious service as the path to redemption in the next life; both poverty and suffering in this world were ordained by God. At age 12 he enrolled in a minor seminary in San Salvador. There he would embrace a life that reinforced a faith of piety and otherworldly focus. Toward the end of his formation as a Jesuit, however, the Second

Father Grande was a passionate preacher and inspired organizer, who constantly feared the church was not walking with the people but in front of them.

Vatican Council dramatically altered his trajectory.

Taking seriously the call of the “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” to recognize the dignity of all human beings, especially the poor, Father Grande began to see that his role as a priest in the church was not to rule over people. Rather, he always looked for the greatest participation possible by the “base” or least empowered members of a community and never proceeded without their input. As a servant-leader, he brought out the gifts within a community by encouraging people to serve one another. This strategy of beginning with where the community was (not where it should be) would characterize his ministry and ultimately lead to his martyrdom.

Father Grande’s ordination was celebrated with his first Mass in El Paisnal—a community he had left as the son of a very poor family. When he visited El Paisnal, he rejected any special treatment because he wanted to be treated and recognized as he had always been. Members of the community recall that he did not like to be called Don Tilo or Padre Tilo; no, he was always just Tilo. As for the food, he liked whatever was given—and profoundly disliked the huge sacrifices rural

farmers made to feed him anything special outside of their normal diet. He expressly said he did not want to be like the “fat priests who eat at the cost of the hunger of others. The little hen would be better for the malnourished children of the peasants than for him.”

Pastoral Immersion

Father Grande began his ministry as the prefect of discipline at the major seminary in San Salvador, where he was deeply committed to the formation of seminarians. He recognized a vast divide between the academic and spiritual formation of seminarians and their pastoral formation—how they related to the people they would serve. To heal that divide he created an immersion program for seminarians that challenged traditional models of formation by putting future priests in direct contact and service with their people. For Father Grande, the Gospel had to “grow feet” and not remain in the clouds.

In the mid-1960s, Father Grande enacted an important experiment in pastoral formation. He gathered groups of seminarians from all over the country during their annual vacation and embedded them in poor communities. In this way seminarians would come into contact with the reality and the peoples they would eventually serve. Father Grande explained it this way: “The first contact with the people was to be characterized by a human encounter; to try to enter into their reality in order to leave with a common reality.” The principal objective was to share the experience of the living God with the people where they lived.

Father Grande was a passionate preacher and inspired organizer, who constantly feared the church was not walking with the people but in front of them. His profound self-awareness was evident when he recognized his own shortcomings in his work with poor communities, including moving too fast, not listening carefully enough and imposing solutions from above. His prophetic ability to hear the cry of the poor challenged the government, the military, wealthy landowners and even his own church leaders. In one homily, delivered before El Salvador’s president and military leaders, he courageously proclaimed:

Many baptized in this country have not accepted the postulates of the Gospel that demand a transfiguration, and therefore, those same people are not transfigured in their mind and in their heart and they put a dam of selfishness in front of the message of Jesus our Savior, and the demanding voice of the official witnesses of Christ through the church, the pope and his bishops!

Agents of Change

Father Grande eventually left the seminary and traveled to Quito, Ecuador, to the Institute for Pastoral Ministry sponsored by the bishops of Latin America. There he learned

how to galvanize poor communities that were oppressed by the social forces around them. What he learned in Ecuador would prove transformative for the rural farming communities around San Salvador.

Throughout Father Grande's life, El Salvador had suffered from deep inequality, poverty and civil unrest. Most of the economy was governed by less than 1 percent of the population; half of the children in most rural communities were dying under the age of 5; and employment was scarce and usually only part-time. Workers on some plantations were often paid one tortilla per day—certainly not enough to feed their families. A kind of fatalism had settled in among poor communities; they had little hope their situation could ever change.

What Father Grande learned and lived out was a simple truth: Until the marginalized communities he served created their own agency, until they acted upon their own reality as a church community, nothing would change. An outside leader could not come in and transform poor communities. Only local lay church leaders could encourage communities to become agents of their own change. The role of the Catholic Church, he believed, was to help those leaders emerge, support them, form them and walk with them. Inspired by the Gospel, these community leaders would become the most effective agents for the integrated

development of their communities.

For two years Father Grande and his team led a delicate "mission" to very poor communities around his hometown. Through their own reading of Scripture, these communities came to realize that it was not God's will that they remain poor. Building the kingdom of God meant they needed to advocate for their communities in ways that were peaceful—but forceful. Throughout Father Grande's pastoral "experiment" in the rural villages of El Salvador, Archbishop Romero carefully watched his friend and confidant try to apply the social teaching of the church to the reality of poor, oppressed rural communities.

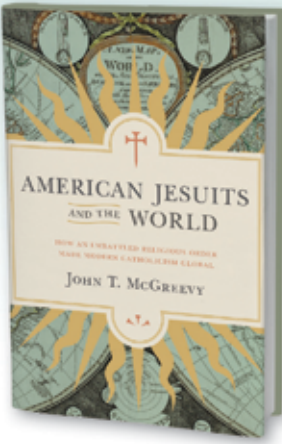
Slowly people began to change their mindset and realize their oppression was not the will of God but actually contrary to God's love for them. But as their awareness and demands for change grew, so, too, did the danger they faced. Soon threats came in against both Father Grande and the communities he served, mainly from wealthy landowners who felt threatened by the priest's work encouraging rural farmers to organize for a better life. Archbishop Romero witnessed the risks taken by Father Grande and saw the road he willingly chose in defense of the people he loved. On March 12, 1977, Father Grande was assassinated by government death squads at the behest of wealthy landowners.

'Revolutionary Inspiration'

In his homily at Father Grande's funeral, Archbishop Romero said:

True love is what Rutilio Grande brings with his death, with two *campesinos* next to him. Like this, the church loves; dying with others and being present with others to the transcendence of the kingdom. The church loves them, and it is significant that while Rutilio walked with his people in order to carry the message of the Mass and salvation, that was where he fell, riddled with bullets. Rutilio was a priest with his people, walking with his people to identify with them, in order to live with them—but not only as a revolutionary inspiration. Brothers and sisters, he was an inspiration of love and precisely because it was for love, he was inspirational....

Father Grande was an example of a servant-leader who embraced poverty and fulfilled his priesthood—not by bringing a wealthy church to the poor but by fully participating in the church already present among the poor. The beatification of Rutilio Grande, S.J., sends a clear message from Pope Francis to priests, to the marginalized and to all who hold positions of power that the church's preferential option for the poor, and those who live it, will be glorified. **A**



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Fact-Challenged

A decade after Stephen Colbert coined the word, “truthiness” has conquered a presidential race. The Republican Donald J. Trump has set the standard in saying things that feel truthful to his supporters, regardless of whether they have any basis in facts. According to Mr. Trump, illegal immigration from Mexico is up (it isn’t), unemployment is as high as 42 percent (only if you count all retirees as wanting to get back to work), and the United States ranks “first” in spending on education but “last” on educational performance (wrong on both counts).

“There’s never been a presidential candidate like Donald Trump,” Glenn Kessler wrote in March in the Washington Post’s Fact Checker department, “someone so cavalier about the facts and so unwilling to ever admit error, even in the face of overwhelming evidence.” Fact Checker had by then awarded Mr. Trump its worst rating, “four Pinocchios,” 26 times for such matters as claiming not only to have opposed the Iraq War in 2003 but to have been “visited by people from the White House” trying to silence him.

Mr. Trump, writes The New Yorker’s Jill Lepore, is perfectly suited to a post-fact, or “truthy,” world that is not completely new but instead resembles the bullying of childhood (if I can beat you up, I must be right) and medieval trials (if you can float in a river, you must be a witch): “Trial by combat and trial by ordeal place judgment in the hands of God. Trial by jury places judgment in the hands of men. It requires a different sort of evidence: facts.”

ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN is an associate editor of *America*.

The fact-free candidate is now poised to take the Republican presidential nomination, and some see his rise as an indictment of American journalism. But Chris Cillizza of The Washington Post does not accept the premise of a negligent press corps. “One of the most frequent complaints I hear,” he writes, “is that ‘the media doesn’t fact-check Donald Trump enough.’” His response: “You are mistaking a lack of changed minds with a lack of fact-checking.... That is not a failure of fact-checking. It is the death of the belief in fact.”

Mr. Cillizza writes that the “fragmentation of the media” into ideological categories is partly to blame for the fact-free world, writing, “You can go through each day as a well(-ish)-informed person without ever hearing a sliver of news that contradicts what you already believe.”

The fear that we are separating ourselves into liberal and conservative camps is one reason for the recent uproar over how Facebook organizes its content. The website Gizmodo reported on allegations that Facebook workers have routinely kept conservative viewpoints out of the Trending section of the social-media website. In a statement to Gizmodo, Facebook says it is merely weeding out “junk or duplicate topics, hoaxes, or subjects with insufficient sources.”

In other words, Facebook is claiming the responsibilities of traditional print media. The New York Times columnist Jim Rutenberg recently chastised journalists for not taking

Mr. Trump seriously until he had already vanquished almost all his rivals. Political journalism, he writes, “has too often lost sight of its primary directives in this election season: to help readers and viewers make sense of the presidential chaos; to reduce the confusion, not add to it.” Facebook’s news curators, as they are called inside the company, surely see themselves as reducing confusion. The trouble is that we may have reached the point where no journalism

The fact-free candidate is now poised to take the Republican presidential nomination.

outlet is trusted enough by Americans across the ideological spectrum to serve as a fact-checker and gatekeeper of political news.

Still, I’m not sure that avoiding different political opinions is a completely new phenomenon. Even when daily newspapers could be found in most homes,

plenty of readers ignored news stories and columns that seemed to challenge their beliefs. My guess is that discussions among family members and friends did more to prevent creeping truthiness than did authoritative news sources like the TV networks’ evening news. And I don’t know what journalists can do about people moving to neighborhoods where almost everyone votes for the same party.

When people are more skeptical about the fact-checkers than about the candidates themselves, it can be irresistible for people seeking political office to throw out dubious statistics and stretch the truth beyond recognition. Mr. Trump may simply be better at it than anyone else this year.

ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN



Francis' Dream for Europe

For Pope Francis, this is a pivotal moment in European history. A quarter of a century after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, he sees new walls being built in Europe and hears Austria's Cardinal Christoph Schönborn warn that "the Iron Curtain exists again, but in another way." He observes that centrifugal forces, driven by nationalisms and xenophobia, threaten to undo the European Union, with its 28 member states and 508 million people, a union that has become "a bastion of peace"—his words—after the most devastating war in history.

Francis has captured the crucial nature of this moment for the European Union and the larger continent of 740 million people. That is why he decided to abandon his lifelong refusal of honors and accept Europe's most prestigious award, the Charlemagne Prize. He saw this as a providential opportunity to speak to the continent's heart and reframe the European dream for a new age.

After receiving the prize in the Vatican's Regal Hall on May 6, this son of European immigrants delivered a remarkable speech to a distinguished audience that included the top European officials and ambassadors, the German chancellor, the king of Spain and Italy's prime minister.

It was a visionary speech and has been compared to Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream." In it Francis shared his "dream" for a new Europe and concluded with challenging words: "I dream of a Europe of which it will not

be said that its commitment to human rights was its last utopia."

While media reports have focused on his "I dream of a Europe" refrain, most overlooked the central part of his discourse, where he called for the building of "a Europe capable of giving birth to a new humanism based on three capacities: the capacity to integrate, the capacity for dialogue and the capacity to generate."

First of all, he said, it is necessary to develop "the capacity to integrate." Emphasizing "the urgency of this fundamental task," he said, "time is teaching us that it is not enough simply to settle individuals geographically: The challenge is that of a profound cultural integration."

Failure to integrate leads to "the poverty of exclusion," he added. He sees this failure reflected in the demise of openness to migrants, in the violence in places like Paris and Brussels and in the emergence of new ghettos in many cities. But he is also aware of many positive experiences of integration, one of which emerged as he was speaking when London elected its first Muslim mayor, the son of a Pakistani immigrant.

Integration is one key word in Francis' vision; dialogue is another. Aware that "the capacity to dialogue" is in short supply in European politics today, he reminded these leaders that "we are called to promote a culture of dialogue by every possible means and thus to rebuild the fabric of society." This "enables us to view others as valid dialogue partners, to respect the foreigner, the immigrant and people from differ-

ent cultures as worthy of being listened to." Indeed, "peace will be lasting in the measure that we arm our children with the weapons of dialogue."

He called for the culture of dialogue to be "an integral part of the education imparted in our schools," and he highlighted the urgent need in the wider society "to build 'coalitions' that are not only military and economic, but cultural, educational, philosophical and religious." He reaffirmed the need to build bridges, not walls.

Francis is well aware of the fragile political situation in Europe, which could become worse if Britain votes to leave the European Union on June 23. With this in mind, he turned to "the capacity to generate" jobs and hope.

Millions of young Europeans are unemployed. He told Europe's political leaders, "If we want to rethink our society, we need to create dignified and well-paying jobs, especially for our young people." This requires "coming up with new, more inclusive and equitable economic models"; it means moving from "a liquid economy directed at revenue, profiting from speculation and lending at interest" to "a social economy that invests in persons by creating jobs and providing training."

In developing these three capacities, Francis said the church "can and must play its part." It can begin by "going forth to bind the wounds of humanity with the powerful yet simple presence of Jesus, and his mercy that consoles and encourages."

GERARD O'CONNELL

GERARD O'CONNELL is *America's* Rome correspondent. *America's* Vatican coverage is sponsored in part by the Jesuit communities of the United States. Twitter: @gerardrome.

Called by Creation

Daily reminders of a loving God

BY ANNIKA FREESE

As a child I could never find God in his house. Sitting in Mass I felt like a machine that could not manage to function properly. I had all the right parts and pieces, but together they would not produce the desired outcome. Looking around, it seemed as if everyone else was automatically filled with God's grace as soon as they walked in the church doors.

This was especially true of my mother. She found God at a young age and never lost sight of him. She was then, and is now, an inspiration to me, but I felt isolated from her because I could never experience God in the same way she did. Church did not feel like a spiritual place to me. I felt judged within its walls and like I did not belong, because I could not feel what everyone else around me appeared to be feeling.

Following my confirmation, I stopped going to church. I had lost my faith almost entirely; I no longer prayed, and I disregarded all that I had learned in my youth. This was an extremely dark time in my life. I felt alone, like a stranger in my own skin. I



going from the Asian side of Turkey to the European side. There was a single moment, and I remember it as clear as day, when I stood looking out at the Bosphorus. The wind was blowing and the golden sun was shining on my face. An intense feeling of safety and comfort washed over me. I saw before me birds flying low over the water. I saw trees blowing in the wind, moving with the flow of the universe. The sky was cloudless and the kind of ideal blue one sees only in paintings.

stopped spending time with my family and friends and retreated into myself. I rarely left my room.

Though my friends expressed their concern for me, my reply was always, "No, I'm fine." And after a while, that reply seemed true. It had been so long since I had felt or experienced any kind of feeling other than a lost loneliness that I became numb to it. I began to wonder: Had I always felt nothing? There was a drought of joy in my life, a void where happiness and a sense of purpose used to be. At the time, though, I could not grasp what was missing in my life.

Months later, I was on a trip to Istanbul with my mother. It was my 17th birthday, and we were on a boat

I had never witnessed such beauty. I felt so small in comparison to these fantastic forces, yet I was not afraid because I knew I was a part of them, too. In an instant, the void that I had been struggling to comprehend—struggling to fill with materials that would never, could never satisfy—was suddenly set ablaze. And even as I looked out at the water and took in this completely new vision, a certain familiarity overtook me. I had felt this before; I had felt this happiness and excitement for life before. I believe that God was calling me back through nature in that moment.

There have been many before me who have found God in nature, and there will be many after, but I cannot express enough the way nature has

ANNIKA FREESE is a senior in high school in Amman, Jordan. Originally from Falls Church, Va., she has lived in various cities throughout the United States, Austria and Jordan.

truly opened my eyes to God and has brought me closer to his embrace. I will not pretend there are not still times when I falter and fail in faith; but when I lose sight of God, he always calls me back through the wind in the trees or a flower growing through the cracks in the cement.

Everyone has his or her own way of connecting with God, and mine is through nature. I feel that God wanted his creation to be a way for his children to come back to him. We will all stumble and fall in our journeys of faith, but it is hard for me to deny God when I

look around and see such wondrous, awesome works of his hand. Only someone who loves me unconditionally would bless me with the ability and opportunity to see such beauty.

To see life end and begin again, to watch the seasons change and to witness creatures of every shape and size living with a content knowledge of their purpose and place—whenever I feel lost, I need only look to these gifts to be reminded of how to live a simple existence that consists of loving God, my neighbor and myself. I am now happier, healthier and less alone. I

spend time with my family and friends; I try to connect with the world around me; and I take every opportunity I can to be with nature. I have begun attending church again, and it no longer feels like a place of judgment.

Finding God is a very personal experience. No one can be sure of when or where this discovery will take place. But if we listen closely, we will find that God is always calling his children home. There is nowhere I can go that God's love cannot find me. And now, when I walk into his house, I seek God there, too.

FAITH IN FOCUS

A Closing and an Opening

On graduation and the priesthood

BY STEPHEN FIELDS

I walked with my 12-year-old nephew that balmy June afternoon through the manicured green Georgian campus of the The Gilman School in Baltimore. My sister had already rushed ahead to find us seats; my brother-in-law was parking the car; and my young companion's older brother and soon-to-be-Hoya was long gone to assemble with his fellows for the graduation ceremony. I supported Matthew as he limped along because of a tense Achilles tendon. Dressed in my best black suit, cuffs with crested links and Panama hat, I focused my mind on the upcoming event and on caring for my wounded charge.

Suddenly, as I turned the corner of the handsome red brick Carey Hall, I spied through the lush trees, off in the distance, the top of the tower of

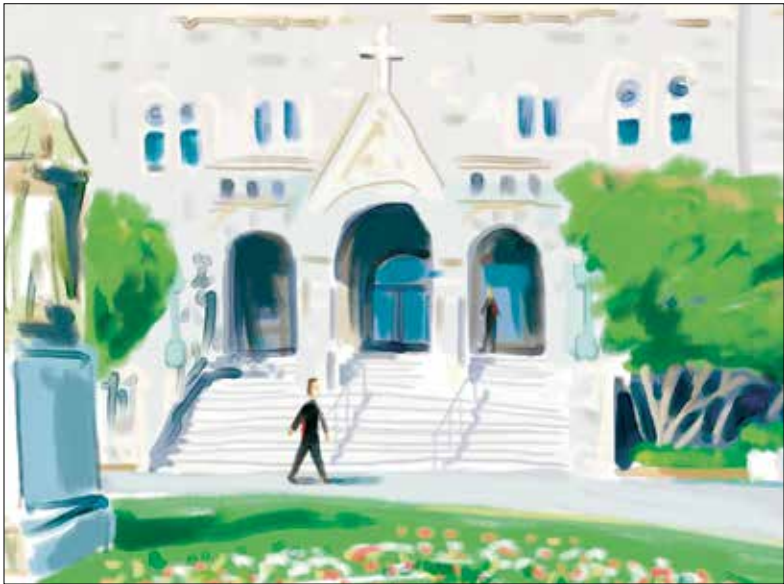
the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, where I had been ordained 29 years before, prostrating myself with 13 others on the floor before its high altar. As I ambled slowly to my graduation seat, I was quickly transformed.

A stillness began to grip me, as I sat there under the

overarching branches, listening to the headmaster's talk, then the valedictorian's, the awards, the parting antics of the boys and the twang of the bagpipe as they awkwardly tumbled down the stairs of the dais. The Gilman graduation ceremony seemed very real, yes

indeed (I was ever so proud of Greg). But in the midst of it, my inner silence returned me to the cathedral, and to the meaning of the priesthood, and to the value and worth of all the sacrifices that it demands.

Peace and gratitude for it all welled



ART: BOB ECKSTEIN

STEPHEN FIELDS, S.J., teaches theology at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

up, along with a renewed strength of commitment to the work of education that was being celebrated in front of me and that, together with Gilman, I could celebrate in my own Georgetown life. And I could do so precisely because of what happened in that building, whose nearby tower mutely told the meaning of all that we were doing that Sunday afternoon, even as it has told the meaning of all that I have done over 29 years.

Just as the oft repeated words of the Hail Mary become, in the rosary, icons that open into the abyss of their significance, so the transpiring events sounded a mantra calling forth a depth of feeling that T. S. Eliot so well describes in "Little Gidding" in his *Four Quartets*:

*We shall not cease from exploration,
and the end of all our exploring will
be to arrive where we started
and know the place for the first
time.*

The past and the present merged, and in doing so, they renewed me for the future.

Is this renewing not to know the eternal within the relentless movement of time? To return to the cathedral where it all began, but to return changed because of time, is yet to sink into the meaning of time. Is it not the same meaning, then as now? To return to the cathedral, is it not to return to what continually happens there—the timeless mystery of the Eucharist, which gives all time its meaning, which both absorbs time and infuses time, blotting what must always change into what can never change?

All our explorations, says Eliot, return us to the center—to the inner life of the cathedral. This center's fresh vision, given that happy Gilman day at a time and in a place of surprise, appeared, as I later recalled with joy, on that best of days, the center's own feast—Corpus Christi, the body of Christ, which is born ever new by the hidden passion of every priest. ■

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
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Throne and Altar Time

It is election season again. Inevitably, it's also the season for many of our Catholic brethren to do some theological mangling of the political issues at hand. Last week, three different Catholic organizations emailed me a voter guide that claimed to show how Pope Francis would be approaching the American presidential election. I was not aware that Francis had endorsed anyone, so I read the document with interest. When I finished reading the guide—mute on family policy and school choice, tepid on abortion and religious liberty—I concluded that the sponsoring organizations would have better spent their money simply sending me Ready-for-Hillary buttons and bumper stickers. Undoubtedly, thinly disguised Republican “Catholic” leaflets will soon fill up the mailbox as well. In truth, teasing a Trump vote out of *any* papal utterance will require Herculean literary skills, but I am certain that some earnest Catholic group will attempt to do so.

As we enter the electoral maelstrom, I would suggest the following principles to guide our ecclesial efforts to approach the political in the pulpit, the classroom and the media.

Stress issues, not persons or parties. We should avoid explicit endorsements of candidates and parties, not simply to defend our tax exemption but, more important, to avoid idolatry. The kingdom of God is not coterminous with any political formation or personality. Political formation in a religious setting rightly focuses on the

intersection between the moral and social orders. In the contemporary American arena it rightly emphasizes the ensemble of human rights, with a central role for the right to life and the right to religious liberty, that promote the common good. The American bishops' revised *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* nimbly covers the spectrum of issues any Catholic citizen should consider: human life, peace, family, religious freedom, economic justice, migration, education and environment. Their broad, comprehensive vision of social justice is not attempting to place theological twinkle lights on either the Republican or the Democratic platform.

Even when we exercise the appropriate asceticism by focusing on ethico-political issues alone, many in the pews will scream, “The church should stay out of politics!” We must firmly resist the effort to be silent on the pressing questions of political justice. The church is summoned by God's word to engage in prophetic judgment on the practices of our society. In fidelity we cannot reduce the Gospel to a spiritual bubble bath: all consolation and no challenge. The picket line circling the church is a sign that we are doing our job. Rejoice in it.

Respect the political order. We all know the low esteem in which politicians are currently held. It is easy to shrug our shoulders at the corruption and stupidity that seem to be our political lot. An old college friend recently lamented, “So, I'm supposed to

choose between a crazy, sexist xenophobe and a deceitful, corrupt politician who holds the lives of the innocent in contempt?” Perhaps it's just my circle of friends, but I have never before talked with so many Catholics with a perplexed political conscience. Despite the anguish, we need to avoid demonizing the political realm. The Roman Missal instructs us to pray for our civic authorities in the Prayer

of the Faithful, but I've rarely heard it. It would be right and just to pray for our president, governor and mayor by name in our worship. Political homilies need not be limited to ethical issues. When is the last time you heard a sermon on King David as a good ruler or Esther as a model political lobbyist?

Just as the moral and political orders often intersect, the duties of the citizen and disciple are subtly intertwined in the pursuit of neighborly love.

Relativize the political order. The oddness of our current political season is not confined to the character of those who would govern us. It is found in the growing tendency to reduce universal moral principles to a matter of fleeting social or personal taste and to elevate the political slogans of the moment to the level of moral absolutes. The Golden Rule endures from century to century as political regimes and parties crumble into the dust. Even in this bitter season of political discontent, God alone is great.

Political homilies need not be limited to ethical issues.

JOHN J. CONLEY

JOHN J. CONLEY, S.J., holds the Knott Chair in Philosophy and Theology at Loyola University Maryland in Baltimore, Md.

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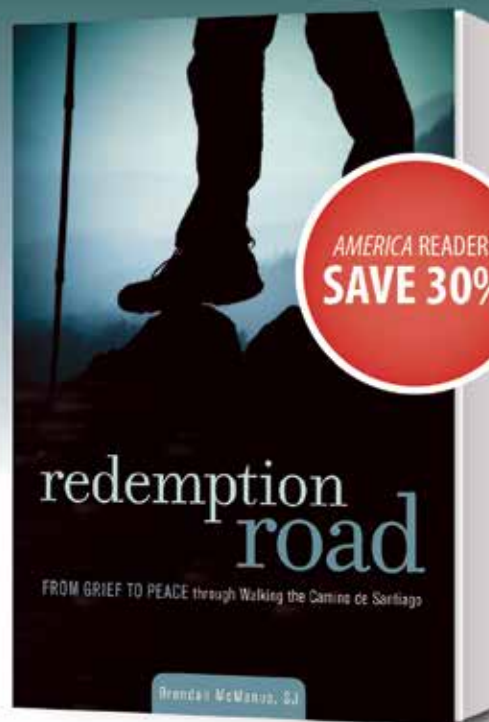
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POETRY | JOSEPH HOOVER

DARING WORDS

The 2016 Foley Poetry Contest

In “Driving Without Insurance,” Charles Lobaito declares: “Throw me in jail...insurance companies/ Make a killing on good drivers & rake/ Them over the fat Santa Claus coals./ \$312 a month is too much!”

Otter Jung Allen writes in “A Want Gone Quiet”: “Once,/ I was so lonely/ that my father gave me doubt as a sibling/ As he found new gods/ in a long needle and hot spoon/ I was given the company of denial.”

“The Cardinal” by Precious Makazha—a quiet poem set in the Vatican—may be the first poem in decades *America* has received about a cardinal of the church that does not rail against cardinals of the church.

Hildegard Schaut, 96 years old from Lena, Wis., gets close to condensing the corporal works of mercy, or maybe all of Catholic social doctrine, in three stanzas: “The good wishes we extend/ by visits or by letters/ we must take time out/ making folks feel better.”

The poem “Upon Seeing ‘The Goonies’ for the First Time” competed with “Can You Be Happy in a Chinese Starbucks?” for best title.

The note Kamila Kaminska-Palarczyk writes introducing her poem “She Cried Wolf” could well have been the poem itself: “Inspired by a stop sign and an elderly Latino woman attempting to cross the road, I cringed when the bag of groceries fell from her arms.... I write to you to warn about the dangers of crossing the road, because you never quite know when oranges will be squashed by a threatening Prius.”

Between Jan. 1 and March 31

over 1,000 poems were sent in for *America*’s annual Foley contest. For more than a few of the entrants, it was clear they were not necessarily writing to win a contest and its \$1,000 prize. They were writing because they had to. Something inside had to get out, regardless of what it might profit: the death of a spouse, a spiritual epiphany, a startling nature scene.

Many were written about social issues. In his submission, Bavid Dailey defends the Islamic faith. Gideon Cecil’s poem advocates for Syrian refugees. In “Good Night America,” Max Beasley attacks American-style capitalism. (“Washington marries Wall Street and we pray for a divorce.”) You rarely see the opposite: politically conservative poems that, say, criticize the influx of refugees, that rail against Islamic extremism or defend “corporate America.” Why is that? (I’m not trying to be coy, either; really, why is there so little “conservative” art?)

We received several entries from high school students, some of which we will publish on our poetry Twitter feed (@americaliterary). In “To Sin or Not to Sin,” Desire Hopkins speaks plainly—not unlike Paul in the Letter to the Romans—what we all have felt: “I know what not to do, but I do it anyways./ I know what not to say, but I say it anyways.... What if maybe I’m not a good person, and that’s why I sin?/ My heart tells me I’m good, but sometimes my actions tell me otherwise.”

In “Anchor,” Lillian Marquis writes about the person who is the most dependable in her life. “When all seems lost, I know just who to go to/ Recently

it can’t be my best friend, so it must be you/ If I needed to hide a body, I could put it in your trunk.” How disturbingly wonderful to be adored by the type of person who someday may also need your help hiding a corpse.

A fair number of the youth poems were about people dying, Ace Dzurovicik’s “Not How I Thought I’d Die” being the most vivid of the batch: “And all that’s left of me and my tattered dream,/ is in the crushed car at the junkyard,/ in which I fell asleep.”

The most heartbreaking poem we received from a high school student was Emily Baker’s “Arithmophobia.” Maybe every school teacher ought to read it at least once a day. “I see numbers and I freeze up/ ... / Instead of burrowing into my mind and claiming it/ they simply bounce off/ like my skin is made of metal.... ‘You should know this by now/.../ ‘You’re not trying hard enough./.../ Maybe I am just stupid/ Maybe I am just lazy/ Or maybe I’m just scared of numbers.”

As for the Foley winner, the judges Erin Grace, Ebony Amoroso and I selected the lovely poem “Claim,” by Shannon Camlin Ward. The three contest runners-up—“Not Jumping,” by m.nicole.r.wildhood; “The Visual Food Encyclopedia,” by Gabrielle Campagnano; and “At the Edge of the Mississippi,” by Anna Elizabeth Schmidt—will be published in subsequent issues.

Composing a poem, maybe for the first time, and sending it out for people to judge is not a small proposition. For some it can be a fairly brave thing. I am grateful for and I applaud all who submitted their work to our contest, who dared to create something that would not have existed otherwise.

JOSEPH P. HOOVER, S.J., is *America*’s poetry editor.

The editors of **America** are pleased to present the winner of the 2016 Foley Poetry Award,
given in honor of William T. Foley, M.D.

Claim

Of all the things I've ever overheard, my favorite
came from a dark-haired girl who told the boy next to her,
"You have to learn not to care, Mike."

Maybe he shrank his favorite sweater,
someone scratched his car. Or maybe she pulverized
his heart by sleeping with someone else.

I'll never know, though I think of her words sometimes,
like now that someone has robbed my house.

The TV, gone, probably propped against a wall
in some pawn shop on 301 or the Merk.

A Dell desktop: tomb of many old poems
I must now stop pretending that I'll ever revise.

But there were lines—blissful lines—delicious words
with the lingering taste of silk chocolate
two lovers might share after sex.

And the jewelry, a legacy of superstitious stones
weighing nothing but generations between tired women.

I do not need my grandmother's rings
to recall my grandmother's hands,
tying ribbons in our hair or wiping crumbs from our
mouths
to erase the traces of indecency.

Sometimes when people die, I imagine their energy
dispersing like beads from a broken strand,
rolling more or less randomly through the universe,
depending on the angle at which each spherule fell:

the tintinnabulation of raindrops through the leaves,
delicate, incomprehensible songs.

I do not need my sister's sapphires: the fathomless
blue of old grief. My God, how it hurt just to look at them.

SHANNON C. WARD

SHANNON C. WARD is the author of the poetry chapbook Blood Creek (Longleaf Press, 2013). Her work has received generous support from Yaddo, Norton Island and the Anderson Center, and her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in many journals, including Great River Review, Tar River Poetry and Raleigh Review.

The publication of poetry in **America** is underwritten
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OF THE MINISTRY

HER SONG. Taylor Swift performs at Bishop Ireton High School in Alexandria, Va., in 2009.



MUSIC | STEPHEN BULLIVANT

A THEOLOGY OF SWIFT

What pastors can learn from a pop icon

No topic, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, is out of bounds for the theologian. This is because theology's true subject matter is God, and "all things," Aquinas sagely points out, either "are God Himself or...refer to God as their beginning and end" (*Summa Theologiae*, q. 1 a. 7).

With the mandate of the Angelic Doctor, then, what might be said—*theologically*—about Taylor Swift, the 26-year-old musical megastar, who released her debut single, "Tim McGraw," 10 years ago this June?

On the face of it, not very much. Religion is one area of Swift's private life that she tends not to be so open about (though rumors persist that she is at least a cradle Catholic). True, the protagonists of "Our Song" from 2006 raise the philosophically intriguing pos-

sibility that God is able to replay the immediate past: "And when I got home, 'fore I said, 'Amen.'/ Asking God if he could play it again." But even in her early, countrified period, overtly Christian lyrics are otherwise few and far between.

Gospel-era Bob Dylan—an obvious and well-trodden hunting ground for theology in popular music—Taylor Swift is not.

In other ways, though, comparisons with Dylan are not so wide of the mark. Both are singers, multi-instrumentalists and, taking a protean approach to genre boundaries, songwriters of genuine genius. (If you don't believe me, go listen—really, actually, properly listen—to any of her five albums. All, down to the very last track, were written or co-written by Swift. And there is scarcely a weak song on any of them.) And if Dylan was the voice

of, and soundtrack to, the youth of 50 years ago, Swift—with album sales of 40 million worldwide—is all that and more for today's young people.

In fact, that is likely the best starting point for a kind of pastoral-theological approach to Taylor Swift. She has evidently touched a huge cultural nerve at the beginning of the 21st century. For those searching for "the signs of the times," the "T-Swizzle" phenomenon is undoubtedly one. Note, too, that it is among young adults that Swift is most popular—and that the Catholic Church (or any church, for that matter) is increasingly not.

That said, my own Swiftian appreciation comes directly from the committed Catholic students I teach—especially a group of bright, 20-something women. I asked one of them just what it is about Swift that she finds

so compelling. Alice Costar, now a razor-sharp theology postgraduate at the University of Bonn, commented on how, being similar ages...

things Taylor sang about were happening in my own life at that time. Just as I was beginning to think that adulthood wasn't all it was cracked up to be, she released "Never Grow Up," a song about wishing a child could be protected from the inevitable hurts in life. The song "22" was released the year I turned 22 and conjures up memories of easily the best year of my life.

If you spend any amount of time following Swift fandom online—as "research" for a commission from **America**, let's say—*relatable* is a term you will meet often. It is not surprising. Her eponymous album, "Taylor Swift," was released when she was just 16. Writing and singing about what she knows, Swift is essentially an eth-

nographer—a participant-observer par excellence—of young adulthood's everyday "joys and hopes, fears and anxieties" ("Gaudium et Spes," No. 1). The song "Fifteen," 2008's morality tale about navigating "life before you know who you're gonna be," is maybe the clearest example. But really, the same applies to her oeuvre as a whole. Would-be youth ministers, take note.

The theology of Taylor Swift can, in fact, go deeper still. While I previously noted the general lack of direct religious content in the Swift canon, there are two glaring exceptions to that rule—which are all the more remarkable for their rarity.

Buried on her 2007 Christmas album, the song "Christmas Must Be Something More," which Swift wrote alone, does not pull its punches: "So here's to Jesus Christ who saved our lives." I have heard Easter morning homilies less avowedly kerygmatic than that.

Subtler, and more powerful still, is "Innocent" from 2010. Received wis-

dom is that the song is directed to the hip-hop artist Kanye West, an extension of forgiveness for a public slight at the Grammys in 2009. Understood in that light, the song is ludicrously overblown. But as a meditation on Christian forgiveness and the chance to "begin again" (to steal the title from a different Swift song—probably her finest, in fact) it is magnificent. With lines like "Today is never too late to be brand new" and "Oh, who you are is not what you did/ You're still an innocent," it is a shame the Year of Mercy already has a theme song (for the curious, it's "Misericordes sicut Pater.") Taylor's song is much, much better.

"In sacred science, all things are treated of under the aspect of God: either because they are God Himself or because they refer to God as their beginning and end." Looks like Aquinas was right after all. He usually is.

STEPHEN BULLIVANT is senior lecturer in theology and ethics at St. Mary's University, London. Twitter: @SSBullivant.

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LEADERSHIP BLINKERED

ÉAMON DE VALERA A Will to Power

By Ronan Fanning
Harvard University Press. 320p \$29.95

History has not been kind to Éamon de Valera.

By the 1990s, the roar of Ireland's Celtic Tiger had put a merciful end to the recession of the 1980s. Those dreary years had sent yet another generation of youngsters abroad, desperate (as the Irish-American rock band Black '47 put it) "to get out of the land of de Valera."

In 1993, Tim Pat Coogan published a long biography that cast a harsh light on de Valera's vision of an Ireland "whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children...and the laughter of comely maidens."

Then there was Neil Jordan's 1996 film "Michael Collins," which depicted de Valera as equal parts intransigent and priggish. And on the enduring question of whether or not Dev was responsible for Collins's assassination, Jordan offered a rather unambiguous answer.

Is the time ripe for a backlash to the backlash against de Valera?

If so, Ronan Fanning's insightful new biography is too even-handed (and brief) to be that book.

Fanning cannot forgive de Valera's most glaring sins, among them paving the way for the bloody Irish Civil War of 1922-23. De Valera's behavior, at this crucial time, was "petulant, inflammatory, ill judged and profoundly undemocratic," writes Fanning, professor emeritus of modern history at University College Dublin.

However, Fanning adds that whatever de Valera's shortcomings, they must "be reconciled with his subsequent

greatness."

Amazingly, this man who "was Ireland" (Coogan's phrase) was actually born in New York City, to a Spanish father and Irish immigrant mother in 1882.

After Dev was sent back to Ireland (his mother remained in the United States), he was on the path to a rather grim life in rural Limerick. He was fortunate enough, however, to have a grandmother who impressed upon him that education might be a possible escape route.

Committing himself to schooling, Fanning argues, illustrates de Valera's "most remarkable character trait: his strength of will."

De Valera later saw acceptance into Blackrock College—and life away from the farm—as an "entry into heaven." A number of college teaching positions followed in the first decade of the 20th century. So how, by 1916, did this bespectacled math teacher find himself leading a company of rebels bent on conquering the most powerful empire on earth?

De Valera was thinking about his career—not politics—when he began taking Irish language lessons in 1908. He fell in love with his teacher, Jane Flanagan (later Sinéad Ní Fhlannagáin), and married her a year later.

"However opportunistic his embrace of the Irish language might have been in its origins," writes Fanning, "he brought the zeal of the convert to his involvement in the Gaelic League."

During these crucial years, cultural nationalism in Ireland was giving

way to something more political and militaristic. De Valera joined the Irish Volunteers and, because of his (relatively) advanced age and income, gravitated to a leadership role. Soon enough, there was talk of an insurrection against the British on or around Easter 1916.

Fanning notes that de Valera's "military failings" were extensive during the Rising. But that meant little when the British executed key Irish rebels, only to

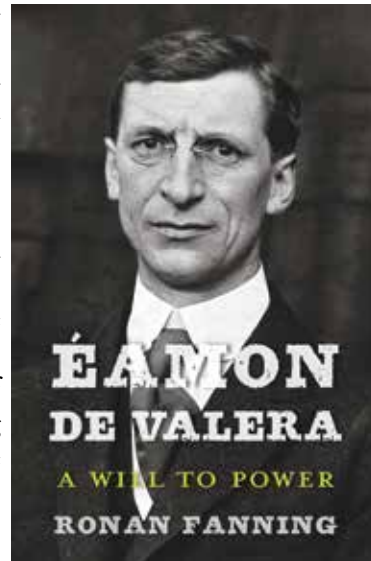
spare de Valera. Why? Probably not because he was American-born, as some historians have said (and as de Valera himself told John F. Kennedy). More likely, Fanning says, it was "because [de Valera] was unknown." Either way, with Nationalist ranks depleted, de Valera was well positioned as a leader for post-Rising Ireland.

The subsequent debacle in 1919, of Michael Collins lead-

ing the Irish contingent in treaty negotiations with the British—while de Valera inexplicably remained in Ireland—has been well documented. For Fanning, this is probably de Valera's low point. The Irish got peace but had to accept partition in the North as well as an oath of allegiance to the crown.

In Fanning's eyes, de Valera "opposed the treaty not because it was a compromise, but because it was not *his* compromise." In the fierce debate over the treaty that followed, de Valera revealed a "contempt for democracy" (Irish political representatives as well as the voting public supported the treaty), while his rhetoric became apocalyptic.

Fanning takes no position on the Collins assassination, though he chides de Valera for doing "nothing to arrest the descent into militarism" and civil war, which mercifully concluded in 1923.



Inevitably, the drama of *A Will to Power* downshifts after the Rising and the Civil War. It is in the 1930s, Fanning argues, that de Valera did his best work. He founded the political party Fianna Fáil, led it to power in 1932 and “within six tumultuous years...had torn up those elements of the Treaty of 1921 he had opposed and had rewritten, almost single-handedly, the constitutional relationship between Ireland and Britain.”

Some Irish American readers may bristle at Fanning’s dismissal of Dev and others who “set about milking anti-partitionist sentiment among nationalists.”

More important, though, Fanning’s narrative loses steam in de Valera’s later years. He deals only briefly with de Valera’s notorious 1945 visit to the German minister to offer condolences upon the death of Adolf Hitler. We also learn little about what this long-time warrior and advocate for a united Ireland thought when the Troubles

broke out in the North in the late 1960s. (De Valera lived until 1975.) Fanning also could have explored more deeply the forces that sent “hundreds of thousands” of Irish immigrants abroad in the 1950s. Finally, what were the long-term effects (possibly right up to the sex abuse scandals of the 2000s) of de Valera and his supporters’ granting the Catholic Church “special status” in Ireland’s 1937 constitution (a move actually viewed as insufficient by some conservatives, who wanted Catholicism to be the state religion)?

These, however, are minor quibbles. Fanning’s book is an excellent, insightful analysis of Ireland’s arguably most consequential public figure.

TOM DEIGNAN (tdeignan.blogspot.com) is a columnist with *The Irish Voice* newspaper and has written about books for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Newark Star-Ledger*. A contributor to numerous books on history and literature, he is author of *Coming to America: Irish Americans*.

GEORGE E. DEMACOPOULOS

AN EARLY FIRST LADY

THEODORA **Actress, Empress, Saint**

By David Potter
Oxford University Press. 288p \$29.95

The most recent installment in Oxford University Press’s *Women in Antiquity* is everything that one would hope for in a book designed to offer “an accessible introduction to the life and historical times of women from the ancient world.” For those who are unfamiliar with her, the Byzantine empress Theodora (A.D. 500-48) is an especially illuminating figure by which to bring so many aspects of the ancient world into focus.

Born into a family of circus performers, Theodora was a mime, a prostitute and then a high-placed concubine be-

fore meeting and marrying the future emperor Justinian, who was the longest reigning emperor in Roman/Byzantine history. With Justinian’s accession to power in 527, Theodora governed alongside her husband at the zenith of Byzantine imperial strength. She played an active role in almost every facet of Justinian’s rule: she inspired legislation, brokered alliances between factions, inspired his stiff resolve in the wake of riots and played a key role in harboring religious minorities. While Justinian did not always follow her advice, her influence in determining political, military and religious policy was likely greater than any other woman of the late-ancient era.

Not surprisingly, she was hated by a great number of people in high cir-

cles, and she was among the targets of a scathing *Secret History*, which purported to expose the backdoor shenanigans of the sixth-century’s most powerful family. For all of these reasons, Theodora is one of the most intriguing women in history.

Potter’s study includes an introduction plus 12 chapters that use specific biographical details and analysis as a segue to a broader social history of the late Roman/early Byzantine world. So, for example, chapters devoted to her early life become vehicles for broader discussions ranging from ancient medicine to prostitution to travel to the dynamic politics of urban mobs. In these early chapters especially, Potter provides a compelling account of urban life for the working class. While much of what he suggests about Theodora’s early life is predicated upon conjecture, Potter shows himself to possess an impressive knowledge of the early Byzantine social world, and he communicates it with graceful prose.

Later chapters similarly depart from Theodora for insightful interludes concerning imperial and ecclesiastical networks, the rivalries and associations between the various ranks of the army, court ceremony and even church architecture. Throughout, Potter makes the Byzantine world come alive for a modern reader in ways that are both familiar and strange.

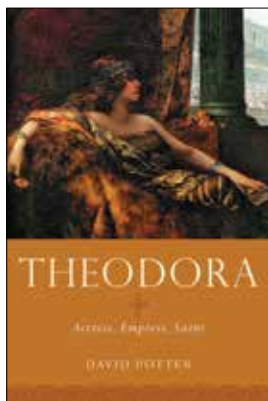
The challenge in telling Theodora’s story, as is the difficulty with any person of the past who does not leave a literary record, lies in navigating the extant historical sources. In Theodora’s case, the problem is not so much a paucity of sources as it is the striking divergence of views of Theodora that we find in the sources.

The most infamous account is that of the historian Procopius, whose *Secret History* (written ca. 551) details the sexual exploits of the teenage Theodora before moving on to describe the various ways in which she had seemingly single-handedly destroyed the Roman

world. For Procopius, Justinian and Belisarius (Justinian's chief general and Procopius's boss) were the weakest of men who sat idly by while their wives brought on the ruination of the empire.

Potter proves himself a careful exegete of the propagandistic mythmaking in the *Secret History* while noting that Procopius's diatribe does contain certain kernels of reliable information. Where he is on less certain ground—as any historian would be—is knowing exactly where the line is between fact and fiction. And, for this reviewer, there appears to be some inconsistency in Potter's reliance on Procopius.

Alternative accounts of Theodora's activity survive in a host of other, less salacious and often sympathetic sources. Especially noteworthy is the information we glean from non-Chalcedonian saints' lives. Among the most in-



triguing aspects of Theodora's career is her patronage of the Christian minority community that did not toe her husband's Christological party line. In some modern renderings, Theodora is more responsible for the ultimate survival of the Miaphysite church than any of its ancient bishops or theologians. Potter discusses the religious debates, players and Theodora's interventions in intricate detail. But it would seem that he, like the rest of us, is left somewhat in the dark as to why she was initially drawn to the community and why she was willing to grant safe haven to its leaders for so long.

Potter devotes considerable time to other aspects of Theodora's political involvement, including her role in developing Justinian's response to the famous Nika riot of 532 (which nearly toppled his rule), her hand in bridging political

alliances between would-be imperial contenders and her role in crafting legislation designed to protect prostitutes and their children. The latter is especially noteworthy in that it shows Theodora to have cared a great deal about the young women who suffered in Byzantine society in a way that she personally understood.

The book closes with a masterful discussion of the modern accounting of Theodora in literature and drama and the extent to which Procopius's sexual fantasies, masquerading as censure, continue to dominate all historical reflection concerning a woman so omnipresent and yet unknown.

In sum, this is a wonderful introduction to a world and to a woman who has been the source of legends for nearly 1,500 years.

GEORGE E. DEMACOPOULOS holds the *Father John Meyendorff & Patterson Family Chair of Orthodox Christian Studies* at Fordham University. Twitter: @GDemacopoulos.

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Positions

VOCATION PROMOTER FOR WOMEN

RELIGIOUS. Do you have a passion to work with the School Sisters of St. Francis in the U.S. by identifying, reaching out to and engaging mature professional women for full membership? • Do you need to work with a group compelled by the mission of the Gospel in the world, where your contribution makes a significant difference? • Are you an up-tempo, fast paced, high energy individual? • Do you always strive toward improving your best performance? • Are you quick to build rapport with others? • Do you enjoy continuously engaging with new people? • Do you establish yourself as a credible person?

If so, the School Sisters of St. Francis need your talent to help us grow, sustain our vibrant mission and create the future of religious life in this 21st century. Our focus as a Franciscan community is: spirituality, health care, education, the arts, and justice, peace and ecology.

Working with autonomy, you will identify, reach out to and invite mature women to discern God's call to religious life. To develop leads, you will place ads, network with relevant audiences, give presentations and develop referrals. Your initiative, creativity and commitment to excellence will yield the following timely results: identification, invitation and engagement of intelligent, naturally talented, accomplished and energetic professional Catholic women open to the invitation to discern God's call to religious life as a vocation, women who have a deepening spirituality and have

the ability to live in community as vowed members who seek to further the mission of the Gospel in the Franciscan charism of the School Sisters of St. Francis. Based at our Milwaukee Provincial Center, frequent travel and expertise with social media are musts; experience with contact management software is highly recommended.

We offer excellent compensation for this consultant position. For immediate consideration, please email your résumé and cover letter, including contact details, to ddierbeck@sssf.org, or fax: (414) 385-5313.

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Translator

Luis Baudry-Simón, translator (from English into Spanish): newsletters, articles, essays, websites, pastoral letters, ministry resources, motivational conferences, spirituality material, etc. Contact: luisbaudrysimon@gmail.com (815) 694-0713.

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Welcome Sinners

ELEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), JUNE 12, 2016

Readings: 2 Sam 12:7-13; Ps 32:1-11; Gal 2:16-21; Lk 7:36-8:3

“I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven” (Lk 7:46)

A tension in the church today mimics a tension Jesus felt with the religious experts of his own day: Why did Jesus welcome sinners without asking for a change or transformation, a turn away from their sin? Some Catholics sense something similar going on with Pope Francis. Why does Francis seem to water down the faith, welcoming in those who seem at odds with the teaching of the church? Jesus did, of course, ask sinners to stop sinning, as does Pope Francis; but there is something deeper at work regarding the complaints of those who arrayed themselves against Jesus’ behavior. The deeper question is straightforward: Why does he not notice how righteous we are?

When the sinning woman crashed Simon the Pharisee’s dinner party, Simon was taken aback: “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.” The flip side of defining this woman as a sinner is the implicit claim that Simon does not consider himself a sinner.

Jesus’ lavish acceptance of the woman known as a sinner is essential for each of us because everyone, Simon included, is a sinner. If Jesus were to reach out only to the people who were worthy of God’s forgiveness, no one

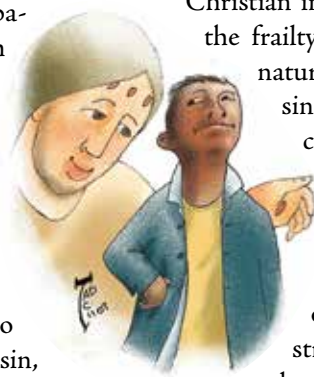
would find an outstretched hand. It is we who define ourselves as “worthy” by creating distinctions between those whom we consider “real” sinners and those whom we judge basically “righteous,” which generally includes me and those like me. But no matter how worthy we consider ourselves, God sees all of us as we are and is aware of our great need for forgiveness. To be forgiven is to acknowledge our own sin, not that of someone else.

Repenting of our sins, though, is the beginning of the process of being Jesus’ disciple, not the end. Perhaps after her encounter with Jesus, the sinning woman became known as “the woman formerly known as the sinner,” which would be nice for her, but neither she nor we ever stop being sinners during our earthly sojourn. Frustrating as it is, even in the light of God’s great forgiveness, we all remain sinners.

Jesus tells all of us to go “and from now on do not sin again” (Jn 8:11), as he told the woman accused of adultery, but we do sin again. As a result of our stumbling along the way, we must cultivate the same constant, searching need to recognize Jesus as the one to whom we must always turn, the one who has gained us salvation from the sin that lurks and stalks us, the one who offers forgiveness from the depth of God’s mercy.

Since our salvation emerges from God’s mercy and God’s mercy, thank-

fully, never ceases, we are able to return to Jesus with tears and repentance over and over. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we learn that the sacrament of reconciliation, also known as the sacrament of forgiveness, allows those who participate to “obtain pardon from God’s mercy for the offense committed against him” (No. 1422). In baptism we have become “justified in Christ”; “nevertheless, the new life received in Christian initiation has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls concupiscence, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life. This is the struggle of conversion directed toward holiness and eternal



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Think about the nature of sin, your own sins in particular. Have you talked to God about them? Have you felt God’s forgiveness? When was the last time you went to the sacrament of reconciliation?

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life to which the Lord never ceases to call us” (No. 1426).

God is never done with us, though we might sometimes feel done with ourselves, especially when “in our effort to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found to be sinners.” Faith in Christ is not a one-time event, however, but a sustained growing in holiness. The Christian life is marked not just by sinful stumbling along the way but by getting up, dusting ourselves off and walking home to Christ as often as we need to repent. And when we walk into the house to encounter Jesus, we receive the same acceptance that the sinful woman did: a welcome home.

JOHN W. MARTENS is a professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn. Twitter: @BibleJunkies.



CATHOLIC INITIATIVES

Primary Identity

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), JUNE 19, 2016

Readings: Zech 12:10-11; Ps 63:2-9; Gal 3:26-29; Lk 9:18-24

“For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith” (Gal 3:26)

Matters of personal identity loom large in today’s culture. Yet elements of identity that once seemed stable, like gender, are often seen today as products of self-construction. These elements, which might also include sexuality and definitions of family, create a fluidity of self-identity that seems to leave no solid ground, no stable place.

Many Christians find that this sort of shifting ground wreaks havoc on traditional notions of what it means to be male and female, but Paul offers a destabilizing theological equivalent in the New Testament when he writes that “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Paul states that our primary identities are no longer gender, ethnicity or social status, but that the supposedly stable characteristics of our personhood have been subsumed “in Christ Jesus.”

The language of being “in Christ,” which reflects a mystical incorporation into Christ’s body, reflects Paul’s own experience of the risen Lord, when all of his most cherished personal identity markers—“circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee” (Phil 3:5)—came to be seen by him as rubbish. The spiritual and mystical components of being “in Christ” transcend all of our human identity markers. When grounded in

the mystical body of Christ, our defining characteristics become secondary to our primary identity as Christians.

Entry into the church is for Paul entry into a new family, since “in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.” Being “in Christ” is incorporation into a new family, in which every gender, ethnicity and social status is welcome; but “child of God” transcends every other identity marker. Paul says, “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.” What Abraham, the father of nations, received was a promise for all people to be incorporated into the family of God, regardless of who you were or who you are.

Baptism is the entry point into the new family of God, and Paul says that “as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” So what does it mean to clothe oneself in Christ? For ages, people have taken clothing as a primary means of self-identity and self-expression, just as we do today. Numerous beauty and fashion bloggers people YouTube, and millions of viewers subscribe for advice on fashion, makeup and lifestyle. Clothing speaks to identity, from Brooklyn hipsters to overworked mothers on the go.

But the clothing we put on in baptism is the start of a transformation and the beginning of a new identity that supersedes our particular modes of identification. The baptismal gar-

ment identifies us not with a tribe but with the anti-tribe, the church, and calls into question our categories of identification. The white robe signals that whatever family you came from before, whatever sort of male or female identification might have troubled others, whatever your status—from Wall Street trader to low-paid fruit-picker—there is a new place of belonging “in Christ” that transcends all of it.

In our incorporation into the body of Christ, there is something significant not about how we define ourselves but about how God defines us

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Meditate on Paul’s claim that “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female.” What does it mean for you to have your primary identity as a member of the family of God? How do you understand clothing yourself in Christ?

as members of God’s family, beyond the human categories by which we draw meaning. Our identities, beyond that of beloved child, do not matter to God. This does not mean that we do not stand against sexism, racism and all forms of oppression because we live in societies that judge people by gender, race and even how they dress. But in God’s family, we are called to transcend the categories and ground our identity on the solid rock of Christ, our brother.

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