America
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A City Under Fire

Can Chicago show a path away from gun violence?

JUDITH VALENTE

OF MANY THINGS

The March for Life, the annual gathering of pro-life activists, clergy and civic leaders will take place in Washington, D.C. on Jan. 22. In our pro-life commitment, **America** is allied with the sentiments expressed in the statement by the Society of Jesus of the United States, "Standing for the Unborn," which was published in **America** on May 26, 2003. As is our annual custom, we republish excerpts from this text as an expression of our solidarity with the women and men who will march this month in the nation's capital. **MATT MALONE, S.J.**

When we, the leadership of the Society of Jesus in the United States, survey the developments unfolding in our culture, we are deeply distressed at the massive injustices. A spirit of callous disregard for life shows itself in direct assaults on human life such as abortion and capital punishment, as well as in senseless violence, escalating militarism, racism, xenophobia and the skewed accumulation of wealth and life-sustaining resources. These realities compel us to speak out against what Pope John Paul II has called "the culture of death."...

Some influential voices posit a zero-sum conflict between "women's reproductive rights" and the right to life of unborn children. Jesuits ought to find their place among those who demonstrate the obvious confluence of women's rights and respect for life in all its forms. Pope John Paul II summed this partnership up when he wrote: "Therefore, in firmly rejecting 'pro-choice' it is necessary to become courageously 'pro-woman,' promoting a choice that is truly in favor of women."...

As Catholics and Jesuits, we would naturally prefer to live in a country where every citizen, voter and court consistently favor legal recognition of and protection for the unborn.... We must acknowledge, however, that phrases such as "the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"...are phrases with contested meanings that others understand differently than we do.... The more attractive option seeks neither to flee nor to dominate situations of pluralism. It commits us rather to a process of engaging those who initially disagree with us on some issues, seeking to create an acceptable consensus wherever possible by building upon those truths on which we can reach agreement....

This path of "proposing, rather than imposing," was described by the great American Jesuit theologian of the past century, John Courtney Murray. While emphasizing the value of tolerance and mutual dialogue, he also advised against any sort of moral relativism....

Another way of describing this stance is to say that Jesuits are committed to narrowing the gap between the current civil law of our nation and the demands of the moral law as we understand it. Our long-term goal remains full legal recognition of and protection for the unborn child—from the moment of conception.

In the near future, we cannot realistically expect complete agreement among all participants in the abortion debate. We must listen respectfully to others' opinions, just as we expect a fair hearing of our own arguments against abortion. Our confidence in the persuasive power of well articulated defenses of pro-life positions sustains us, even as we acknowledge the long struggle ahead.... In the meantime, our common calling is to stand in solidarity with the unborn, the "least of our brothers and sisters" (Mt 25:40), through prayer and political activism.

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Cover: Miyoshia Bailey, holding a photo of her slain son, Cortez, speaks during a press conference in Washington, D.C., on Dec. 15, 2015, about gun violence. Reuters/Kevin Lamarque.

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ON THE WEB

Francis Clooney, S.J., explores the place of **Jesus and Mary in the Quran**, and Fordham University's president, Joseph McShane, S.J., discusses his impressions of **millennials on college campuses.** Full digital highlights on page 17 and at americamagazine.org/webfeatures.

Put Students First

The Chicago public school teachers' union (C.T.U.) voted overwhelmingly in mid-December to go on strike. The issues include compensation, teacher evaluations and layoffs. Before a strike, the union and school officials are mandated to attempt mediation. The actual strike would not begin until spring 2016.

The teachers last went on strike in 2012. And that time, according to the journalist Micah Uetricht, the union got what it was asking for, a rare major victory for organized labor. But the contract they signed in 2012 ran out last June, and negotiations since then have failed to produce a new agreement. According to the C.T.U.'s vice president, Jesse Sharkey, the union is asking for improved teaching and learning conditions with less standardized testing and less compliance paperwork, adequate staffing for both teachers and other professionals like librarians and nurses, and help from the administration with social problems that spill over into the schools. The last demand reflects the problem with violence that infects many Chicago neighborhoods.

The school situation requires the deep involvement of Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who is also under pressure to restore fractured relations between the community and the Chicago police. It requires commitment by the school board, the determination of the union to avoid a strike and the cooperation of the wider civic community, which has a profound interest in the quality of schools. The almost 400,000 students in the Chicago public schools do not need a strike. They need to learn, to grow, to hope. They need the adult community of Chicago to get behind them and to give them every chance to take their own turn some day in leading their city.

U.S. Weapons Over Yemen

The death toll in Yemen continues to pile up as the proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia grinds on. Human Rights Watch reports that more than 2,500 civilians have died—many under a bombardment maintained by Saudi coalition air attacks allegedly against rebel Houthi positions. H.R.W. documented 16 coalition airstrikes from April through October 2015 that appear to have violated international humanitarian law. In raids that led to at least 369 civilian deaths, H.R.W. researchers could not identify an evident military target or found that the strikes failed to distinguish civilians from military objectives.

If H.R.W.'s charges are borne out, the United States could be morally categorized as an accessory to the coalition's possible war crimes. The air campaign would not be possible without high-tech air capacity provided by the United States to its regional allies active in the skies over Yemen.

Human Rights Watch and other humanitarian agencies have called on the United States to halt further arms sales to Saudi Arabia and urged the U.S. Congress to focus its oversight powers on future sales and the use of U.S.-supplied precision weapons and aircraft in the conflict. "How many civilians will die in unlawful airstrikes in Yemen before the coalition and its U.S. ally investigate what went wrong and who is responsible?" asked H.R.W.'s Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director. "Their disregard for the safety of civilians is appalling."

Some U.S. senators have been roused into action by the carnage. They should be joined by fellow lawmakers. In a region already supercharged with anti-Americanism, only new enmity can be expected when shrapnel marked "made in the U.S.A." is pulled from the bodies of noncombatants. Saudi weapons sales—and military policy—need to face more critical scrutiny by Congress.

Working for Women

A report released by the United Nations Working Group on Dec. 11 about discrimination against women in the United States found that despite the country's commitment to freedom and liberty, American women are not afforded "their rightful place as citizens of the world's leading economy." The working group found that in certain careers, like politics, women are staggeringly underrepresented. While women make up nearly half of the country's workforce, they fill less than 20 percent of the seats in Congress. Women also are overrepresented in positions that earn low-income wages; in most fields, women still face a gender wage gap. Many of these issues have led to an increased percentage of women living in poverty. The report adds that impoverished women face "higher levels of violence and vulnerability."

The working group report offers suggestions, including raising the minimum wage to help combat rising poverty rates among women in the United States, providing universal health care and ensuring better access to campaign funding. The report also emphasizes the need for universal, affordable child care. Often mothers must opt between working and caring for a child. For this reason, the report states, "Women are…far more likely than men to work only part time for family care reasons." While the issues addressed in the working group's report are not new, additional suggestions and an added focus on women's rights in the United States are, unfortunately, still timely.

Peace Through Mercy

In his message for the World Day of Peace, Pope Francis began with a crucial reminder: "God is not indifferent! God cares about mankind! God does not abandon us!" The reminder may seem obvious, but it is necessary after a year like 2015, which was difficult for many. Last year saw increasing numbers of refugees, troubling religious persecution and tragic violence at home and abroad. In the face of such sorrow, some may lose hope for peace; some may despair or, perhaps worse, become indifferent to the suffering of others.

Indeed, it is all too easy to retreat into a little, private world, focused on our own desires and struggles, especially when the difficulties faced by others in our communities, whether global or local, seem so intractable. "Some people prefer not to ask questions or seek answers," Pope Francis wrote in his message. Yet as Christians this is exactly what we are called to do: to ask why injustices occur, what can be done to alleviate them and how we are called to respond.

Peace often seems unattainable. Still, the pope shows us the way forward, which is the way Christ has shown us again and again: mercy. Through mercy—transmitted and made real through solidarity, dialogue and good works—we can move closer to the peace that we desire and that our world needs. This peace is not a task only for governments and world leaders, but one that must begin with a conversion of heart, one that requires us to reject our own excuses in favor of action on local, national and global levels. We can begin with the following.

Express solidarity with the poor. We must, as Pope Francis urged in "Laudato Si'," understand that everything is connected and that the least among us often are burdened most heavily by injustice. January is Poverty Awareness Month, a reminder of the need for solidarity with the more than three billion people who live in poverty around the globe. True solidarity means taking conscious and concrete steps to include others in our lives and in the rights and privileges we may already enjoy.

Concerned Catholics can sign up through many church and nonprofit organizations for action alerts, which often include prompts to contact elected officials. Ask political leaders to act on their commitment to sustainable development; ask for just and compassionate ways to accommodate refugees and migrants; ask nations to work to address the root causes of the poverty, violence and conflict that spur such an exodus. Volunteering with or donating to organizations like Catholic Charities, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Catholic Relief Services and Jesuit Refugee Service can go a long way in supporting the church's efforts on these fronts.

Commit ourselves to compassionate, open and honest dialogue. In an increasingly secular culture, conversations about faith can be difficult or controversial, but people of faith should make an extra effort to reach out to people of other faiths and of no faith to bridge divides and promote unity. Many can agree on the obligation to serve people in need, and service projects can be a unifying event for people of all beliefs, as groups like the Interfaith Youth Core have demonstrated. Parishes should work to offer invitations for dialogue around issues like race, sexuality, power and poverty.

In his message for peace, Pope Francis pointed to the importance of families, teachers and the media in the effort to form young people into individuals who are willing to listen to others respectfully and compassionately, who are open to diverse opinions and to sharing their own experiences of faith. Parents and teachers should model and facilitate respectful dialogue. Those who work in media should recognizes their role in shaping "public opinion on difficult situations which trouble our consciences," as the pope put it, and use that power to give voice to the voiceless and for the advancement of truth, not only to achieve some objective or policy.

Act with mercy. The Gospel call to mercy asks us to work to feed the hungry, visit the sick and imprisoned and shelter the homeless, among other works. Many parishes and nonprofits offer a variety of volunteer opportunities for individuals to serve the wider community, whether through soup kitchens or visiting homebound parishioners or participating in prison ministry. These simple actions help us to turn our gaze outward to individuals in need and to the global scope of many issues that may affect them. Mercy calls us out of indifference into action and thus is a necessary step for building peace. Mercy asks us to treat both the stranger thousands of miles away and the people closest to us with the same compassion and love, seeing them all as members of one family, who, as in any family, are not always at peace but are inextricably intertwined.

REPLY ALL

Armchair Skeptics

Re "Paris Climate Check" (Current Comment, 12/21): To those who are still "skeptical" about the cause and effect of climate change, I have a simple question: If this is indeed a hoax and an inflated claim created by the liberal tree-huggers who want to prevent "poor" people from ever escaping poverty, then what is the reason that countries like China, India and Russia, who are still poor relative to the Western countries, come to the same view about the cause (mostly man-made) and effect (dangerous disruption to the economic and politic stability) of climate change? Together with big oil producers like Saudi Arabia, they have all the necessary scientific resources to debunk this hoax; and, so far, they could not produce any serious studies to this purpose.

To those who sit comfortably in the living room of your house and denounce the call of Pope Francis, as well as the effort of the world community to tackle this critical issue, do you ever look around the world so you can see for yourself the detrimental effect of climate change and pollution that is impacting so many places? If not, what is the basis for your objection—ideology, arrogance, ignorance?

DOUGLAS FANG
Online Comment

Climate Wager

Personally, I take a Pascal's wager approach to carbon emissions—even if the science is not solid in every aspect, and if the worst-case scenario is highly unlikely, it is still prudent to take measures to reduce emissions and deforestation. I am a fan of nuclear energy, fracking and other technological solutions, and I believe free-market forces will be vastly more successful than government-imposed mandates.

But I object to the global warming ideologues for 1) their quasi-religious apocalyptic language; 2) their unwillingness to deal with scientifically credible questioners; 3) their over-confidence in climate models that failed to predict the past 15 years or so of the pause or at least slow-down in global warming; 4) the fact that many leaders of the environmental movement have an anti-human, anti-Christian worldview. How many of Pope Francis' allies on reducing carbon emissions are also past or present supporters of enforced sterilization campaigns or sex-selection abortions?

So I will buy my electric car and use smart energy efficient technology but keep a skeptical eye on catastrophic projections. And I will continue to look into the assumptions and numbers behind the headlines and oppose any ideology I believe is harmful to humanity.

TIM O'LEARY
Online Comment

The Only Answer

I cannot agree with the editors' assertion in "Staring Down Terror" that there "are no easy choices ahead in confronting the Islamic State" (Editorial, 12/7). As far as I can see, it is not morally acceptable to allow terrorists to keep a country or the world fearful, ever in danger of deadly aggression, and to shed innocent blood.

Peace is always superior to war. However, adhering to St. Augustine's teaching, it is also necessary that "although charity is good, it must never be practiced contrary to sound judgment." Amen! And it has been said, "All it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to sit back and do nothing." Again, Amen! In the interests of peace, the world must unite with bonding resolve to annihilate terrorists and terrorism from the earth, repeatedly if necessary. How can anything else work?

BRUCE SNOWDEN
Online Comment

Still Paying for Iraq

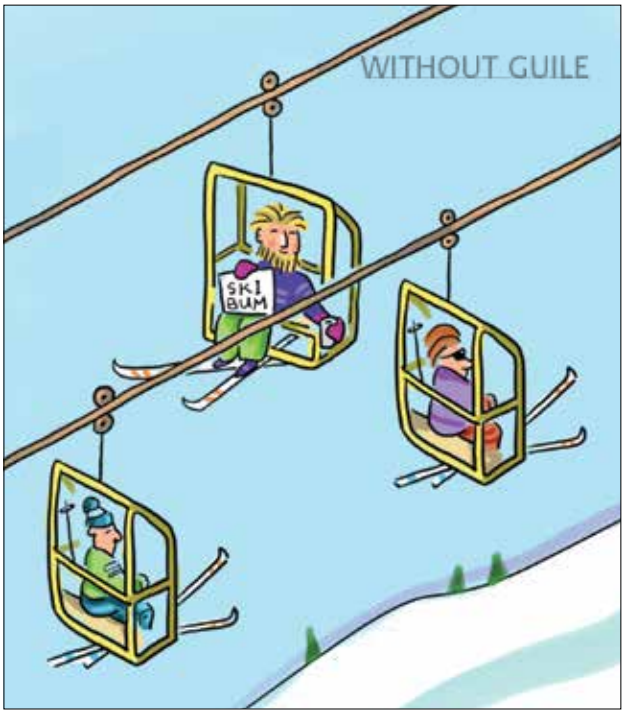
The key words in the U.S. response to the Paris attack are proportionality and noncombatant immunity. If President Bush had understood these two ideas, there would have been no invasion of Iraq in 2003. The problem with President Obama is he is Christian, sane and too intelligent for the American who loves the Donald Trump solution: "Bomb the hell out of them." Mr. Bush did that and we are still paying for it.

PAUL FERRIS
Online Comment

A Countercultural Church

It is always a pleasure to read Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J., and to appreciate the thoughtfulness of such a mind. It is also very tempting to ask whether today, 25 years after "The Uneasy Dialogue" (Vantage Point, 11/30) first appeared, he would write the same way.

Take, for example, the question of whether the church should become more "counter-



CARTOON: BOB ECKSTEIN

cultural." The church has all too often taken on the trappings of the particular culture in which it existed, particularly when those trappings seemed to enhance its power and influence. Thus, still today, its formal governance structures seem to be modeled on those of the Renaissance courts. There is a sense then, in which a truly "countercultural" church should be truthfully questioning not only the secular cultures in which it exists but the formation of its own traditional historical culture as well.

Cardinal Dulles was writing before the full force of the sexual abuse scandal broke and the enormous hypocrisy made possible by the church's authoritarian governance structures became painfully evident, even decades after the Second Vatican Council. When he talks of a "docility to authority" as part of the Catholic tradition, we must ask ourselves whether a little bit less docility might have helped prevent the church from succumbing to that particular tragic flaw.

NICHOLAS CLIFFORD
Online Comment

Shocking Study?

Contrary to the perspective of the editors in "Our Brother's Keeper" (Editorial, 11/30), I do not see the study results about white mortality as either "new" or "shocking." Anyone who lives in the modern world can see what is and has been going on. Drs. Case and Deaton formalized some of the economic factors. Without diminishing the economists' contribution in the least, however, I would appreciate seeing what sociologists, psychologists and other academic thinkers have to say in light of their research.

Further, I am not sure we want to refer to the people to whom many awful things have happened as "battered by life" because, on some level, everyone is jostled by life in some way. Moreover, this notion implies victimhood rather than resilience. It is true, however, that we inadequately care about and for those who seem to have lost meaning in their lives.

JAMES BOOTH
Online Comment

More Than a Sin

The editors write in "Smart Oversight" (Current Comment, 11/30), "The smart thing to do would be not to dismiss complaints [about sexual abuse] but rather to continue to focus the church's spotlight on this great sin." Crime. It is a crime. Treating it as a "sin" is part of what got us going in the exactly wrong direction.

MOLLY ROACH
Online Comment

The Sacrifice of Isaac

In a letter to the editor, John A. Butler objected to an interpretation of Gen 22:1-19 included in an article in the Nov. 2 issue entitled "Violence Continues Over Sacred Sites" (Reply All, 11/30). Mr. Butler asserted that Abraham was aware that he would not be asked to kill Isaac, and what made the story compelling was Abraham's wondering how God would intervene. A proper reading understands that what makes the story compelling is Abraham's angst over sacrificing the son on whom the covenant depended, yet trusting God nonetheless. Indeed, there is strong evidence to suggest that in the original version of the story Isaac was indeed sacrificed, with a redactor intervening to have the story serve ultimately as a canonical instruction against human sacrifice. It is clear that in the story Abraham believes that he will have to sacrifice Isaac.

JOSEPH ALEXANDER
Linden, N.J.

Celebrating New Life

I do not agree with the assertion in "Last Things," by John Conley, S.J., that "our capacity to mourn…the dead has palpably declined" (11/16). On the contrary, at 78 years of age, I can recall funerals hardwired for the most morose mourning; from six dirty orange candles at the casket, dour vestments and a travesty of the "Requiem Mass" screeched by three eighth-grade girls escaping algebra class.

May I suggest that we have advanced into an era in which our capacity to pray for the dead has enlarged exponentially, when properly approached. The traditional rosary at the wake service has often morphed into the parish priest joining family members of the deceased the evening prior to the Mass. I recall happily an ambiance among those present often warmed by the gradual diminution of grief—which is the object of such gatherings. Nowadays a family might ask a hand in shaping the Mass and are usually delighted to meet the priest to discuss readings, hymns, favorite stories. None of these personal touches needs diminish the thrust of the celebration toward the Father in the risen Christ and our association with him in new life.

(REV.) BRIAN M. RAFFERTY
Lake Shore, Md.

Catholics in the World

Re "Graham Greene's Pope," by Heather Moreland McHale (11/16): I agree with Pope Benedict XVI that in trying to be redemptive, politics is trying too much. Both neoconservatives and liberal progressives, for example, resolve the tensions inherent in religious freedom by simply replacing God with government. I also agree with Pope Francis that a good Catholic meddles in politics. To be in the world but not of the world does not mean you ignore the ways of the world. Though just passing through, you must of necessity relate to others and cannot avoid politics unless you join the ostrich with its head in the sand.

ERNEST MARTINSON
Online Comment

Letters to the editor may be sent to **America**'s editorial office (address on page 2) or letters@americamagazine.org. **America** will also consider the following for print publication: comments posted below articles on **America**'s website (americamagazine.org).

America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC REVIEW

"This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom… [which] has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself."

Declaration on Religious Freedom,
Dignitatis Humanae,
December 7th, 1965

***America* is proud to provide an upcoming special issue on February 29 dedicated solely to international religious freedom, a problem that deeply troubles our world today.**

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Matt Malone, S.J.
President and Editor in Chief

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DISASTER RESPONSE

Foul Weather, High Winds, Floods Claim Lives Around the World

SANDBAG BRIGADE. Local volunteers and the British Army fill sandbags on Dec. 28 to stem floodwater in York, England.

Unprecedented flooding around the world drew the attention of Pope Francis during his last general audience of 2015 in Rome on Dec. 30. Noting several rain-driven crises, he said, "I invite everyone to pray for the victims of the calamities which in these days have befallen the United States, Great Britain and South America—particularly Paraguay." Pope Francis added, "May the Lord give comfort to all these peoples, and may fraternal solidarity aid them in their need."

Paraguay has been the country hardest hit in South America by flooding that has also spread across Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, causing several fatalities and driving at least 150,000 people from their homes. Climatologists say the flooding is due to unusually heavy summer rains resulting from an intense "El Niño" weather phenomenon this year.

In the United States, severe weather that included tornadoes and flash floods killed dozens of people in December. The foul weather also brought heavy snow and freezing rain over a great stretch of the country from Texas to northern New England.

The United Kingdom was in the throes of another major north Atlantic storm as Pope Francis called for prayer and assistance in Rome. Several episodes of severe weather had already produced flooding from western Scotland to Wales.

A 78-year-old Catholic priest trapped in his home was among those rescued as floods ravaged the north of England. The Rev. John Gott was in the rectory kitchen at the Church of the Good Shepherd in the Yorkshire town of Mytholmroyd when barriers to the River Calder collapsed and a wall of water crashed into his home. The Diocese of Salford was also badly hit by the floods, with the Church of the English Martyrs in Whalley swamped by the River Calder. Worshippers have been given permission to use a neighboring Anglican church while the building is cleaned up.

The floods have caused damage collectively estimated to be around $8.6 billion. Rain fell at record levels across northern England throughout December; Scotland and Ireland also were affected. Hundreds of families were evacuated on Dec. 26 when rain arriving with Storm Eva caused widespread flooding across northern England, including Manchester, Leeds and York.

Practical ecumenism was also evident in the Lake District of Cumbria, in the Diocese of Lancaster, where Catholic, Anglican and Methodist leaders agreed to help one another, particularly with the use of church buildings, when any party requested assistance. The Rev. Tom Singleton, a priest serving in Cockermouth and Keswick, said that groups of Muslim men had also arrived from Yorkshire to help to clean up flooded areas after they saw the devastation on television.

He said the local Christian churches have a "really good tradition of

working together," but that the involvement of Muslims was new.

"To have people come in, of their own volition, is something remarkable," he said on Dec. 31.

In Carlisle, another Cumbrian town, the 600-student Newman Secondary School was lost to floods; students will start the new year being taught from trailers in a field.

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

Catholic Charities Welcomes Iraqi, Syrian Families in Michigan

As war and violence continue to rage in Iraq and Syria, hundreds of thousands of refugees have fled their homelands to find security, regardless of what the future may hold. Refugees making their way toward Europe and the United States are seeking a better, safer life, refugee advocates said.

Catholic Charities of Southeast Michigan has resettled 400 refugees in the state and wants to help more in collaboration with federal and state officials. Jeralda Hattar, director of refugee and immigration services for Catholic Charities of Southeast Michigan, said misconceptions about the process persist. "The majority of these cases have been Iraqi refugees. So far, we've only settled two Syrian families," Hattar told The Michigan Catholic, newspaper of the Detroit Archdiocese. Nearly 75 percent of Syrian refugees are women and children, Hattar said, and of those who are men, a large majority are older. In November, 31 state governors said their states would not welcome any more Syrian refugees because of security concerns. Calls from some Americans to accept only Christian refugees into the United States are unrealistic, she added.

"That's never going to happen," Hattar said. "What the Christian community needs to keep in mind is whatever you advocate nationally that is against accepting Muslim refugees ultimately affects both Muslim and Christian refugees regardless because the federal government will not distinguish in their security process."

THE FIRST STEP. Syrian refugees wait to register at the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees in Amman, Jordan, on Dec. 11.

The Obama administration plans to resettle an additional 15,000 refugees, and Hattar said Catholic Charities has the capacity to accommodate 1,100 refugees in Michigan.

For now, the agency has resettled 294 out of a projected 650 refugees for fiscal year 2015. Logistical constraints and delays in the security screening process have slowed the flow.

Concerns have been raised about the vetting process, especially after French authorities learned that one of the extremists who participated in coordinated attacks in Paris on Nov. 13 possessed identification papers from a refugee checkpoint in Greece.

When refugees apply for asylum, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees provides camps for temporary living. Before arriving in the United States, the U.S. Department of State, Homeland Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigation vet each candidate in a process that can take up to 24 months to complete.

Once cleared, refugees are assigned to organizations like the U.S. bishops' Migration and Refugee Services, which study each case to determine where to resettle an individual or families. When M.R.S. sends a case to Catholic Charities of Southeast Michigan, staff members interview the newcomers to learn where they want to live, what language and work skills they have and whether they have family in the area who might assist in their relocation.

"Our goal is to work with every individual refugee to get them to the point of self-sufficiency," Hattar said. "We consider what living preferences they might have, and if there are people of the same culture in the area. But we do promote diversity because we don't want to create 'refugee communities' that would not be economically viable."

As more refugees come into the area amid increasing debate among lawmakers, Hattar encourages local Catholics to show support.

"I would encourage all Catholics to review Catholic social teaching, read the many verses of the Bible concerning people on the run and Jesus calling on us to help a stranger. Contact your politicians, educate yourself," Hattar said.

"For those who want to do more, volunteer," she added.

"We need people to mentor refugees as they transition into life in America. Help us make our community a welcoming place and encourage them in the integration. But most of all, be open-minded."

Winter's Homeless

The first day of winter, Dec. 21, the winter solstice, is the shortest day and longest night of the year. For people who are homeless, it's a night that represents the harsh challenges of living on the streets. For the past seven years, St. John the Evangelist Homeless Shelter, a ministry of the Diocese of Green Bay, Wis., has sponsored an interfaith memorial prayer service to remember local men and women who have died while homeless. The service is part of Homeless Persons' Memorial Day, which has been sponsored nationally by the National Coalition for the Homeless since 1990. Green Bay's memorial service began near the entrance of St. John the Evangelist Church with a candlelight prayer service and circle walk. A procession into the church featured men and women carrying candles and a pair of shoes or boots representing each homeless person who died in the Green Bay area in the past year—12 people were remembered at the service. A 13th candle was lit to remember all those who died whose names were unknown.

Nuclear Power Risk

The risks of adding nuclear energy to South Africa's power grid outweigh its economic benefits, the country's Catholic Justice and Peace Commission said as it called for a halt to nuclear procurement plans and a referendum on the issue. South Africa is in a financial crisis and cannot afford the new nuclear plants, reported to cost about $100 billion, the commission said in a statement on Dec. 29 from its chairman, Bishop Abel Gabuza of Kimberley. The statement, which followed an announcement that the government would go ahead with plans to add 9,600 megawatts of nuclear energy to the country's strained grid and would call for bids, also raised concerns about the project's vulnerability to corruption. The commission urged President Jacob Zuma's administration to poll citizens on its plans. "Given the enormity of the risks that the South African government is asking its citizens to bear through the nuclear option, including the enormous safety risks and economic risks, it is only fair that the government directly consults its people on the matter," said Bishop Gabuza.

Protection Falters for Catholic Institutions

The bishops of the United States were "gravely disappointed" that the 2016 omnibus funding bill, passed on Dec. 18, did not include the Abortion Non-Discrimination Act. Without the measure, according to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic institutions that provide health care and other human services to the poor and vulnerable face legal threats "as they lack clear and enforceable protection for their freedom to serve the needy in accord with their deepest moral convictions on respect for human life." Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, president of the U.S.C.C.B., commented on Dec. 30: "No one should be forced by the government to actively participate in what they believe to be the taking of an innocent life. This is not about 'access' to abortion. The principle at stake is whether people of faith and others who oppose abortion and abortion coverage should be compelled to participate in them."

From CNS, RNS and other sources.

NEWS BRIEFS

March for Life

Because of ongoing renovation at the National Mall, the **March for Life mid-day rally** on Jan. 22 has been moved from the west front of the Capitol to the Washington Monument grounds. ✦ A **92-year-old deacon** at Queen of Heaven Parish in Albuquerque, N.M., was recovering after being mugged by three individuals who stole the Christmas offerings from his car trunk on Dec. 28. ✦ Concerned about the treatment of newcomers to the United States, New Jersey's Catholic bishops in their Christmas statement called on people of faith to "**go beyond their comfort zone**" and renew their commitment to caring for immigrants, refugees and the poor. ✦ The landmark prosecution of **Msgr. William Lynn,** the first high-ranking U.S. Catholic churchman convicted of a crime in connection with the scandal of sexual abuse by members of the Catholic clergy, will play out again after Pennsylvania court threw out his July 2012 conviction and ordered a new trial on Dec. 22. ✦ Noting in his Christmas message that this year "the celebrations of Christmas and the birth of the Prophet coincide," **Cardinal Bechara Rai of Lebanon** urged Christians and Muslims to work to preserve peaceful coexistence and called for more help for refugees.

DISPATCH | MIAMI

Mexico's 'Narco-Alms' Problem

In 2010, when I was covering Mexico's drug war, I met a Roman Catholic priest named Andrés Larios in the sweltering town of Apatzingán, in Michoacán State. He had a macabre theological problem on his hands.

At the time, Apatzingán was ruled by a vicious drug cartel known as La Familia Michoacana. Its calling card was the severed heads of rivals; that year more than 20 of them were dumped in Apatzingán's town square.

"We've had to consult our bishop," Larios told me, "about whether there's a proper way to say funeral Masses for heads without bodies."

But Larios was, and still is, sure of one thing: He and his fellow priests in Apatzingán could become victims themselves—especially as they had become more outspoken in their condemnation of local narco-mafias. Larios and half a dozen other clerics there have received death threats.

I thought of Larios in November when I read that the badly burned and beaten body of Father Erasmo Pliego had been found on a road in central Puebla State. Pliego was the 11th Mexican priest to be murdered, usually in brutal fashion, in just the past three years. Two other priests are missing, and they too are believed to be victims of drug gangs. It is a crisis Pope Francis will have to address in February during his five-day visit to Mexico, where drug violence has claimed more than 100,000 lives over the past decade.

Priests have long been caught in Latin America's narco-crossfire. But a big crux of the problem—one that bishops are loathe to acknowledge—is the church's historically ambivalent relationship with the continent's drug lords. Those kingpins are expert at cultivating Robin Hood images, and they often steer hefty sums to the Catholic church and the social projects it oversees, including schools, hospitals and soup kitchens.

Drug kingpins are expert at cultivating Robin Hood images.

In the 1980s, the all-powerful Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar used his largesse to co-opt Catholic priests and bishops in the region near his base city, Medellín. They became some of his most admiring apologists.

A generation later, the same phenomenon hit Mexico—especially in poor towns like Tezontle, in the central state of Hidalgo. There, for example, authorities discovered that a Catholic chapel built in 2009 had been funded by one of the most violent narco-bosses in Mexico's history: Heriberto Lazcano, head of the bloodthirsty Zetas cartel.

It really did not take much investigating: A plaque on the chapel's wall named Lazcano as the benefactor. The local bishop had to admit that Zeta money had been donated to—or in some cases laundered through—other churches in his diocese.

Mexicans have even coined a sardonic term for the arrangement: *narco-limosnas*, "narco-alms."

But when organized crime gets accustomed to that kind of cooperation, it lashes out all the more fiercely at clerics who don't play the game—priests who might use their pulpits to decry the senseless drug-related murders, for example. Or who help victims' families seek justice. Or who simply don't grant gangsters the V.I.P. treatment they're used to getting, like fast-tracked weddings or annulments.

Any of those reasons could have triggered the murder in December 2014 of the Rev. Gregorio López, who was found with a bullet to his head after being kidnapped in southern Guerrero State. López was the third priest killed that year in Guerrero—which just three months earlier had been the scene of the disappearance, and presumed massacre, of 43 college students by politically connected narco-thugs.

That atrocity has shaken many Mexican priests out of their silence toward the drug cartels. And that, unfortunately, has put more of them in the cartels' crosshairs.

But in a country where less than 5 percent of violent crimes are ever solved, *los narcos* have the upper hand. As a result, Mexico has now supplanted Colombia as the world's most dangerous place for priests, according to the Mexico City-based Catholic Media Center. Despite that dubious distinction, critics say Mexico's government and church hierarchy have failed to speak out forcefully enough against the attacks.

Pope Francis can rectify that during his Mexico visit—whose itinerary includes Michoacán State. I hope he gets to meet Father Larios.

TIM PADGETT

TIM PADGETT, *Latin America editor for NPR affiliate WLRN, is* ***America****'s Miami correspondent.*

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A Path for the New Year

At the end of a year of political chaos and Congressional dysfunction, something remarkable happened. Washington did its job. The year 2015 brought the tearful resignation of a speaker, a bombastic Republican frontrunner and a socialist challenger to the Clinton coronation. But another surprise was that Republican and Democratic leaders negotiated and passed and the president signed major budget and tax legislation. There was no shutdown, less drama and more dialogue, less brinkmanship and more leadership.

Could it be the so-called Francis factor? In September, Pope Francis told Congress, "You are called to defend and preserve the dignity of your fellow citizens in the tireless and demanding pursuit of the common good." On Capitol Hill, I found leaders challenged by the pope's call to see politics as a vocation. Clearly, John Boehner's decision to leave the speakership and Paul Ryan's reluctant decision to accept it brought different dynamics and a willingness to work together.

The Christmas miracle was that reasonable compromise prevailed over partisan combat and ideological stalemate. The expected extension of business tax breaks for powerful interests was matched by the extension of tax credits for poor working families. Bipartisan education and transportation bills were passed and signed. Congress funded the federal government without paralyzing policy riders often demanded by partisan warriors.

This outbreak of legislative sanity contrasted with the exploitation of legitimate fear and economic frustration for extreme policies by leading Republican presidential candidates. Donald Trump tweeted, defended and doubled down on his unconstitutional call to deny access to the United States because of a person's religion. He extended his call to demonize and deport undocumented immigrants to now disqualify any Muslim from coming to our country, simply because of his or her faith. Speaker Ryan, breaking his no-comment rule on the campaign, later said the Trump proposal on Muslims "is not what this party stands for, and, more importantly, it's not what this country stands for." In fact, we protect American values by practicing them, including religious freedom and welcoming refugees, in difficult moments.

> There was more dialogue, less brinkmanship and more leadership.

In contrast to the angry campaign, Speaker Ryan in a major speech at the Library of Congress offered predictable partisan and ideological points, but added: "We are not here to be someone but to do something—to serve our country. We believe in the American Idea: The condition of your birth should not determine the outcome of your life. And we want to do our part to pass on that idea to the next generation. We do not see politics as a popularity contest. To us, it is a calling."

President Obama at his year-end press conference took a political victory lap and defended his sometimes tone-deaf response to terror but also commended the bipartisan agreement. He said: "There's still a lot more that Congress can do to promote job growth and increase wages in this country. I still want to work with Congress— both Democrats and Republicans—to reform our criminal justice system."

President Obama, Speaker Ryan and other leaders welcomed and expressed respect for Pope Francis. The pope's New Year's peace message outlines an agenda that his Washington admirers could work on together. Francis called for "specific and courageous gestures of concern for the most vulnerable… prisoners, migrants, the unemployed and the infirm." He also called for addressing wages, working conditions and discrimination against women in the workplace; praised "the search for new ways to confront climate change and to protect the earth"; and warned against undermining "the fundamental and inalienable right to life of the unborn."

In this New Year's message, Pope Francis warned against "destructive cynicism" and "the globalization of indifference." Both are terrible temptations in this election year. Francis calls for an "attitude of mutual responsibility" requiring us "to act together in solidarity…to demonstrate concern for the more vulnerable of our brothers and sisters and for the protection of the common good." This is not the usual political path in Washington or on the campaign trail, but it offers a better way forward for our nation in this New Year.

JOHN CARR

JOHN CARR *is* ***America****'s Washington correspondent and director of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University. He previously served as director of the justice and peace department at the U.S. Bishops' Conference.*

Can Chicago offer an example of a path away from gun violence?

A City Under Fire

BY JUDITH VALENTE

HANDS UP. Demonstrators confront police officers during a protest in reaction to the fatal shooting of Laquan McDonald in Chicago, Ill., on Nov. 27, 2015.

PHOTO: REUTERS/ANDREW NELLES

As the world properly focuses its attention on the recent carnage in San Bernardino, Paris and elsewhere and concerns grow over whether terrorists will soon strike again, a different kind of terror continues to afflict people in the United States. It is the daily violence on U.S. streets, often involving the nation's youth and, regrettably, sometimes its police.

In the nation's heartland, the city of Chicago offers a troubling profile in violence that is becoming familiar in other cities as well. More than 2,800 people were shot in Chicago last year, and by December 2015 there had been 417 gun homicides, up almost 20 percent from the previous year.

Chicago's suffering became vividly clear to the nation with the release on Nov. 24 of a police video of an incident captured in October 2014. It showed a uniformed officer repeatedly firing at the teenager Laquan McDonald, even as he lay wounded in the street. Large pro-

JUDITH VALENTE, ***America****'s Chicago correspondent, is a regular contributor to NPR and "Religion and Ethics Newsweekly." Twitter: @JudithValente.*

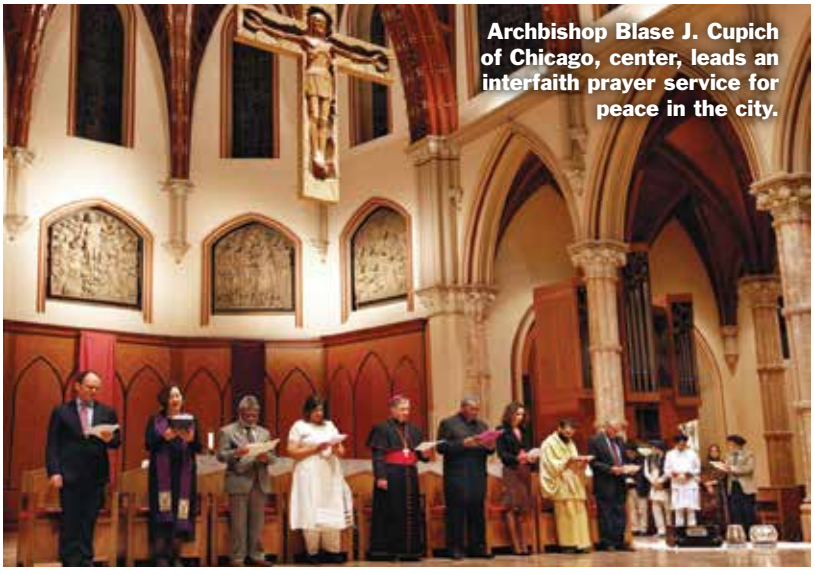
tests followed the release of the video, and Chicago's Mayor Rahm Emanuel quickly fired the police superintendent, Garry McCarthy. A federal probe into police procedures in Chicago has been initiated as calls for the mayor's resignation grow louder.

Even before the McDonald controversy, the city had been reeling from the execution-style murder of 9-year-old Tyshawn Lee. A fourth-grader who dreamed of playing in the N.B.A., Tyshawn was lured from a basketball court into an alley and shot at close range in the head and back. His presumed offense: he was the son of a reputed gang member.

Just a few weeks before Tyshawn's murder, an 11-month-old baby was shot while being held in his mother's arms. His mother and grandmother were gunned down. Only the baby survived.

Tyshawn Lee's suspected killer is alleged to have been seeking revenge for the shooting deaths of his own mother and brother. According to prosecutors, the 27-year-old Terror Dome gang member reportedly vowed to kill "grandmas, mamas, kids and all" in his South Side Auburn Gresham neighborhood.

"We're a city of walking wounded families," said the community activist and crisis responder Dawn Valenti.



Archbishop Blase J. Cupich of Chicago, center, leads an interfaith prayer service for peace in the city.

South-Side Peacemaking

Leo Tolstoy, surveying the chaos and suffering of 19th-century Moscow, asked, "What then can be done?" It is a question our churches and communities need to be asking. Fortunately, there are many in Chicago who have taken up the challenge to bring hope and healing.

Ms. Valenti is part of a crisis team called Chicago Survivors. The group includes many mothers who have lost children to violence, mothers like Toneya McIntosh, whose teenage son was killed.

"It's a struggle every day for me and my family to wake up knowing I can't see him no more, can't hear his voice, see that beautiful smile," Ms. McIntosh says.

Or like Diana Aguilar, whose 6-year-old daughter, Aliyah, died in a drive-by shooting.

"You're nervous, you're scared, you don't know what to do," Ms. Aguilar says about the aftermath of a shooting.

Chicago Survivors' corps of volunteers arranges counseling for victims' families, organizes funerals and candlelight vigils, helps families navigate the police investigative process and sends "Peacemaker" speakers into the schools. In one recent case, Ms. Valenti even arranged for professional cleaners to remove the blood stains from a family's car, where two young men died in a gang-related ambush.

Susan Johnson, an American Baptist minister, heads Chicago Survivors. Ms. Johnson was pastor at a church not far from where the Obamas have a home in Chicago's Hyde Park-Kenwood neighborhood. She decries what she calls "the normalcy we've ascribed to seeing a murder a day."

Lingering spiritual questions are often the hardest to address in gun violence cases. Ms. Johnson says family members are angry, frequently at God. About 75 percent of those families have small children still in the home. They often experience subsequent panic attacks. Early and repeated exposure to violence can affect their ability to learn and to interact with others.

"It's very difficult to stay by the side of a survivor. Their path to recovery is a long one," Ms. Johnson says.

Support from local churches and pastors is essential, but often missing, she adds. "Very few walk the anti-violence walk."

Looking for Alternatives

David Kelly, a Precious Blood priest, is one of those who are trying to walk that walk. Father Kelly is a leader in a movement called Restorative Justice. His work as a chaplain at the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center led him to conclude that putting kids in jail fuels crime instead of preventing it.

Restorative justice focuses less on punishing crime than on seeing how those who have perpetrated a wrong can make it right. It calls for building a greater sense of community in troubled neighborhoods and for creating dialogue between warring groups.

"We're not just nice people doing nice things," Father Kelly says. "Restorative justice looks at the issue of who was harmed, who did the harm and how we can repair the harm. It deals with relationships, because ultimately, crime is a violation of relationship."

CNS PHOTO/KAREN CALLAWAY, CATHOLIC NEW WORLD

It is also a way, he says, of holding kids accountable "without labeling them demons or criminals." And, he adds, it is gaining support among a growing number of judges who hear juvenile cases.

The United States continues to incarcerate more youths than any other country in the industrialized world—an estimated 70,800 juveniles in 2010. That is more than the population of several U.S. state capitals.

While youth violence remains an intractable problem, an overwhelming majority of incarcerated young people have been jailed for nonviolent offenses, and African-American youth are nearly five times as likely to be confined as their white peers. "No Place for Kids," a report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 2011, found that juveniles who spend time in detention have higher rates of recidivism than those placed in alternative programs, are less likely to return to school and are less likely to find jobs.

Then there is the cost of incarceration. It takes an estimated $66,000 to $88,000 to house a young person in a correctional facility for nine to 12 months—far more than it costs to attend some public universities for a year.

But there is also reason for hope. The number of juveniles in detention has dropped by about 30,000 from a 1995 high of 107,600. That is due in part to efforts to seek new, innovative responses to delinquency that are more humane and cost-effective, especially for non-violent and first-time offenders.

The veteran Cook County Juvenile Court judge Colleen Sheehan is one of those looking for alternatives. Ms. Sheehan supports a proposal to form restorative justice community courts for offenders 18- to 24-years-old. Offenders in that age group, she says, currently have fewer alternative options than juveniles have.

"We're coming to a point in time when [courts] have to do something different, new and innovative," Ms. Sheehan says, "or we're going to become irrelevant."

The judge has sent some of her juvenile offenders to gatherings called Peace Circles, organized by Father Kelly and held with offenders, victims and their families. In these meetings, each side can freely express emotions and come to some sort of resolution.

Peace Circles for conflict resolution have their roots in both Quaker and Native American spirituality. At one recent circle, a teenager had to face a young father whose home he had burglarized.

"Little by little, people spoke, not to the issue of the burglary, but of themselves," Father Kelly recalls. "People began to lean in and engage one another in a more intimate way." The burglary victim and the teenager who robbed him learned they had much in common. Both had absentee fathers and overworked mothers who struggled to provide for them.

The man whose home was burglarized said what disturbed him the most was not that a window was broken and some of his possessions stolen but that his 5-year-old son said to him afterward, "Daddy, I don't want to live here any more."

"What he had vowed as a father, to protect his son and give him a home that was safe, was taken from him in the burglary," Father Kelly said.

The Peace Circle ended with the young father saying what he wanted as restitution: for the young boy to return to school and check in with him periodically on his progress.

Like Susan Johnson of Chicago Survivors, Father Kelly says churches have been largely missing in action in the struggle against youth violence. "The churches need to open their doors. They need to make kids feel welcome," he says. "Instead, churches are afraid of these kids. They need to go out, find these kids and build relationships so they can feel they belong."

Archbishop Blase Cupich of Chicago has urged the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to make gun control and curbing gun violence one of the church's top priorities in the 2016 presidential election. The archbishop recently told the Chicago Federation of Labor, "I want the church to become an even more committed partner...joining with business, government and labor in promoting the lives and dignity of those who are too often left behind in our city, nation and the world."

A Short Life, Destined for Tragedy

Of course, a few isolated programs alone cannot solve the problem. The Rev. Michael Pfleger, a longtime Chicago activist, says there has been a consistent lack of will on the part of government, business and churches to address the root causes of urban violence in neighborhoods.

"We've got to confront our failed education systems and the lack of options and opportunities," Father Pfleger said at Tyshawn Lee's funeral. "We've got to look at the broken bridge between law enforcement and the community... to confront the gun lobby and the NRA [National Rifle Association] who is running to the bank while blood runs in our streets."

A recent report on the Cook County juvenile justice system sponsored by Roosevelt University and Adler University in Chicago found that putting teenagers into the penal system disrupts their connection to school, particularly their ability to receive special education services. The report also said incarceration adds to mental health issues, raises the risk of suicide and increases their acceptance of criminal thinking.

Furthermore, the study notes, "participants identified the paradox of not being able to receive any preventative services for themselves and/or their children without first becoming involved with the [criminal] justice system."

The death of Laquan McDonald, the young man whose shooting was captured on that now-infamous police video, did not occur in a vacuum. It came at the end of a short life that seemed destined for tragedy. At the age of 3, Mr. McDonald was taken by the Department of Children and Family Services from a mother who neglected him. He was returned home, but at the age of 5, was removed again after his mother's boyfriend beat him.

Mr. McDonald was sent to another foster home before a grandmother took him in and gave him some semblance of stability. She died when he was 15. Less than a year later, he was picked up on his first charge—possession of marijuana. He had been attending an alternative school for 16- to 21-year-olds and seemed to be doing better. But on the night of his death, according to police, traces of P.C.P. were found in his body.

What if Tyshawn Lee's murderer had been offered the chance to be part of one of Father Kelly's Peace Circles long before the Terror Dome gang took hold of his life? What if there were enough safe havens for Laquan McDonald? Would he have turned to a life of petty crime and drugs before dying in a hail of bullets?

It may sound naïve to propose inviting police and angry community leaders or police officers and suspects into peace-making circles. But is it any crazier than what is happening on Chicago's streets?

What then can be done, indeed. A

States Can't Block Refugees

As the U.S. Supreme Court reaffirmed in its 2012 decision, Arizona v. United States, the federal government's power to regulate immigration is pre-eminent and may not be disrupted by state laws. Federal authority is grounded in Congress's power to establish a "uniform Rule of Naturalization" and the inherent sovereign powers of the executive branch. As Justice Kennedy wrote, "Immigration policy can affect trade, investment, tourism, and diplomatic relations for the entire Nation.... Perceived mistreatment of aliens in the United States may lead to harmful reciprocal treatment of American citizens abroad."

Refugees are defined as persons who have fled their home countries and have "a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion." Persons who have participated in the persecution of others are not considered refugees. Nations assist refugees by providing transportation to safe zones, funding refugee camps and services, and granting legal (asylee) status to people, like the millions of recent arrivals in Europe, who relocate on their own. The United States is one of the few countries that has a formal resettlement program that takes refugees from the country to which they originally fled and relocates them in a third country.

Most refugees resettled in the United States are first identified, registered and assessed by the United Nations or one of its partners, like the International Catholic Migration Commission, as qualified for and in need of resettlement. All refugee applicants are interviewed and vetted outside the United States, and anyone who is deemed a threat to the security of the United States is rejected for resettlement. Refugees from Syria are subject to additional scrutiny. When a person is approved for resettlement, the federal government works with select U.S. nonprofits, including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, to identify welcoming communities and suitable homes for refugees. The federal government also works with state governments to fund and provide basic social services to refugees during their initial adjustment period.

Police powers of the states do not trump federal control of immigration.

State challenges to refugee resettlement. State objections to the resettlement of refugees from Syria and Iraq are based on the same general authority to protect the peace relied upon by Arizona when it created state law penalties for persons without lawful immigration status. The Supreme Court struck down those laws because even the broad, constitutionally recognized police powers of the states do not trump federal control of immigration. Thus, with regard to refugee resettlement, states may not prevent the federal government from admitting refugees, nor prevent religious and nonprofit organizations from resettling refugees within their borders. They also may not stop refugees resettled elsewhere from moving to their states nor deny state benefits to otherwise qualified refugees. States also are prevented from implementing discriminatory policies based on religion, race and country of origin.

Federal refugee discrimination. Unlike the state governments, Congress may pass discriminatory immigration laws when justified by U.S. national interests. Refugee laws, by their very nature, are designed to protect specific groups from persecution. Congress, however, shares immigration power with the executive branch. The current administration has deemed Syrian and Iraqi resettlement of special concern to U.S. interests. No one can say with absolute certainty that a person is not a security threat. Thus, bills that would require such certification would effectively terminate refugee resettlement and would be vetoed by President Obama.

Even when acting in unison, however, Congress and the president still are constrained by the Constitution. A law that bans all Muslims from entering the country, for example, must be absolutely essential to national security to pass the strict scrutiny standard required by the First Amendment. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court's 1944 Korematsu decision, which upheld the internment of U.S. citizens of Japanese descent and has never been overruled, serves as a reminder of what is possible. As Justice Scalia recently noted: "Of course, Korematsu was wrong. But you are kidding yourself if you think the same thing will not happen again. *Inter arma enim silent leges*." In times of war, the laws fall silent.

ELLEN K. BOEGEL

ELLEN K. BOEGEL, *who teaches legal studies at St. John's University in New York, clerked for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.*

Saving Syria

ISIS seeks to control the country's future by destroying its Christian past.

BY MICHAEL PEPPARD

Jan. 18, 1932. Dura-Europos, Syria. Block M8. Perched high above the Euphrates River, Clark Hopkins reflected on a momentous day of excavations in the desert of eastern Syria and penned the following in his diary:

> In the fresco room in front of the tower south of the Main Gate the dirt came off one section and showed 5 people in a boat—2 standing below, one on a bed on the shore. Above, a god on a cloud...

Over the next three days, Clark Hopkins and Henry Pearson, professors from Yale University's departments of classics and fine arts, would dig, scrape and brush away 1,700 years of the past. The cosmopolitan city of Dura-Europos, a fortified crossroads that connected western Syria to Mesopotamia during the Hellenistic and Roman eras, had already yielded abundant art and artifacts. But this room seemed unique. Working with their Armenian foreman, Abdul Messiah, the professors found that each wall of the rectangular room on this block held paintings: on one a shepherd with a flock of sheep; below this a male and a female figure near a tree and a serpent. Shortly thereafter, the first inscriptions were found amid the frescoes, one of which read, "Christ, remember me, the humble Siseos."

MICHAEL PEPPARD *is associate professor of theology at Fordham University. His new book,* The World's Oldest Church: Bible, Art, and Ritual at Dura-Europos, Syria, *has just been published by Yale University Press.*

FIRST CHURCH. West Portico of the Dura-Europos synagogue in 2008.

IMAGE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/MARSYAS

Suddenly the paintings took on a stunning symbolism. That "god on a cloud" was not an image from Syrian, Greek or Roman mythology. It was one of the oldest depictions of Jesus Christ, seemingly hovering, arm outstretched, over a man in need of healing. Hopkins, Pearson and Messiah had uncovered the world's oldest extant Christian church—dating from about the year 250.

They were looking at the only church walls to survive from before the rule of Constantine, opening a small window into the era before imperial support for Christianity, before wealth flowed into the church coffers, indeed at the exact time the emperor Decius was enacting the first general persecution of Christians. These four walls held the answer to a centuries-old question: Outside of the catacombs in Rome, what did early Christians paint on their walls?

Selective Destruction

During my years of writing a book about the excavation and interpretation of this building, there has been a distinct change in the questions people ask me about it. Until about a year ago, the main question was, "What new is there to say about such an old discovery?" But now the first question everyone asks is, "What has happened to the site—did they... destroy it?"

The answer to this question is both no and yes. The Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, has certainly been to Dura-Europos in the past two years. The only reason they did not destroy the church is because they could not: its walls were removed by the Yale excavation team decades ago. Several of the panels remain safely on display in the Yale University Art Gallery. Similarly the synagogue discovered down the street from the church—arguably the most important extant synagogue from the ancient world—was removed decades ago and is housed, at least for now, in the National Museum of Damascus.

So ISIS could not destroy the monumental third-century Jewish and Christian buildings from this city. But satellite photographs from 2014 do show extensive looting of the site, which all but destroys it for future archaeological purposes. The Geospatial Technologies Project, sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, performed a detailed analysis of high-resolution satellite imagery and found that "Dura-Europos has been

Detail of a baptistry wall painting of Jesus healing the paralytic, from the Yale-French excavations at Dura-Europos in Syria; Roman, third century A.D.

IMAGE: YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY

subjected to extremely heavy looting. Inside the ancient city wall the disruption was so extensive that counting of individual looting pits was impractical." As of April 2014, they estimated that 76 percent of the city had been looted, and this does not count roughly 3,750 individual looting pits outside the city walls. In one satellite photo from 2014, four vehicles were present in the otherwise deserted city, suggesting that looting was ongoing—a fact corroborated by on-the-ground reports.

At first glance, the looting of small artifacts might seem to run counter to ISIS's tendency toward destruction. This seeming contradiction invites us to reflect on their cynical and shortsighted strategy for dealing with the cultural patrimony of Syria. On the one hand, ISIS has been intentionally destroying monumental forms of cultural property that are not seen to fit within their very constricted notion of Syrian culture. They are trying to control the future narrative of Syrian culture by eliminating the diversity of its past.

Dura-Europos had been a perfect signal of such diversity, with religious structures dedicated to gods that were Greek, Roman, Sumerian, Parthian, Palmyrene and Judean in origin. The Roman era of the city also showed extensive linguistic diversity. Although the Greek language retained its cultural dominance and Latin became an administrative language, the remains exhibited Hebrew, various forms of Aramaic (including Palmyrene, Syriac and Hatrian, from eastern Mesopotamia), northern Arabic and Iranian (including Parthian and Middle Persian). In terms of religion, language and culture, Dura-Europos was thus exactly the kind of tolerant crossroads that is unwelcome under ISIS's ideologically strict regime. If large monuments had remained, they almost certainly would have been destroyed.

On the other hand, ISIS has not been destroying the small artifacts discovered amid Dura's innumerable looting pits. Rather, they seem to be organizing the monetization of portable cultural property—pottery, statuettes, reliefs, coins. In other words, an image of a Greek god on a monument needs to be destroyed with a hammer and broadcast around the world by video. But if an image of a god is found on a small statuette, ISIS regards it not as an idol but as currency. And quite a currency it has become: Western intelligence experts have estimated that antiquities are the second-largest source of revenue (after oil) for the regime.

Such inconsistency with regard to cultural property shows that ISIS is likely not concerned about the long-term benefits of Syria's rich and diverse heritage. Yes, portable objects can bring short-term financial support, but sending them all abroad means most are never coming back. And though broadcasting the destruction of monuments and buildings may bring a short-term boost in recruitment to their ideology, it undermines one of the best sources of long-term revenue for Syria, which is tourism to its many famous sites.

"One day, this conflict will end," said Amr al-Azm, who used to work for the Syrian Antiquities Ministry, "and when it does, Syrians are going to need to rally around something in order to rediscover a common national identity." But, he continued, "when your past has been destroyed, what basis is there for people to want to live together again?" This is exactly what ISIS wants to destroy—any historical foundation for cultural pluralism.

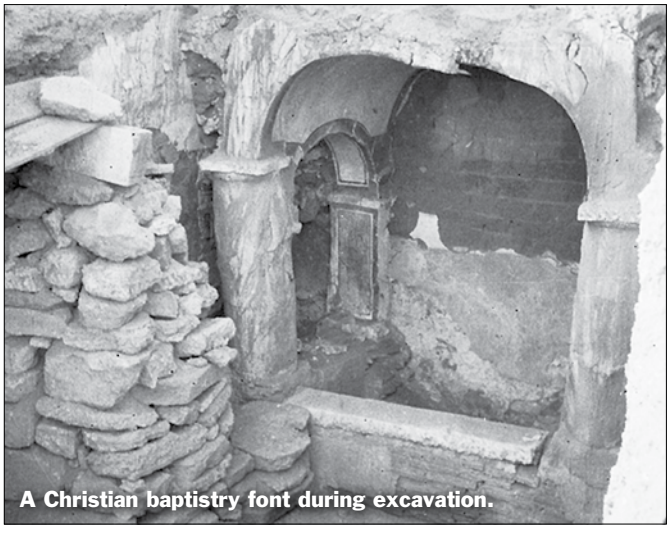
A Disappearing Past

The march of ISIS leaves a trail of unknown unknowns regarding the history of early Christianity in the rest of Syria. Archaeology in the region is one of the last remaining sources of knowledge about the formative centuries of the world's

largest religion, but those sources are being eliminated or otherwise removed from their archaeological context.

Prior to ISIS, the government of Syria actually had so many church mosaic floors from its countryside that it did not have enough museum space to display them. Mosaics that would have been prominently displayed in galleries of almost any other country were crated in storage facilities at the museum of Ma'arat al-Numan. And now during the current war, that museum—built specifically to house mosaics from the region—has been repurposed as a fortification and munitions depot. In June of this year, it was bombed, apparently by Syrian government helicopters.

Smaller, more fragile items will fare even worse. During the Dura-Europos excavations, a fragment of parchment was discovered that shows Greek verses of the Diatessaron



A Christian baptistry font during excavation.

(an ancient harmonization of the four Gospels popular in Syria). It remains the oldest manuscript fragment of that influential text, and among the oldest fragments of biblical texts from anywhere. How many more items like this have been ground to shreds during amateur excavations or sent off to careless collectors?

While the human tragedy of Syrian refugees justifiably occupies our attention—and nothing should distract Western Christians from it—the destruction and dispersal of Syrian antiquities tells a parallel narrative. We are losing irreplaceable opportunities to bolster and pass on the distinctive emphases within ancient Syrian identity: the focus on Christ as a physician of bodies and souls, the narratives of the Diatessaron and the apostle Thomas, the early and robust devotion to the Virgin Mary, the motif of salvation as a marriage ritual and more.

Previously buried images of Jesus' walking on the water, David's slaying of Goliath and a procession of veiled, torch-bearing women can draw us closer to ancient Christian faith from the eastern frontier of the Roman empire. We may even find, as I argue in my book's conclusion, that the earliest securely dateable image of the Virgin Mary was misidentified in 1932 and has been hiding in plain sight at the Yale University Art Gallery. The Christians at Dura-Europos still have secrets to reveal about early Christianity in the East. But chances to access their particular form of Christian identity are slipping away.

'The Cradle of Christianity'

Syrian Christians produced unique ecclesiastical offices and dramatic portrayals of saintliness, like Pelagia of Antioch and Simeon Stylites, the ascetic whose characteristic pillar was the center of a major pilgrimage complex from the fifth century onward. Earlier this year ISIS entered the church and complex, known as Deir Semaan (Monastery of Simeon), outside of Aleppo. While they apparently did not destroy the early Byzantine structures, stone quarrying and looting were reported. The Geospatial Technologies Project further noted that a satellite photo from August 2014 shows a large tent-like structure erected in the basilica of St. Simeon. Except for illicit excavation, it is difficult to imagine why else a large tent would be set up inside a Byzantine basilica during a war.

With such human and cultural destruction unfolding before our eyes, the temptation to despair is strong. Scholars of the ancient world usually lack the expertise to recommend policy responses to these crises. In lieu of that, several organizations have built up an impressive digital infrastructure for the organization and dissemination of information about Syria's cultural property.

The French trilingual Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology is among the best databases, as is the English bilingual, multimedia resource Manar al-Athar, based at the University of Oxford. Australian Ross Burns runs the excellent Monuments of Syria website. Scholars from Spain have more recently started Heritage for Peace, an organization that leads clear discussions of cultural heritage issues and law. The U.S. Department of State has joined efforts with the American Schools of Oriental Research on the Syrian Heritage Initiative. Finally, Syria's state-run Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums is mostly in Arabic but has snippets of news in English, too.

These organizations are playing a vital role by documenting Syrian heritage, so that its future can be rooted in the truth about its past. That past includes perhaps the most distinctive Christian culture from the ancient world. Syria has often been called "the cradle of Christianity," since at Antioch the disciples of Jesus "were first called Christians." And in Damascus, the apostle Paul made one of his most famous escapes from danger. Here in our own time, after 2,000 years of unbroken Christian tradition in Syria, both its people and cultural property are in dire need of salvation.

PHOTO: YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY, DURA-EUROPOS COLLECTION.

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Teacher, Heal Thyself

Fixing the nation's education crisis requires elementary thinking.

BY RAYMOND A. SCHROTH

After navigating St. Joseph's Prep, Fordham University and the United States Army, inspired by several Jesuit teachers who had kept writing to me when I was far from home, I joined the Jesuits. Four years later in 1961, I found myself standing in McQuaid Jesuit High School in Rochester, N.Y., before my first class. I had only my novitiate, two years of philosophy and a short summer workshop behind me to prepare for the job. Was that enough to outsmart the 14-year-old mind?

We had heard the old teacher adage, "Don't smile before Christmas," but our principal had armed us with a trick to establish our authority right away: Create an opportunity to publicly chastise a student to let them know who is in charge. For example, as class begins, a student near the door will probably get up and close it. Quickly snap, "Who told you to close that door?"

Alas, one of my students did just that, and I corrected him for all to see. I went on to teach the class. Afterward, the offending student, trembling, came up to apologize. It dawned on me—perhaps on the class as well—that I was a stupid jerk. I would not try that again.

Jacques Barzun, in *From Dawn to Decadence*, described the Jesuits as schoolmasters "unsurpassed in the history of education." They knew that "born teachers are as scarce as true poets," so they devised a "preparation that included exhaustive learning and a severe winnowing of the unfit at every phase of a long apprenticeship." My apostolate had begun.

Besides teaching religion, English and world history (of which I knew little), I moderated a literary magazine and made some friends for life. Someone gave the school a horse, so I organized a riding club at a local stable. After ordination I taught at five Jesuit universities, was dean at two and taught journalism part time at three secular universities.

The Society of Jesus, along with the teaching profession, has changed a lot since 1961. That year there were 27 Jesuits teaching at McQuaid; today, in a community of six, two Jesuits teach at the school. Meanwhile at the 30 new Cristo Rey high schools around the country—mainly serving financially disadvantaged students of color, of whom 88 percent go on to college—the pupils also learn social skills and work one day a week in business offices to help pay their tuition. About a third of these schools are Jesuit enterprises. Today there are 28 Jesuit colleges and universities and 63 high schools, but lay persons have widely assumed leadership in both. Fewer young Jesuits are available to get doctorates and pursue tenured positions.

Nevertheless, Jesuits remain united on the goals of their schools. In *Jesuit Schools and the Humanities Yesterday and Today*, historian John W. O'Malley, S.J., lists the "five hooks" that unify Jesuit teaching:

1. It releases the "fly in the bottle," that is, it helps students escape the bondage of unexamined assumptions.

2. It helps students understand our pasts, where we came from.

3. It communicates a commitment to "faith that does justice." That comes from Cicero's "We are not born for ourselves alone." Our talents are given us to serve.

4. It offers a study of the great literature so we can fit words to thought—that's called *eloquentia perfecta*.

5. Its humane letters sharpen students' aesthetic sensibilities—teaching prudence to make wise decisions. These principles remain relevant today.

Common Core Work

Today the teaching profession can, at times, be compared to a gym in which the teacher is a boxer past his prime getting battered against the ropes. Fights concern the federal government's attempt to raise the academic standards through programs like No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top. The long-term goals are to produce an educated work force even as the United States falls behind other countries both in its schooling and in the industrial marketplace. An emphasis on economics and technology satisfies those who see the school system as a training ground for their factories and corporations; but humanists who see the English enrollments sliding consider it intellectual suicide to push aside the liberal arts—literature, art, philosophy, history—which feed the students' souls as well as teach them to think, write and speak well.

The main instrument for national reform is the Common Core, initiated by the National Governors Association. The resistance to the Common Core is broad. Many parents are confused by the new curriculum which followed the new standards, especially in math, and a new onslaught of standardized testing. Unionized faculty dislike being evaluated

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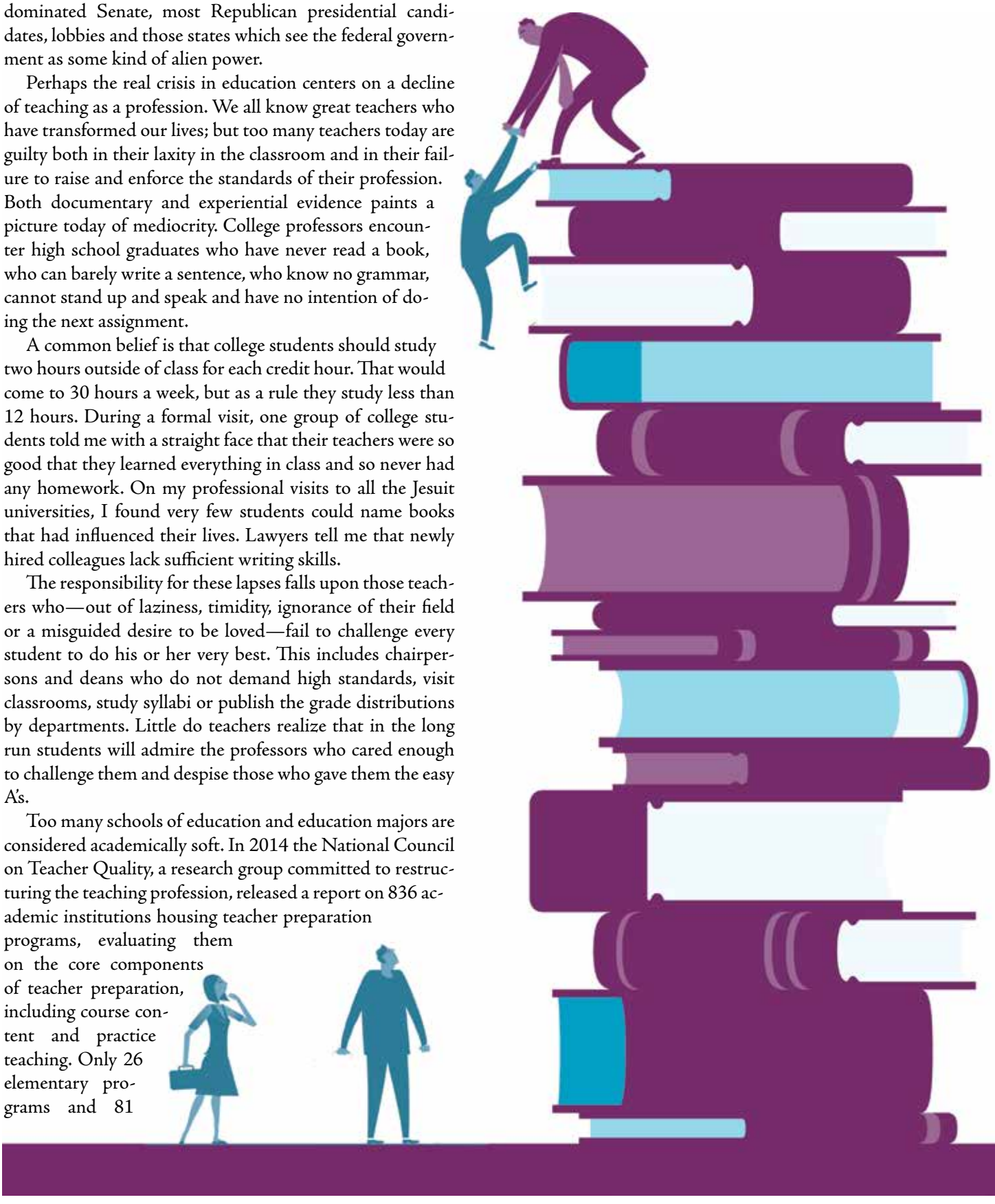
by state-administered final exams. But political opposition to Common Core standards comes from the Republican-dominated Senate, most Republican presidential candidates, lobbies and those states which see the federal government as some kind of alien power.

Perhaps the real crisis in education centers on a decline of teaching as a profession. We all know great teachers who have transformed our lives; but too many teachers today are guilty both in their laxity in the classroom and in their failure to raise and enforce the standards of their profession. Both documentary and experiential evidence paints a picture today of mediocrity. College professors encounter high school graduates who have never read a book, who can barely write a sentence, who know no grammar, cannot stand up and speak and have no intention of doing the next assignment.

A common belief is that college students should study two hours outside of class for each credit hour. That would come to 30 hours a week, but as a rule they study less than 12 hours. During a formal visit, one group of college students told me with a straight face that their teachers were so good that they learned everything in class and so never had any homework. On my professional visits to all the Jesuit universities, I found very few students could name books that had influenced their lives. Lawyers tell me that newly hired colleagues lack sufficient writing skills.

The responsibility for these lapses falls upon those teachers who—out of laziness, timidity, ignorance of their field or a misguided desire to be loved—fail to challenge every student to do his or her very best. This includes chairpersons and deans who do not demand high standards, visit classrooms, study syllabi or publish the grade distributions by departments. Little do teachers realize that in the long run students will admire the professors who cared enough to challenge them and despise those who gave them the easy A's.

Too many schools of education and education majors are considered academically soft. In 2014 the National Council on Teacher Quality, a research group committed to restructuring the teaching profession, released a report on 836 academic institutions housing teacher preparation programs, evaluating them on the core components of teacher preparation, including course content and practice teaching. Only 26 elementary programs and 81



ART: ISTOCKPHOTO/AKINDO/AMERICA

secondary programs got top rankings.

The weak schools disregard the basic methods of reading instruction. As a result, only 30 percent of American children learn to read beyond the basic level. Only 15 percent improved teaching on how to control classroom disruption. Worse, many classroom teachers have not been tested in the subjects they are assigned. In 509 institutions, 44 percent of the education graduates received honors, compared to 30 percent of other students. As a result the word spreads that getting an education degree is an easy college path—when, considering the responsibility of forming young minds, it should be the most rigorous.

A program which stands out as an alternative to some dubious education programs is Teach for America. Modeled on the Peace Corps, for 25 years it has recruited young college graduates to teach in predominantly disadvantaged neighborhoods. In 2013-14 it sent 11,000 recruits to 38 states. The program has succeeded also as a growth experience and resume booster for the young former teachers who move on to successful public and political careers. Now, however, there is a 13 percent drop in applications, indicating, perhaps, that short training periods are not enough and the temporary young teachers who may leave after two years might not be the answer to the problem of mediocre teaching. One letter to The New York Times suggests this reflects a bigger problem, "a lack of respect for the teaching profession."

Books That Teach

Jacques Barzun, *Teacher in America* (1945); Gilbert Highet, *The Art of Teaching* (1950); Mark Edmundson, *Why Teach?* (2013); Garrett Keizer, *Getting Schooled: The Reeducation of an American Teacher* (2014); Elizabeth Green, *Building a Better Teacher* (2014); Dana Goldstein, *The Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession* (2014); Vanessa Rodriguez with Michelle Fitzpatrick, *The Teaching Brain* (2014).

Charter Wars

In some cities a miniature civil war simmers between charter and public schools. On one level the battle is pedagogical. Among New York City's 1,800 public schools with 1.1 million students, there are 197 charter schools serving 82,200 students; 34 of those schools are part of the Success Academy network, which outclasses the others in test scores. But the network's unique pedagogical philosophy raises questions that both underline and undermine its success.

Pressure on faculty and students is high. Faculty teach 11 hours a day and post lists of which students are doing well or poorly. Teacher turnover is high, either from exhaustion or in opposition to what the departing teachers consider excessive regimentation of student behavior. Stringent rules require that students sit up straight and direct their eyes during class, move silently through the corridors and control their bladders to the point where many wet themselves rather than interrupt a test in response to tension ("At Success Academy Charter Schools, High Scores and Polarizing Tactics," The New York Times, 4/7/15).

To the network's critics like Diane Ravitch, the charter movement "undermines the public's commitment to pubic education." Others charge that high test scores at charters are an illusion created by excess test preparation, that charters accept few students with learning difficulties and suspend troublesome students whom the public schools hold onto, and that they benefit from conservative outside backers of the privatization of education.

The number of charter schools in the United States has nearly doubled in the last year, from 3,400 to 6,700, growing especially rapidly in Washington, Maryland, California and Florida; and a long article in The Washington Monthly (June/July 2015) reports that in New Orleans, 10 years after Hurricane Katrina, 92.5 percent of public school students attend charter schools—a move described by Tulane University economist Douglas Harris as "the most radical overhaul of any type of any school district in at least a century." A New Orleans political writer whom I taught writes to me that his son attends the same school his father attended as a child, but it is now a charter school and the son's reading and math skills far surpass those of his father at the same age. The boy is in first grade and reads French every night.

What Must We Do?

The following suggestions emerge from readings, consultation and experience.

1. *Teaching is a religious endeavor,* so we should bring it to both our public and private prayer and share our lights and shadows with colleagues. In the Journal of Catholic Higher Education (Winter 2015) articles place the core curriculum in the context of striving for intellectual excellence. Mark W. Roche describes his seminar "Faith, Doubt, and Reason," in which students read theology, philosophy, literature and sociological studies, attend plays and view films, write 60-page papers and take two one-on-one oral exams. For solidarity, students and faculty could participate in at least one weekend retreat each year.

2. *Support the Common Core.* If America is to become one family from many, there are values everyone must share. I have read the proposed literature syllabi of over 250 books and texts for grades 6 to 12 and am delighted to see *Walden,* Richard Wright and Longfellow, while I would save

Dostoyevsky for college. As one young teacher wrote to me, "I think it is wonderful that a 17-year-old girl from the upper West Side and a 17-year-old from Bed-Stuy would both be entitled to read and explore in class a treasure like Jane Eyre."

3. *Know each student well.* Our novice master told us to pray over our class list. I had each student fill out a 3-inch-by-5-inch card with name, address, phone number, email, names of family members, parents' occupations, previous schools, jobs, employment, travels, hobbies, skills and life ambitions. Then I shared the same about myself. On the card I kept a record of our meetings through life: their children, jobs, moves, books they wrote and family deaths. I tried to interview each one for at least 15 minutes in my office. Just one question: What can I do to help you?

4. *Decorum counts.* In class we present ourselves on time prepared for a serious 50 minutes. No hats, hoods, food, drinks, chewing gum or cellphones in sight. A daily one-page paper from the students is accepted only in the first minutes of class. I once had a young woman who placed her purse on the seminar table and got out her mirror and makeup and started painting her face in class. No.

5. *Discussion works when everyone is prepared.* Preparation is guaranteed in one of three ways: 1) a quick five-question quiz on a blue-book page on the assigned reading; 2) a one-page (exactly) essay analyzing the reading; 3) a one-page, single-spaced outline of the reading on a strict format.

Either split the class into small groups of four or five students or form a tight circle of 25. Give them five minutes to buzz with their neighbors and then draw them all into the discourse, everyone speaking once before anyone speaks twice. Do not ask questions to which you know the answer; if so, they will be trying to read your mind rather than express theirs. Sum it up and prepare for tomorrow's class.

6. *Tenure matters.* Tenure has a bad name because it is sometimes carelessly or unjustly administered. In high schools and universities, tenure is meant both to protect the institution from the harm that an unqualified teacher could do and to protect the freedom and the future of a person who has integrity, generosity, scholarship and superior teaching skills. But first the teacher must be thoroughly tested in three areas: teaching, scholarship and service.

The scores of students on standardized tests should not be decisive. The background or attitude of the class may be beyond the teacher's control or responsibility. During the first six years, the senior faculty and administration should visit classes and mentor and evaluate the candidate.

Some high school teachers write serious books. The others should demonstrate their scholarship by articles, public lectures and attending conferences. Service is committee work, advising and just being around for games, retreats, concerts and shows. All members of the tenure committee must sign the reports (majority and minority) presented to the candidate and the administration.

7. *Technology in the classroom?* Teachers should not become overly reliant on technology. Jacques Barzun told a theater full of teachers they needed only two tools: a blackboard and a piece of chalk.

8. *My novice master told us we had to love our students.* My impression at the time was that only God's love could energize us to handle the workload. But over 40 years I learned there was much more to it than that. Vanessa Rodriguez's *The Teaching Brain* stresses that teachers must constantly examine themselves to accomplish the unique teacher-student interaction that constitutes teaching.

I interviewed teachers and students to track down the one indispensable quality a teacher must have. I started with novelist Richard Ford, who teaches at various distinguished universities between books. Immediately, with certitude, he replied: "Empathy."

A young man who had met Ford and who had been teaching a few years at a Jesuit high school and is now entering the Jesuits, had the same response, only after working through the spiritual preparation that allows one to love well. It means, in effect, that students and teachers are equals in intimate communication. Last year the McQuaid 1964 graduating class invited me to their 40th-anniversary reunion. I told them that I had come to them 40 years before directed to love them; but it was they, by their openness and sincerity, who made it possible. They were easy to love.

From Churches to Church

Assessing the movement toward Christian unity

BY THOMAS P. RAUSCH

What will tomorrow's church be like? Will it be a truly catholic (small "c") church, a communion of local churches living in visible unity? Or will it be a multiplicity of churches and communities, even more divided in faith and life? The present estimate of the number of Christian denominations is roughly 43,000, according to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. In 1900 the number was 1,600. From a Roman Catholic perspective, Christian unity means a communion of churches sharing a common heritage and living in visible communion with each other.

Recently the World Council of Churches published an important convergence (not consensus) text entitled *The Church: Toward a Common Vision*. The statement is structured in terms of four ecclesiological issues. Relatively brief, it treats successively the church's essentially missionary origin, its nature as a communion, its growth toward the kingdom and its relation to the world.

To summarize briefly, the church takes its origin from the saving activity of the Trinity. Visible unity is important for its nature and mission, a point that is emphasized repeatedly. Such unity may require changes in doctrine, practice and ministry, so that the churches may recognize in each other the "one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church" (Chapter I). The text stresses the nature of the church as a communion. While diversity is a gift of the Lord, the unity and catholicity of the church means that each local church should be in communion with all the other local churches (Chapter II).

Growing toward visible unity requires "communion in the fullness of the apostolic faith; in sacramental life; in a truly one and mutually recognized ministry; in structures of conciliar relations and decision-making; and in common witness and service to the world" (No. 37). But many differences remain about the number of the sacraments or ordinances, who presides at the Eucharist, how ordained ministry is structured and whether it is restricted to males, the authority of councils, and the role of the bishop of Rome (Chapter III). The nature of the church is missional. Participating in the Divine Mystery, the church serves God's plan for the transformation of the world. It proclaims the Gospel, celebrates the sacraments and in manifesting the newness of life given by Christ anticipates the kingdom already present in him, though it acknowledges a need for the churches to be accountable to each other because of new conflicts over moral principles and ethical questions (Chapter IV).

Obstacles to Ecumenism

The text from the World Council of Churches is significant for a number of reasons. First, it presents a transdenominational ecclesiology that should find resonances in the different churches. Second, because they share a Trinitarian faith, each church is called to live in visible communion with other Christian communities. Each has a structure, consisting of apostolic faith, sacramental life and a recognized ministry. Third, the text's view of salvation is not narrowly individualistic but serves God's plan for the transformation of the world. Finally, the centrality of the Eucharist in the text is remarkable; it clearly sees the church as a eucharistic community. But will it fly?

In the West there are new obstacles to ecumenism. The vision of visible unity seems to be slipping away for many of the Reformation churches. Some stress justice over unity. Many are concerned today with a new search for denominational identity, as Cardinal Kurt Koch, prefect of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, has noted. There is a lack of agreement on sacramental practice, and the Eucharist is not yet central in many denominations, including many evangelical communities.

Meanwhile, mainline churches in the United States and Western Europe continue to lose members. The Rev. Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, points out that those denominations that were once pillars of the ecumenical movement are in many places experiencing diminishing numbers and resources, with a resulting toll on ecumenical organizations. Member churches of the World Council of Churches constitute little more than 20 percent of world Christianity, and their number is diminishing. Kinnamon asks if the W.C.C. is becoming too ideological, substituting a commitment to economic, social and ecological issues and losing ecumenism's traditional vision of a reconciled church, sharing the Eucharist and making decisions in common. Some point with hope to the growth of evangelical Christian communities, but the claim that they represent 40 percent of Americans may be great-

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REUNION. Pope Francis waves during a special audience with members of the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships at the Vatican, Oct. 31.

CNS PHOTO/TONY GENTILE, REUTERS

ly exaggerated. In his book *The Great Evangelical Recession,* John Dickerson cites a number of studies to show that the actual number is closer to the range 7 percent to 8.9 percent.

But if Christianity is diminishing in the West, it is flourishing in Asia, Africa and Latin America, as Christianity's center of gravity shifts from Europe and North America to the Southern Hemisphere. A recent Pew Forum study finds that more than 1.3 billion Christians live in the global south (61 percent), compared with about 860 million in the global north (39 percent). Mark Noll notes, "This past Sunday it is possible that more Christian believers attended church in China than in all of so-called 'Christian Europe.'" Thus the profile of global Christianity has changed dramatically, and the Western church cannot afford to ignore the fact.

Much of this growth has been in the church's evangelical, Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal expressions. Also rapidly growing are the independent, indigenous churches, whose members comprise about one-fifth of all Christians today and are thus not members of traditional denominations or churches. Allan Anderson, professor of mission and Pentecostal studies at the University of Birmingham, England, cites studies that claim that there are "628 million 'Pentecostals, Charismatics and Independent Charismatics,' collectively termed 'Renewalists,' in the world in 2013; 26.7 percent of the world's Christians." Roman Catholics number over one billion. That means that Roman Catholics, Pentecostals and charismatics together amount to close to 75 percent of the total 2.1 billion Christians in the world.

This recentering of the majority Christian population to the global south poses significant challenges for the ecumenical future of the church. These southern Christians and some in the West see the World Council of Churches' statement on the church as being too traditional and excessively Western in its approach. Much less concerned with doctrine, confessional difference or ecclesiology, these new communities have a different agenda. Unlike the Enlightenment-influenced West, they sense the nearness of the supernatural, place great emphasis on healing—of body, mind, soul, spirit and society—and stress life issues like AIDS, violence and poverty.

New Churches, Little Structure

Some of these new churches are quite distant from the historic Christian tradition. Most are not eucharistic communities. Some preach the "prosperity Gospel," promising wealth to those who follow Jesus. Their denominational boundaries are often porous, and multiple Christian identities are not unusual. A recent report on Pentecostal-evangelical and African-initiated churches in South Africa describes a self-styled prophet who calls on his congregants to eat live snakes or underwear. These churches, built around charismatic preachers, "lack any real structure or theology apart from an eccentric literal reading of the Bible and people's willingness to believe in what is preached." They pop up and just as quickly disappear. And not a few Christians in these new

churches, not all of them dysfunctional, are decidedly anti-ecumenical, as was evident at the W.C.C.'s 10th assembly in Busan, Korea, in 2013, where hundreds were protesting not just the assembly but the ecumenical movement itself.

Some today, like Robert Jenson, a Lutheran, are speculating that the ecumenical future lies with the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern churches and Pentecostal groups; or, to cite Cheryl Bridges Johns, a Pentecostal, with a reformed Catholicism and a mature Pentecostalism. If anything should move our separated churches to learn to work together, it should be the increasing number of the so-called nones, those who are religiously nonaffiliated. According to the Pew Forum, they now constitute 23 percent of adult Americans and 35 percent of millennials.

Bonds of Communion

Given the enormous ecclesiological diversity of the new churches of the global south, will these churches be able to receive the W.C.C. statement on the church as a challenge to renewal of ecclesial life, commitment to justice and peace, mission and unity? Will it help these nonliturgical and often noncreedal communities to re-engage with the great tradition? Probably not. But these are the churches growing today, and their members often have strong faith and great energy. Therefore we should ask, how might the Catholic Church and the confessional churches establish the bonds of communion that witness to a common ecclesial life?

First of all, it is important to keep in mind that ecumenism always begins in friendship. When people from different churches or traditions get to know one another, they no longer remain the "other" but become friends, associates, brothers or sisters in Christ. That holds also for relations between more traditional Western churches and these new churches. Second, the social mission of the church may offer common ground for addressing together many of the practical problems these new churches face. While there are often ethical differences between the churches, most of our churches face the same differences within our communions. Finally, we might ask, what if the Catholic Church, the Orthodox churches and the other liturgical churches were to relax somewhat their sacramental discipline to extend occasional eucharistic hospitality to those from these new churches who are able to recognize Christ's presence in the Eucharist and are willing to live in communion? Might some experience of common worship lead to a new sense of the church as a eucharistic community?

So what is the future of the church? Christian unity is God's work, not ours, as recent popes have emphasized, but we are all called to work toward it, that the world may believe (Jn 17:21). A

Pope of Mercy

On March 13, 2015, the second anniversary of the election of Pope Francis, the pope took the world by surprise when he announced the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy.

God's mercy has been at the heart of his own life ever since an extraordinary, mystical experience of it at the age of 17 that has shaped his exercise of ministry as priest, bishop and now pope.

Mercy was the central theme of his first address as pope to the hundreds of thousands of people in St. Peter's Square on March 17, 2013. And on a flight from Rio de Janeiro to Rome four months later, on July 28, Pope Francis told the international media that this is "the *kairos*"—the appointed historical moment—for mercy and that the church as mother "must travel this path of mercy and find a form of mercy for all."

While St. John Paul II wrote an encyclical on God's mercy, Pope Francis called the jubilee year to communicate this mercy to a wounded world that is in great need of healing and reconciliation. He linked this jubilee directly to the two assemblies of the Synod of Bishops on the family and is challenging the church to abandon a judgmental attitude and address the entire spectrum of family situations in the light of God's mercy and to find ways of integration for those who are excluded.

His apostolic exhortation on the family is expected to be published on March 19, the feast of St. Joseph and the third anniversary of the inauguration of his Petrine ministry. It will draw on the discussions and conclusions of the synod meetings on the family and be framed in the perspective of mercy.

This is the first holy year on a specific theme, and the first that is not centered on Rome. Previous holy years involved mega-events and big business in Rome, which benefited a range of economic, political and clerical interests. The pope's decision to decentralize the jubilee celebration has disrupted and upset that network of interests and, some predict, could result in fewer pilgrims coming to Rome, compared with the jubilee in 2000.

This is the first holy year on a specific theme, and the first that is not centered on Rome.

Above all else, Pope Francis wants the jubilee celebration of mercy to involve local church communities in every country and to be accessible to the poorest of the poor, to prisoners and those trapped in conflict situations. Hence his decision to open it in Bangui, in the Central African Republic, in the heart of a conflict situation.

As is clear from the document that formally announced the jubilee, "The Face of Mercy" ("Misericordiae Vultus"), the pope wants this jubilee to be inclusive, one from which no one feels excluded.

In that announcement he explained that this holy year is a radical call to the church and individual believers to experience God's mercy and to show mercy in their individual and community lives through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, and thereby respond in concrete ways to all who are wounded and suffering in today's world.

As pope, Francis has blazed the trail in this regard, showing how to be merciful in daily life. He appointed a former humble Polish priest, Archbishop Konrad Krajewski, as papal almoner and gave him the task of reaching out on his behalf to provide concrete assistance to the many poor, hungry, homeless, desperate people in Rome, and to immigrants there and elsewhere.

Pope Francis has had showers and a barber's service installed for the poor and homeless people under the colonnades in St. Peter's Square and opened a hostel to provide beds for many of them at night. He has organized a visit for them to the Vatican museums and to the Shroud of Turin, and in countless other ways has sought to affirm their dignity as human beings.

He has asked every parish in Europe to take in a refugee family and instructed the Vatican's two parishes to do likewise.

As pope, Francis has visited prisoners in jails in several countries during his journeys, called for abolition of the death penalty and urged reform of the penal system. He spends much time with the sick, the disabled and terminally ill children.

By his personal witness to the Gospel of mercy, the pope is setting an example for the whole church in this holy year—in the first place for his brother bishops—making clear to everyone that to follow Jesus means to be merciful always.

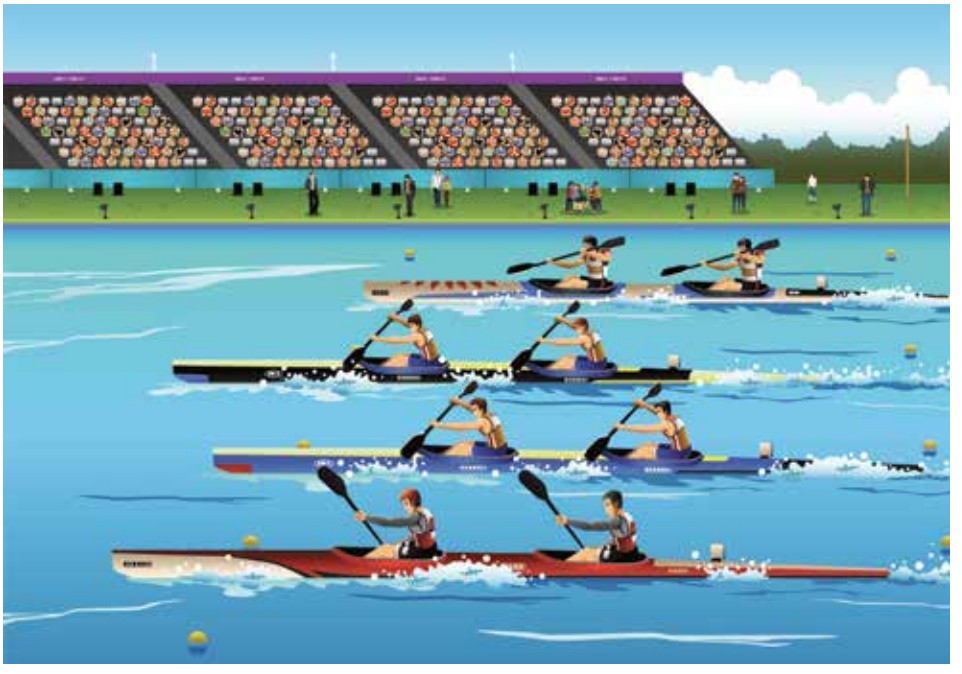
GERARD O'CONNELL

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: @gerryrome.*

Competing Together

A revolution of heart at the Special Olympics

BY MATTHEW WOOTERS



It was a splashy, ugly start. The oars of our two-man kayak slapped the water eagerly, but there was no rhythm. The boats on either side of us fought through the same water, striving for the lead. I restrained myself from looking to see where we were in the pack, trying instead to focus on Will's tempo in front of me. Fifty meters down the lane, we hit our stride. Our strokes synced up and we took off.

Before the race, I told Will that I was nervous. But he reassured me. "Being nervous is O.K.," he said. "It will help you paddle faster. Most of all, let's have fun." I was invited to participate in this exhibition race with Will to promote the sport he loves. Will is an exceptional athlete. At this point in the week, Will has been competing against the best in his sport from around the world. He has already won two medals and, after our race, will go on to win two more.

Will also has an intellectual disability. This summer I had the honor of kayaking with him during a unified sports experience at the Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles. These games were Will's first; he competed locally and nationally to qualify, and he joined 7,000 other athletes from 165 countries for the world competition.

Started by Eunice Kennedy Shriver in 1962 in her suburban Washington, D.C., backyard, the Special Olympics are now the largest sporting and humanitarian event in the world for people with special needs. They were also the largest event for sports of any kind in 2015.

Mrs. Shriver was inspired by her sister, Rosemary, who had an intellectual disability. She felt that all people deserve a chance to learn, to play and to compete, just as she and Rosemary had played, sailed and run together growing up. Well ahead of her time, Mrs. Shriver knew what many now know: Sports have the ability to bring people together, to empower them, to help them feel their dignity and to teach those who were ignored by many schools and doctors at the time that they matter and can be more than they ever dreamed. Mrs. Shriver, without knowing it at the time, started a revolution.

Unified sports at the Special Olympics integrate people with and without intellectual disabilities to play sports on the same team, or in my case, in the same boat. As Will and I prepared for our race, he responded to my basic questions about stroke speed and hand placement. But his finest advice was this: "The best way to start a race is with patience and generosity." I trust Will. He knows his sport, and he seems to savor the chance to teach me. He said that if I paddled, he would steer.

Cheering for Others

And so, Will steered. I attempted to keep up with his incredibly fast stroke speed, and toward the end of our race, we charged down the 200-meter straightaway to a roaring crowd. As we

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ART: ISTOCKPHOTO/ARTISTICCO

neared the end I was exhausted and soaking wet. But under Will's direction and coaching we carried on. "Keep it up, Matt, you are doing great! This is so fun!" I was not so sure. My 6-foot-3-inch frame and terrible coordination were not well suited to a kayak.

Still, we finished in first place. I was completely out of breath, veins pumping with adrenaline, excited from the thrill of it all. But I did not expect what happened next. Will steered our boat around to cheer on the other teams as they finished. "We need to cheer on the other teams," he said. "Especially lane three—they have no one to cheer for them."

I am struck by my own selfishness in this moment. All I could think of was our glorious win and my exhausted muscles. But Will, with his priorities in the right place, reminded me to cheer on the other teams, with a special concern for those without fans in the stands. He cheered on the competition with the same enthusiasm he showed as he steered our boat to victory. I was also struck by what a radical notion this was: he thought nothing of the victory. Instead, he knew that once we finished, we needed to celebrate the others and cheer for those who needed it. I was aware of how starkly different this is from any other major sporting event in the world. Cheer on the opponent? Have consideration for them, and know who has fans here and who doesn't? Where was I? I was taking part in something special, a revolution of the heart that Mrs. Shriver began all those years ago.

In a world of toxic divisions, vitriolic political speeches about immigrants, racism and police brutality, I have been privileged to see the opposite. I have seen a place where differences do not divide but unite. A place where the values of our world are flipped on their head, where beauty, strength and success take on new meaning. A place where the marginalized are not considered weak, broken and inessential but rather valuable, beautiful and competitive. The Special Olympics are a place where the athletes do not receive patronizing, pity-filled platitudes but where they teach, through their joy, what it means to be human, to love and to compete fairly and fiercely.

I saw Israeli and Palestinian athletes hold hands after they finished their race. I saw a place where language differences did not inhibit relationship or friendship. A place where "the other" was not feared and viewed with suspicion. A place where a hijab or wheelchair did not define the person using it. A place where heads of state, movie stars and celebrities came to cheer on the most marginalized group in the world. I have seen an image of the kingdom of God where all are welcomed, celebrated, encouraged, cheered on to victory and told they are indeed "special." A place where there is no "them" and "us." There is just us.

And as my time with Will taught me, we are all in the same boat. A

NOT SO PRIME. Maggie Smith as Miss. Shepherd and Alex Jennings as Alan Bennett

PHOTO: NICOLA DOVE, COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

FILM | JOHN ANDERSON

A ROAD NOT TRAVELED

Kindness meets conflict in 'The Lady in the Van'

There's a moment, mercifully brief, in the middle of director Nicholas Hytner's **The Lady in the Van** that is quite obviously the "trailer shot," the one intended solely for the commercials. It is joyous. It is elevating. It is baloney. It will cause viewers to be transported out of the film, out of their seats, out of the theater, aloft with the birds, down the urban canyons of glass and steel and onto the ledge outside a corporate conference room, where one movie exec is saying to another, "We gotta find some way to sell this movie!"

Hence the scene in question: The vagabond Miss Shepherd, the lady of the title, played by the venerable Maggie Smith, careening delightedly down a residential London street in a runaway wheelchair; a woman giddy with flight, intoxicated by speed, perhaps reliving some recklessly carefree days of her youth—whatever you want to project onto the scene, the scene will happily absorb it. That the sequence has almost nothing to do with the spirit, or spirituality, of the movie at hand can be viewed as a tradeoff: It will give the distributor something to sell, while allaying any tenuous ticket-buyer's fear that what is on sale is a serious movie.

Because while ostensibly a comedy, "The Lady in the Van" is also a profoundly serious movie. It is not really about rattling wheelchairs or giddy old ladies, and not really about Maggie Smith, or her character Miss Shepherd—whose Christian name is Mary, or Margaret, depending on who knew her when. What the movie is about is the nature of charity. And the man who is chasing the wheelchair.

In the late 1960s, the playwright Alan Bennett ("Beyond the Fringe," "The History Boys," "The Madness of King George") moved onto London's genteel Gloucester Crescent, a street in Camden Town populated by other art-

ists and writers, people who were absorbed in creative pursuits but hardly oblivious to property values—or what damage might be done to them by the presence of a certain Miss Shepherd, who had taken up residence on the street, literally, some time before Bennett's arrival. Moving her dilapidated van up and down the block from day to day, skirting parking restrictions and vagrancy laws, Miss Shepherd ate and slept in the vehicle and performed whatever ablutions an aging homeless woman might need perform within close proximity to her parking spot du jour.

"Nuisance" would be one way to describe her. "Unwelcome" would be another. "Tolerated" would be a third, within limits, at least by most of Bennett's neighbors. And Bennett himself? Most would say he acted above and beyond the call of civic if not necessarily Christian duty: One day, he acceded to her suggestion that he allow her to park in his unused driveway. She stayed there 15 years.

The film is based on Bennett's script, which began as a memoir in the London Review of Books, morphed into a radio drama on the BBC and then became a stage play starring Smith. "The Lady in the Van" would be a fairly flimsy construct of a very British kind of comedy, full of frustrated impulses of the strictly human vs. English human variety and a constant conflict between what is decent and what is correct, if not for the nagging question it poses about what drives a generous instinct. "It's not kindness, it's convenience," Bennett (Alex Jennings) says at one point, conceding to himself (literally—there are two Bennetts in the movie, the weak willed and the strong) that what seems to others like kindness on his part is just a way of avoiding the unpleasantness that might be involved in ridding Gloucester Crescent of its one seemingly immovable inhabitant.

Not that he wants to get rid of her. He would rather she just go away. But the thing he wants more is to appear the decent chap, not the type who says, as one neighbor does, "This is London; nobody's kind." Bennett, in a kind of backhanded compliment to himself, acts in a way that is kind and generous and empathetic, while admitting all the

Frances de la Tour as Ursula Vaughan Williams

while that such qualities are not selfless, that they in fact bring their own rewards—some even more valuable, perhaps, that the ones he bestows on Miss Shepherd.

He also has to admit to himself that his charitable impulses toward Miss Shepherd are a redirection of the feelings he has—or doesn't—for his aging mother, on whom he draws regularly for comic material, but without a commensurate feeling of love or devotion. Being nice to his outdoor tenant is a way of doing penance. A shortcut to redemption. "I'm not a saint, I'm just lazy," Bennett says later. For us the audience, Bennett's self-effacement is nothing short of a provocation.

And Miss Shepherd? An interesting case. What is unknown to Bennett and his neighbors—who include Ursula Vaughan Williams, widow of Ralph, played by the always delicious Frances de la Tour—is that Miss Shepherd is a woman in hiding. They would never have asked her anything—Miss Shepherd is a woman who never says thank you, not even for the presents and crème brûlée brought to her on Christmas; she never says she's sorry ("'Sorry' is for God," she says). But we know what she's about, because the movie has begun with a crash and a bang and some blood smeared across Miss Shepherd's windshield, and her flight from a crash and a policeman (Jim Broadbent), who decided to blackmail her rather than turn her in. And so began her life on wheels.

The other big "reveal," though not so big—but big enough to warrant an alert that we will now spoil it—is that Miss Shepherd was a nun, a "disputatious" nun, if one of her co-convent dwellers is to be believed, but also a musical prodigy whose pianism was forbidden her as an exercise in obedience. An exercise in cruelty, the movie would say, since the loss of the piano is as dispiriting to Miss Shepherd as the fact that she lives in a van. Music haunts the movie, and Miss Shepherd can't bear to hear it badly played; but during a day trip to Blackpool, she is entranced enough by a free public performance that she does the previously unthinkable, and sits and listens. She also plays, though it might be a dream, and Smith is such a good actress that the music makes her younger.

She seems so, at any rate. And "The Lady in the Van" seems like it could be one of those Christmas movies that is not really a "Christmas movie" but works with the season, because it is about all the right things. Motiveless humanity. Irrational kindness. Doing good when you know full well that no good deed, at least on behalf of Miss Shepherd, will go unpunished. Yes, director Hytner's movie is something of a pat on the back for playwright Bennett, but it does not dilute the message of the movie. And he certainly seems to have earned it.

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PHOTO: NICOLA DOVE, COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

CREDO...

"I don't believe in that God either." This is a comment I found myself making relatively often at get-togethers over the recent holiday season. Usually it's in the context of a conversation where I explain to someone what I do for a living.

Generally the exchange is a variation on the following: I'll say, "I'm a musician and writer," which often elicits some genuine curiosity regarding what I write about. When I respond, "I write a lot about the intersection of culture and faith," this is frequently met with a somewhat quizzical look. Not at all disdainful or suspicious, it's more like an expression of surprise that these two topics ever intersect at all.

This sometimes opens up a conversation about religion and spirituality, in which I try to explain how my own faith journey has been deeply informed by musicians, writers, filmmakers, etc.—artists who ask "big questions" in their work, questions in which something is at stake about what it means to be alive in a particular time and place.

After my attempts at clarification however, the question I often get asked is something along the lines of, "So, do you actually go to church...like, every week?"

For more than a decade, I've had the opportunity to explore the margins of religion and faith—the unaffiliated and unchurched, the seekers and the spiritual. Overwhelmingly, the people I've encountered have been intelligent, successful adults who have accomplished a great deal in their personal and professional lives. But the contrast is often stark when those accomplishments are juxtaposed with their spiritual understanding.

It would be inappropriate—and cause for concern—for a 30- or 40-something to behave like a 12-year-old in personal relationships or the work environment. And yet, all too often, these same people's relationship to God and faith and their understanding of its role in their lives is frozen in early adolescence and hasn't been thoughtfully engaged since their confirmation or bar mitzvah.

I believe in a God who speaks to us as adults through beauty and truth.

This isn't an exclusively Catholic phenomenon. The challenges involved in developing an adult faith hold true across traditions. I remember an interview I worked on a few years ago with a smart, young musician who had some serious indie rock cred. He was considered a bit of a traitor among some fans because the Pentecostal Christian faith of his childhood that had influenced his early music had been replaced by a new-found atheism. The more I read his thoughtful answers about the process that led him to abandon Christianity, I couldn't help but think, "You're not an atheist; it's just that the tools you were given to understand faith as a child no longer worked as an adult and your faith wasn't able to grow up with you."

Developing spiritual maturity can be difficult in a culture where the conversation around faith seems to be set up as a contest between evolutionary atheism and fundamentalist creationism, a false choice if ever there was one.

Adolfo Nicolás, S.J., superior general of the Jesuits, was right when he identified "the globalization of superficiality" as one of the great dangers facing the world today. The overwhelming tidal wave of information that bombards us can be insidious and anaesthetizing because it encourages us to simply skip along the surface of reality. The gods of data and information fill our brains but distract us from going deeper. Deepening requires that we constantly seek what is authentically human. It requires that we grow up and "put away childish things." I believe in a God who speaks to us as adults at our most profound depths through beauty and truth.

This is the God of Coltrane's "Love Supreme" and Radiohead's "OK Computer," Handel's Messiah and Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah," Walker Percy's "The Moviegoer" and John Michael McDonagh's "Calvary," Chagall's "White Crucifixion" and Archie Rand's "The 613." I believe in the God of Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr., the God of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Ignatius Loyola and the God of my 3-year-old niece's laughter.

So please don't talk to me about your God who will inevitably be eclipsed by science and technology or your God that you learned as a child was obsessed with sexual morality to the exclusion of all else and existed only to judge and condemn.

I don't believe in that God either.

BILL McGARVEY, *a musician and writer, is the author of* The Freshman Survival Guide, *owner of CathNewsUSA.com and was the long-time editor in chief of BustedHalo.com. Twitter: @billmcgarvey.*

OF AND FOR THE POOR

FAITH & JOY
Memoirs of a Revolutionary Priest

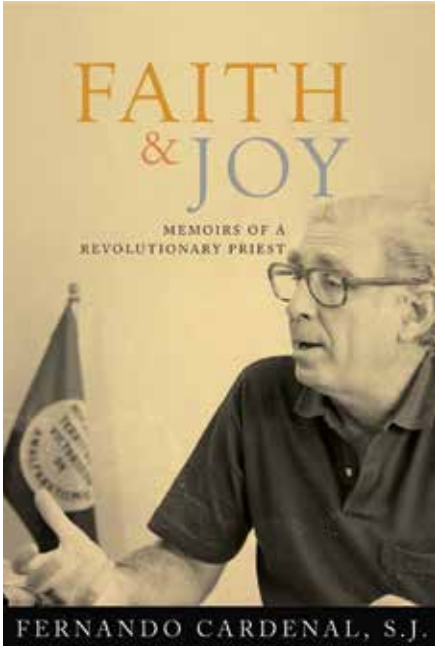
By Fernando Cardenal, S.J.
Orbis Books. 288p $29

Those of us whose memories are long enough to recall the days of the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua know the names of Miguel D'Escoto, Ernesto Cardinal and Fernando Cardenal, for all sorts of reasons—especially for their appointments to positions in the Sandinista government and the less than enthusiastic response of Rome to the idea of ordained priests serving in a Marxist-socialist administration. Most people probably know least about Fernando, but this newly published memoir, shortened from the Spanish original published in 2009, should change all that.

A lifelong Jesuit who eventually committed himself to the anti-Somoza struggle of the 1970s, became director of the literacy crusade and later minister of education in the post-revolutionary government of the 1980s, he was eventually forced by John Paul II to leave the Society of Jesus. But he continued to live in the community and later became the first person to be readmitted to vows in the Jesuit order after having been dismissed. To this outline, Cardenal adds a great deal of color and pathos, with a dash of humor here and there.

Although the text of the memoir reaches back briefly to Cardenal's time in training, or "formation," as a Jesuit, and ends in 2004 with his pronouncing final vows in the order, the bulk of these recollections cover the years from 1970 to 1990. In 1970 Cardenal took up his first post as a priest, serving at the Jesuit University of Central America (U.C.A.) in Managua as vice president of student affairs. In 1990 the Sandinista government of Daniel Ortega surprisingly lost the election to a coalition of small parties led by Violetta Chamorro, precipitating corruption and power struggles among the Sandinistas that led Cardenal to resign from the party. He resigned for the same reason that he had joined the party more than 15 years earlier, his concern for the poor.

In my 35 years of teaching about liberation theology I have heard time



and time again that it all begins in the experience of the poor and that, in the famous words of Gustavo Gutiérrez, "theology comes after," it is the "second act." That this is true I have no doubt, and consequently I have also learned that if you want to teach students about liberation theology, the volume upon volume of learned theological essays by all the great Latin American theologians pale in their usefulness beside one or two first-hand accounts. Best of all has been Mev Puleo's set of interviews in Brazil during the 1980s, *The Struggle Is One: Voices and Visions of Liberation*. But *Faith and Joy* is a close second.

Faith and Joy is a first-person account of what revolutionary change in the church meant to the poor. It describes, often in great detail, many of the church-inspired movements in the Nicaraguan revolution. We encounter Nicaragua's own version of the student movements that marked Europe in the late 1960s, as the students of U.C.A. demanded a greater say in their own education and occupied the university in time-honored fashion until their demands were heard. We learn how the Jesuit order in Central America shifted its orientation to the service of the poor. We get an eye-witness account of the terrible devastation of the earthquake that flattened Managua in 1972. And we are led through the heart-searching that Cardenal endured before he committed himself to the cause of the Sandinista Front for the liberation of Nicaragua.

Inevitably, the most interesting chapters are those that cover the years between Cardenal's joining the Sandinista Front and the end of the Ortega administration in 1980. It may come as a surprise to some just how important Cardenal was in the five years before Somoza was overthrown, when he served as one of "the group of 12," an influential team of individuals who mostly lived outside Nicaragua at this time. They were not officially representative of the Sandinista Front but worked to promote their cause in the surrounding Central American countries, most effectively in Costa Rica. No doubt it was Cardenal's success that led to his being offered a post in the new government, though he was horrified to learn that they wanted him to be their ambassador to the United States. Fortunately for him, that was changed to the much more appropriate role of working with the youth.

The Nicaraguan bishops at the time were very conservative, even though in the end they spoke out against Somoza.

(A friend once described them to me, in the days after the revolution had succeeded, as "little boys who have had their toys taken away.") But they moved to invoke Canon 285 of the Code of Canon Law, which prohibits priests from holding political office. Despite the intervention of the Vatican secretary of state at the time, Cardinal Casaroli, Cardenal, along with his brother Ernesto and the Maryknoll priest Miguel D'Escoto, were suspended from priestly work and Cardenal was eventually dismissed from the Society, though the Jesuits obeyed the papal edict with heavy hearts and did all they could to mitigate the harm. Later, thankfully, he was reinstated.

This is a familiar story and remains a distressing one. What this book adds, in this episode as throughout the 15 chapters, is the first-hand witness of a holy man to his struggle to be faithful to the Gospel's call to care for the poor. *Faith and Joy* is a good title for the book. But maybe *Courage and Compassion* would have been even better.

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KYLE KRAMER

WORSE THAN IT SEEMS

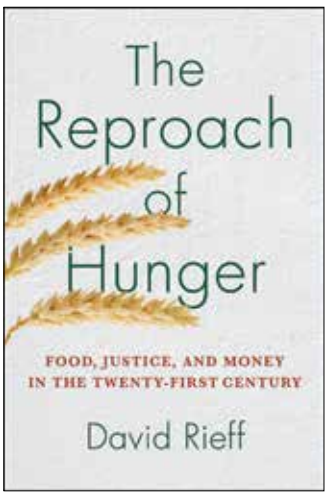
THE REPROACH OF HUNGER
Food, Justice, and Money in the Twenty-first Century

By David Rieff
Simon and Schuster. 432p $27

If you ask Bill Gates, Jim Yong Kim, Jeffrey Sachs and other well-known figures in the development world, we are just around the corner from eliminating global poverty and hunger. In his latest book, however, *The Reproach of Hunger*, David Rieff is far less sanguine. He argues that the mainstream stance, in which the marriage of innovative technology and liberal capitalism provides the magic bullet to solve the poor world's ills, is a combination of hubris, ideology and naïve optimism.

Rieff is quick to admit that hunger has been greatly reduced in recent decades. This has been largely due to the "Green Revolution," which brought modern mechanized farming methods and increased agricultural productivity to much (but not all) of the developing world. Famine, which he defines as an overall shortage of available food and which has been part and parcel of the human condition since we have been a species, has become much more rare in the latter part of the 20th century. Also in that time period, agricultural prices began to stabilize and even decline.

This was true until the first decade of the 21st century. Rieff sees the 2007-8 global food crises as bellwethers of even more trouble ahead for the world's "bottom billion." By early 2008, the price of agricultural staples like rice, wheat, soybeans and corn (the basic foodstuffs of the poor) had increased by as much as 130 percent. There was still sufficient food, but desperately poor people, who spend a much higher percentage of their income on food, simply could not afford to buy it.



The price shocks of 2007-8 were the result of a perfect storm: high oil prices driving up the cost of fuel and fertilizer, droughts and a cyclone that reduced food production, diversion of crops into ethanol production (40 percent of the U.S. corn crop is turned into auto fuel) and financial speculators increasing the volatility of global commodities markets. Even though prices have since settled down, they remain higher than before the crisis. And, Rieff reminds readers, all the factors that created that crisis are still in play, plus the additional long-term, non-episodic threats of global warming, degraded farmland, rising global population, political instability and shortage of capital to invest in modern mechanized farming. Price shocks may indeed become a "new normal," which will threaten the poor with hunger in the form of undernutrition (insufficient calories) or malnutrition (inadequate nutrients and food variety).

As Rieff explains it, the developed world addresses food issues according to the following paradigm. Innovative technical experts, increasingly from the private sector, endeavor to help poor countries enter the global food system, which depends on machine fuel, fertilizer and capital-intensive industrial farming techniques. This transition, of course, will mean that poor countries must follow the path of rich Western nations, allowing themselves to be guided by socially responsible corporations and the invisible hand of market forces into the same liberal capitalist economies that support such production-intensive, exports-based agriculture. The rising economic tide in developing nations, so goes the trope, will lift the boats of their poor along with everyone else.

According to Rieff, it is seen not only as gauche but as a moral failure to question this "techno-utopian" paradigm. And yet Rieff, certainly not seeking (or likely) to win any popularity contests in the developed world, asserts that this paradigm is nothing short of an ideology—one with many

problematic assumptions and dangerous blind spots.

To begin, the prevailing development model assumes the superiority of modern industrial agriculture. It fails to consider whether poor countries can and should adopt it—along with the attendant costs it exacts on the socio-cultural fabric (as unemployed farmers migrate to cities), ecosystems and the remaining farmers, who become vulnerable when they raise crops for a global commodity market rather than for local markets and personal subsistence.

A second weakness of the current development model is that it places "excessive faith in the liberal progress narrative" and technical innovation while soft-pedaling the very real obstacles—if history is any guide—of epidemics, population growth and other natural and human-caused disasters. It also fails to address the disturbing and real trend that as countries jump on the capitalist bandwagon and become wealthier, the increased wealth flows mostly toward those who are already well off, exacerbating income inequality, impeding democracy and providing the desperately poor with little, no or even negative progress out of poverty.

Third, the modern development movement also places too much faith in the good intentions of powerful yet unaccountable private-sector efforts. The work of Bill and Melinda Gates is admirable, and their intentions certainly seem noble, for example, but to whom do they ultimately answer? What if their interests suddenly turn, for example, from solving the problems of poverty to exploring the far reaches of outer space? Who could stop them, and what would be the fallout for development?

Along similar lines, Rieff is dubious about this brave new world of "philanthrocapitalism," a term for philanthropy fueled by big business profits. He sees it (though few else in the developed world seem to) as no little irony that many of the problems wealthy First Worlders are trying to solve in the developing world may be the very ones they have helped create or maintain by the very way they do business, like evading taxes or exploiting cheap labor and lax environmental regulations in poorer nations. "Corporate social responsibility," the latest term of art, may end up being a smokescreen or an oxymoron.

Rieff's most profound objection to the development model is that it almost completely ignores the issues of human rights, politics and culture. Other than their vague and weak language calling for "transparency" in governance, Rieff opines that today's development experts assume their technical fixes can be carried out irrespective of a country's political and cultural realities.

That, Rieff argues, is a fatally flawed assumption. Even the most elegant technical solutions can—and likely, will—be sabotaged by ineffective or corrupt governments or by counterproductive (and deeply rooted) social and cultural practices. Human societies are not just machines needing the proper parts and adjustment; we are in large part guided by beliefs and impuls-

es that are irrational, subjective and often self-destructive. It is in this respect that Rieff comes closest to Catholic social teaching: claiming that "the fundamental problems of the world have always been moral not technological."

Rieff's argument concludes with two suggestions. The first is to steer away from the Scylla of techno-utopian "food security" promises and from the Charybdis of the activist-led, antiglobalization, revolutionary "food sovereignty" movement. Instead, he favors the attempt to strengthen democratic governance in poor nations. The second is to have a bit more humility about what we can achieve and in what time frame. Optimism is a bad religion when it ignores the facts on the ground.

Rieff's tome is not pleasant reading. His dense prose can often be serpentine and hard to follow. His subject is painful and difficult, although he treats it in an abstract and cerebral way that, unfortunately, includes no flesh-and-blood stories of the poor about whom he is deeply concerned. And by his own admission, Rieff offers scant hope. But his argument is copiously researched and his critique is well worth considering. It is an important voice in the essential conversation about how better to serve the poor and hungry of our world.

KYLE KRAMER *is the executive director of the Passionist Earth & Spirit Center in Louisville, Ky., and the author of* A Time to Plant: Life Lessons in Work, Prayer, and Dirt.

DENNIS VELLUCCI

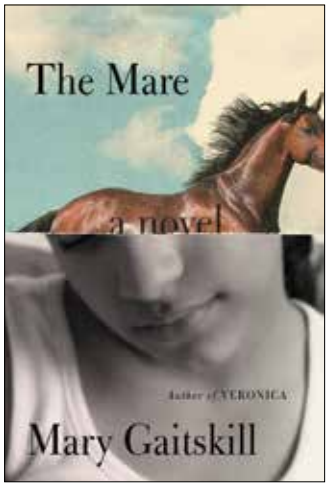
A MOTHER'S LOVE

THE MARE

By Mary Gaitskill
Pantheon. 448p $26.95

An 11-year-old Dominican girl from Brooklyn spends two weeks in upstate New York, where she discovers an affinity for horses and learns that she is a natural equestrian, a skill she cultivates over the next few years under the sponsorship of a white, middle-class benefactress and over the objections of her immigrant mother. This, in one sentence, is the plot of *The Mare*, the new novel by Mary Gaitskill, whose reputation for tough, edgy fiction began with her debut story collection *Bad Behavior* in 1988 and who has since maintained it by tackling daring subject matter in bold, unsentimental and stylistically innovative ways.

The Mare, at first glance, would seem to be a departure; its situation invites sentimentality and clichés. Gaitskill's strategy is to acknowledge them unapologetically to explore deeper themes of race, social class and the nature of altruism. It's not that the story is unimportant to Gaitskill—recent interviews reveal that she came to horseback riding just lately, in her mid-50's, and the novel resonates with her emotional investment in the world of horses and their caretakers. She writes of the animals with tenderness and empathy and marvels at their interaction with trainers and riders. But the "troubled girl redeemed by her love for a horse" trajectory of the plot nearly overshadows the thornier issues Gaitskill raises.



Gaitskill intentionally calls readers' attention to what is familiar and predictable in her story. The epigraph comes from Enid Bagnold's classic *National Velvet*, and the young protagonist is called Velvet. The mare she trains is named "Fiery Girl"; Velvet herself is fiery, known at school as a "ferocious fighter." Both girl and mare have been victims of abuse, but they are mutually rehabilitated by their bond; both become more confident, more tractable, more disciplined, truer to what is best within them. And lest the reader miss it, Gaitskill underscores the homophone of the title: Velvet comes in contact with several women, each of whom, in her own way, acts as a mother to her. There is Silvia, her birth mother, tyrannical and frightened; Ginger, her sponsor, well-intentioned and sincere but intensely self absorbed; Miss Pat, the no-nonsense barn manager who recognizes and nurtures Velvet's potential; and Gaby, a neighborhood eccentric who protects Velvet and dispenses wisdom. Each functions as *la mère* to Velvet.

The story progresses in short chapters narrated from different points of view, most often Velvet's and Ginger's, less frequently from the welcome perspectives of Paul, Ginger's skeptical but patient husband, and Silvia, both critical observers who, peripheral to the main action, can offer more objective accounts than either Velvet or Ginger. For Velvet, Gaitskill creates a voice that is vibrant and authentic despite bursts of improbable precocity. Initially suspicious of glossy brochures showing "white people on some grass hugging dark children," Velvet is street smart and resourceful, a "manipulative" kid, in Paul's view. She has to be in order to survive a neighborhood where acquaintances are routinely lost to prison or violence and a home where her mother wields a slipper like a club to affirm authority over a daughter she fears she is losing to "some fool woman [who] has made her into a pet."

Velvet's uncanny intuition, about both humans and horses, can strain credibility, as when she detects fissures in Paul and Ginger's marriage long before Ginger does, or during the several "horse whisperer" moments Gaitskill gives her. But Velvet's voice is most affecting in descriptions of her burgeoning sexuality and in her imperfect attempts to articulate the horse-human connection, something that, as many riders will attest, may lie beyond the power of language to express.

Ginger is a trickier character. At first she seems noble and philanthropic, and her good wishes and affection for Velvet are never in doubt. But her motives are questionable. In recovery from addictions to drugs and alcohol, Ginger finds her life comfortable but empty because she has never had children, and this is her greatest regret. Sheltering Velvet for a few weeks a year allows her to "play at being a mother," in her snooty neighbors' disapproving but not inaccurate terms. Full of insecurity and disappointment, Ginger thinks she sees in Velvet "an enchanted hunger," but the hunger is her own. She romanticizes her effect on Velvet; she perceives Velvet's eyes "golden and shining, like she was in a scene from something on TV." Reading Velvet to sleep, Ginger convinces herself she is "living a dream she had seen from…advertisements and children's books." The first Christmas she hosts Velvet brings her "own childhood…to life again."

When Paul observes something "unnerving" and "fevered" in Ginger's interest, she remonstrates, "Can't you see how good this is for me?" And when Velvet achieves success, Ginger is filled with "vindicated joy"—*she* has been proven right, after all. Inarguably, Ginger opens new worlds to Velvet, but there is something discomfiting about Ginger's largesse. She is the well-meaning white liberal whose service to the underclass is ultimately all about herself. Ginger does the right thing for the wrong reason.

Ginger's unconscious condescension can be shocking. When she first meets Velvet's mother, Ginger likens her to "an orangutan." Ginger contemplates uprooting Silvia and Velvet's younger brother from Brooklyn so that Velvet can spend more time at the barn—and so that Ginger can spend more time with Velvet. Ginger rationalizes, "Mexicans live here. I see them mostly working in restaurants. If she [Silvia] cleaned houses, she could make at least ten dollars an hour." Silvia has no interest in cleaning houses. In the novel's most disconcerting passage, Ginger generalizes about the people in Velvet's community: "Maybe they really are different from us, more violent, more dishonest…nicer in some ways, yes, warm, physical, passionate. But weak-minded…no self-control." Her association with Velvet, benevolent as it is, awakens a latent bigotry.

Is it ever truly possible to bridge differences of ethnicity and economic status? Does an implicit superiority taint every act of charity? Can altruism ever be completely free of self-interest? While it is easy to be inspired and heartened by the transformation Velvet undergoes and the empowerment she acquires in her work with horses, these are the provocative and disquieting questions that linger at the end of *The Mare*.

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Proclaim the Good Word

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), JAN. 24, 2016

Readings: Neh 8:2–10; Ps 19:8–15; 1 Cor 12:12–30; Lk 1:1–4; 4:14–21

"He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him" (Lk 4:16–17)

The broad context for Ezra's reading of the Law of Moses to the people "before the Water Gate" is the return from the exile in Babylon and the reconstruction of the religious life of the people of Israel. This reconstruction included rebuilding the Temple but also rebuilding the knowledge of God's law. The people are hearing the commandments of God, newly codified, for the first time.

The scene at the Water Gate is a public assembly in which the law was proclaimed to and heard by all the people. Public promulgation of the law was necessary in antiquity, when many people could not read and even those who could read would not have possessed a copy of the text. In fact, many codes of law, not as voluminous as the laws of modern nation states, were made public in the city square on a stone stele, like the law code of Hammurabi, so people could know the laws.

Public proclamation was a sort of ancient Internet, bringing the law to all the people and creating a sense of communal accountability. And Ezra was speaking to all people, "both men and women and all who could hear with understanding," an inclusiveness that is significant since it is repeated twice in Nehemiah. The last group, "all who could hear with understanding," included children, probably all those above age 7, as that was considered the age of reason.

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The lengthy public reading, "from early morning until midday," was not just to acquaint people with the law; it also had a didactic function, since the reading from the law of God was accompanied by interpretation. Ezra, and those who taught with him, "gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading." This is an early example of what is found later in the synagogue and then adopted by the church: the proclamation of God's word accompanied by an explanation so that all might understand the meaning of God's word.

It was the task of Ezra as priest and scribe to build the people up by interpreting God's word, a task that would later fall to rabbis and priests. Ezra's proclamation led the people to mourn, but Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites, all of whom were involved in teaching the law, encouraged the people not to weep. Their weeping arose from a conviction of sinfulness based on a lack of knowledge of God's law, not a rejection of it, so the teachers of the people encouraged them instead to take joy in what they had heard and to celebrate with a feast. God's law is intended to lead to joy, not misery.

For Luke, the proclamation of the Scripture by Jesus is so significant that he places it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Luke places this scene in Chapter Four in order to start Jesus' ministry with his proclamation of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue, unlike Mark and Matthew, where much of Jesus' mission has already occurred before Jesus returns to Nazareth. This allows Luke to present Jesus as a new Ezra reading and interpreting Scripture for all the people.

But in Nazareth, his hometown, Jesus' interpretation of Scripture, so central to the life of the Jewish people from the time of Ezra and before, takes on a new dimension, one never seen before in the teaching of God's people. As Jesus proclaimed the good word for the people, reading from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, he explains Scripture by reference to himself, saying, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus' interpretation is to identify himself as the one who fulfills the promises of God in Scripture.

It is a bold and shocking declaration, which reorients the interpretation of Scripture for Jesus' disciples. Jesus' explanation means that Christians everywhere interpret the word of God through the clarifying lens of Christ. As the church, our task is still the same as that of Ezra and the gathered people of Israel: to hear God's word proclaimed, to ponder it and to listen. But we do so as the church, listening for the voice and guidance of the Messiah, the one who interpreted the Scripture with his life and death.

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Contemplate your experience of Scripture. How does Jesus' teaching help you understand it? How has Scripture guided your daily life? Name one thing about Scripture that you find difficult to understand.

ART: TAD DUNNE

What Is Love?

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), JAN. 31, 2016

Readings: Jer 1:4-19; Ps 71:1-17; 1 Cor 12:31-13:13; Lk 4:21-30

"Faith, hope, and love abide; the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor 13:13)

I do not recall hearing the question and I do not recall offering my answer, but my parents and grandparents remember the question and they certainly remember my response. The story goes like this: The pastor boomed a question from the pulpit, "Does anyone here know what love is?" The congregation was pondering in silence, until I answered back, a 2-year-old toddler, "Oh, how should I know?"

If someone asked for a definition of love today, I might wonder for a moment if I knew how to define love, but St. Paul's ode to divine love in 1 Corinthians 13 means I have on hand a thorough and complete definition. I know what love is. The truth is that even though as a toddler I thought like a child and reasoned as a child and did not know how to describe love, I had already experienced God's love in my family.

Love is the experience of being intended, wanted, cared for and known. It is not just the prophet Jeremiah whose life was intended by God before he was born and who was called by God as a boy to fulfill a specific vocation. Each of us has been called forth by the love of God who wills us into being and who intends for us to remain in the presence of God's love for eternity. Love is the essence of God's being and so the true intention for each of our lives.

This is why, when Paul is speaking to the Corinthians about spiritual gifts—the same Corinthians who have argued about which gifts are superior, such as speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*) or prophecy or gifts of healing—the apostle outlines "a still more excellent way." The more excellent way Paul outlines describes the precedence of love (*agapê*) in the spiritual life. Paul assures us that there is no substitute for love in the life of the church. No spiritual gifts, no prophetic powers, no mysteries, not knowledge, not generosity, not even faith, replace the superiority of love. Paul asserts that if he does "not have love, I am nothing" or merely "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." Because the essence of God is love, the Christian life is love.

Paul defines the essence of love, grounded in his understanding and experience of God's own love. Paul defines *agapê* with a sort of list: love is patient, kind, not envious, not boastful, not arrogant, not rude, does not "insist on its own way," "is not irritable or resentful," rejoices in truth and not wrongdoing, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things and never ends. To take stock of this list is to see where we have failed one another on numerous occasions, but it also illuminates what it means truly to love each other and to understand how fully God loves us. More than offering us a definition of love, it offers us the overwhelming reality of how God cares for us.

The irresistible reality of God's love becomes evident when we reflect on the last item on the list: love never ends. Paul says that "as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end," but because God is love and because God is without beginning or end, love truly is at the heart of existence, also without beginning or end. We are tempted sometimes to think that love does not win, when we see horrors inflicted on innocents because of their religious beliefs, the color of their skin or simply out of cruelty and bullying. But love is our past, present and future.

Paul says that "when I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways." If he means that he did not know what love was, or how to define it, or how to put into words his own experience of love as a boy, it makes sense to me. How should he know?

But as an adult, he came to know the experience of God's love and through the experience of the reality of God's love to express it more perfectly than any writer before or since. Paul was called into existence by a loving God to fulfill a call, but it was not just his superior gifts as a writer that allowed him to express God's love. It was the pure experience of that love. Our experience of love in this world, both God's and the love of other people, sustains our hope and faith when love sometimes seems absent, a question difficult to answer or a virtue hard to define. In his heart and mind Paul knew, "faith, hope and love abide," but "the greatest of these is love." With Paul, we know what love is: eternity in God's presence.

JOHN W. MARTENS

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Contemplate the experience of love, both from God and from family and friends. How have you experienced God's love? How has it given you hope and faith? What does it mean to you that "love never ends"?

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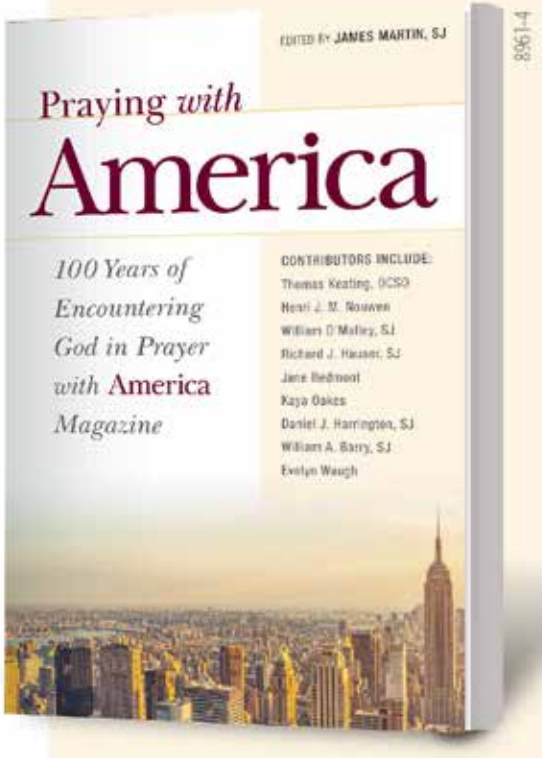

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