

# America

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ISSUE

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

FEB. 18, 2013 \$3.50

THEY FIRE  
OLD WORKERS  
TO BE ABLE TO  
DISRESPECT NEW  
ONES

# Walmart

## Job Insecurity

THE HIGH COST OF LOW PRICES

KEVIN CLARKE

Getting to Work

PATRICIA RANFT

LENTEN ISSUE

# OF MANY THINGS

To mark America's 5,000th issue, we reprint below a reflection by John LaFarge, S.J., our sixth editor in chief, which originally appeared in the 2,000th issue on Sept. 13, 1947. In the words of Father LaFarge, "the reader can attach to this interesting item whatever importance he wishes." **MATT MALONE, S.J.**

By the help of the most recently devised electronic calculator we figured out in the sixteen-thousandth part of a second that we have put down 54,000,000 words on paper during the thirty-eight years of AMERICA's existence. The reader can attach to this interesting item whatever importance he wishes....

AMERICA's one-thousandth number described what was going on in that Europe: That world had only the vaguest possible inkling, if any at all, of the terrible catastrophe that in less than twelve months' time was to engulf the whole of our Western civilization in the icy claws of the depression, and all the consequent disasters....

Those issues of November 24, 1928, were fewer and, in general, simpler and easier to handle than those of the present day. And yet those of today are somehow blended into one great issue about which we were then already warning...the issue of the Christian concept of liberty, as opposed to totalitarianism....

All this makes us very humble as we approach the issues of the present day...because we realize now something that only partly, at the very best, could be realized in 1928—the terrific responsibility of the United States for the welfare of the world—and consequently the severe obligation that rests upon us of this country today, somehow to understand the issues and look into their inner and permanent meaning.

But when we undertake to gauge these issues there are certain cautions which we need to observe....

The first caution is not to con-

fuse the transitory with the permanent. A transitory event rouses us from our lethargy and is a challenge to our courage and intelligence. But the permanent issue remains as a subject for study and an ever-greater clarification of objectives and methods....

Our second rule is that we should not confuse various levels at which the issue is posed. It is all too easy to shift from one level to another and try to make religion do the work of politics, or make politics do the work of religion....

If I say it once more, I think that one of the outstanding weaknesses of our religious thought—or at least of our religious handling of the issues—is precisely our difficulty in reconciling ourselves to the fact that there *are* so many different levels on which an identical problem can be treated. Those who speak one language—whether the language of the psychologist or of the political scientist or of the moralist or the theologian or of the day-to-day journalist or of the labor analyst or whatever you wish—find it difficult and almost intolerable to have to listen to the language of those who speak a different tongue. Yet we should all be working together and we should all be intelligent and broadminded enough to appreciate the contributions to the same problem which are suggested by those who enjoy another approach, another background of experience....

[W]e hope that AMERICA's readers will be patient with us.... We know that thousands of you penetrate into secrets which we ourselves with our own limited minds and souls have not fully fathomed. We know that you can help us with your thoughts, your ideas, your prayers, your suggestions. We depend on you.... If any world at all will survive, it will be the result of our collectively envisioning the "issue"—that is to say, the *consequence*, the *result*, the unfolding of those things which have now become the "issues of decision" in the year 1947.

# America

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Cover: Striking Walmart workers and supporters protest at a store on Black Friday in Paramount, Calif. Reuters/Bret Hartman

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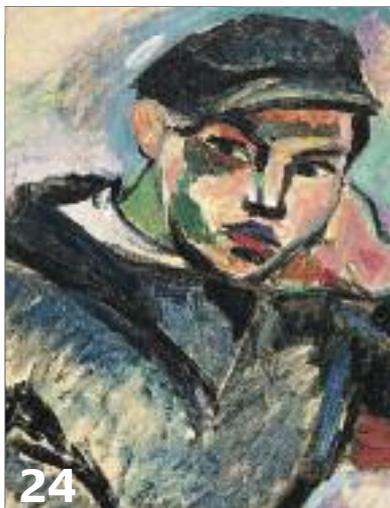


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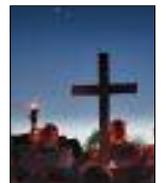
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*Jefferson; Soldier of Christ; On a Farther Shore*



## ON THE WEB

From the video archives, the editors suggest **practices for Lent**. Plus, James Martin, S.J., Tim Reidy and Bill McGarvey discuss the **Oscar nominees** on our podcast. All at [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org).



### All the President's Men

President Obama may have won a second term thanks to an increasingly diverse electorate, but he has been called to task for failing to showcase that diversity in his cabinet. A now famous picture from the Oval Office shows the president in a room full of male advisors. Yet in one important respect, the president is already achieving a small measure of diversity.

Chuck Hagel, Mr. Obama's choice for secretary of defense, attended the University of Nebraska, Omaha. National Security Advisor Thomas E. Donilon is a graduate of The Catholic University of America. John O. Brennan, the nominee for director of the Central Intelligence Agency, went to Fordham University. Denis R. McDonough, the president's new chief of staff, graduated from Saint John's University in Collegeville, Minn.

We might be accused of special pleading if we note how many of these appointees are graduates of Catholic schools. So let us focus on another important fact: None of them hail from the Ivy League. There are, of course, many Ivy League grads in the West Wing, from John Kerry at State (Yale) to Jacob J. Lew at Treasury (Harvard). Yet they do not dominate as they do in, say, the Supreme Court, where every justice attended Harvard or Yale Law School.

In appointing advisers with a wider mix of educational backgrounds, the president is following the lead of an unexpected pioneer: Justice Clarence Thomas, who has been a vocal critic of the preference for Supreme Court clerks from Ivy League schools. "Isn't that the antithesis," he asked in a recent talk, "of what this country is supposed to be about?"

### Finally, Immigration

After years of neglect and partisan hyperbole, immigration reform is finally taking shape. Both the president and Senate leaders announced proposals last month to guide the legislative process. As of this writing, the principal difference between the plans concerns the path to citizenship for the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States. President Obama wants this process to move forward without preconditions, while Republican leaders are pushing for implementing border control measures before opening up the path to citizenship.

The debate promises to be long and perhaps heated, but leaders of both parties should not let this chance slip away. The nation's undocumented immigrants have been left in

limbo for too long; they deserve a chance to play a public, productive role in society. Some will deride any path to citizenship as "amnesty," but as people of faith we know that sometimes such broad acts of charity are called for. Political leaders should not be afraid of exercising their powers in the cause of mercy.

The details of the proposals may change significantly in the coming days, but in important ways they follow the recommendations put forward by the U.S. bishops in their 2003 letter, "Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope." One particular recommendation from the bishops is worth emphasizing as the debate continues: addressing inequities in Latin America and elsewhere that drive so many people to seek refuge in the United States. That flood may have slowed with the downturn in the U.S. economy, but it promises to surge again once conditions improve. Until the United States works with Mexico, in particular, to reduce poverty abroad, immigration will be a perennial issue at home.

### Vive la France?

The French military intervention in Mali has been welcomed by many of the long-suffering residents in the Saharan north of this vast nation. They have had quite enough of life under the virulent strain of Shariah law enforced by their Islamist "liberators." The arrival of the French has also delighted what passes for the Malian government and military, which had seemed bereft of a strategy to halt a rebel momentum that after enveloping the Tuareg deserts, seemed well on its way to overrunning the entire nation. It has apparently been welcomed even in war-on-terror-fatigued Washington, where many are pleased to see an alternative power step up to confront Islamist extremism.

But while accolades may be in order, this latest use of force also provokes uneasiness. The French incursion may have put an end to an outburst of Islamist tyranny in North Africa, while deflecting a threat to Europe's southern flank and protecting French postcolonial interests in the region. But it will achieve little toward addressing the legitimate grievances of Mali's Tuareg north. The French intervention will only briefly shore up a state that is barely holding itself together and has contributed to a deteriorating humanitarian crisis. Finally, this latest use of force merely reprises the era's militarist response to the geopolitical challenges of Islamist extremism. Dialogue, engagement and nonviolent, new thinking should be just as welcome as the French Foreign Legion before the next conflict begins.

# Give It Up

It might surprise some Catholics to learn that fasting during Lent is not meant to be undertaken solely for one's spiritual well-being. While self-abnegation can serve as a vivid reminder that our physical bodies should not rule our lives, the early church fathers thought that fasting needed to be connected to something else: almsgiving. St. John Chrysostom wrote that fasting without almsgiving was hardly praiseworthy; in fact, it hardly counted as fasting at all. Ironically, he compared it to gluttony and drunkenness, since it smacked of selfishness. For St. Augustine, fasting was avaricious unless one gave away what one saved. The practice, then, needs to be informed by charity, not simply a desire to attain spiritual perfection.

Fasting and almsgiving are, along with prayer, the pillars of Lenten practice. But as even devout Catholics might be surprised by the comments of Sts. John and Augustine, they might also be surprised by the new ways that these old traditions can help them—and others—as they prepare for the great celebration of Easter.

The three practices should be intertwined. Prayer can soften hearts and awaken compassion, making a person more likely to be generous to others. It also makes fasting more palatable. A deeper relationship with God leads to growing solidarity with the poor, a desire to imitate Christ in his poverty and a hope to be freed from the snares of our consumerist culture. Fasting aids prayer by reminding us of our dependence on God and can also, as St. John and St. Augustine knew, help us in a practical way by saving money for alms. Finally, almsgiving can deepen our prayer as we are brought into contact with our brothers and sisters who live in poverty, and it can prompt an important question: Am I consuming too much?

Can we say anything new about this Lenten triad? Many Catholics forego things like desserts or soda, noble enough goals to wean us from foods that might be unhealthy. But why not take up the fasting officially suggested by the church? Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of universal (that is, for everyone between ages 18 and 59) fast and abstinence. Fasting is defined as one full, meatless meal. Abstinence means refraining from meat. Fridays in Lent are also days of abstinence. Perhaps an entire day without food—health permitting—could also be added to this regime. This kind of voluntary fasting, difficult as it is, can remind us of the involuntary hunger that is the daily lot of millions of our brothers and sisters around the world, of all ages.

Second, try an alternative fast. Is there something we can forego that will wean us from a “disordered attachment,” as St. Ignatius said? For example, cutting back on our use of social media means more time for people face to face. In this way fasting might provide a kind of alms for our family and friends. How about fasting from family arguments? In this case, the alms we give could be greater peace.

Almsgiving may also benefit from some creative thinking. Giving to organizations like Catholic Relief Services' Operation Rice Bowl, for example, is a superb way to help the poor, the hungry and the homeless across the world, as Jesus asked of us when he said, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Mt 9:13). Almsgiving is a concrete form of this mercy. But can our alms include the spiritual kind? This may be as simple as offering the alms of forgiveness and reconciliation to someone against whom we have held a grudge. That offering is as valuable as anything we may put into the collection plate this Lent.

Creativity in fasting and almsgiving may encourage us to be creative in prayer. Lent is one of the best times to think about new ways of fostering a personal relationship with God. The biblical motif of dying and rising to new life that define Lent can help us identify with Jesus, who understood human suffering. Reflecting on those Scripture passages can be an entrée for us into his life and open doors for him to enter into our hearts.

But meditating on suffering is not the only way to pray during the days before Easter. For example, you might try to rediscover a spiritual practice. If you have not been to Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament recently, check out your parish's schedule. If you've never tried Christian centering prayer, you could learn about this practice, which has roots in the apophatic tradition of Christian spirituality. If you've not been on a retreat in some time, why not see what a local retreat house is offering during Lent. For many retreat centers, Lent is a prime time for accessible and inviting spiritual programs.

This Lent, may prayer move us all to charity and asceticism. May our almsgiving remind us to consume less and pray more. And may we make St. John Chrysostom and St. Augustine, not to mention Jesus Christ, happy by allowing our fasting to awaken a deeper reliance on God and move us to give to those in greatest need.



# SIGNS OF THE TIMES

EGYPT

## Church Official Blames Morsi For Deaths and Disorder

**D**isorder spread throughout Egypt's urban centers as the second anniversary of the beginning of a popular uprising and overthrow of the Mubarak regime on Jan. 25 became an opportunity for women, secularists and Christian Egyptians to protest the nation's increasing tilt toward Islamist rule. Protestors demanding the ouster of President Mohammed Morsi filled Cairo's Tahrir Square, and parallel protests led to violence in other metropolitan areas. The chaos accelerated when clashes flared after a Cairo court handed down death sentences for 21 supporters of Port Said's Al-Masry soccer club for their part in a 2012 riot that left 74 people dead. Scores have been killed and wounded in street violence. Egypt's army chief, Gen. Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, even warned on Jan. 29 that the political crisis could lead to the collapse of the state.

In the two years since the Arab Spring reached Egypt, the nation's Christians have faced growing uncertainty and intimidation. Thousands have joined an exodus out of Egypt into the United States, where as many as 100,000 refugees have swelled a pre-revolution population of 350,000. With the continuing disorder in the streets and the damaged economy, which relies on a tourist trade that has collapsed, and amid new threats against Christians emerging from among Islamist groups, that emigration is likely to continue.

This existential threat has not gone unnoticed by Christian leadership. In

January the Catholic Church in Egypt issued a stinging critique of President Morsi, accusing him of manipulating public opinion and acts of gross



**BETWEEN THE KORAN AND THE CROSS: Protestors in Cairo's Tahrir Square.**

incompetence that led to the deaths of protestors. The Rev. Antoine Rafic Greiche, spokesperson for the Catholic bishops' conference of Egypt,

IMMIGRATION

## Congress Faces Familiar, Treacherous Path to Reform

**F**or more than 20 years, efforts to pass a far-reaching reform of the U.S. immigration system, pushed at times by Democrats as well as Republicans, by Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, have gotten as far as a vote in one body of Congress before falling apart. The last time Congress passed a substantial immigration reform law, in 1986, the Rev. Nicholas DiMarzio, then the director of Migration and Refugee Services for the U.S. Catholic bishops, helped coalition-building among interest groups like the National Council of La

Raza and the A.F.L.-C.I.O. "It was a whole different political scene," said now-Bishop DiMarzio of Brooklyn, N.Y. "Bipartisanship was possible. I don't know how it's going to work this time."

In the mid-1980s, undocumented immigrants numbered around five million people in perhaps 10 states, mostly along the Mexican border and in New York, Florida and Illinois. Today, more than 11 million people lack legal status, and the list of states with the fastest-growing populations of immigrants includes Tennessee,

North Carolina, Arkansas, Delaware and Wyoming. The coalition-building it took to pass previous immigration legislation may offer lessons for today's Congress as it launches an effort that may have the best chance of achieving comprehensive reforms since the era of the Iran-Contra affair and the initial public stock offering for Microsoft. Since more than 70 percent of Hispanic voters supported President Obama in the 2012 election over his rival, Mitt Romney, Republican leaders have moved swiftly to restart efforts to fix an immigration system that is widely described as broken.

On Jan. 28 a bipartisan panel of senators, quickly dubbed the Group of Eight, presented a framework that would include a path to citizenship for



accused Morsi of failing to adequately ready security forces for the clear likelihood of street violence. President Morsi “must take responsibility for the

deaths of those who were killed in the recent unrest,” he said. “The security forces were unprepared for these protests, even though they were predictable. This is the government’s failure.” By Feb. 1, 57 people had died in clashes with police and security forces.

“The people are dissatisfied with the Islamist regime,” Father Greiche said. “Divisions are increasing. The bloody protests in the Suez region and in Cairo show how the country is falling apart. But perhaps this will also lead to new reflection and to a new unity about the future of Egypt. At any rate, it cannot go on like this.” Father Greiche also condemned Morsi’s initiatives at dialogue as insincere. The president, he said, “must finally start a national dialogue that is worthy of the name. We had plenty of staged events that were designed to produce nice pictures, but were otherwise a waste of time.”

Of key concern to Egyptian Christians, according to Father Greiche, is the constitution that Morsi

signed into law in December in the face of bitter opposition, not least from the Catholic Church, which withdrew from the negotiations to draft the document. Bishop Kyrillos William, administrator of the Coptic Catholic Patriarchate of Alexandria, warned that the “religious orientation of this constitution prepares the way for an Islamic caliphate.”

Among other incidents that have concerned both secularists and Christians since the constitution was approved, an Egyptian woman and her seven children were sentenced to 15 years in prison for converting to Christianity. Reports in January describe how thousands of people emerging from a mosque destroyed a Sunday school under construction in Fayoum. In a separate incident, on Jan. 18 thousands of Muslim protestors in Qena reportedly attacked eight Coptic Christian homes and businesses, torching Coptic-owned pharmacies and vehicles.

undocumented immigrants and would reduce backlogs in the immigration system that hinder family reunification. A day later, President Obama outlined a similar but more comprehensive list of his goals for immigration legislation.

The proposals of the president and the Senate panel have been cautiously praised by faith groups, civil rights organizations and employers. Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Migration, welcomed the senators’ effort. “It is vital that the framework includes a path to citizenship, so that undocumented immigrants can come out of the shadows and into the light and have a chance to

become Americans,” Archbishop Gomez said, noting the senators’ blueprint for reform “gives hope to millions.”

Archbishop Gomez noted some room for improvement. The proposal fails to restore to immigrants due process protections that were lost in the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act; and it does not address, he said, the root causes of migration, such as the absence of living-wage employment in the sending communities or protection for refugees fleeing persecution.

Nevertheless, Archbishop Gomez pledged the support of the U.S.C.C.B. for pushing sound immigration legislation forward and working with Congress to create an immigration sys-

tem that respects basic human rights and dignity while also ensuring the integrity of U.S. borders. “A reformed system can protect human dignity and the homeland at the same time,” he concluded.



**AMERICAN SMILE:** Anais Arias-Aragon with her certificate of citizenship in San Francisco on Jan. 30.

## Mahony Relieved Of 'Public Duties'

Cardinal Roger M. Mahony will “no longer have any administrative or public duties” as retired archbishop of Los Angeles because of past diocesan failures to protect children from clergy sex abuse, Archbishop José H. Gomez announced on Jan. 31. The archbishop’s statement came the same day the archdiocese published the files of clergy who were the subject of a 2007 global abuse settlement. Archbishop Gomez also accepted Auxiliary Bishop Thomas J. Curry’s request to be relieved as the regional bishop of Santa Barbara. Cardinal Mahony and Bishop Curry, however, remain bishops in good standing, with full rights to celebrate the sacraments and minister to the faithful without restriction.

Cardinal Mahony, now 76, headed the archdiocese from 1985 until his retirement in March 2011. Bishop Curry, 70, was the archdiocese’s vicar for clergy and chief adviser on sexual abuse cases in the mid-1980s. “I find these files to be brutal and painful reading,” Archbishop Gomez said on Jan. 31. “The behavior described in these files is terribly sad and evil,” he said. “There is no excuse, no explaining away what happened to these children. The priests involved had the duty to be their spiritual fathers and they failed. We need to acknowledge that terrible failure today.”

## No Life Sentences For Minors

The U.S. bishops’ Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development has endorsed a national campaign to end the practice of sentencing people under the age of 18 to life in prison without possibility of parole. “While there is no question

## NEWS BRIEFS

A Romanian appeals court ordered the demolition of a recently completed 18-story office building in Bucharest, built in defiance of various stop-work orders, because of the threat it would pose to its neighbor, the Cathedral of St. Joseph, in the event of an earthquake. + Msgr. Kevin Wallin, 61, a former pastor in Bridgeport, Conn., was indicted, along with four others, on **federal drug charges** on Jan. 15 for allegedly peddling methamphetamine. + The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on Jan. 29 filed amicus curiae briefs in the U.S. Supreme Court in support of the federal Defense of Marriage Act and California’s Proposition 8, both of which **confirm the definition of marriage** as the union of one man and one woman. + After four full days of prayer and discussion in Rome, the bishops of the Chaldean Catholic Church elected Archbishop Louis Sako of Kirkuk on Jan. 31 to be the **new patriarch** of their church, which is based in Iraq. + In his **first month on Twitter**, Pope Benedict XVI sent two dozen messages in nine languages, generating more than 270,000 responses, 8 percent of which, according to a “sentiment analysis,” were negative.



Louis Sako

that violent and dangerous youth need to be confined for their safety and that of society, the [conference] does not support provisions that treat children as though they are equal to adults in their moral and cognitive development,” said Bishop Stephen E. Blaize of Stockton, Calif., chairman of the committee. “Life sentences without parole eliminate the opportunity for rehabilitation or second chances.” The federal government and 38 states allow youths to be sentenced to life without possibility of parole. Currently, over 2,500 young people are serving such sentences. According to Amnesty International, the United States is the only country that imposes this sentence upon children.

## Stopping Violence Against Women

Violence against women in India has been a problem for centuries, but the

news of the gang rapes of several young women have provoked shame, outrage and now perhaps action. The Women’s Commission of the Archdiocese of Bombay (Mumbai) is one of the leading lights in this fight with its new campaign, called 37 Million Diyas: Say Yes to Love, Say No to Violence. The 37 million is the difference between the male and female population of India, one of the biggest factors in the violence. This differential is a result of the widespread practice of abortion for sex selection. Parishes across the archdiocese held an hour of prayer and remembrance for women victims of violence. Before parishioners, Cardinal Oswald Gracias vowed prayer and work on behalf of women and said, “It will continue for as long as it takes for you and me to bring about change.”

From CNS and other sources.



# Statements in Stone

The fog rubbed its muzzle on the windowpanes all across the eastern seaboard this year during the mild early winter months. Living outside New York City, I spent many mornings straining to see through the mist and searching for familiar landmarks as I drove around. More often than not, the first structure that would loom into view whenever I crested a hill or rounded a turn would be a massive stone structure atop a hill: a Catholic church, college, seminary or similar institution towering over the landscape and refusing to surrender to the fog. They are everywhere in the Hudson River Valley, these monumental buildings. The historian in me wonders if some archaeologist in the far future will conclude that “Catholics feared the valleys and the waterways, retreating to their dun-forts atop hill and palisade.”

Their size and location speak to a sometimes unspoken impulse in the pre-Vatican II church in the United States—the desire for a “muscular Catholicism” that made no bones about its presence in a largely Protestant nation, but instead sought to assert itself through architectural grandiosity. If you don’t believe me, do some research on the “bishop’s residence” built before 1965 in any city in the United States. You’ll find a palace fit for a prince. Many have now (thank goodness) been sold off, but the buildings remain—public statements asserting the power and majesty of the church and of those who saw themselves as its princes.

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JAMES T. KEANE, a former associate editor of *America*, is an editor at Orbis Books in Ossining, N.Y.

But at whom are these structures—the palatial bishop’s home, the massive Gothic cathedral, the fortress-like novitiate, the retreat house built like Versailles—aimed? Protestants, who might be reminded of the Catholic presence among them? Catholics themselves, to encourage their sense of the eternal nature of the church? Or the young men and women enrolling in college or pursuing vocations to the priesthood and religious life, reminding them that they were entering something larger than themselves? More to the point, why did their construction cease almost entirely after 1965?

There are demographic answers, obviously, including financial considerations as well as the declining numbers of men and women entering religious life since the Second Vatican Council. The immediate aftermath of the council itself also offers some answers, as the rediscovered mandate to be of and in the world instead of set apart from it found an enthusiastic reception among many American Catholics. The marketing catchphrase at my own undergraduate university before Vatican II was “A Man of Two Worlds” (the local archbishop wasn’t about to let women on campus in those days), suggesting that a good young Catholic needed to be able to participate in American life while maintaining his or her identity in the sacred world of the church. In the decades since, that sense of being “set apart” (there’s the reason you build your city upon a hill!) dissolved to a significant degree. In recent years, that

same institution unveiled a logo that includes (not my words) a “subtle cross” hinted at by other graphic components—in other words, faith not as a distinguishing characteristic, but as a background element. The impulse to stand out, it seems, has been overtaken by the impulse to fit in.

But this provokes another question. If recent Pew Forum surveys are to be believed, fully one third of American-born Catholics leave the Catholic Church during their lifetime, and one in 10 Americans is an ex-Catholic. At the same time, the Catholic Church in the United States has grown in terms of real numbers, the result of waves of immigration in recent decades from Catholic countries in Asia and

The buildings remain, asserting the power and majesty of the church.

Latin America.

What role will buildings play for these new populations moving into the American church and their sense of being both Catholic and American? Is there an architectural movement that reflects their place in American society and buttresses their understanding of their faith? Is their impulse to “fit in” not paralleled by the impulse to assert a public faith? Perhaps architecture is no longer the way that is done; or perhaps we are too early in this change in American Catholic life for the physical manifestations of the change to be obvious. Or, perhaps, are we naïve and self-satisfied enough to assume that Gothic or Tudor structures built by Irish and Italians make a Guatemalan, a Filipino or a Vietnamese churchgoer feel at home in their faith?

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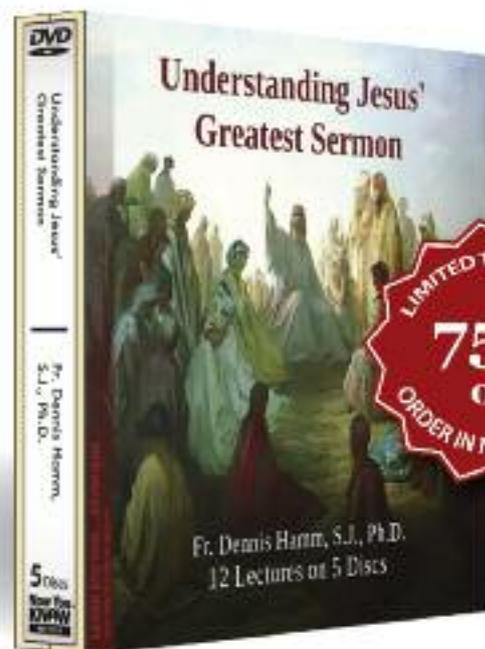
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New labor campaigns hope to turn low-wage work into a decent living.



PHOTO: REUTERS/JONATHAN ALCOHN

# Job Insecurity

BY KEVIN CLARKE

**W**hen William Fletcher complains about the way he is treated at his job, people tell him to find a different one. Mr. Fletcher, 23, of El Monte, Calif., is an associate on the floor at a Walmart store in Southern California. Quitting Walmart is an option he has considered, but given the state of the economy, Mr. Fletcher says he is grateful to have the job. Besides, he says, for him and other Walmart employees who struggle with low wages, chaotic scheduling and insensitive management, the “sad reality is we love our jobs; we love working with the public.”

And why should working the Walmart retail floor not be the kind of job that pays enough for him to “have a home, have health insurance, have all the basic things in life?” Mr. Fletcher wonders. He finds it slightly un-American to think of quitting just because job conditions are not ideal. Besides, he points out, “Walmart is the largest chain retailer in the world; they control the market. If I go someplace else, I’m going to have the same problems.” “We’re going to fight to make this job better,” he says.

**STRIKE UP THE BAND:** Mariachis join Walmart workers protesting poor wages at a Walmart store in Pico Rivera, Calif.

KEVIN CLARKE is an associate editor of *America*.

That's what he began doing two years ago when he joined Organization United for Respect at Walmart, or OUR Walmart, a national effort to unite Walmart's nonunion employees around demands for improved working conditions and wages at this U.S. corporate and retail giant. Mr. Fletcher is part of an emerging labor phenomenon of non-union activism directed against Walmart and other powerful, profitable U.S. corporations that maintain large, low-paid work forces. In 2012, unprecedented labor actions by nonunion workers included walkouts and in-store protests at fast-food outlets and Walmart stores and warehouses.

In Illinois the Workers Organizing Committee of Chicago led demonstrations at retail and fast-food establishments along Michigan Avenue's famed "Magnificent Mile" in a "Fight for 15," a city-wide minimum wage of \$15. In New York, Fast Food Forward coordinated a walkout among hundreds of fast-food workers at a variety of chain restaurants last November. The organization's aim is not unlike OUR Walmart's, converting so-called McJobs into positions that offer a wage, schedule and benefits package that might allow workers to support themselves and their families.

With union organizing efforts crippled by a regulatory structure that has not kept up with changing corporate practices and the increasing popularity of so-called right-to-work laws, "the cards are stacked against workers these days in terms of labor law," says Gerald J. Beyer, an associate professor of Christian social ethics at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia. Nationally union membership is at historic lows; in 2012 unions represented just 6.6 percent of the private workforce, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Instead of fighting against the current, these retail and fast-food workers are no longer primarily seeking to organize into union locals but are devising new ways to agitate for better conditions, borrowing tactics from community organizing and the civil rights movement, often in cooperation with traditional unions.

The OUR Walmart campaign, for example, enjoys the logistical support of the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, which has for years tried unsuccessfully to penetrate Walmart's anti-union ramparts. A Walmart spokesperson dismisses the OUR Walmart movement as the grumbling of a few disgruntled employees, amplified by the U.F.C.W., but the retail behemoth was concerned enough to file a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board that attempted to halt an OUR Walmart demonstration timed for Thanksgiving and Walmart's

annual Black Friday shopping-palooza. In its complaint, the company alleged that the group is little more than a front for U.F.C.W. organizing. A union spokesperson acknowledges an ongoing role with the group but claims that, while the U.F.C.W. still provides communications support, OUR Walmart has established independence over the last year.

## Union Standoff

The company has been able to turn back various other union organizing efforts with management interventions that critics say make a mockery of labor laws meant to protect union organizing. In 2007 Human Rights Watch called Walmart "a case study in what is wrong with U.S. labor laws." The organization's researchers said among other misbehaving U.S. retailers, Walmart "stands out for the sheer magnitude and aggressiveness of its anti-union apparatus and actions."

OUR Walmart's Black Friday protests brought national attention to the retailer's decision to jump-start the Christmas shopping season by opening on Thanksgiving Day itself, thereby torpedoing many of its employees' family celebrations. Ultimately, few Walmart employees scheduled for work joined the protest, according to a Walmart corporate statement.

Karin Aubrey, an OUR Walmart member from Cape Canaveral, Fla., says that before Thanksgiving 12 or 13 associates from her store were willing to walk out, but as the holiday approached, the group began to lose its collective nerve. According to Ms. Aubrey, her co-workers were warned by managers that they "would be handing out pink slips" in the event of a walkout.

"Everybody was terrified," she says. "No one came out."

"The reality is that there are only a handful of associates, at a handful of stores, scattered across the country that are participating in these U.F.C.W. made-for-TV events," Kory Lundberg, Walmart's director of National Media Relations, wrote in an e-mail message. "Most of the numbers of people the U.F.C.W. claims at their events aren't even Walmart workers. They are union representatives and other union members."

"We're not union, and we're not necessarily looking to be union," counters Ms. Aubrey. Her aims are not quite that ambitious. A little more heft to her paycheck would suit her just fine.

Ms. Aubrey, 55, has been working for Walmart off and on for years. She earns \$10.10 an hour and can barely afford her rent. "I am clearing less than \$250 a week; I have been

## Why should working at Walmart not be the kind of job that pays enough to 'have a home, have health insurance, have all the basics in life?'

on food stamps since they cut my hours," she complains. "They give you a measly 40 cent raise each year, then they increase health care costs or something else and take it all back." According to Ms. Aubrey, only the department managers at her store are able to get full-time hours and "some of the old-time employees."

She says, "The rest of us are part-timers. There's a lot of single moms in my store and many of them, because of the part-time hours, get government assistance. There's not only a lot of them on food stamps, there is a lot of them that qualify for Medicaid."

It is not exactly news that fast-food and retail workers are not being offered a living wage; but the willingness of such workers to agitate for better conditions without the collective cover offered by a union is notable. Joseph A. McCartin, a professor of history at Georgetown University and director of the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, called the OUR Walmart campaign a "significant development" within the contemporary labor movement.

Professor McCartin explains that efforts to improve conditions at Walmart could have an important ripple effect. With 1.3 million "associates," the company's term for non-management retail employees, "Walmart is the largest private employer in the United States," says Mr. McCartin. "They're the trendsetter." Walmart's decisions set standards not only for other major retail chains, but for the treatment

of entry-level employees across employment sectors.

"Movements that effect changes go after the biggest players first," says Mr. Beyer. He speculates that efforts like OUR Walmart could provide the "spark" that ignites a broader labor renewal.

The significance of the movement transcends any specific gains achieved at Walmart. While other employment sectors continue a decline, significantly reducing the number of jobs that offer a chance at a middle-class lifestyle, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that the retail sector will offer the second-largest source of new jobs in the United States over the next 10 years. The nature of that growth so far is not encouraging. Since 2006, the bureau reports, the retail and wholesale sector cut one million full-time jobs and added more than 500,000 part-time positions.

### Minimum Value

Many of the employees of some of the nation's most profitable corporations—Walmart, McDonald's, Yum Brands, Home Depot—earn wages at or near state and federal minimums. The federal per-hour standard, currently at \$7.25 (19 states have higher minimums, ranging up to Washington State's \$9.19), can only be adjusted by an act of Congress. As a result, the federal wage floor has not kept pace with the rising cost of living, and its value has declined more than 30 percent since its peak in 1968, according to an



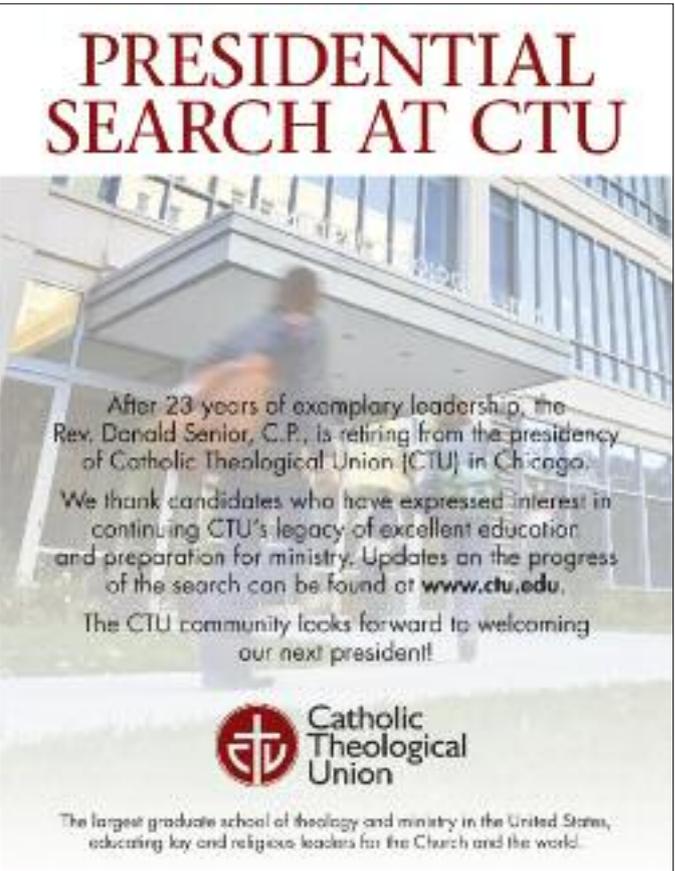
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A minimum wage job, as a result, is essentially a sure path to poverty. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the typical retail salesperson earns just \$21,000 per year. Demos, a liberal New York-based public policy research center, estimates that establishing a minimum retail annual wage of \$25,000 a year would lift more than 1.5 million retail workers and their families out of poverty or near-poverty.

After four years at Walmart, Mr. Fletcher earns just over \$10 an hour. He does not have one of the coveted full-time schedules. He cannot afford the company's health insurance plan. Mr. Fletcher alleges that Walmart deliberately keeps employees like him trapped in a part-time, low-wage limbo, unable to qualify for or afford the company's health insurance, unable to get by on their weekly take-home.

"We have hard data that tells a completely different story than what a few [OUR Walmart] associates may think," counters Mr. Lundberg. "We have 250,000 associates that have worked for the company for more than 10 years; we promoted 165,000 hourly associates last year; our turnover rate [37 percent] is lower than the retail industry average [44 percent], nearly 75 percent of our store management teams started out in hourly positions, and 20 percent of the people we hired last year were rehires—meaning they worked for Walmart, decided to leave and concluded they were getting a better deal at Walmart so they came back.

"The fact is," says Mr. Lundberg, "our pay and benefits plans are as good or better than our retail competitors, including those that are unionized. If they weren't, we wouldn't be able to hire people and staff our stores. Last year alone, we received five million job applications."

But internal Walmart documents leaked to the press in recent years, including a memo from November 2012 that detailed Walmart's parsimonious compensation plan, suggest Mr. Fletcher's experience is not unique. Mr. Lundberg is correct, however, that Walmart wages compare favorably with other retail chains. Walmart reports an average wage among associates of \$12.50, a figure Mr. Fletcher says is unheard of among the people he works with.

IBISWorld, a marketing research firm, reports Walmart's average wage is just under \$9 an hour, exceeding the rates paid at Target and Kohl's but below other big-box retailers like Home Depot and Lowe's and substantially below the \$17 an hour paid at Costco. And Mr. Lundberg may claim union parity, but, according to the U.F.C.W., union retail workers can expect to earn 20 to 30 percent more than their nonunionized peers.

The low pay may keep costs low for Walmart's customers, but U.S. consumers make up the difference indirectly. A lot of his fellow workers, Mr. Fletcher reports, qualify for a number of government support programs, including supplemental nutritional programs, housing assistance and earned income

tax credits. "If you plan on getting by on a Walmart salary," he says, "you have to know how to do so on public assistance."

The reliance of Walmart and other retail workers on government aid, particularly Medicaid, has been well documented. And more Walmart workers are likely to be added to Medicaid rolls in 2013. This year, as Walmart celebrates its 50th anniversary, the company further reduced eligibility for health insurance for employees who work more than 30 hours a week.

Mr. Fletcher thinks U.S. taxpayers would be "shocked" to learn "how much they're supporting Walmart workers," especially considering the company's outsized annual profits. In 2011 Walmart reported a net profit of \$16 billion on \$447 billion in revenue, making it number two on Fortune 500 in terms of revenue, just behind Exxon, and number 10 in net profitability. The lion's share of Walmart's income goes directly into the hands of the company's largest shareholders, the Walton family, holders of 48 percent of Walmart stock and the richest family on earth, with over \$107 billion in net worth.

## Retailing Solidarity

Mr. Beyer, the Saint Joseph's University professor, worries that a term like *solidarity*, "bandied about" too frequently, is in danger of losing its import. "We need to do a better job educating young people about solidarity and what it is" in practice, he says.

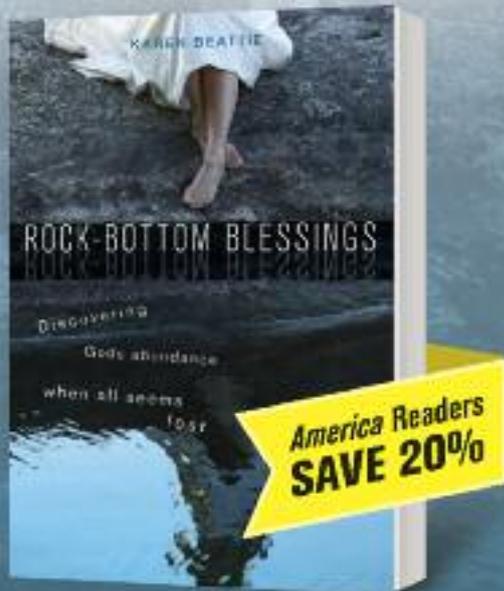
"Our role as consumers is another side to this," he says, a role that Catholics should take special care evaluating. There is nothing in U.S. law that requires a minimum wage to be a living wage, as advocates have demanded. But within the tradition of Catholic social teaching, more than a century in the making, the moral obligation of a just wage—that is, a wage suitable to protect human dignity, provide for basic needs, recreation and even family savings—has been well established. "We as Catholics could start by looking at our own campuses and institutions," says Mr. Beyer, where low pay, poor benefits and confrontational management-worker relationships have sometimes been the source of scandal.

And as individual consumers, Catholics and people of good faith might consider an examination of conscience as an essential part of an everyday shopping list. With so many new U.S. workers—even college graduates with huge education debts—downscaled to minimum-wage work, the stakes are high as the nation confronts its low-wage future at retail checkout counters. Given the current state of the economy, Mr. Beyer acknowledges that shopping has become no easy ethical calculus for many who are seeking to stretch family budgets. Even if it, in some respects, may represent "cooperation with evil," Mr. Beyer admits that in today's economy "close to 50 million [U.S. consumers] need to find the cheapest goods they possibly can."

Many find them at Walmart.

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# Getting to Work

## Entitlement societies and the devaluation of labor

BY PATRICIA RANFT

**D**uring the 2012 presidential campaign, we heard quite a bit about unemployment, redistribution and the government's role in the economy: Do the rich support too many (Mitt Romney's "47 percent" comments) or too few (President Obama's tax-the-rich solutions)? Are government programs excessive or insufficient? Is capitalism good or bad? One thing not discussed, however, was the nature of the activity presupposed in all economic discussions: work. This is unfortunate, for as we debate whether and how to extend or limit entitlement programs, we must understand the nature of work. Perhaps because of our separation between church and state, we have not delved into the one discipline most able to help us in this task: theology.

First we must understand the entitlement society. The late 19th century was a time of broad vision, universal claims and supreme confidence in the ability to unravel life's mysteries. Karl Marx envisioned a new social and political order. Sigmund Freud redrew the landscape of the inner world. Charles Darwin claimed that a mechanism hitherto unknown controlled the natural world. In the early 20th century these grand schemes were embraced and embedded in cultures throughout the world. There were many reasons for this rapid acceptance, for each theory contains truths that advance our understanding of the world and the self. But instead of the selective adoption of certain elements of the theories, they were often indiscriminately promoted, particularly in education. School boards, for example, demanded, under threat of suit by the American Civil Liberties Union, nearly absolute adherence to Darwinism in textbooks.

These theories still exert immense influence, even though their various flaws are undeniably visible. The breakup of the Soviet Union revealed Marxism's cancerous sores. Gender psychology, neurobiological discoveries and brain imaging discredited many of Freud's tenets. And despite contrary assertions from the evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould, it matters that evolution is a theory and not a proven fact. Throughout the 20th century, however, these

theories were steadfastly promoted as self-evident facts. Together the theories constructed a mechanical world with an inconsequential God, where the unconscious regulates behavior, evolution creates nature, social change originates "not in men's brains...but in the economics of each epoch" (Frederick Engels) and jurisprudence is "determined by economic conditions" (Engels and Marx). The secular entitlement society was born here, and it solved many pressing social issues. In a deterministic world, however, humanity has little responsibility or control. This is a problem.

### Theology of Work

Fortunately, 19th-century thinkers also theorized about work; the century is dubbed the concept's golden age. The discussion began when Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel posited that only in work is a person's humanity realized. It accelerated with Marx, who saw humans primarily as *animal laborans*. This prompted a rebuttal by Pope Leo XIII in the encyclical "Rerum Novarum" (1891). The 20th-century Roman magisterium continued to elaborate a theology of work to address the issues 19th-century theorists had unearthed, culminating in Pope John Paul II's encyclical "Laborem Exercens" (1981). These 20th-century teachings built upon Scripture: Work is intrinsically valuable (1 Cor 3:14-15), necessary for survival (2 Thes 3:10) and community (Eph 4:28), an expression of mutual charity (1 Thes 4:11) and the basis for social justice (1 Cor 3:8-9). This concept of labor was more positive than the generally negative view of labor in ancient societies as demeaning and punitive.

The church fathers rarely discussed work, although early monastic leaders incorporated the concept into their rules. During the next centuries, society was too busy laboring to contemplate the nature of work, but by the 11th century, conditions were more conducive to reflection. St. Peter Damian (1007-72), a Benedictine monk, recognized the opportunity and produced the first sophisticated treatment of the concept of work. It is the foundation of all future Western developments of the concept, including those of the 19th and 20th centuries.

St. Damian's concept of work is optimistic and rooted in eschatology. Because this world's imperfections will be replaced by the perfection of the next, it is our duty to ready

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PATRICIA RANFT is emeritus professor of history at Central Michigan University and author of *The Theology of Work* (Macmillan, 2006).

the world for that transformation. This requires change, and work accomplishes change. “As to our beginning and to our end, these we cannot alter,” he wrote, but work can change what happens “between these two limits.” Thus the mandate to change the world is a mandate to work, be it physical, intellectual or spiritual. It is to be considered not as “something voluntary, but as completely necessary.” No one is exempt from this mandate. The specific task of each person varies but not its intrinsic value. Because “all are from one and all are one” in the body of Christ, he wrote, “whatever function is assigned by nature to a particular member can be said to be performed by the body which is its whole.”

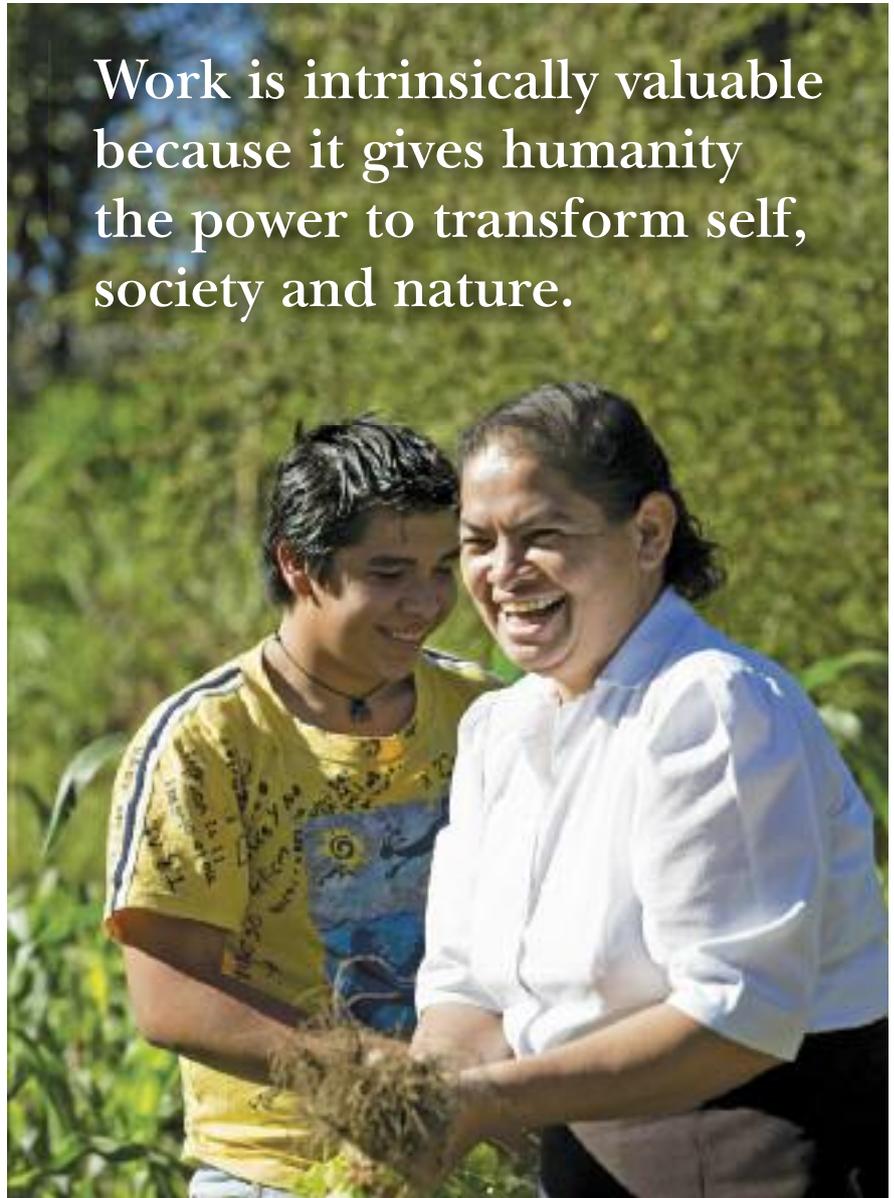
Work, in other words, is the great equalizer. St. Damian insists, for example, that the manual labor of lay brothers is as valuable as the choir monks’ spiritual labor. He reminds Countess Guilla, the wife of Rainerius II, that the nobility must work as hard as the lower class. Centuries before Marx, Damian pondered the relationship between work and social justice; if all have a responsibility to work, then how is living off the labor of another just? “Do not live by plundering the poor, but recoil from food acquired through violence,” he counsels the countess, and remember that “the apostle instructs everyone to work with his hands, so that he will have something to share with those in need.” One is not good because of who one is or what one does, but only if one completes one’s assigned labor.

Gradually, society accepted Damian’s views. Peasants heard from the pulpit that their labor, no matter how servile, was not demeaning. To the contrary, by doing the labor proper to their role, they changed their world and themselves. They reached their full potential through labor. Work gave them a purpose. These messages were heralded and expanded by new monastic communities formed during the era. Guigo I, a Carthusian monk, taught that utility, not dignity, was the criterion for judging the value of work. When work is useful to one’s neighbor, then it is good; if not, it “does great harm.”

Work not only equalizes the classes; it is an equalizing force between men and women. “Male and female were

joined together, therefore, in such a way that each one works through the other,” Hildegard of Bingen taught, “for they should work as one in one work, as the air and the wind intermingle in their labor.” Work bestows power to individuals, for people “by their labors might overturn the world.” Work makes the individual a member of the community; Juliana of Mont Cornillon “chose a humble and abject task

Work is intrinsically valuable because it gives humanity the power to transform self, society and nature.



CNS PHOTO/EDGAR POMERO

**GROWTH POTENTIAL:** The fields in Santa Tecla, El Salvador.

[milking cows] which would serve the common good” and thus shared in “all the good works accomplished by the community that enjoyed the milk.” The greatest evil is to not work, for willful refusal is an act of utmost ingratitude for “the gift of work.”

At the same time these religious recognized the difference between the negative state of “unemployed leisure” and

the noble state of rest. “Everyone engaged in study, every skilled artisan, every manual worker... strive for rest and aim for rest” because, Baldwin of Ford preached, God is “supreme rest.” By the end of the High Middle Ages, Peter Damian’s concept of work had triumphed. Manual labor lost much of its social stigma. Work sanctified and transformed. It gave people power and purpose. The old saint was one who withdrew from the world; the new hero was the saintly worker who labored in and for the world.

The continuity of Blessed John Paul II’s “*Laborem Exercens*” with medieval theology is obvious: “Work is a good thing for man—a good thing for humanity—because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes ‘more a human being.’” The results of labor are universal: “It embraces all human beings, every generation, every phase of economic and cultural development.” At the same time work establishes an individualism that negates determinism. Work is done by “a person, that is to say, a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself and with a tendency to self-realization.”

Next, John Paul II rebuts specific tenets used by 19th-century theorists in the construction of the secular entitlement state. Thanks to his intimate familiarity with Marxist and socialist concepts of work, he transcends their society from within by maintaining a personalist, non-instrumental position on the nature of work. A person needs to know that he is “a true subject of work with an initiative of his own,” John Paul II wrote. The personalist position is not new; the Second Vatican Council stated that “when a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well.” John Paul II, however, used the position for a new purpose, “to highlight—perhaps more than has been done before—the fact that human work is a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question.”

## Benefits of Labor

Such is the legacy of Christian work theology, a tradition of, yes, “theories,” but insightful ones about the role of work in life. Work is intrinsically valuable because it gives humanity the power to transform self, society and nature. Labor is necessary for survival, an agent of change and an equalizer of classes and sexes. It is utilitarian. It allows us to optimistically anticipate a better future. It fosters individualism, yet binds community and forms the basis for social justice. Work, in short, is what we do to attain happiness. Without work we have no power, no equalizer, no social justice, no change, no survival.

Herein lies a potential problem with entitlement societies: They foster an environment and mentality that dimin-

ishes the importance and benefits of labor. They declare that all need not work—but are silent about the negative side of unemployed leisure. Entitlement societies imply that receiving the benefits of others’ work is just as good as working oneself. This allows for survival—but little else. Instead of providing an equalizer and the basis for social justice, entitlement societies have great potential for the opposite. As the rift between northern and southern European Union members bears witness, entitlement societies have tremendous capacity for breeding anger, class warfare and envy. They fool people into believing that not working is as desirable as working. Most importantly, they deny people the opportunity to reach their full human potential. No amount of material security can replace this loss.

The French Revolution forced society to admit that when a nonworking minority lives off the fruits of a working majority, social problems thrive. Should we expect different results from a reverse situation? We are fast approaching such a scenario: Workforce participation is at a record low: 52.2 percent of young adults are jobless and 49 percent of households receive benefits. Partisans can argue about why this is the case, but the reasons matter less than the fundamental reality that too many people are deprived of labor’s nonmaterial benefits. A proper decision about whether or how far to grow our entitlement society must include consideration of what the loss of work entails.

Society needs mechanisms to support the poor. In populous societies that means legislated programs; hence, the entitlement society. Such programs are not the problem per se. The problem arises when programs do not acknowledge or promote the essential connection between that support and work. More worrisome is the fact that entitlement programs now extend well beyond support of the poor; many encourage early cessation of work. Senior citizens, thinking only about the onerous nature of labor, retire while still able and active, only to discover in boredom the beneficial nature of work.

We must listen to theology. Material support alone does not bring happiness. It must be accompanied by work. When government separates workforce participation from material support, it does a supreme disservice to recipients. When social policies encourage the cessation of work at mid-life, those early retirees no longer have access to work’s non-material benefits. When culture proposes nonproductive leisure as the ultimate good, it is deceiving individuals. High unemployment rates are unacceptable not solely for economic reasons, but for the psychological and moral well-being of citizens. Without work, a person is deprived of power over self and society and of the opportunity to fulfill potential. Without work, social problems multiply. Without work, true happiness is elusive. 

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# After the Flaw

Noticing the little ‘ifs’ during Lent

BY JOSEPH P. HOOVER

If you have ever thrown an elbow or slid cleats high. If you ever snapped back or punched first. If you have ever quietly stolen inconsequential things, small pieces of candy from a store, a magazine from a waiting room. If you have wiped your mouth on someone’s dish towel and hung it back up. If you have argued from authority.

If you decided somewhere along the way—without even realizing it—that you would not have a relationship with the plaintive, pith-helmeted mail carrier. Instead you two would walk by each other day after day like creatures from a sad divorce eons ago who had forgotten they ever knew each other.

If you don’t wash your hands, not much.

If you walk by figures sleeping on the concrete under rough gray blankets and quietly wonder where they screwed up to get themselves there; and then feel incredibly judgmental for thinking such things. And then wondering again: Really, what did they do?

If some reasonable cleric ever told you that the Greek word for sin means “missing the mark,” and you turned that into a kind of general pass for yourself. As if somehow all the inane, corrupt or just mildly sad things you do could be melted down and written off into a darts allegory.

If the thought of one more dilation and extraction happening between one

more pair of terrified legs leaves you swamped with so much despair and rage you just want to give up the whole cause altogether.

If you are a resolute pacifist in



regard to wars no one wants you at anyway, but undertake silent acts of violence against any number of people who flash into your mind all day long.

If you do not think you are allowed three consecutive moments of honest anger.

If you meet every slight, each missed appointment, every unreturned phone call, with “It’s all right,” or “You were probably busy,” or a quick look away and “No worries”; and so melt away bit by bit into people’s dim consciousness of you as one whose time or expectations are not really to be taken seriously.

The little things. The things so small you barely notice them—minor life habits, interior dispositions, inclinations, forgettings. The way you let darkness settle over you and become you. A letting go, a relaxing of stan-

dards, a reorienting of priorities. Venial matters. “A disordered affection for created goods,” to put it doctrinally. Things you didn’t even know could count against you, but somehow are reducing you, reducing you.

If there is a hint of irony or sarcasm in everything you do and thus no one feels as if they know you. And not in the way that we are all ultimately unknowable, as God is unknowable, and all sentient beings blessed into the dirt of conventional reality are unknowable. But unknowable as in, just, we wish we knew you a little.

If you seem not to have become the person you wanted to be because...because...you’re lazy. And it is not your dad’s fault or the world’s fault or low blood sugar or a failure to ingrain into the depths of your soul like some Paul Simon hook the fact that God loves you—but because you are 32 and very talented and very smart and you play a stupendous amount of video games.

If you are a heroic and beloved ghetto nurse or teacher or priest and don’t understand why the people who actually live with you can barely put up with you. And you assume it is because, sadly enough, they are probably jealous.

If you are really, honestly, just not very nice. Not to anybody.

In the dharma there is no concept of sin. There is only behaving in a karmically unskillful way toward other human beings. Says my skillful professor.

How absolutely lovely, you think. Unskillful. The darts, a dark basement, a few too many drinks. Easily

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ART: BOB ECKSTEIN

remedied things.

If you meet with lawyers and sign papers and pack boxes and are still unable to admit that you and your wife are getting a divorce.

If you have had little injections of disease into those lines between your eyebrows, and your clever religious daughter told you that just as Christ became sin in order to redeem mankind, you have become *botulinum toxin* in order to redeem your face. And once you actually considered this, it did seem that way. You took a risk putting that stuff under your skin. And there is a payoff: You are making the world a little more pleasant for anyone who looks at you. You are—her words—“giving praise and glory” through the humble vessel of your unruffled skin.

The little illusions, the avoiding of reality. The nimble blades of pride. The things we all do. Your bad is not so bad. It will never get into the paper. You're a good person, after all, every-

one knows it. You were a member of the National Honor Society. But your lack, your lack, it is still there. Life is *dukkha*, says the Buddha. Life is suffering. Better translation: Life is flawed. And to deny there is a flaw is to really suffer.

(And if you have ever gotten outraged beyond proportion when someone who wasn't even Eastern told you things like “life is suffering.” Still the flaw, the flaw.)

If you ever had sex before marriage and felt it to be very helpful to your general well-being and wondered why religious people always told you it was wrong. Why did they tell you that you as the girl would use sex to get love and that you as the guy would use love to get sex and the two of you would become part of each other? And that, when it was over, you would be like two boards pried apart, splinters left in each other forever?

Wasn't that the image the handsome secondary virgin used in the high

school gym, bursting out of his Asics dry-fit? And you feel like the sin, the *real* sin, is being told sex is bad—even though no one ever told you sex is bad. But you somehow got that message. Until you specifically decided to revolt against that message at fall break of freshman year when your roommate had gone back to Dubuque and the place was all yours.

Somewhere, or somehow, in you, or in the virgin who wasn't a virgin, or church, or the way religious people talk about sex or sexual people hear religion, or the fallenness of humanity, or the ruddy pleasures of Maxim magazine, or that ironic burlesque outfit on the Lower East Side where even your doe-eyed mother could enjoy a drink without feeling too seamy...somewhere in all of this—the flaw. A flaw that leaves you declaring that any thoughtful moral process should be forbidden from all decisions about sex; or, alternatively, any sexual desire should be interrogated so much



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as to become like a dictator dispensing unwanted shame into your life; or the whole thing run from in fear like a terrorist lurking in the subway.

The flaw, the flaw...

And if you don't think much of yourself. If you believe, frankly, that you are pretty much a dirtbag. And just saying that actually gives you a sense of relief. But then that relief does not melt away the fact that you still think you are horrible. And what do you do when this and all the other clear proofs of your utter wretchedness come piling down like leaves made of stone from a tree made of poison? Where do you turn then?

You have not slept with another man's wife or burned a cross on a lawn or shifted massive amounts of funds where they shouldn't be shifted. You just do some things and fail to do other things.

If you pay occasional witness from a newspaper to distant wars, to their I.E.D.'s and casualty lists, their market

squares and holy festivals blown to pieces, to the small photos of stony-faced dead kids from Oklahoma and wonder why the whole thing doesn't seem to worm its way one inch into your heart.

If every time you start talking about other people you begin by pointing out that you don't usually talk about other people.

If your quest for moral perfection is slowly killing you.

If you do any of this, or any of it is done to you—the flaws, the sins, the marks missed. An unhinged world pressed on your soul, or your unhinged sins visited on the world. If this is the case, then the church season of Lent is for you. These days are for you not even because you are necessarily Catholic or Christian or believe in God or saints or crucifixes as scaffolding constructed for the dismantling of

all wrongs. But because other people do.

And those other people take time to name these wrongs. They name them and so, like Adam and his beasts, have some dominion over them. And those

who do not do any of this naming can at least take comfort or nostalgia—as in a deep green Packard or Joan Fontaine—

that some people are out there plugging away at this ecclesial Fourth Step. Through incense and kneelers and soft lulling chants they are grounding down, getting into the deep sadness of themselves. Putting their conscience through its paces. And something about Jesus, and something about redemption. Something about laying all on the king.

But first taking firm hold of the flaws, no matter how small, and gazing in confusion and sorrow and wonder. **A**

### ON THE WEB

From the archives, the editors suggest practices for Lent. [americamagazine.org/video](http://americamagazine.org/video)

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ART | KAREN SUE SMITH

## MASTERWORKS IN PROGRESS

*Exploring the mind, and work, of Henri Matisse*

While writers are never expected to produce a book, a play or even a single poem without prior drafts and rewrites, artists are sometimes held to a different standard: the spontaneous masterpiece. This is especially true of modern artists whose work involves distillation or the capturing of a feeling or the conveying of energy—or all these at once. The wonder of Henri Matisse (1869-1954) is that he could render paintings that appear spontaneous, pared to their essential qualities, full of exuberant, unconventional colors, and might, like a ballerina's

leap, seem easy to execute.

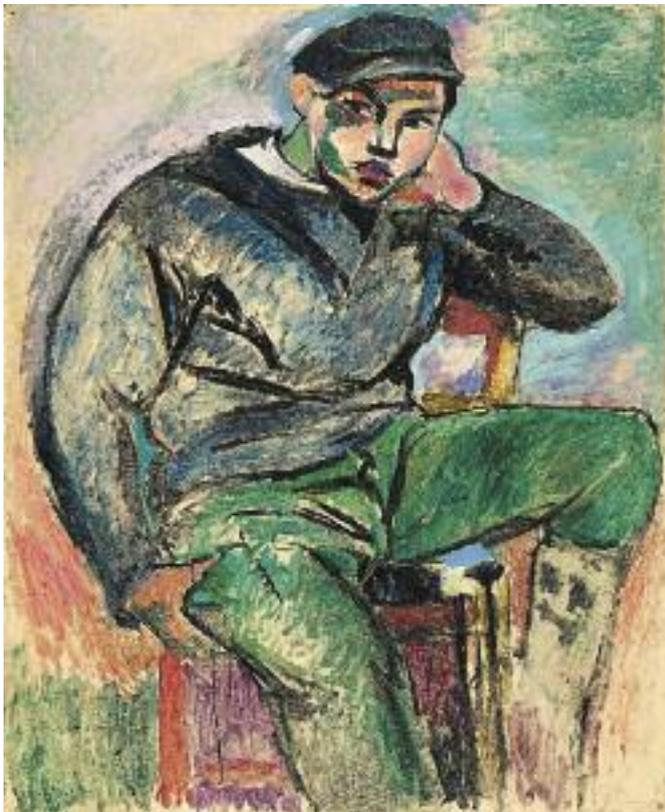
The reality, of course, is quite different. Like a toned dancer, Matisse could produce his work only after submitting to an arduous process. Matisse sketched and painted his subjects repeatedly in pairs, trios and whole series, sometimes over a period of years.

This creative process is the organizing principle behind **Matisse: In Search of True Painting**, an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, on view through March 17, 2013. The exhibition was organized in collaboration with the National Gallery of Denmark,

Copenhagen, and the Centre Pompidou, Paris, where it has been shown already. In it you will find galleries of the artist's finished paintings presented alongside other treatments of the same subject.

The effect of seeing these various efforts grouped together is enthralling. That is because the viewer can almost glimpse into the mind and heart of Matisse himself. We can almost see him at work, looking, thinking and comparing the results of his earlier choices before striking out in yet another direction with a new version—creativity in motion. Matisse found his subjects “ever new,” he said, even when he painted the same still life or view from his studio window over and over again.

Matisse maintained a disciplined manner of working throughout his career. Of the 49 canvases in this show,



**“Young Sailor I” (1906)**



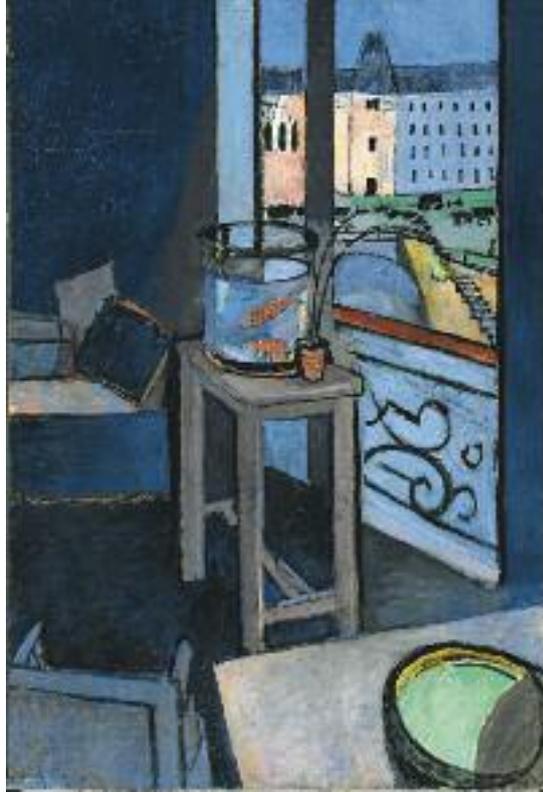
**“Young Sailor II” (1906)**

the first was painted when he was 30, the last when he was 79. And he did not stop then, but continued the same process to the end of his life, making a number of preparatory drawings in different styles for the Stations of the Cross in the Chapel of the Rosary in Vence. (These sketches would have fit well with the theme of the exhibition but are not included; nor are the more familiar variations of “The Pink Nude.”)

Matisse fans will likely have seen in previous exhibitions a few of the pairs and trios shown here. “Young Sailor I” and “Young Sailor II” (1906), for example, are often shown side by side. The first of the two paintings is a more realistic portrait of the sitter, while the second is a looser, flattened interpretation, referred to as a “deformation” intended by the artist, lest anyone think it was a slip up. Matisse himself sheepishly said it had been painted by the postman.

In “Seated Nude” and “Nude with a White Scarf” (1909) Matisse followed up his sketchy first effort with a second painting much more deliberate and conclusive, its colors deepened and the figure outlined thickly in black. A comparison of the 1914 pair “Interior with Goldfish” and “Goldfish and Palette” is even more striking, in that the first painting led the artist to explore a detail in a second work. And explore it he did.

In the first version, Matisse directs the viewer to look through his studio window to a well-lit building in the distance. In order to see it, we must look past the goldfish bowl set in front of the window and a balcony grill. In the second painting, by contrast, Matisse leaves out the entire view and



“Interior With Goldfish” (1914)



“Goldfish with Palette” (1914)

instead makes the goldfish the focal point, setting it off against a large, black vertical stripe, a decision that causes him not only to obscure the palette mentioned in the title (look for it on the right) but to convert the grillwork into a horizontal pattern set off against solid blue. As a result, the second painting is transformed. It is no longer a “scene” painting at all, but has become modern, cropped, abstract.

The paintings of Laurette, a professional model who spent half a year with Matisse and posed in various costumes, hats and accessories from among his extensive collection, constitute the first series he painted. Of some 50 paintings of her, three are shown and can be compared.

Matisse selects one of his favorite sculptures, a nude woman with her arm raised behind her head, as a subject in three paintings (“Goldfish” and two with the same title, “Sculpture and Vase of Ivy”). His placement of the sculpture next to other objects—an apple, a goldfish bowl, a vase—looks to be part of the artist’s exploration of flattened space. He also uses the sculp-

ture to present the human figure as “one form among many” of comparable size. Seldom has the artist reduced a live model to the size of other objects in a composition, but this little sculpture allows him to do so. Matisse was an accomplished sculptor who often turned to sculpture’s tactile three-dimensionality when he reached an impasse in painting. Sculpture became another excavation tool that helped him dig deeper in his search for what he called “pure essence.”

Matisse also painted images of his own paintings into new works. He may have loved these paintings particularly or painted them anew to consider them again. He may also have considered them to be elements or building blocks of a new creation in the making (see “Nasturtiums with the Painting ‘Dance’ I” and “Large Red Interior”).

The artist’s practice of looking repeatedly at his own work and plumbing its depths served him in another vital respect. It enabled Matisse to drink from his own well (or to stick to his own inner lights, to change the metaphor) even as other

artists, many of them his friends, broke new ground. He painted with Paul Signac and tried pointillist paintings himself (see “Luxe, calme et volupté” and “Still Life With Purro II”). He also incorporated cubist elements in much of his work and understood what Picasso was doing over decades. Matisse was influenced by new movements but not bowled over. None of these other forces derailed him from his own track.

In the 1930s Matisse hired a photographer to document his work in various stages of development and used the photos—all in black and white—as another step in his creative process. Then in 1945, for the first time he publicly displayed six paintings at the Galerie Maeght in Paris with the photos of his preparatory works. In this way Matisse insisted that the process of making art was as important for the public to see as were the finished works.

Fortunately, the current exhibition

#### ON THE WEB

James Martin, S.J., and Tim Reidy discuss the Oscar nominees. [americamagazine.org/podcast](http://americamagazine.org/podcast)

includes three sets from the Maeght show: “La France,” “The Dream” and “Still Life With Magnolia”—all of them magnificent. “The Dream” series, with myriad preparatory drawings, illustrates the evolution of an artist’s idea. Viewers might wish to spend time in Gallery 7, comparing for themselves what Matisse has done, considering and assessing his decisions. Since it isn’t always obvious why he changed

this or that, it helps to read in the wall text that the artist’s stated aim was to “condense the meaning of [a] body by seeking its essential lines.” But which lines are those? A careful look will reveal exactly what Matisse thought they were.

Short of being invited into the artist’s studio for a tour and a long chat about how he works—sadly, no longer a possibility—this exhibition provides the next best thing.

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**KAREN SUE SMITH** is the former editorial director of *America*.

to us and who spin the images of national and media celebrities. For 12 years the department of communications and media studies at Fordham University at Lincoln Center has awarded the Ann M. Sperber Prize, named for the author of the classic biography of Edward R. Murrow, to the author of the best biography of a journalist. Seven judges, including myself, spend the summer plowing through a half dozen volumes on publishers and their families, TV personalities, columnists and muckrakers. Past awards have gone to biographers of William Randolph Hearst, the New York Times columnist James Reston, the cartoonist Bill Mauldin and the muckraker I. F. Stone. Last year it went to Douglas Brinkley for his biography of Henry Luce, founder of Time-Life; and this year to John Matteson of John Jay College of Criminal Justice for *The Lives of Margaret Fuller*.

The journalism biography is a literary species unto itself. The journalist writes the “first rough draft of history,” and his or her biographer, a few years or a century later, uses history to evaluate the “first draft.” The best journalists both record and prophesy: Did they first see Hitler as a menace or a clown, did they measure the

Vietnam war in terms of an international conspiracy or a local revolution? More like the novelist than the historian, the biographer opens the door to the secrets of the human heart, portrays an alternate lifestyle, or even universe, which tempts the reader to imagine: This life could have been mine. Or: Thank God that it was not.

## BOOKINGS | RAYMOND A. SCHROTH

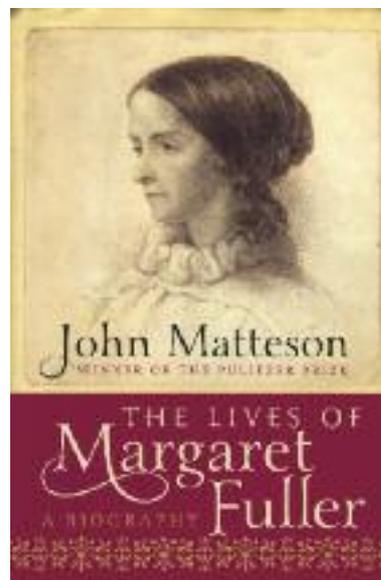
### LIVES TWICE TOLD

A few months ago the biggest controversy in the war among scholarly biographies was between Henry Weineck, author of *Master of the Mountain: Thomas Jefferson and his Slaves* (Farrar Straus and Giroux), who presents Jefferson as a founding father who violated the principles he expressed, who said he hated slavery, but owned 600 slaves, and Jan Ellen Lewis, who calls *Master of the Mountain* “a train wreck of a book” by an author blinded by his loathing of Jefferson (Chronicle of Higher Education, Nov. 23). But Jonathan Yardley in *The Washington Post* (Dec. 9) picked Wieneck’s book as one of the

10 best of the year.

This means the battle will go on; for the question of who Jefferson or Lincoln really was is also to ask who are we, the citizens and readers, who inevitably model ourselves on national heroes.

What is true of biographers of presidents is also true of biographers of journalists, who select and funnel the facts



Stacy Schiff, author of *Cleopatra: A Life*, suggests that every biographer has two lives: one is her own personal chaotic list of things to do, confusion and misgivings; the other is the life of her subject, pinned on a page, with a clear beginning, middle and end. And inevitably the first leaks into the second and she finds herself on the page.

Matteson's competitors included authors of big biographies of newspaper families like the Medills and Pattersons, as well as of individuals like William F. Buckley, Pauline Kael and Lincoln Steffans; and I must confess that over two years of judging I longed for a family not torn apart by infidelities, multiple divorces, drugs and booze. But many of these people were very rich with mansions spread around the world and wealth that freed them for a lifestyle that had few boundaries. Though I also admired Peter Hartshorn's *I Have Seen the Future*, on Lincoln Steffans, I was swept away by the life story of Margaret Fuller.

In his acceptance speech at the award presentation last November, Matteson, who is also a lawyer, thanked his employer, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, who "believed in me when no one else did," gave him an intellectual home and restored the humanities to the central position in their curriculum. In 2008 he won the Pulitzer Prize for *Eden's Outcasts: The Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Father*. That evening he identified Margaret Fuller and himself with Ann Sperber, the biographer of Edward R. Murrow, who said, quoting Murrow, "I've always been on the side of the heretics against those who burned them because the heretics so often proved right in the long run."

Margaret Fuller believed that a woman could be the intellectual equal of a man, that salvation may not depend on conventional piety, "but on one's ceaseless striving toward enlightenment and earthly perfection." Fuller

did not seek a "small cringing safety in the world, but a tremendously risky life of defiance, adventure and love."

Margaret Fuller is well known as an educator, Transcendentalist friend of Emerson and Thoreau, the first editor of *The Dial* literary magazine and, finally, as the foreign correspondent for Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* during the Roman Revolution of 1848, when she hoped in vain that Pope Pius IX would defend democracy. In 1850, returning home, she, her husband and their infant son died when a hurricane

destroyed their ship within sight of land. Matteson compared her to Murrow again: both realized that "the continuance of freedom depends not on the physical power to preserve it, but on the moral will to maintain it." Matteson demonstrates that the best biographer is not just a research historian or a brilliant writer, but a moralist as well.

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RAYMOND A. SCHROTH, S. J., is literary editor of *America*. He is also the biographer of the CBS commentator Eric Sevareid and Robert F. Drinan, the Jesuit congressman.

BOOKS | V. BRADLEY LEWIS

## THE POLITICS OF PRAGMATISM

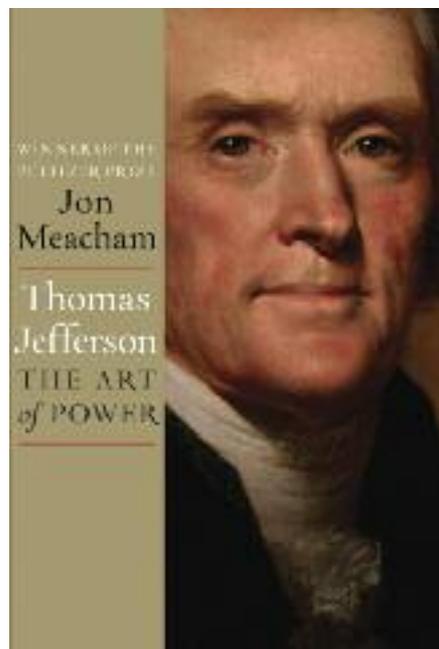
### THOMAS JEFFERSON

#### The Art of Power

By Jon Meacham  
Random House. 800p \$35

Thomas Jefferson was the closest thing to a philosopher-king we have ever had in the United States. Jon Meacham's eminently readable and balanced new biography aims to recover the "mortal Jefferson," both philosopher and politician, who blended the two roles in a way that reveals something to us of "the art of power." Jefferson the wielder of power emerges more clearly in the book than Jefferson the thinker, and this is not surprising. As Meacham shows, when ideas contended with power in Jefferson's life, the exigencies of the latter generally won out, as Plato himself would have expected.

This mortal Jefferson was in awe of his towering father, a wealthy and industrious planter who died when Thomas was 14, but who left his son with an image of command that nourished his own need for mastery. The future president studied history, classics and French as a boarder with a private tutor before enrolling at William



and Mary, where, one gathers, he made more of his college experience than perhaps any undergraduate who has ever lived. He read widely under the formidable Dr. William Small, a force for the dissemination of Enlightenment thinking in Virginia's colonial capital.

He also participated in the social life of the city far beyond what one would expect of a college student, acquiring a priceless extracurricular

education in politics at the dining room table of Small's friend and Virginia's royal governor, Francis Fauquier. A third influence was George Wythe, with whom Jefferson later studied law and learned how to live in grand style. There and elsewhere Jefferson seems to have imbibed a typical cocktail of Enlightenment ideas—Meacham notes more than once Jefferson's professions of special admiration for Bacon, Locke and Newton—that in turn led to his repeated denunciations of “kings and priests.”

Jefferson does not seem to have expressed a desire to see the last of the former strangled with the entrails of the last of the latter, as Diderot did; but he did evince an occasionally disturbing indulgence for the excesses of Diderot's revolutionary followers. He wrote to a friend in 1793 that although he deplored the deaths of innocents in France's revolutionary violence, “rather than it [the revolu-

tion] should have failed, I would have seen half the earth desolated.”

Meacham marks this statement as “hyperbole,” and it may have been, along with Jefferson's oft-quoted view that the “tree of liberty” needs periodic watering with the “blood of patriots and tyrants.” But if it is a fair indication of the political implications of Jefferson's philosophical views, it forces us to ask just how seriously we should take Jefferson as having united philosophy and political power.

As for the philosophy itself, one must also bear in mind that in the 18th century the modern distinction between philosophy and natural science had not yet been made and that Jefferson's philosophical interests were often enough a voracious curiosity about scientific developments and about anything related to his own practical concerns as a farmer and

amateur naturalist. He was no speculative thinker. The closest he got to this was his famous deism, which is not much illuminated by the story Meacham relates at one point of a young Jefferson's disappointed response to God's failure to grant his prayers for the shortening of the school day. Jefferson's own religion may have included a belief in the afterlife, perhaps even with rewards and punishments proportioned to one's earthly deeds, and led him to famously abridge the Gospel so as to express his admiration for Christ's moral teachings, while leaving aside claims to divinity and miraculous works.

More closely related to Jefferson the politician is an intriguing subsidiary theme of Meacham's narrative concerning Jefferson's constant fear of British conspiracies. He read of these matters through the lens of 17th century English political thought, the ideas that informed political discourse during the English Civil War era, itself rife with fears of conspiracies that might bring England under the rule of an absolute monarch who would in turn reverse the effects of the Reformation in England, perhaps in league with the French and Spaniards.

Jefferson's principles on any number of questions were, in their translation into political action, much subject to practical compromise. He was often willing to appeal to traditional Christian ideas when the politics of the moment demanded it, for example during the darker days of the Revolutionary War. His theoretical opposition to slavery met an immovable obstacle in the prejudices and political alignments of the day. These ideas led him to abandon his own reformist efforts early on in his career and coexisted with ownership of more than 600 slaves during his lifetime.

### ON THE WEB

The Catholic Book Club discusses *The Patriarch*, by David Nasaw. [americamagazine.org/cbc](http://americamagazine.org/cbc)



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His opposition to the Federalists' elevation of the power of the national government and the presidency itself did not stop him from using those powers to the fullest, especially in the case of the Louisiana Purchase.

The goal of preserving the union as a modern, independent bastion of republicanism authorized considerable compromise of republican values and proved resilient against the angry protests of

purists like Jefferson's kinsman, John Randolph of Roanoke. These collisions of theory and practice often produced Jefferson's finer moments as president and offer us matter for reflection as we contemplate both the trappings and burdens of empire.

---

V. BRADLEY LEWIS is an associate professor in the School of Philosophy, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.

DAVID I. KERTZER

## PIUS'S BALANCING ACT

### SOLDIER OF CHRIST

#### The Life of Pope Pius XII

By Robert A. Ventresca  
Belknap Press of Harvard University  
Press. 432p \$35

No one in 20th-century church history has attracted more controversy than Eugenio Pacelli, who as Pope Pius XII reigned from 1939 to 1958. To his critics, he was the pope who shamefully failed to protest the mass murder of Europe's Jews. To his defenders, for whom his sainthood has become a sacred cause, he was a holy man who did all in his power to save Europe's Jews and preserve the church through perilous times. In this new biography, the historian Robert A. Ventresca provides what he sees as an antidote to the "Pius war," offering a balanced examination based on primary sources.

The last Roman pope, Pacelli, born in 1876, came from a family identified with Rome's black papal nobility, his father and grandfather prominent in Vatican service. The combination of Eugenio's family connections and his own intelligence and drive led to early placement in the office of the Vatican secretary of state and a rapid rise there. In 1917, with the Great War still raging, he was sent to Munich to become papal nuncio, moving on in 1925 to establish the nunciature in Berlin. The

12 years he would spend in Germany are central to understanding his life.

Pius XI chose Pacelli to become his secretary of state, recalling him to Rome in late 1929 and offering him the cardinal's hat. It was natural for the pope to turn to him to help cope with the unstable situation in Germany. Pius XI's decision, at Pacelli's urging, to enter into a concordat with Hitler shortly after he came to power in 1933 offers one of the early points of dispute in the "Pius war." The pope's reversal of German church leaders' previous condemnation of the National Socialists, along with Pacelli's concordat negotiations, paved the way for the dissolution of the Catholic Center Party. Heinrich Brüning, Center Party chancellor of Germany from 1930 to 1932, famously denounced Pacelli for abandoning the party to make a deal with Hitler.

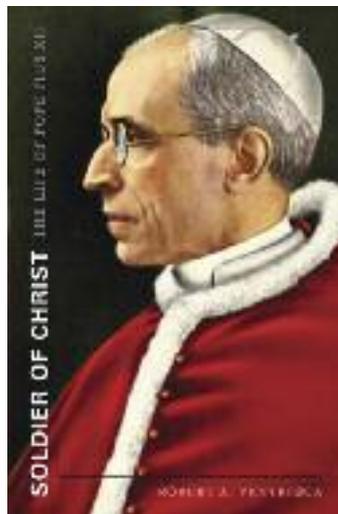
Pacelli learned to his horror that Engelbert Dollfuss, Austrian chancellor at the time, was writing a denunciation of his own, charging that the Vatican's concordat with Germany undermined Austria's ability to resist a

Nazi takeover. A devout Catholic and leader of Austria's Social Christian Party, Dollfuss was much appreciated by Pius XI. When Pacelli heard of the document, Ventresca tells us, he met with the Austrian ambassador to the Holy See and asked him "to expunge any trace of Dollfuss's critique from the archives." Dollfuss himself was assassinated by the Nazis in 1934, four years before Nazi Germany seized Austria.

It is a mark of Ventresca's desire to adopt a balanced approach in dealing with such controversial topics that in evaluating Pacelli's life-long defense of the German concordat he leaves the judgment to the reader. "He was either unwilling or perhaps simply incapable of envisioning alternative means of engaging with Hitler." He adds, "This was evidence either of a resolute character and prudential judgment, or, conversely, of a fateful inability to admit mistakes and to learn from them."

Much of Ventresca's book focuses on relations with Germany, including Pacelli's role in restraining an increasingly irascible and combative Pius XI from doing anything that might risk a break with the Nazi regime. Ventresca attributes the measured tone and absence of any explicit reference to National Socialism in the pope's

famous 1937 encyclical, "Mit Brennender Sorge," which denounced the failure of the German government to abide by the concordat, to Pacelli's influence. As for the Vatican decision not to say anything about Kristallnacht, the Nazi pogrom of 1938, he mentions the plea by the Archbishop of Westminster to Pacelli and the pope to speak out. "Pacelli's response to Hinsley's suggestion was



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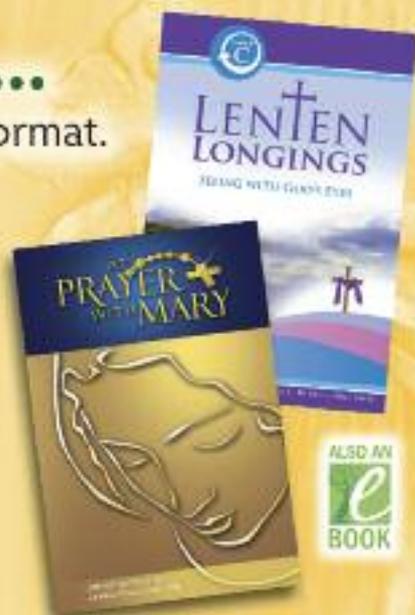
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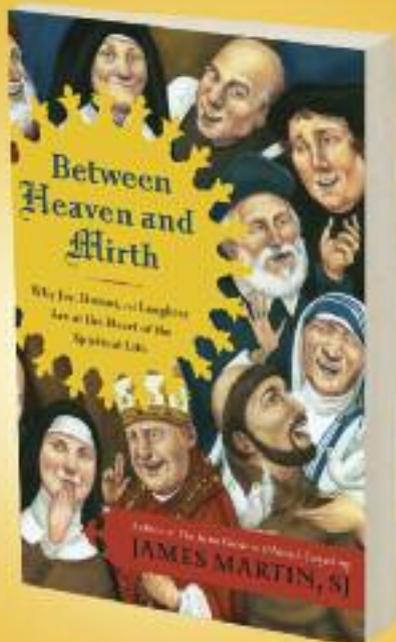
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characteristically evasive,” writes Ventresca.

Ventresca passes fairly quickly over another controversial episode, one whose contours are only now becoming better known with the recent opening of the Vatican archives for the Pius XI papacy. Pius XI died the day before all the bishops of Italy, together with various high government officials, were to mark the 10th anniversary of the Lateran accords that had put an end to the decades of conflict between the Holy See and the Italian state. Benito Mussolini feared that the pope would use the occasion to denounce Italian Fascism and the Fascists’ embrace of the Nazis.

Upon the pope’s death, Pacelli used his position as chamberlain to suppress the text of the remarks the pope was to deliver. He also buried the text of the secret encyclical that the pope had commissioned denouncing racism and anti-Semitism. Neither document would see the light of day until after Pacelli’s death.

Pacelli was eager to turn over a new leaf with both Mussolini and Hitler, and in fact both governments were much relieved by his election as pope. Although others have been critical of Pacelli’s decision to conceal Pius XI’s final two efforts to distance the church from the totalitarian regimes, Ventresca offers a much more non-judgmental interpretation. “In both instances,” he writes, “Eugenio Pacelli showed himself very much to be his own man, deftly steering a course for papal diplomacy consistent with his temperament and philosophy.”

Ventresca’s account of Pacelli’s almost two decades as pope concentrates heavily on the Second World War, the Holocaust and its immediate legacy. Although under intense pressure to do so, the pope refused to denounce publicly the Nazis’ invasion of Poland in 1939 or its invasion of France the following year. As Ventresca writes, he did not want to seem to be taking sides.

Moreover, in these early war years the pope thought it likely that the Nazis would win and worried about the damage the church would suffer if it were identified with the losing side.

As Ventresca amply demonstrates, criticism of the pope’s silence began early in the war and came in good part from Catholics. For Catholic critics in the midst of the war, he writes, “the pope’s refusal to condemn explicitly Nazi aggression...began to feel like a failure of moral leadership, a betrayal of the pastoral function of the papal office.” Ventresca also notes that even after the war, when the pope was no longer constrained by worries about protecting the church from the Nazis, he “offered no special word of acknowledgement or comfort to the Jews.” This, concludes Ventresca, provides “further evidence of his unwillingness or inability to grasp the true nature and scale of the Nazi war against the Jews and its consequences.” Likewise, “any frank talk about the thorny problem of lingering anti-

Semitism throughout Europe, let alone the historical legacy of anti-Judaism, was out of the question.”

After the picture that Ventresca has painted, his conclusions come as something of a surprise. Following a final section detailing the “tendency toward inertia, stagnation, and reaction” that marked the last years of Pius XII’s reign, he offers a final, highly positive assessment. “[T]here is a strong argument to be made,” he writes, “that taken as a whole his reign over the church was consistent with the moral, pastoral, and political leadership expected of the Vicar of Christ. Pius XII fulfilled the complex papal role as well as anyone of his generation, or any generation, could.”

Thanks to the rich historical evidence Ventresca has brought together here, readers will be able to reach their own conclusions.

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DAVID I. KERTZER is a university professor of anthropology, history and Italian at Brown University, Providence, R.I.

TOM DEIGNAN

## A NATURALIST’S EVOLUTION

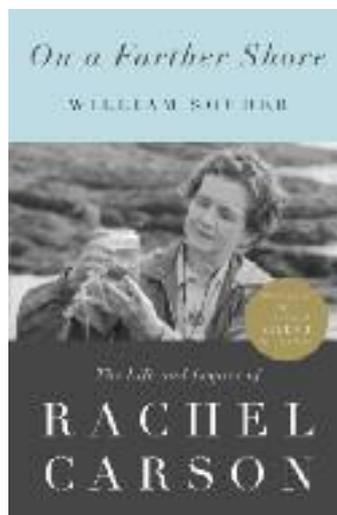
### ON A FARTHER SHORE The Life and Legacy of Rachel Carson

By William Souder  
Crown. 512p \$30

The most crucial swing vote in the 2012 presidential election may well have been cast by the late Rachel Carson. Much was made, back in November, of the boost New Jersey’s Republican Governor Chris Christie may have given President Obama in the wake of Hurricane Sandy. Less

noticed, however, was the endorsement by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg of New York, motivated by what the billionaire mayor described as a looming global warming crisis.

Last year was the 50th anniversary of Carson’s landmark book *Silent Spring*, which famously chronicled the ecological havoc wrought by pesticides like DDT. But as William Souder notes in his insightful new biography, *On a Farther Shore: The Life and Legacy of Rachel*



Carson, the acclaimed nature writer had also “been concerned...for years” about “a pattern of warmer temperatures and rising sea levels.”

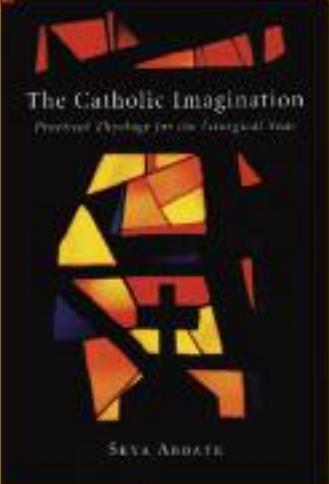
In short, Carson was not only way ahead of her time; she may well have been ahead of our time as well. Rachel Carson was born in 1907 in Springdale, Pennsylvania, “a hard-scrabble town on the Allegheny River.” Neither of Carson’s parents finished high school, and the family’s financial situation was “always precarious,” Souder writes. Carson was initially an English major at Pennsylvania College for Women, which she had chosen “because it was a Christian college.” In an otherwise thorough and informative work, religion is a subject Souder could have pursued further. As Linda Lear noted in her 1997 biography, Carson’s grandfather was a Presbyterian minister. *On a Farther Shore* could have more deeply explored how religion may (or may not have) shaped Carson’s views of life and nature.

Souder is on firmer ground when he traces the evolution of the pre-Rachel Carson conservation movement, exploring such figures as John James Audubon (of whom Souder has written a biography) and Teddy Roosevelt. Souder also convincingly argues that Carson’s views were profoundly shaped by the cold war and the deadly impact of merely testing nuclear weapons, much less deploying them. Another key figure in Carson’s life was Professor Mary Scott Skinner, a mentor who set Carson’s mind afire. Their fruitful intellectual collaboration is all the more impressive since it took place less than a decade after women received the vote.

As early as the 1930s, while Carson was working at a marine lab in Massachusetts, the “great variety of life in the sea impressed upon her that every living thing belonged to a larger diverse community of life that was sustained by interdependence.” Ulti-

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mately, Souder makes it clear that *Silent Spring* was the product of Carson's diligent work over several decades, the book she had been preparing her whole life to write. It is fascinating, then, that she initially had

no interest in doing so, instead suggesting that—of all people—E. B. White of *The New Yorker* tackle the project.

Souder also reminds us that even if Carson had never written *Silent Spring*,

she would still be remembered as an important writer. In June 1951 *The New Yorker* ran excerpts of her ocean book, *The Sea Around Us*. The book was a sensation, eventually winning a National Book Award. That Carson could do all of this as she was supporting her mother and several other family members is astonishing and enlightening, especially these days, as we continue to debate fiercely when, if and how women can “have it all.” Through judicious use of Carson's correspondence, Souder paints a portrait of a fiercely determined woman, one who certainly defies stereotypes about hippy-dippy nature lovers.

Yes, Carson was poetic about the natural world. But she was also a shrewd businesswoman who “loathed compromise” and very much knew the value of a dollar. As for Carson's relationship with Dorothy Freeman, her married best friend, it is perhaps inevitable that readers will come away from this book with more questions than answers. Souder describes this as “a transcendent, romantic friendship that existed in a realm above ordinary physical love and desire.” Still, it is never quite clear why Carson did not (even when younger) enter into a romantic relationship with anyone.

In the end, *On a Farther Shore* is at its best outlining Carson's far-reaching legacy. Just as Abraham Lincoln is said to have referred once to Harriet Beecher Stowe as the “little woman” whose explosive book started the Civil War, so John F. Kennedy could not ignore “Miss Carson's book” when *Silent Spring* was released in 1962. She was dismissed as a “peacenik” and Commie, and naturally the Federal Bureau of Investigation “launched an investigation of Carson.” Within a decade, however, we had Earth Day, the Environmental Protection Agency and a broad environmental movement, developments Carson unfortunately was not around to see. In one of history's cruel ironies, Carson was diag-

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nosed with breast cancer in 1960. She died in 1964, just two years after *Silent Spring* was published, at the age of 57.

Protests in certain circles notwithstanding, recent extreme weather events seem to have forced mainstream politicians to finally acknowledge climate change. But is Rachel Carson's legacy really so secure? In the summer of 2012, Mayor Bloomberg himself announced that trucks would roll through the upper West Side of Manhattan spewing pesticides designed to kill mosquitoes bearing West Nile virus. Yet Carson, Souder writes, "had made it clear in *Silent Spring* that there was room for the intelligent application of pesticides in some situations." Though fierce and determined, Carson was no ideologue. She remains ahead of her time—and ours.

---

**TOM DEIGNAN** (*tdeignan.blogspot.com*) is an author and teacher who writes for *The Newark Star Ledger* and *The Irish Voice* newspaper. He is working on a novel about a New York City high school.

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## LETTERS

### Faithful Theologians

Re "The Noble Enterprise" (2/4): Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl focuses on the important aspect of the ecclesial foundation of theologians. The role of faith in the theological task places revelation at the very center and implicitly indicates the worshipping community as its apex.

The 2,000-year-old theological tradition calls the theologian to understand the mystery of God in different times and epochs as foundational. Understanding the vocabulary and nuances of language systems throughout the centuries calls our attention to the immense work that remains to be completed in presenting the riches of our Catholic tradition, including Greek, Latin and Syriac sources. This handing on of the faith does not compel us to return to a particular period in time but rather to be in continuity with tradition.

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The 1994 joint Christological statement of Blessed John Paul II and Mar Dinkha IV, for example, presents an important and exemplary model of historical-theological endeavor in cooperation with the magisterium. Theologians render a true service to the body of Christ as lived in faith. Dynamic fidelity to tradition can serve as an inspiration and model for an active engagement in the ecclesial dimension of theologians and direction for the future.

(REV.) MARK M. MOROZOWICH  
*Washington, D.C.*

### Ingenious Spirit

Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl writes, "Natural scientists are grateful for the existence of physical laws since their work is only sound, only fruitful, when it respects the foundational truths of those concrete boundaries." I find myself puzzled by this statement. Physical laws are less "foundational truths" or "concrete boundaries" than

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generally reliable, empirically benchmarked, summative inferences—but ones that are always tentative, always revisable in the face of new data.

Granted, there is a certain inertia that appropriately disposes the community against change, but paradigm shifts do happen. (Without the precession of the perihelion of Mercury, for example, Newtonian gravitation would never have been updated to Einsteinian.) These shifts make

physics more sound, more fruitful.

It may well be that theological boundaries are immune to such shifts; part of me, at least, hopes that God's Spirit is more ingenious than that. As a favorite hymn puts it, "The Church of Christ in ev'ry age/ Beset by change but Spirit-led/ Must claim and test its heritage/ And keep on rising from the dead."

PAUL J. NIENABER, S.J.  
Winona, Minn.

### Catholic Gift

Re "All Hands on Desks," by Thomas J. Healy, John Eriksen and B. J. Cassin (2/4): This is a much-needed and long-overdue call to action to preserve Catholic schools, the great gift of the church to the American community writ large.

The preservation of this gift has long been more a matter of will than of means. Perhaps the current crisis, with its complex causality, will rally Catholic leadership behind the effort to preserve and carve out a future for Catholic schools. Credit is due to agents like the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and all others who labor to reimagine such a future and to realize those dreams.

ROBERT MUCCIGROSSO  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

### More Study Options

Re "By the Book" (2/4): Ronald D. Witherup, S.S., has performed a valuable service outlining the Catholic approach to Bible study. I found it especially heartening to see him delve into the link between study and prayer, with a particular emphasis on *lectio divina*.

But I would like to suggest some additional resources. In addition to Bible "programs" like Little Rock and the Threshold series, mention should be made of Lectionary-based devotional journals like Give Us This Day, Living With Christ and The Word Among Us, the journal I have had the privilege of editing for the past 17 years.

These three magazines, and others like them, offer a daily approach to the Scriptures that unites readers with the worship of the church. Each has its particular emphasis, but they all draw



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on solid and informed Catholic biblical scholarship as they invite readers to meet the Lord in his word. Using everyday language and often speaking to the ordinary lives of their readers, these journals do a fine job of marrying the mind and the heart, the letter and the Spirit. And that is something that the fathers of Vatican II would have delighted to see.

LEO ZANCHETTIN  
*St. Augustine, Fla.*

### Asking for More

Re “Signs of Life” (1/21): Helen Prejean, C.S.J., must be commended for her positive outlook and tireless work for the “born but imprisoned.” I have heard too many homilies/sermons about the unborn and no mention from the pulpit about capital punishment—as if the two are not both “playing God” with human life.

Sister Helen’s total lack of edginess and defensiveness—in this article as well as in her public presentations—speaks to the Jesus model. I am once again inspired and instructed about how to speak up. Congratulations, also, to the U.S. bishops for clearly writing about the issue. More, please. Louder, please. Hard to hear over the angry shouting.

COLLEEN ROCKERS  
*Evergreen, Colo.*

### Amazing Creation

Re “Reimagining Creation” (Letters, 1/21): Donald Rohmer wrote that we need “a creation story that inspires us.” But creation speaks for itself.

The naturalist Euell Gibbons didn’t take three seconds to reply to the question, “What do you see in nature as the greatest proof against evolution?” He replied, “I have never seen an organism that didn’t have a symbiotic relationship with another.” In simpler terms, all living things are an interconnected chain of life. Our Father in heaven hears us all and created the universe for us. David, in amazement, asked, “What is man, that God is mindful of

him?” (Ps 8:4). Yes, Jesus died as a man and rose again so we could have faith in and live for Him.

If God can create a universe and its minutiae and is all-knowing, He can make man from mud in an instant and give him a brain so he can look around and worship.

WALLACE TURNBULL  
*Lynchburg, Va.*

### Harm to Others?

Re “An Irish Priest’s Defiance: Some Context,” by James Martin, S.J. (In All Things blog, 1/20): This is very helpful, but I would like to add an important dynamic: The decision between obedience and justice must take into account other persons affected by the decision to accede to being silenced.

In other words, one should ask, “Who will be hurt by my fidelity, and how badly?” Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., for example, agreed to a silencing that hurt mostly him. It deprived the world (for a time) of access to his theological ideas, but he was the one who lost the most—the feedback from other scholars that would have improved his own work.

In matters about which Tony Flannery, C.Ss.R., is being threatened, it’s a different question: Are people hurt by the magisterium’s teaching regarding homosexuality? How badly? Are people (men and women) hurt by the magisterial exclusion of women from positions of authorized leadership in the church? How badly? We

must never forget that sometimes silence can harm others.

LISA FULLAM  
*Oakland, Calif.*

### Priests’ Experience

Re “New Translation Receives Wide Acceptance” (Signs of the Times, 12/24): A similar survey should be conducted among the priests who have been burdened by a translation that is very difficult to proclaim or to pray at all. The new translation has not been “received” in a theological or an emotional sense by most priests who have had to use it and have been forced to give inadequate and dishonest explanations for why the change was necessary.

I am inspired by questions raised by George Wilson, S.J., in *Worship* magazine: “Did the project achieve the improvement needed? Did the new texts help the faithful to pray? Were they helped to enter into the act of communal worship...? Do they assist that particular gathering of the faithful—with its own unique story and genius—to enter into the praise of the Lord?”

I would respond with a resounding no to those questions, and I believe that most English speaking presbyters would say the same. The 1998 ICEL revision of the Missal is not only a much better implementation of the liturgy document of Vatican II, it is a more legitimate and inculturated expression of the prayer of the Roman Catholic Church.

PETER CHEPAITIS, O.F.M.  
*Middleburgh, N.Y.*

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# Close Encounters

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT (C), FEB. 24, 2013

Readings: Gn 15:5-18; Ps 27:1-14; Phil 3:17-4:1; Lk 9:28-36

*“Master, it is good that we are here.” (Lk 9:33)*

When God entered into a covenant with Abram, “a trance fell upon Abram, and a deep, terrifying darkness enveloped him.” When Jesus took Peter, James and John to the mountain to pray, “a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened when they entered the cloud.” The terms of the covenant are not grounded in a gentleman’s agreement or a polite handshake between equals. They embody a relationship between the people of God and the living God himself.

In this relationship God’s whole being is present, including the reality of God’s fearsome power. But if the encounters with God that sometimes mark the covenant are not “terms of endearment,” neither should they be construed as ancient manifestations of “terrors of the covenant.” These are the terms of the covenant.

Nothing new comes without change, and the necessary transformations bring fear and trepidation. The spiritual transformation essential for the people of God, however, requires the power and grace of God to be present in ways that overshadow human beings. Often these changes require suffering rooted in our own fear that we cannot change or cannot maintain faith in the ways of God.

Note, however, that although Abram and the apostles experienced the darkness, terror and fear that accompanied the presence of God, this was not their

entire experience of God. They did not flee. Peter, in fact, says, “Master, it is good that we are here,” and he is correct. Peter is sometimes mocked for speaking before thinking during the Transfiguration. But when we consider what he says, he is correct that the good place, the best place, is in the presence of God.

Luke describes Peter as “not knowing what he was saying”; and this lack of “knowing” could describe either his need to say something in response to Jesus’ glory or the inspiration to speak words whose full meaning was not apparent to him. Peter continues to speak, telling Jesus that three tents ought to be built for him, Moses and Elijah. Some commentators have seen in this a desire to capture the experience. But should we not want glory to dwell with us? Perhaps the problem with Peter’s suggestion is that he can imagine only temporary dwellings, when God’s glory is meant to dwell permanently among the people of God.

Peter also attempted too quickly to ground the glory of God in his midst by bypassing the spiritual transformation Jesus was to undergo before he could dwell in glory permanently. Moses and Elijah, the great representatives of the law and the prophets, appear to Jesus and speak to him about the “departure” he was about to “fulfill” in Jerusalem. In Greek this departure is called *exodos*.

Like the wandering Israelites, Jesus had much to suffer before he could enter the Promised Land. The word *exodos*, found only in Luke’s account, refers to the complex of events that would culminate in Jesus’ ascension. There is no way to the ascension, however, without the crucifixion, the resurrection and the preparation of the church for its own *exodos* into the world.

Exodus is spiritual transformation, but spiritual transformation is not easy, and only God’s power and grace can truly transform us. Exodus also includes the fear of leaving behind what is good to forge onward for what is better. Peter was right, it was good that he and James and John were there to witness Jesus’ glory, but there was more



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- How am I prepared to encounter God?
- Can I say with Peter that it is good to be in the presence of God? How is this good for me?
- What transformation is necessary for my spiritual growth?

in store. That which would lead to permanent spiritual transformation for Jesus and his followers required an *exodos* that demanded suffering, fear and terror. Peter desires three dwellings, with Jesus between Moses and Elijah, but the key verse in this regard might be Lk 23:33, in which Jesus hangs between two criminals, one on his left and one on his right.

“Master, it is good that we are here,” said Peter on the mountain, but the terms of the covenant required a transformation that would make suffering and sin themselves temporary dwellings on the *exodos* to glory.

**JOHN W. MARTENS**

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