SPRING BOOKS

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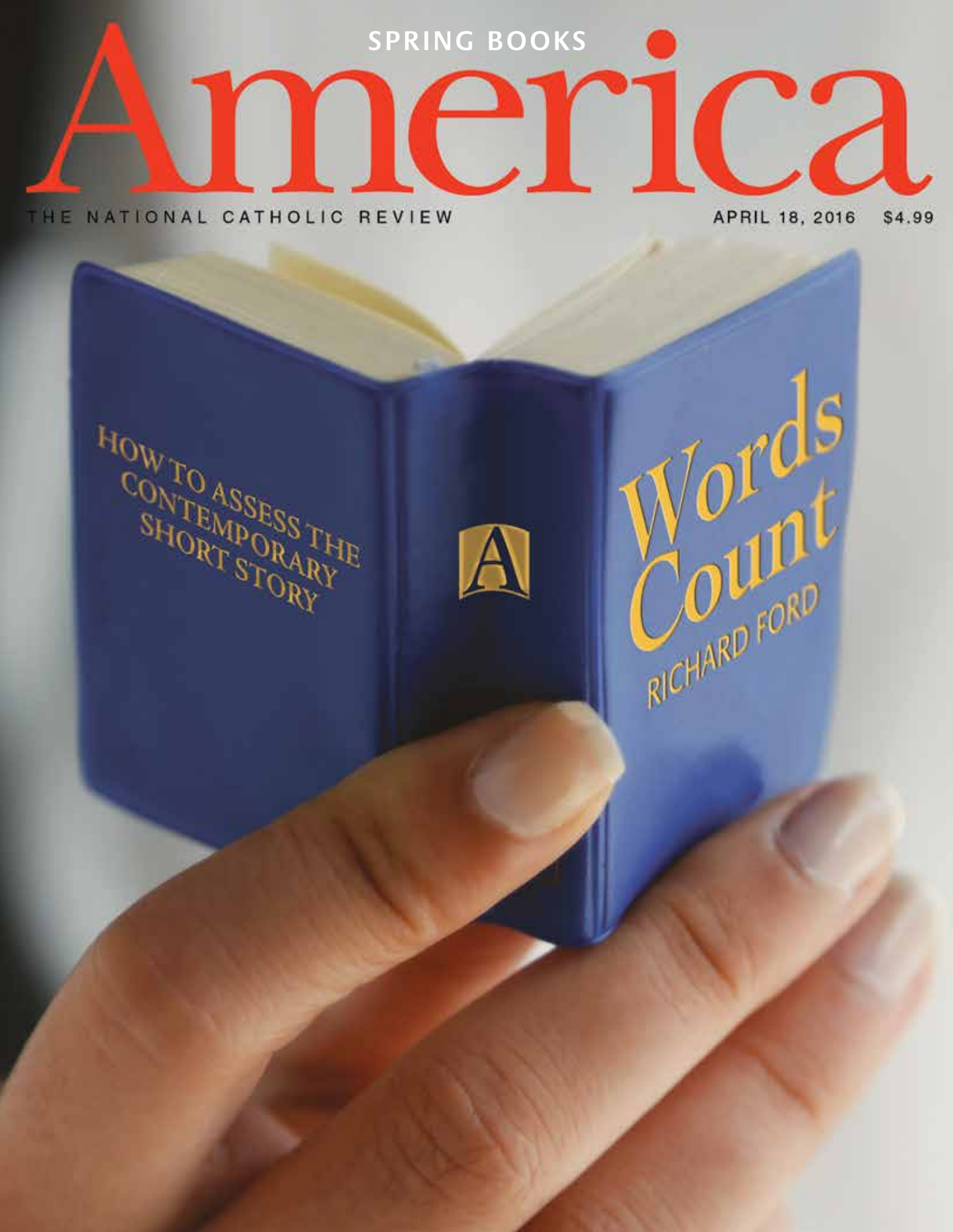

OF MANY THINGS

At precisely noon on May 17, 2011, the 85-year-old daughter of the last king of Ireland touched down at Casement Aerodrome, a military airfield southwest of Dublin. For the first time in a century, a reigning British monarch set foot in what is now the Republic of Ireland but for centuries had been the impoverished vassal of its English overlords. The royal visit marked the full realization of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, the international agreement between the British and Irish governments that restored home rule to Northern Ireland and brought an end to decades of bloody conflict.

For Queen Elizabeth II, the visit marked another milestone. After nearly 60 years on the throne and millions of miles traveled, she had never visited the Republic of Ireland. Yet she was determined to make the trip, motivated in large part by her sense of Christian duty to reconcile the estranged, to be a healer of the breach. "God sent into the world a unique person—neither a philosopher nor a general (important though they are)—but a Saviour, with the power to forgive," she said in her Christmas broadcast that year. "Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith. It can heal broken families, it can restore friendships and it can reconcile divided communities. It is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God's love."

Forgiveness, of course, is much more than a feeling. It is a series of small, often painful acts that culminate in a conversion of hearts that create the very possibility of peace. Queen Elizabeth II put forgiveness into action. "With the benefit of historical hindsight we can all see things which we would wish had been done differently or not at all," she said at the state dinner hosted by the Irish president, Mary McAleese. "To all those who have suffered as a consequence of our troubled past I extend my sincere thoughts and deep sympathy."

That sympathy runs deep, for the queen's visit to the republic was not just a moment of reconciliation between two long-estranged peoples, but her personal act of forgiveness. When Lord Louis Mountbatten was killed by agents of the Irish Republican Army in the summer of 1979, the queen suffered the loss of one of the most beloved members of her family, the uncle of her husband and the godfather of her first son. It was a truly extraordinary moment, therefore, when she laid a wreath at a memorial garden in Dublin dedicated to the memory of "all those who gave their lives in the cause of Irish Freedom." She had somehow found the courage within her to forgive, to rebuild, to begin anew.

It is from numberless such personal acts of courage and charity that peace has at last come to Ireland. As important as big international agreements are, they are not the true stuff of reconciliation. Peace happens when hearts meet. The long process of peace-building involves a thousand mostly private moments of mercy that are nonetheless identical in substance to the very public process in which the queen participated. But we must have the courage to try, the hope that the trying is worth it and the faithfulness to persevere.

In the course of a century, the editors of this magazine have unashamedly championed the cause of Irish freedom. In doing so, we have had a few unkind words to say about the British and the queen's predecessors. As we mark the centenary of the Easter Uprising, we celebrate the fulfillment of our forebears' dreams, but we also repent of what we too have done and failed to do. Yet in repentance there is hope, the very hope we saw during those mid-May days in 2011. In the words of Seamus Heaney:

History says, Don't hope
On this side of the grave,
But then, once in a lifetime
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up,
And hope and history rhyme.

MATT MALONE, S.J.

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Contents

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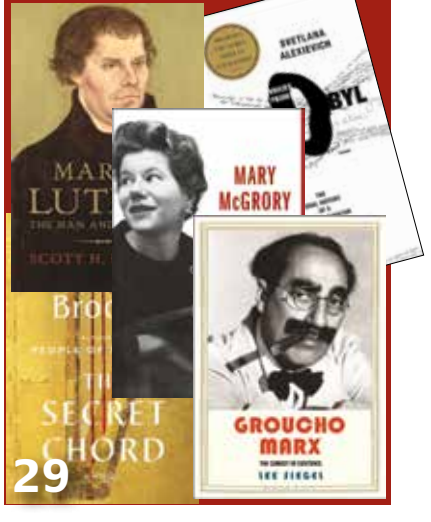


ARTICLES

COLUMNS & DEPARTMENTS

BOOKS & CULTURE

ON THE WEB

Quang Tran, S.J., writes on why it is time for **purgatory to make a comeback**, and Mitch Pacwa, S.J., remembers **Mother Angelica**, right. Full digital highlights on page 38 and at americamagazine.org/webfeatures.

Make Work Pay

California is on the verge of passing a $15 minimum wage law; New York may be next. Following years of inaction at the federal level—the last minimum wage increase out of Washington came in 2009—many cities and states have been setting minimum wage policy on their own as economic inequity in the United States reaches a social breaking point. That emerging patchwork of minimum wage levels may not be an undesirable outcome.

Certainly it is necessary for the federal government to establish a rate below which no worker should fall. Even better would be a Congressional bargain linking the minimum wage permanently to objective economic indicators and establishing automatic cost-of-living adjustments. But with the cost of living ranging widely around the nation and within states, varied minimums could have a greater impact on poverty reduction. Oregon recently voted to move toward the $15 minimum over the next six years. The state will step up from its current $9.25 an hour to $14.75 by 2022 in the city of Portland, but there will be a slightly lower rate for small towns ($13.50) and the most rural areas ($12.50), where a large hike could discourage job creation.

The new wage levels should move thousands of Oregonians out of a working-poverty trap. The results in Oregon should be assessed and replicated if the tiered approach proves effective in poverty reduction without job loss. Many people who work for minimum wage are supporting themselves and their families on it; they deserve a proactive wage policy that aids them in that effort.

Children in the Court

"I've taught immigration law literally to 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds. It takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of patience. They get it. It's not the most efficient, but it can be done." Sometimes it requires a ludicrous statement to call attention to a ludicrous system. In this case, the statement was uttered by Jack Weil, a U.S. immigration court judge, who was speaking about minors who appear in his court without a parent or a lawyer. They are among the thousands of unaccompanied minors who appear in immigration courts without legal counsel. Though nonprofit agencies and pro-bono attorneys have tried to shoulder the load, 42 percent of children detained by the U.S. immigration system must fend for themselves in deportation hearings. This greatly increases the likelihood that they will be deported back to their home country.

In a special report compiled in 2015 in conjunction with all 13 Jesuit law schools in the United States, Jesuit Refugee Service identified three important reforms targeted at vulnerable migrants. The first is now the subject of a proposed Senate bill. The Fair Day in Court for Kids Act would guarantee a lawyer to unaccompanied minors detained by the U.S. government. Short of such a guarantee, the White House should continue to push for additional funding for programs that provide legal representation to children and families seeking asylum. Finally, the process of "expedited processing" for children and families should end. Because of the large number of migrants who entered the United States in 2014 and 2015, deportation cases were fast-tracked, making it more difficult for lawyers to prepare and for immigrants to locate the resources available to them. Many of these children fled violence or gang life in their home countries and have a legitimate case to make for asylum. Children in detention deserve more than just temporary food and shelter. They deserve a real chance at a new life.

A Vow to End Child Marriage

For young girls in some societies, a wedding day is little more than a far-off celebration and a dream of a white dress. For young girls in other societies, it is a potentially traumatizing day that already has come and gone. Forced marriage of young girls is an ongoing challenge in many nations. The U.N. Population Fund estimates that more than 140 million girls under the age of 18 will become brides between 2011 and 2020, and more than a third of that group will be under the age of 15. Young women in poverty who lack an education are particularly vulnerable. Child brides are often at high risk of sexually transmitted diseases and sexual and domestic abuse and have little opportunity for education or vocational training. Across the globe, pregnancy remains among the leading causes of death for girls age 15 to 19.

The government of Nepal is working to change these statistics. The country recently hosted its first Girl Summit as part of its continued efforts to end child, early and forced marriage. The nation has managed to decrease the number of child marriages by 10 percent over the last decade (in 2013 the rate was 41 percent). Nepal has outlawed child marriage and hopes to end the practice by 2030. The Girl Summit reflected efforts by the government to broaden the reach of this message and sought to educate and empower young girls and boys to end the cultural acceptance of these practices. This multifaceted, widespread approach can serve as a good example for other nations working to end child marriage.

Presidential Powers

Eight years ago, Senator Barack Obama warned that the powers of the office he sought were being stretched beyond their constitutional limits: "The biggest problems that we're facing right now have to do with George Bush trying to bring more and more power into the executive branch and not go through Congress at all." The editors of **America** echoed his concern in "Abuse of Office" (4/28/08).

Mr. Obama campaigned on a promise to reverse the excesses of the war on terror at home and abroad, which in the name of national security trampled on the rights of suspected enemies and U.S. citizens alike. Today, while some of the worst Bush-era abuses have been checked, President Obama evinces little discomfort exercising the executive powers amassed by his predecessor.

Torture. Within days of taking office, President Obama banned the use of "enhanced interrogation techniques," the Central Intelligence Agency's euphemism for what amounted to a state-sanctioned program of torture. But whereas Mr. Obama's break with the Bush administration's illegal and immoral use of torture was swift and decisive, his commitment to transparency and accountability for these crimes has been lukewarm. It took a year for the Obama justice department to open an investigation into the C.I.A. program, which ended in 2012 without a single criminal charge. Since that time a summary of the Senate Intelligence Committee report on torture has only reinforced in gruesome detail the extent to which intelligence officials misled the White House and Congress about the brutality, efficacy and lawfulness of the agency's harsh interrogation practices. International law requires that torture allegations be investigated and those responsible be prosecuted. Mr. Obama should appoint a special prosecutor to do so.

Signing statements. President Bush's sweeping use of signing statements—letters attached to legislation to clarify, challenge or disregard Congressional intent—rightly earned the criticism of then-Senator Obama, who said he would not employ this tactic "as a way of doing an end-run around Congress." While President Obama has been more sparing than his predecessor in his use of these statements, he, too, has used them to unilaterally reject parts of laws he sees as encroachments on his executive authority. In the face of a willfully obstructionist Congress, the president also made generous use of executive orders and presidential memoranda to achieve his own policy aims. Whatever one thinks of Mr. Obama's actions on immigration reform or federal gun safety research, it is not a victory for the democratic process when a president sidesteps the legislature.

CNS PHOTO/LARRY DOWNING, REUTERS

Domestic spying. President Obama showed little interest in rolling back the reach of the insatiable surveillance state before government contractor Edward Snowden leaked thousands of classified documents that revealed the National Security Agency's indiscriminate monitoring of U.S. citizens. Even after the 2013 revelations, the Obama administration variously ignored, weakened or offered only grudging support to surveillance reform efforts. The resulting USA Freedom Act of 2015 technically ends the government's bulk collection of telecommunications metadata and strengthens transparency and civil liberty protections at the notoriously government-friendly Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court. It is unclear, however, to what extent the reforms will actually curtail mass surveillance or why the public should trust an agency that has consistently misrepresented the extent of its activities, even in Congressional hearings.

Habeas corpus. When the Supreme Court in 2008 granted Guantánamo detainees the right to challenge their detention, Senator Obama applauded the justices for "rejecting a false choice between fighting terrorism and respecting habeas corpus." Today 89 prisoners remain. To be fair, lawmakers in Congress have obstructed the president's efforts to close the military prison at every turn. But there have also been self-inflicted wounds. Mr. Obama has defended the use of military commissions, aggressively appealed habeas petitions and acknowledged that there are detainees "who cannot be prosecuted for past crimes…but who nonetheless pose a threat to the security of the United States." The president's latest doomed plan to shutter the prison camp, released in February, would therefore relocate the facilities but leave in place a fundamentally flawed system of indefinite detention.

If the executive oversteps of this president are not of the same scale or number as those of his predecessor, neither are they insignificant. In a tragic irony, the limited progress that has been made toward the president's promises to end America's wars and close Guantánamo Bay has come in no small part from Mr. Obama's rapid expansion of a secretive drone war that has kept U.S. boots off the ground and enemy combatants out of our prisons. It is also a program that degrades the office of the presidency and is nothing less than an abuse of power.

REPLY ALL

Illusions of Certitude

After reading "Scalia v. Aquinas," by Anthony Giambrone, O.P. (3/21), I was tempted to defer to the dictum, "Say good things about the deceased or say nothing." But in fact Justice Scalia's confidence in his ability to divine the true meaning of the Constitution is an example of legal fundamentalism no less naïve than the religious variety.

Unlike the artificial languages of science and mathematics, the language of the law is rife with ambiguity. Whether we consider the Constitution rotten with ambiguity or, like the Bible, rich with ambiguity is a crucial question for which there is no definitive answer. It could be considered rotten, defective because it leaves room for interpretation; or it could be considered rich, a text from which principles can be applied to factual issues that the framers could not have possibly anticipated. The only wrong answer to this question is that the Constitution (or the Bible) is unambiguous. And that is the answer Justice Scalia, like his fellow originalists, insisted on, despite manifest evidence to the contrary.

Why is this position dangerous? Because it leads to illusions of certitude, which is perhaps the most lethal intellectual disease of our time, whether we find it in Sharia law, the Vatican curia or the U.S. Supreme Court.

JAMES C. RAYMOND
New York, N.Y.

Aquinas on Abuse

I appreciate this candid story of the real Antonin Scalia. Isn't it regrettable that the writer's correct natural-rights view on the application of statutory law was not applied by the U.S. Catholic bishops in their resolution of the church's sexual abuse cases? St. Thomas Aquinas would have been pleased had the strict adherence to inappropriate time limitations statutes been viewed for what it was: allowance for numerous wrongs to go unpunished. Instead, the natural law would have permitted settlements based on fair standards. Although Aquinas's philosophy is taught in our schools, it was not practiced when it came time to settle.

PIERCE CUNNINGHAM
Cincinnati, Ohio

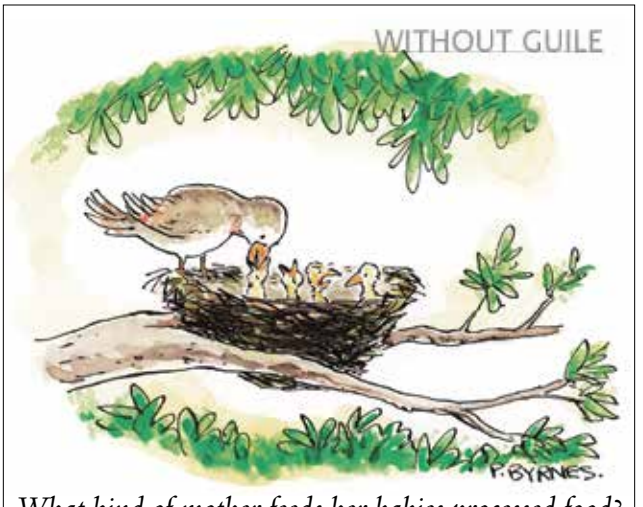
American Mirror

Re Of Many Things, by Matt Malone, S.J. (3/14): I tell friends often that Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders and Ted Cruz are a reflection of the American soul. If they do not like what they see, they need to take a close look at their reflection.

I do not miss the longed-for political parties that never really existed. But I do miss bishops leading. I miss bishops being taken seriously by politicians, Catholics and non-Catholic Americans. I truly miss the Catholic mark most Catholics once showed through their actions with civility, forbearance, humility, temperance and restraint. The political process has declined because the American soul has darkened. It is foolish to blame Ms. Clinton and Mr. Trump, Republicans and Democrats. These all metamorphosed on our watch and with our money. We are the ones who supported them.

Give us Catholic leaders forming the conscience of the United States, and then we will make America great again. Until then, brace yourself.

GUILLERMO REYES
Online Comment



What kind of mother feeds her babies processed food?

CARTOON: PAT BYRNES

Purely Political?

Re "What Did He Say?" (Editorial, 3/14): I believe it was John Courtney Murray, S.J., who taught that people writing and speaking from a religious perspective have the right to address the moral content of political issues, since there is no issue that is purely political. Thus Pope Francis, bishops' conferences and others have not only the right but the duty to point out what is moral and what is not in what many consider to be purely political areas, like immigration reform, the environment and the economy.

(MOST REV.) PETER A. ROSAZZA
Hartford, Conn.

Tax Comparisons

In "College Free for All?" (Editorial, 3/7) the editors write: "Proponents of free tuition, at least for the lower middle class, point to Germany, Finland, Norway and Sweden, all of which offer a free college education. It is 'free' because fewer students attend college in these countries than in the United States and because citizens are willing to pay much higher income taxes."

The first part is true, but the second part is certainly not. While fewer students in Germany attend college (the schools are very selective), income taxes are not really higher in Europe than in the United States. Yes, the federal-level taxes are higher, but Americans, unlike Europeans, also have to pay state income and local taxes. And this is before we get to things like property tax or taxes on business, which are a whole lot higher in the United States than abroad. For all the taxes we pay we should be getting free college and health care the way the Europeans do, or at least have

an Abitur system that is selective, as in German universities and technical schools.

DON CARLIN
Online Comment

Gendered Language

The article by Travis LaCouter and Marcarena Pallares, "The Transforming Power of Tragedy and Poverty" (3/7), reminded me that **America** does not seem to have a policy requiring authors to use inclusive language. The constant use of *mankind*, *man* or *men* throughout the article when referring to all human beings should be totally unacceptable. Many of **America's** writers do use inclusive language, and a few even avoid using gender-specific pronouns for God, but it should be communicated to all who wish to be published that submissions must use inclusive language.

KATHY MARTIN
Spring Valley, Ill.

Abortion Stories

Re "False Mercy," by Helen Alvaré (3/7): The author is correct to point out that supporters of abortion have quickly appropriated the Zika virus issue to advance their own ends. Nonetheless, in order to advance her own position, which advocates a complete ban on abortion, she is also guilty of distortion and unsubstantiated allegations. Not "all" women regret their abortions—either at the time or decades later. The author might profitably read a recent article in The Washington Post ("In Abortion Debate, a Space Between," 2/26), which highlights the vast range of responses women have to abortion. There is no single response. Not all women regret their abortions; many are sad but believe it was still a necessary choice.

The larger issue is that abortion is defined in terms of a problem by, for and about women. If the all-male hierarchy of the U.S. Catholic Church expressed more openness to artificial contraception and to opening up the priesthood to women, their position on abortion would not be so suspect.

ROSEMARI ZAGARRI
Online Comment

We the People

Re Of Many Things, by Matt Malone, S.J. (2/29): Justice Scalia's reliance on "original meaning" acknowledges that in the Constitution it is "We the People" who established the government and who retain to ourselves the ultimate power to change it by amending that Constitution. By using the amendment process set forth in Article 5 of the original document, we have changed the Constitution 27 times, updating it to meet our evolving intentions.

If we do not like the way the Supreme Court reads the First Amendment, or the Second, or any other, we need simply to restate it or repeal it by amendment to make clear our current intent. Justice Scalia understood the limitations implicit in a Constitution that vests only certain enumerated powers in the federal government and its branches and in which the people clearly retain to themselves the power to make changes.

JOSEPH J. DUNN
Online Comment

Judicial Approval

I am disappointed to learn that Father Malone, had he been a Supreme Court justice sitting with Antonin Scalia, would "more often than not" have found himself in agreement with the late conservative justice. Does this mean that the editor in chief of **America** would have approved of Justice Scalia's opinions broadening an individual's gun ownership rights, limiting citizens' class actions against corporate defendants, supporting the "free speech" (i.e., unlimited political spending) of individuals and corporations, defending the death penalty, and criticizing and curtailing affirmative action or the operation of the Clean Air Act?

JAMES H. DUFFY
New York, N.Y.

Policing the Priesthood

Re "Abuse Commission Shake-up" (Current Comment, 2/29): As a victim and survivor of clerical sexual abuse myself, I appreciate this thoughtful essay and the understanding that "the voice and witness of survivors on the papal commission is essential." I personally know Peter Saunders. He is a man of integrity. He loves the church and he loves Pope Francis, even though Mr. Saunders was sexually abused by two Jesuits when he was a schoolboy in London.

Mr. Saunders is on a leave of absence by decision of the commission, not of the pope who hired him. I hope and pray that Pope Francis will find a way to integrate Mr. Saunders back into a Vatican process created for dealing with current challenges, which include working more closely with the secular police around the world. It is the job of the police to investigate crimes in the church; the pope has enough to do in removing the predator from the priesthood.

ROSEMARY EILEEN McHUGH
Online Comment

Human to the End

"My God, My God," the excellent article by James Martin, S.J. (2/15), gives us great insight into the humanity of Jesus—and our own. And that is the catch. Jesus was a true man and true God, and from a human perspective his cry was one of agony to one who could save him from that utter humiliation—and the Father did not. It is exactly what each one of us may endure in the agony of our death. We do not understand, and Jesus in his humanity did not understand. But there was no despair: "Into thy hands I commend my spirit" were the final words of surrender and faith in his Father's will.

In other words, Jesus truly was like us in all things except sin. He endured the same agony we all do, to the very dregs of our humanity. How terribly consoling.

PETER RIGA
Houston, Tex.

ENDING EXTREMISM

Asia Religious Leaders React to Lahore Attack: Urge Reconciliation

Christian religious leaders across Asia called for Muslims to take a stand against Islamic extremists and seek reconciliation and forgiveness. They urged Muslims to pursue a peaceful interpretation of religion in the aftermath of the Easter massacre at a public park in Pakistan.

"The attack is an outcome of a barbaric and insane interpretation of religion by a group of misguided people who exploit religion," said Bishop Gervas Rozario of Rajshahi, Bangladesh, chairman of the Bangladeshi bishops' Justice and Peace Commission.

A Taliban splinter group claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing on March 27 in Lahore's Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park, which the group claimed was intended to target Christians. But of the 72 people killed, only 14 were confirmed to be Christians, police said. Another 340 people were injured. The bombing came five days after a terror attack in Brussels, claimed by the Islamic State, left 35 people dead and hundreds injured.

Muslim-majority Bangladesh, which once was part of Pakistan, has seen a series of extremist attacks and threats on religious minorities, including Christians. "From Europe to Asia, no one is safe from fundamentalist threats and attacks, not even in Bangladesh, where the majority of Muslims are peaceful," Bishop Rozario said. "But minorities continue to be attacked sporadically, and possibilities of a gruesome attack like that of Lahore can't be dismissed."

It is impossible for governments in Pakistan or Bangladesh to contain fundamentalism unless large sections of the population are involved in a social movement against extremism, the bishop said. "There are many good Muslims, and they must play an active role in collaboration with the government to contain the rise of fundamentalism," he said.

Any attack in the name of religion is un-Islamic, said Mufti Ainul Islam, head imam of Hizbul Bahar Jame mosque in Dhaka. "Those who are behind such attacks are insane, misled people and their acts are utterly unacceptable and condemnable," he said, describing the perpetrators of religion-based violence as "foolish" and "ignorant" about the teachings of the Quran.

In Christian-majority Philippines, which has experienced Islamic extremist-related violence in southern regions in the past, Catholic bishops called for calm. "We should refuse to allow these extremists to dictate how we should live and relate with one another," said Bishop Gerardo Alminaza of San Carlos, Philippines.

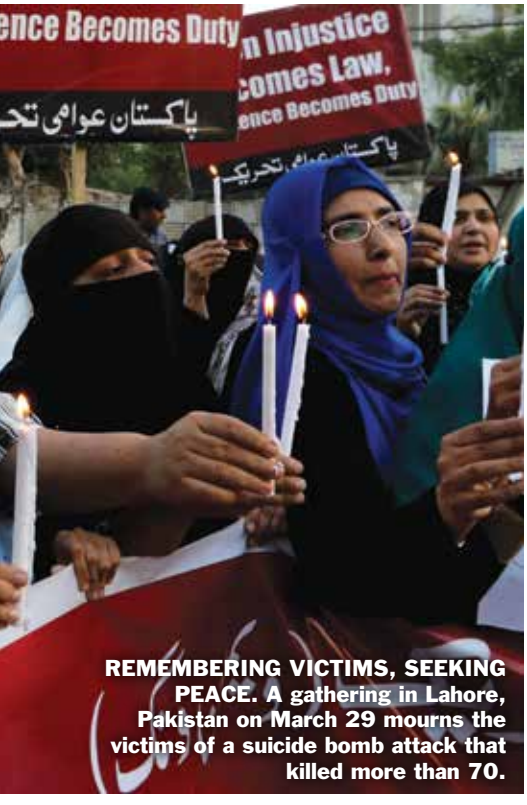
Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle of Manila warned in a radio interview that "the spread of evil continues" and appealed to Christians "not to lose hope," while at the same time calling for "deeper faith" in combating terrorism.

In Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country, Christians and Muslims alike condemned the Lahore bombing. Jakarta, its capital, experienced seven explosions and several gunfights in January in incidents reportedly coordinated by the Islamic State group.

"Whatever their intentions, violence is never to be justified. As Muslims, we dare to say that whoever uses violence to preach is against the very nature of Islam. Islam denounces violence," Helmy Faishal Zaini, secretary general of Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, said.

"This requires collective effort throughout the world against terrorism. The United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation must take tough action against the perpetrators of the Belgium and Pakistan bombings," Zaini said.

Bishop Yohanes Yuwono of Tanjungkarang, chairman of the Indonesian bishops' interfaith commission, urged all people to seek peace. "The pope's act of washing the feet of a Muslim and a Hindu indicates a hope for peace throughout the world," Bishop Yuwono said. "We should always echo such a message."



REMEMBERING VICTIMS, SEEKING PEACE. A gathering in Lahore, Pakistan on March 29 mourns the victims of a suicide bomb attack that killed more than 70.

U.S. CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Mixed Report Card for 2015

Church leaders have issued a mixed report on the health of the nation's Catholic schools. In 2015 Catholic schools served nearly 24,000 fewer students than in 2014, although 14 new schools opened across the country.

The assessment was issued on March 29, the opening day of the National Catholic Educational Association's annual convention in San Diego. Church leaders outlined some of the steps they are taking to support growth in Catholic school education, including fundraising for tuition assistance, marketing and strengthening academic and faith formation.

"There's a strong demand and enthusiasm for Catholic schools," said Bishop George V. Murry of Youngstown, Ohio, chairman of the N.C.E.A. board of directors. Speaking at an opening news conference, he said that around 27 percent of schools had waiting lists.

The schools continue to face significant challenges, however. Closings and consolidations led to a total loss of 43 schools this academic year, Sister Dale McDonald, a Sister of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and N.C.E.A.'s director of public policy and educational research, reported.

Total enrollment in the 2015-16 academic year stood at almost 2 million students, a 1.2 percent decrease from the previous year, Sister McDonald said, adding that the figure was a far cry from the peak of 5.2 million in the 1960s. The findings of the annual report on the 6,525 schools included:

- Catholic schools saved state and local education agencies more than $24 billion per year, based on the per pupil cost of public education, which is $12,000 annually.
- Catholic school student-to-teacher ratios remain good compared to public schools. The ratio is 13-to-1 in Catholic elementary schools and 11-to-1 in secondary schools.
- 85 percent of Catholic school graduates attend four-year universities, compared to 38 percent from public schools.
- 16 percent of students in Catholic schools are Hispanic.
- 78 percent of Catholic schools have students with mild to moderate disabilities.

"We often hear that Catholic schools don't do disabilities," Sister McDonald said. "[But] we try to care for all students and have made significant progress in that area."

It is a challenge to schools and the association itself to "spread the good news about a Catholic school education" using media and social media, said Thomas Burnford, N.C.E.A.'s interim president.

In the public arena, he said, it is important to build on legislation that provides some form of financial assistance to parents to help them choose a private or faith-based education for their children. To date, 27 states and the District of Columbia do so, enabling 1.5 million families to exercise that choice nationwide, he said.

He and the other leaders who spoke said it was important to communicate to the broader public why Catholic schools matter in today's society.

"They are not important because of the defects of the public school system," Bishop Robert W. McElroy of San Diego emphasized. Catholic schools are important because "we reach into the hearts and souls of our students," he said, and help them to understand the importance of sacrificing their own self-interest for the good of the whole community, society and nation.

"This contribution of our Catholic schools to the common good has never been more useful in our history than it is at this moment," the bishop said.


SINGING CATHOLIC SCHOOL PRAISES. Members of the Northeast Deanery Children's Choir sing at Our Lady of Guadalupe in Ferguson, Mo., in November 2015.

Remembering EWTN's Mother Angelica

Mother Mary Angelica of the Annunciation, P.C.P.A., founder of the EWTN Global Catholic Network, died peacefully on Easter Sunday, March 27, surrounded by the Poor Clare Nuns of Perpetual Adoration of Our Lady of the Angels Monastery in Hanceville, Ala. "This is a sorrow-filled day for the entire EWTN Family," said EWTN's chairman and chief executive officer, Michael P. Warsaw. "In the face of sickness and long-suffering trials, Mother's example of joy and prayerful perseverance exemplified the Franciscan spirit she held so dear." Her popular EWTN television show, "Mother Angelica Live," was launched in 1983. Mitch Pacwa, S.J., a Scripture scholar and the host of "EWTN Live," commented, "The history of Catholicism in the United States will need to include a section, if not a chapter, on Mother Angelica." In a remembrance published at americamedia.org, Father Pacwa said "authenticity" was one of Mother Angelica's stand-out characteristics. A sometimes combative presence on camera, "she was absolutely no different offstage than on. She said what she honestly thought because she believed it to be true, and she did not fear that anyone might dislike her. Her only fear would be to displease the Lord Jesus."

Collection for Ukraine

In a surprise announcement on April 3, Pope Francis called on "all the Catholic churches in Europe" to hold a special collection on Sunday, April 24, to "alleviate the material needs" of all who are suffering "the consequences of the violence" in Ukraine. Issuing this call in St. Peter's Square after celebrating Mass on the Second Sunday of Easter, the pope said he hoped this gesture might "help to promote peace and respect for law without further delay in this sorely tested land." Pope Francis has been concerned about the dramatic situation in Ukraine, where tensions with Russian separatists persist. The pope drew the world's attention to "the consequences of the violence" and ongoing hostilities in Ukraine, noting that thousands have been killed and more than a million have had to leave their homes.

Assumptionist Priest Killed in Congo

Founder of a website documenting the ongoing violence in North Kivu Province, the Assumption priest Vincent Machozi was murdered on March 21, shortly after he posted an article denouncing the presidents of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda because of recent massacres in the region. Father Machozi defended the Yira ethnic group (also known as Nande), who have been victims of the illegal exploitation of coltan in eastern Congo. "Soldiers arrived in a vehicle a little after midnight, broke down the door and shot him on sight," said the Very Rev. Emmanuel Kahindo, vicar general of the Assumptionist congregation stationed in Rome. Father Kahindo said that in a conversation last October Father Machozi told him: "Pray for me because I will be murdered...." He led Kyaghanda Yira, an organization that defended the rights and the land of the Yira people. It is estimated that since 2010, some four million people have been systematically driven from their land, terrorized and massacred by armed groups in North Kivu.

NEWS BRIEFS

Peacekeeper scandal

A new **law in Indiana banning abortions** based on potential disabilities, gender and race "reflects the love that God has for everyone by affirming that every human life is sacred," Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin of Indianapolis said on March 24. ✦ The United Nations on March 31 announced more than 100 new alleged victims of **sexual abuse by peacekeepers** in Central African Republic, dramatically widening the scope of an abuse scandal among U.N. forces that has persisted for months. ✦ A Vatican spokesperson confirmed on March 31 an **investigation of former officials** of the Bambino Gesù pediatric hospital in a case involving the financing of remodeling work on the residence of former Vatican secretary of state Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone. ✦ Pro-life advocates expressed dismay with new Food and Drug Administration guidelines, announced on March 30, that **allow the use of RU-486 later into pregnancy** and with fewer visits to a doctor. ✦ The pope's **"Franciscus" account on Instagram**, launched on March 19, became the "fastest growing account on Instagram to date," according to an Instagram spokesperson, when it hit the million-follower mark in just 12 hours.

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

DISPATCH | JOHANNESBURG

Country for Sale?

The last few weeks of March brought South Africa close to a constitutional crisis. That this probably won't happen has less to do with rationality and justice than it does with a culture of cover-up and state capture by the dominant faction of the ruling party.

A number of African National Congress parliamentarians have revealed that they were offered posts in the national cabinet, not by President Jacob Zuma—whose job this is, according to the Constitution—but by representatives of a family-run Indian multinational corporation with substantial investments in South Africa, the Guptas.

This family has a long history of political involvement in the country. The Guptas own the New Age, a pro-A.N.C. national newspaper, and the similarly sympathetic ANN7 television news channel. They have close business associations with the Zuma family and other A.N.C. heavyweights.

If the allegations are true—and most South Africans in media and politics believe they are—this is a very serious situation in a country already reeling from other crises: severe drought, an economically destructive fight between factions of the A.N.C. supporting Zuma and those supporting finance minister Pravin Gordhan, the threat that South African bonds may be reduced to "junk" status and a pervasive sense that the ruling party is corrupt to the core.

It means that the president has violated his oath of office under the Constitution—an impeachable offense. And it means that the domestic affairs of the country have been interfered with by a foreign power—not a state, in this instance, but a multinational.

"So what's new?" you might say. We all know this happens all the time. Presidents and political parties can be bought by business, even in the most stable of democracies. Foreign powers interfere with weak states all the time. Businesses manipulate politics. If a state is functioning efficiently, the economy must be sound and businesses need to be in on the process.

Political parties can be bought by business, even in the most stable of democracies.

But....

In a normal society businesses advise, engage with government and, if they are dissatisfied, move capital elsewhere. If businesses, particularly multinationals, engage in direct intervention in a state by means like financing coups or putting "their" people into office and are found out, they are subject to prosecution within the state and international condemnation outside.

And presidents who violate their oath of office get impeached. At the very least they are fired for not doing their job.

Not in South Africa, it seems. When the news broke, the National Executive Committee of the A.N.C. met. Though some on the executive committee, notably those close to Pravin Gordhan and key members belonging to the South African Communist Party (which is in alliance with the A.N.C.), denounced the Guptas in general and condemned any notion of their involvement in affairs of state, Zuma was exonerated. The A.N.C. has also denied claims that Zuma offered to resign over the crisis.

The fallout continues. Amid widespread anger against Zuma and his faction among sections of the A.N.C. (including many veterans of the anti-apartheid struggle) who are concerned that the party's reputation has been further damaged, rumors spread of an imminent cabinet reshuffle, in effect a purge of Zuma's critics. Prominent among those rumored for "redeployment" (to use the A.N.C. nomenclature) is Deputy Finance Minister Mcebisi Jonas, one of those who alleged they had been approached by the Guptas.

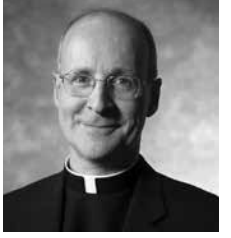
Political analysts see it in wider terms: confirmation of their assessment that we are seeing party and state "capture" by the faction led by President Zuma, with an underlying intention of personal gain. Civil society is angry, too. Some feel—with justification—that the country is for sale to the highest bidder. Last week the Dominican order formally asked the public protector, Thuli Madonsela, to address the matter. She has indicated she will ask Parliament for funds to investigate.

It remains to be seen whether her office will get them. Her term in office runs out in October. The Zuma faction in power may simply have to sit it out and then—with or without advice from its friends in business—appoint one of their own to the position. The chances that Ms. Madonsela will get other funding—from the Guptas, for example?—is unlikely. It is more probable that the *eschaton* will begin before October.

ANTHONY EGAN

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

JAMES MARTIN



Don't Be a Jerk

"Coarsened" is a word you've probably heard more and more frequently in the past few years. It's most often applied to the state of public discourse in our country, particularly in the political sphere.

Lately, some of our political candidates have been calling one another names, using schoolyard taunts and shouting over one another during televised debates. There have even been articles written that used insights from child psychologists to aid parents hoping to teach their children that this is not how adults should behave. On top of that, your social media feeds (Facebook, Twitter and the like) may be filled with increasing levels of invective. Even in our own church many Catholics seem ready to call another person a "bad Catholic" at the drop of a biretta.

You can be excused for feeling that having a conversation on a controversial topic might prove dangerous for your emotional, psychological, spiritual and maybe even physical health. You might get slugged.

All this reminds me of some great advice I once heard from the Jesuit historian John W. O'Malley, author of several books, including *The First Jesuits* and *What Happened at Vatican II?* But it isn't an aperçu from St. Ignatius Loyola or one of the early Jesuits. Rather, this wisdom came from an older Jesuit whom John had once known. They were three rules for getting along in Jesuit community: (1) You're not God; (2) This isn't heaven; (3) Don't be a jerk. That last one was originally in saltier language—using a synonym for a kind of donkey—but it still works.

The first two are essential for life in general. "You're not God" has multiple implications. First, you can't change most things, so stop trying. Second, you're not in charge, so stop acting as if you were. And third, you don't know everything, so stop acting as if you do. It brings calm, perspective and humility.

The second dictum, "This isn't heaven" can help to reduce the complaining you do. For example, if you live in a Jesuit community where the roof leaks (as ours once did, in my room, for several months) or where the elevator apparently runs up and down on a stream of molasses (as ours has always done), you are reminded to complain less because, well, this isn't heaven.

> Ask God to help you see others the way God sees them.

But it's that last apothegm that I wish more people remembered when they enter into public discussions: "Don't be a jerk." Now, I'm the first to admit that I break that rule from time to time (probably more than I know, since I may not notice it). But today a surprising number of people think nothing of attacking people anonymously on Twitter, calling fellow politicians terrible names and maligning their integrity during debates, posting mean comments on Facebook and shouting over one another on talk shows—basically, being a jerk. And jerkiness is contagious, I think. Seeing public figures shouting on television probably encourages people to do it in their private lives. At the very least, it does not encourage charitable behavior.

How does one avoid that contagion? Here's where some other traditional bits of wisdom can help. First, always give people the benefit of the doubt. Believe it or not, St. Ignatius placed that simple maxim at the beginning of his Spiritual Exercises, where he called it a "Presupposition." "Every good Christian," he wrote, "ought to be more eager to put a good interpretation on a neighbor's statement than to condemn it." Amen.

Second, avoid ad hominem arguments—that is, attacks on the person. The difference here is between "I think your argument is incorrect because…" and "You're a bad Catholic." Avoiding that will ratchet down emotion significantly and help all interactions go more smoothly.

Finally, an overtly spiritual approach: Ask God to help you see others the way God sees them. The old adage that everyone is fighting a battle (or carrying a cross) is helpful. In the Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius invites us to imagine the Trinity looking down on all of humanity with love. The next time you're angry with someone, think of the Trinity gazing down on the person you're about to flame.

None of this should prevent people from discussing things, whether one-on-one, online, in public, on television, even on debate nights. You can always disagree. You can even disagree vehemently.

Just don't be a jerk.

JAMES MARTIN, S.J., *is editor at large of* ***America*** *and author of* Seven Last Words: An Invitation to a Deeper Friendship with Jesus. *Twitter: @JamesMartinSJ.*

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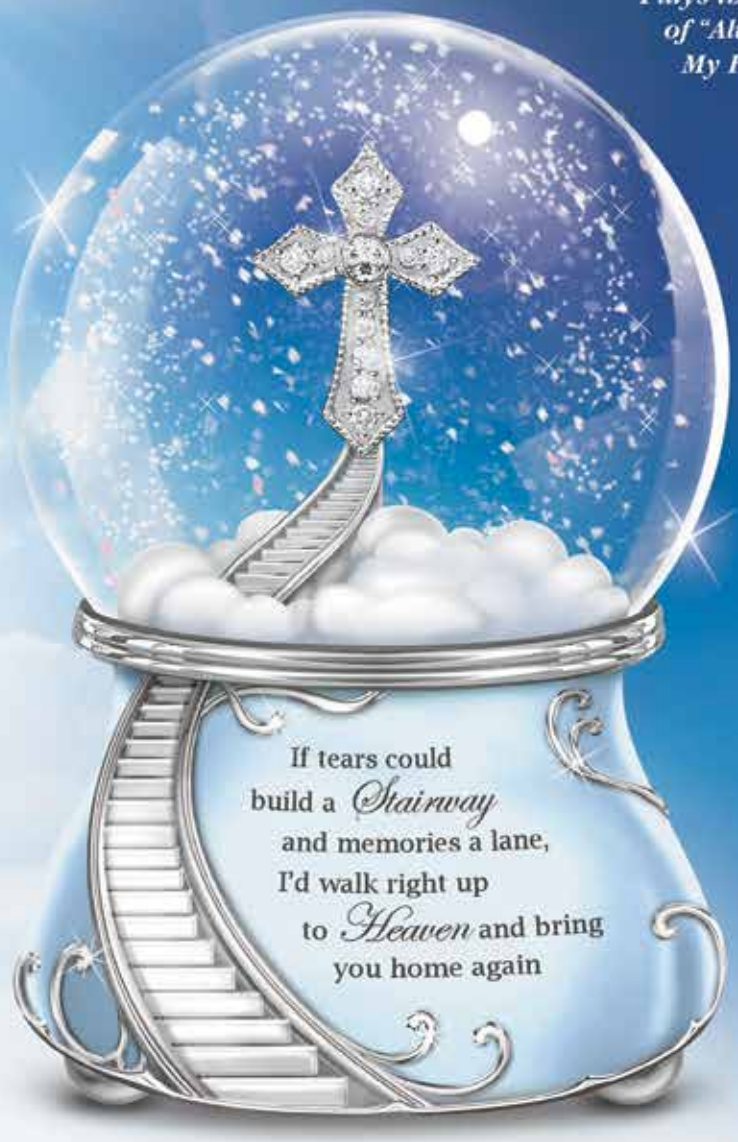

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GO ASK ALICE. A window display congratulating the short story writer Alice Munro in 2013

Words Count

How to assess the contemporary short story

BY RICHARD FORD

People often ask me (and you know when someone says that, no one has *ever* asked); but still, I am often asked if I think the short story is thriving in America. There is some fly-in-the-bottle—possibly quite insincere—anxiety that it might not be. A certain kind of person—often residing on the Upper West Side of New York, near Columbia University, and along the Connecticut shore of Long Island Sound—worries about such matters: The death of the novel. The watering down of the villanelle by countless writing workshops. Most of the people I know who write wonderful short stories never worry about this. So I can always confidently answer those who are worried that the short story is thriving.

There have never been a lot of great short-story writers working in America at any one time—or in Brazil, or Canada or Uzbekistan; or a large number of great short stories being written. Ever. Read any magazine that publishes short fiction today—and by that I mean *any* magazine, including the one you probably all subscribe to—and you will see what I am saying is true. Like any other form of greatness, why would there be a lot of it? M.F.A. programs do turn out would-be story writers in large lots. And most of them are likely and harmlessly to fail to write one wholly good short story in their lives, nor to make a contribution to the form—except as readers. (Which *is* a contribution.)

But writing mediocre short stories is a victimless crime and has nothing pernicious to do with those few writers who will and do write them superbly: Alice Munro, Deb Eisenberg, William Trevor, Claire Keegan, George Saunders, Edward P. Jones. The value of literary art is not like gasoline prices. It does not fluctuate when the supply goes up or down. A good short story, like a good poem or a good essay, becomes everlastingly what *good is*. Much better, I think, to worry about the success of Donald J. Trump, or the fate of our republic or changes in the Catholic Church

RICHARD FORD, *author of five collections of short stories and eight novels, is perhaps best known for his novels about Frank Bascombe, beginning with* The Sportswriter *(1986). He has won the Pulitzer Prize and many other awards.*

REUTERS/ANDY CLARK

than about the future of the short story. And if you cannot help worry about the short story, then go sit down and write one. Because, if nothing else, making an effort to write a great short story will cause you to look all the more admiringly and with greater confidence at those who—by some rare magic—do it wonderfully.

Short Story, Tall Order

I have, over the years, in addition to trying to be a short-story practitioner, been a short-story enthusiast and a conserver. I have edited *The Granta Book of the American Short Story*, both volumes, the *Best American* and others. I have done this mostly to promote wonderful writers working in the form; and also to keep myself reading new work—a habit that can get lost in the hustle of one's own writing life. I have also done it to make a few, piddling extra bucks so I do not have to do other really terrible things I do not need to mention. But each time I have sat down to write an introduction to the volumes I have edited, I have tried to do what these anthologizing tasks seem to ordain: I have tried to define the short story form.

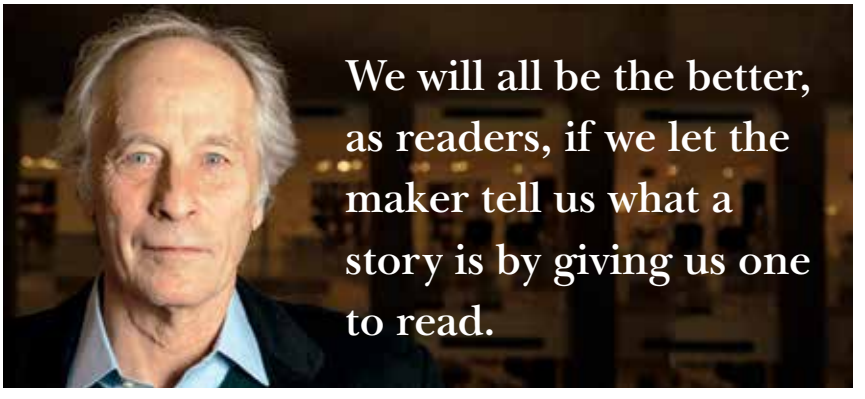
Something about short stories seems to beg for defining. They beg for it in the way that novels do not. As readers, we let novels sprawl all over the beds where we usually read them. We can dismiss a novel as being inferior; yet when we think that, we do not usually assail its very *novel-ness*. We almost never snarl, "This is not even a novel." Whereas with short stories we often do snarl, "This isn't even a story." I wrote once that when a novel has serious defects, its other formal strengths come to its aid; and with their assistance the book can still limp on to redeem itself. *Tender Is the Night* comes to mind—a busted narrative structure rescued by memorable characters and vivid prose. Or *The Sound and the Fury*—a truly nutty beginning rescued by Faulknerian bravado, giant passion and ambition, plus over-all weirdness. And Joyce's *Ulysses*—which, as Samuel Johnson said of *Paradise Lost*, no one ever wished it were longer—a novel rescued (as far as I can tell) by college professors, the Irish themselves and by people who like to have something to hold over someone else.

But when short stories exhibit serious defects (implausible characters, implausible premises and endings, extreme brevity), they sort of stop existing as short stories and become just failures not worthy of notice. Like fireworks that do not go off.

Why is that? Maybe it is stories' overall shortness that asks that they be put into a cramped, perfect-seeming jewel box in order to be noticed and appreciated. Like the diamond I give my wife. Or maybe it is their *formal* smallness. Typically, stories have few characters, few incidents, few settings; they generally involve a small span of time, often seem highly artificial but still want to produce an impact in one's life. Maybe it is *that* which tempts us to dismiss them ruthlessly—some readerly skepticism about whether they are really worth our time: As if to say, "If you're gonna be so small, you better be really good." Both these lenses, through which short stories are seen as vulnerable, represent of course the corrosive gaze of the "purist"—always the first hater of truly imaginative literature while passing as its staunchest defender.

Defining the Short Story

But, back to task—to define a short story. Was a short story a prose narrative of something under 5,000 words? Did it contain only one dramatic event? Need the number of characters be confined to just a few? Were there limited settings? Limited chronological time schemes? Did you have to be able to read one "in a sitting?" Did the whole story have to be secretly coiled up in its first paragraph only to strike in its last? I had a teacher who told me once that a short story "shouldn't contain a death." He did not say why. So much, then, for Frank O'Connor's great story "A Guest of the Nation"; so much for Hemingway's "Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber."



RICHARD FORD. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Thinking further, did there have to be an epiphany somewhere, like in *Dubliners*? And were there particular subjects that were especially appropriate for short-story treatment? War? Sex, maybe? Infidelity? The same Frank O'Connor in his introduction to his influential book of essays, *The Lonely Voice*, said short stories *always* concerned what he called "submerged population groups." Of course, he did not take into account that he was Irish and an apostate, divorced Catholic on an isolated Catholic island—and was thus *himself* a member of a rather submerged group. He can be forgiven for trying to rationalize his personal circumstance in his literary criticism. But I do not think he was right. Just think about the stories of John Cheever or Alice Munro.

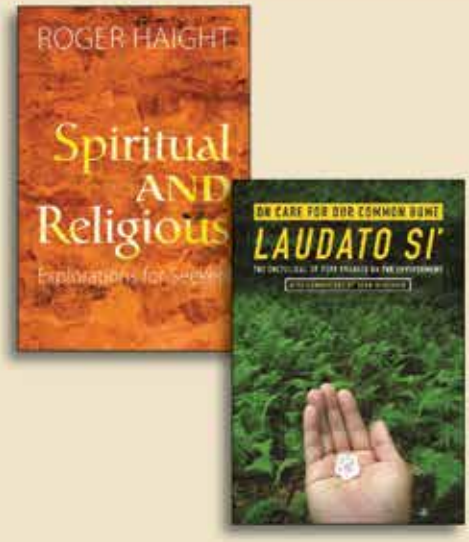
For every observable tenet I can come up with for short

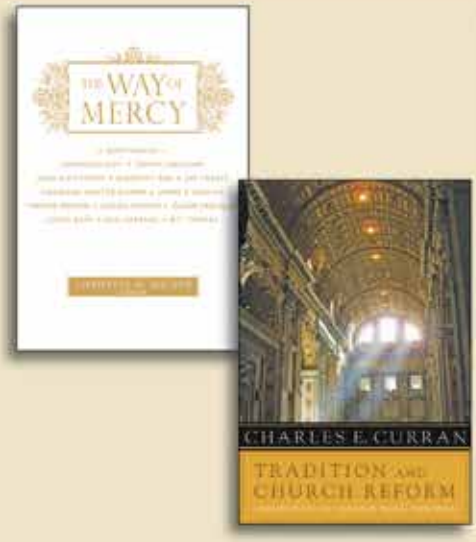
stories, I can always think of a really good story that ignores or violates all my attempts at a generally workable definition. Like most things in art, the rules are constantly being defeated by some dazzling piece of imagination. And as someone who would write stories myself, I do not want to pronounce a supposedly defining limitation that could discourage someone who wants to write a short story but finds his or her idea of what a story is does not fit my template. Art's goal, if it would seem to circumscribe the imagination, does so only to free and quicken it. The urge to define always gives way, as it should, to the thrill of excellence.

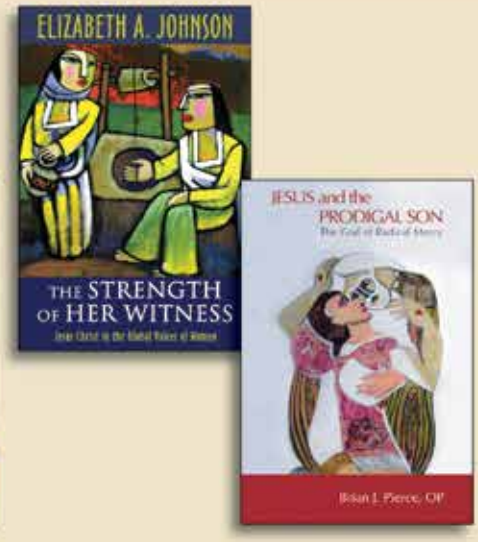
What I have ended up doing, and not at all frustratedly—in truth, victoriously—is defining a short story only by its length. A short story is a prose narrative that is short. How short? Well, that is tricky. Shorter than a novel? Okay. Shorter than a novella? Often—though we are even less sure about the definition of novellas than we are about short stories. But *short* in a permissive sense of shortness, a sense that favors the maker's decisions and requirements rather than the pseudo-critic's, and one that assumes we will all be the better, as readers, if we let the maker tell us what a story is by giving us one to read.

You can tell I am not going to pronounce a better definition of short stories than this, or argue what I like about them by proving I do not. What I do like in a story is that precipice-feeling, the sense, when you read one, that it risks its own extinction by being small. And within that relative smallness, I like stories that instantly suppress my native resistance and authoritatively subordinate me to their formal requirements and authorize all my responses. I like stories that demonstrate an awareness of their own existence as artifice and make me hold the fact of their artifice pleasurably in my mind while they muscle me around where they want me to go and still seem somehow as plausible as my own life. I like stories that understand that they are husbanding my precious attention and need therefore to give me back something important. And I like stories that are up to telling me directly something important about life, something that I did not know and in language I can understand and that gives me pleasure when I learn it. That is what great storytelling is—for me. Some of my likes, you can tell, are not the exclusive province of short stories but also come along in novels and novellas and villanelles and sestinas. And why not? As readers, we are only here for the good stuff. We do not care all that much for what the package looks like.

In *The Lonely Voice*, back in the 1960s, Frank O'Connor wrote that the short story was our "national art form" in America. He wrote this purely because he did not mean it—and in his paradoxical, County Cork way, knew no one would believe it. The Irish, he believed but did not say, had it all over us Americans. Only, art is not a competition. Art aspires not to be better than something else—but only to be excellent in its own terms. To be absolutely—not comparatively—good. Again, to be what good is. A







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Taking a Joke

One of the most memorable moments of Nancy Reagan's tenure as first lady was her spoof of the show tune "Secondhand Rose" at a white-tie affair in 1983. Mrs. Reagan, who died on March 6, performed the song in thrift-shop clothes in response to criticism about her accepting designer dresses as gifts. As recounted on the website of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, "She received a standing ovation… from a newly appreciative and admiring press corps," and her willingness to poke fun at herself "transformed her image." Five years later, when the New York Times scolded the first lady for again "borrowing" expensive clothing, its editors nevertheless referred to the "Secondhand" performance as "a graceful response" to controversy.

Mrs. Reagan helped to make self-deprecating humor de rigueur in American politics. When Dan Quayle was nominated for vice president in 1988, he got good press by going along with the gag that he was a lightweight running for an unnecessary office. After George H. W. Bush was defeated for re-election in 1992, he invited "Saturday Night Live" member Dana Carvey to do his impression of the president at the White House—an impression that Mr. Carvey described as a cross between Mr. Rogers and John Wayne. Being a good sport, especially about a portrayal that lampooned Mr. Bush's not-always-successful effort to come off as tough, helped the president's image and may have helped his family to stay relevant in the Republican Party.

Bill Clinton got his first national exposure making a speech at the 1988 Democratic national convention that seemed to last forever. Leaning into the joke that he was a longwinded bore was the natural next step, so the Arkansas governor appeared just a few days later on Johnny Carson's "Tonight Show" and joked that he had intentionally given a terrible speech to make presidential nominee Michael Dukakis look good. Mr. Clinton's star was back on the rise.

Perhaps a president can go too far in making fun of himself, and the annual White House Correspondents' Dinner is a test of that proposition. George W. Bush startled many at that event in 2004 with a series of photo gags in which he supposedly hunted for Saddam Hussein's fabled weapons of mass destruction in the Oval Office—an audacious response to criticism that he rushed to war in Iraq on the basis of unreliable intelligence reports. Barack Obama has made jokes at the dinner about conspiracy theories that he's not a U.S. citizen, which probably doesn't help efforts to put those rumors to rest.

A president can go too far in making fun of himself.

Several candidates seeking to replace Mr. Obama have tried to show they can laugh at themselves. The Republican Marco Rubio attracted some ridicule in 2013 when he awkwardly took a swig from a water bottle while giving a response to the president's State of the Union speech. The Florida senator quickly tried to get ahead of the joke—for example, by selling bottles of water on his website with the pitch "not only does Marco Rubio inspire you … he hydrates you too." The consensus was that Mr. Rubio benefited by coming across as someone who didn't take himself too seriously.

That was before Donald J. Trump entered the race. Mr. Trump, who did not seem pleased when President Obama made fun of him at the correspondents' dinner in 2011, has many public-speaking skills, but the ability to make fun of himself is not one of them. If he gets to the White House, he may not respond with good cheer to ribbing about his business ventures, New York accent or distinctive hair style. Mr. Trump's success may be a sign that the public has grown weary of self-deprecation in the service of image-making. He has dismissed as phony the friendship between two of his rivals, Mr. Rubio and Jeb Bush ("They hate each other"), and his rejection of good-natured humor may tap into some voters' belief that difficult times call for impolite leaders.

We shouldn't go that far. Nancy Reagan's song may have been corny, but it was a welcome cease-fire in partisan battles, a chance for all to share a laugh. Self-mockery can be a kind of empathy—it says, "I know what it's like to be ridiculed"—and empathy is sorely missed in today's politics. I wouldn't mind seeing a "Secondhand" reprise this year.

ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN

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

City of God

Are we doomed to retreat into the desert?

BY JAMES DOMINIC ROONEY

I was in a rather different state of mind from many commentators on the day "Laudato Si'" was promulgated, as I was nearing the end of a silent retreat at a very traditional Benedictine monastery—Our Lady of the Annunciation of Clear Creek (in Oklahoma). The monks are unusually self-sufficient, making much of their own food and furniture. They even have their own water supply, filtering and preserving rainwater from around the monastery. It is, however, the harmony between this and the other work of prayer and worship with which they are often occupied—what St. Benedict calls the *opus Dei*—that made the greatest impression.

The monks at Clear Creek spend much time in the chapel, chanting the psalter in Latin according to the old rite, with hearty Gregorian antiphons at the conventual *Missa Sancta*. I, as a priest, was celebrating my own "private" Mass each day, as the community follows the practice of having each priest quietly celebrate his own Mass and then participate in the sung Mass as a community afterward. As I fell into the routine, I noticed that each of the elements I was using had been hand made by the monks: the hosts, the wine, the vestments and even, to some extent, the chapel. It makes a very particular impression to be saying Mass and raising the chalice and paten with bread and wine made right there. In asking the Spirit to come and transform them into an acceptable offering, you are, quite literally, fulfilling the words of the eucharistic prayer, offering back to God *de tuis donis ac datis* ("from the gifts you have given").

Pope Francis' encyclical has, maybe justly, been criticized for its wandering injection of commentary on contemporary environmental science and policy. Time will tell, ultimately, who is correct on that score. Sometimes he is also seen, correctly perhaps, as too particular in matters of technical expertise that are beyond his competence. But I think to focus on this is to miss the spirit and heart of the message of "Laudato Si'," a message that calls us to recognize that we Christians are a spiritual priesthood. This was the beating pulse that I felt in the encyclical, reading it as I sat in the monastery library.

At the outset of the encyclical, the pope quoted Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, known as the "green patriarch" for his own exhortations on environmental issues. It is no secret that the key to understanding Bartholomew's thought on the matter—and, I think, Pope Francis'—is the background of deeply classical spiritual insight on the harmony Christ came to restore between mankind and creation. It recalls the Theophany blessing of waters in the Eastern liturgical tradition, wherein the priest immerses a crucifix in the water of local rivers or lakes, a blessing that symbolizes the fact that all water on our planet carries within it the irreversible change wrought in the universe by the entry into time of the Word of God. Original sin has broken our relationship not only with God and human beings but with the whole cosmos. And only the God-man can restore it to what the Father envisioned that it could be. One need only think of St. Jerome and his lion, St. Seraphim of Sarov and the animals near his hermitage and St. Francis of Assisi with all his menagerie. This insight was common, too, not only to Pope Francis and the ecumenical patriarch but also to St. Bonaventure, whom the text quotes (No. 66).

The monks I was staying with impressed on me a similar lesson; they sustain the spirit of the liturgy throughout their meals. Before, prayer for benefactors; during the meal, a chanted reading from Scripture and pious reading; and after, more prayers for the world. The entire pathway of daily life is sprinkled with prayer and elevated into a continuous liturgy. One can see why the monastic life is often called a "school of the Lord." Instead of teaching a bifurcated Christian life—with ordinary, weak believers on the one hand and those strong enough to take up the spiritual life on the other—monasticism makes clear that Christianity is not a private affair that might be relegated to a segment of our lives. Christianity preaches a universe where no particle of dust has gone untouched by the Incarnation; there is no real possibility of a world "without God."

Faith in the Real World

Of course, this seems wildly contrary to everything postmodernism seems to teach us. Pope Francis notes, citing the German thinker Romano Guardini, that technology and modern relativism, even if not explicitly manifest in a moral code, have led to a world often content to do without the divine (No. 203-4). This presents a great difficulty in living our faith in this same world (in a post-Roe v. Wade and now post-Obergefell v. Hodges America), as many practic-

JAMES DOMINIC ROONEY, O.P., *is a doctoral student in philosophy at St. Louis University.*

WALK BY FAITH. Parishioners from 10 churches in Ferguson, Mo., walk to City Hall on Nov. 2.

CNS PHOTO/LISA JOHNSTON, ST. LOUIS REVIEW

ing Christians have found. Is our society so fragmented as to be unable to be salvaged? Are we doomed to retreat into the desert and search for God as a scattered (but ostensibly faithful) remnant or as those advocating small countercultural communities (the so-called Benedict option) of upright moral practice that become witnesses to the sin of the City of Man? This is the siren song of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue,* calling forth a new St. Benedict—someone who will, perhaps like the Essenes, raise up an unadulterated priesthood to the Lord in the wilderness. One day, at the Messiah's coming, they can return to cleanse the defiled temple of the modern world.

The greatest fruit of "Laudato Si'" is its response to this. Its diagnosis is simple, profound and direct: Secularism is not the creation of a world lacking the divine creator but of one in rebellion. The City of Man might be built around a forum where lies a Nietzschean mausoleum to the "God" we killed, but it inevitably conducts all the transactions of the marketplace in its shadow. Secularism cannot escape its consciousness of God and vainly tries to fill the void. Francis focuses on this as the root of current environmental crises.

Without the Incarnation, the world itself loses its significance and meaning as anything other than a vast resource pool to be pillaged for human gain. To this the pope links the rise of gender ideologies and attempts to redefine marriage, to disregard both the old and the unborn, to experiment genetically on our children and to allow exploitation in drugs and sex trafficking (No. 120-23). When the *Übermensch* arrives, what need is there for an external standard for his actions, whether from the universe of creation or even biology? Of course, the folly of this is apparent in that the relativist world Nietzsche built has begun to languish from its own internal contradictions.

The most important aspect of Pope Francis' solution is that it is most decidedly not the aforementioned MacIntyre-Benedict option. For both Catholics and evangelicals struggling against the seemingly insurmountable tide of popular opinion that threatens to engulf all aspects of contemporary life, "Laudato Si'" offers a word of hope and a better path. "No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful, or our God-given ability to respond to his grace at work deep in our hearts" (No. 205). The final chapter gives a vision to this alternative to the Benedict option. Following a venerable tradition, we can call it the Dominic option.

The Benedictine monastery is the "school of the Lord" by showing us that Christian life makes a radical demand on our lives; but it was the Franciscan/Dominican inspiration in the Middle Ages to take traditional monastic contemplative living, to unite it to apostolic ministry in preaching and care of souls in cities and to found third orders—associations in which the ordinary lay faithful could associate themselves to a worldwide order through promises of conversion and the following of a rule of life. The priory then

becomes not only a contemplative haven for the friars themselves but a hub for a "community of love" that extends into all ways and walks of life.

A Shared Spirituality

"Laudato Si'" underlines that the City of God is built in reappropriating the call of Christ to sanctify the world around us as the priests we have become through baptism, sometimes with very small, prayerful gestures of love and at other times even through international political action. This requires a unified, common spirituality that sees in each created thing, whether human or beast, a little reflection of the face of the triune God. We regulate our lives with the same spirit one might find in a contemplative monastery but within the heart of our broken contemporary world. It is this love that redeems and restores; it is the living love that "makes all things new" (Rv 21:5). The pope's call is not to retreat but to do what we can from inside to build that city (No. 231) not by the dissolution of our faith but by banding together in modern third orders and associations that can rebuild the environment, both human and natural.

The Dominic option should bring us together...to transform our world, not to become isolated from it.

The confirmation of that reading of the papal encyclical comes in its final chapter. In a most telling gesture, Pope Francis suggests one of the least pragmatic activities as the key to restoring meaning in our modern world: rest on the Lord's day and the eucharistic worship of the church (No. 236-7). The Benedictine monastery, with its own pulse of life, centers on the eucharistic Lord at its heart; the same is true of our Dominican priory. The monk is told by St. Benedict to regard every good of the monastery—down to pieces of cutlery—as if they were sacred vessels for the Mass. It is no accident that monasteries often are among the most environmentally friendly places and tend to generate very little waste. Catholics should do no less, whether this requires being careful about how they use energy in their home, or how they vote, or how they give money and time to the poor. If we can recover in our lives, in our care for the environment and in our care for one another that same love and care that St. Benedict spoke of, making our lives a participation in what we do at the altar, I think we will have grasped what Pope Francis' vision for an antidote to secularism looks like.

The Dominic option should bring us together in eucharistic communities within the city, communities tied by definite practices and eucharistic communion, grounded in a deep and living doctrinal commitment to our faith, animated by a desire to transform our world and not to become isolated from it. It is no accident that *Lord of the World*, a novel beloved by Pope Francis, has the church founding a third order in the end times—the Order of Christ Crucified—whose goal is to combat the Antichrist with the Mass and the rosary.

My order's founder, St. Dominic, spent his whole life accentuating the teaching "and God saw that it was good" against heresy that denied it, while likewise weeping at his daily Mass, "What will become of sinners?" Similarly, St. Francis of Assisi wrote, "Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures" and, in the same breath, "show all reverence and all honor possible to the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom the things that are in heaven and the things that are on earth are pacified and reconciled to Almighty God."

"Laudato Si'" is particularly fine in ending in that same praise to the triune God that St. Francis himself delighted in and whose little knight in the world we all might similarly aspire to be.

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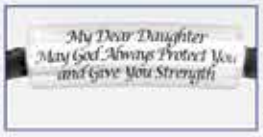

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FAITH IN FOCUS

Subsidized Solidarity

My year in Section 8

BY MARLENE LANG

My living in Section 8 housing was an accident. Hired late in summer, I had hoped to be situated close to the school before I started teaching. Only two miles from school I found a complex of older brick apartment buildings set among trees and hills, in a mostly suburban area. While the place was not ideal, the rents ran below 30 percent of my income—affordable. I toured the model apartment with the agent but was unable to see inside the unit I would inhabit.

Two days before classes began, I moved in. The one-bedroom with den sat on the ground floor; its patio door was at the bottom of an embankment. The cement was covered with silt from recent rains. There was a mildew smell inside. Having covered the federal government's response to flooding years back as a journalist, my radar went off: This place had been flooded and was never cleaned up properly.

I made my concern known to the management and a maintenance man arrived to "check for water leaks." A leaking faucet in the bathroom was replaced and a dehumidifier brought in. This was the beginning of a series of surprises, complaints and pseudo-remedies. Allergic to mold, I began to peruse other apartments, planning an escape. That's when I found the reviews.

Online comments informed me that my apartment complex "used to be nice, but since it went Section 8, it's a hole." (The reference was to Section 8 of the Housing Act of 1937, a housing assistance program that subsidizes the rent of low-income households.) Another reviewer, trying to be helpful, advised: "There was a fatal shooting there last year. Get out."

Internet searches about the area turned up details about recent shootings. One was a triple shooting, a man breaking into an apartment, shooting a woman and her 19-year-old son, then killing himself after a hostage situation. The young man had jumped in the line of fire to protect his mom. Both have recovered. The building where it happened is behind mine, just across a parking lot. A month later, a woman ran from another of the 30 buildings, just as a delivery man approached, and she screamed for him to call 911 because someone had been shot. That someone died. There was little follow-up to these stories. I had no idea about such incidents the day I visited the model apartment. Fatal shootings are not legally required disclosures; they are like lead paint that has already been removed.

I looked into what it would take to break my lease and found that no matter how I sliced it, I would be out about $1,500. I sent a legalese-laden letter to the management stating I was going to buy a mold test, because I suspected I was living in post-flood conditions. The manager argued that she didn't smell anything, and that a mold test kit would "of course" show high results because of the "area we live in." She agreed to let me move into an apartment on the third floor of my building.

On the way into the leasing office to collect the new keys, I encountered the only neighbor I knew by name coming my way on the sidewalk. We almost passed each other, but I remembered she lived upstairs and I wanted to know if she would be my neighbor. I called out, "Ruth!" She turned around and said, "Marlene; I remember, because I have a sister Marlene."

Ruth is an older, African-American woman with pretty gray hair, kind eyes and a stately way about her. I told her I was moving upstairs to Unit 11 and asked which apartment she was in. "I'm in 9!" she said.

I explained that the mildew had driven me out, and she said, "I wanted to say something the day we met, but I wasn't sure what to say. The guy that was in there before you moved out be-

MARLENE LANG, *a doctoral candidate in practical theology at St. Thomas University in Florida, worked for 10 years as a government reporter and editor.*

cause of it. When we got all that rain, it got in. I couldn't believe they rented it out! But you didn't hear this from me," she said.

I said, "Well, then we're both on the third floor now. We'll be next-door neighbors."

"Good!" she said. "I'm glad you're moving." I walked on to the office.

That manager had lied to my face. She was going to let me live in that mold and get sick and take my money for it. This is the face of evil, I thought. And she's just the site manager. Who owns this place?

Right at Home?

A few things quickly became evident. Tenants living in subsidized apartments have little buying power, which means things do not work exactly right. The faucets function, technically, but you move the handle all around just to find the place where it will be warmer or where it will turn off. It is never the same spot. The toilet is leaking and maintenance had to order a new tank, but it's Labor Day weekend, so it won't be fixed until Tuesday. The lock doesn't turn smoothly; it fights you. You have to pull the door toward you to get it to catch, like a Zen lockmaster. I have to save complaints for the big stuff, like the garbage disposal that sounds like a bunch of loose bolts grinding around.

For a week I asked myself why I didn't just break the lease. Why not flee? I realized that although I had moved to the building by mistake, my decision to stay was part of a more deliberate way of thinking. My reasons involved St. Francis of Assisi and choosing poverty and Óscar Romero and Mother Teresa, who talk about being with the poor and living in solidarity.

My quiet time in the mildew downstairs yielded this thought: It was simply time for me to live with the poor—not in some pretentiously expensive, cheaply built community called "The Reserve at [insert an exclusive sounding word here]" for half my monthly income. It was time to live here in this building with the spotted carpets in the hallways overlooking the bus stop, where that handful of moms and little kids gather at 3:45 to wait at the end of the parking lot for the older siblings' drop-off. Sometimes they sit on the concrete car stops. Why can't they put a bench there?

Were I to break this lease, get a lawyer, seek more comfortable accommodations, I suspected I would not necessarily be better off. I knew this. Sitting on my concrete patio—I had no outdoor furniture yet—I thought about that cryptic Gospel passage where two disciples ask Jesus where he lives, and he says, "Come and see." I had always wondered where he took them. John's Gospel doesn't say. But it is safe to guess it was among the poor and powerless. At the start, I thought living in Section 8 housing was an accident, but each day it looks more and more like an invitation. A

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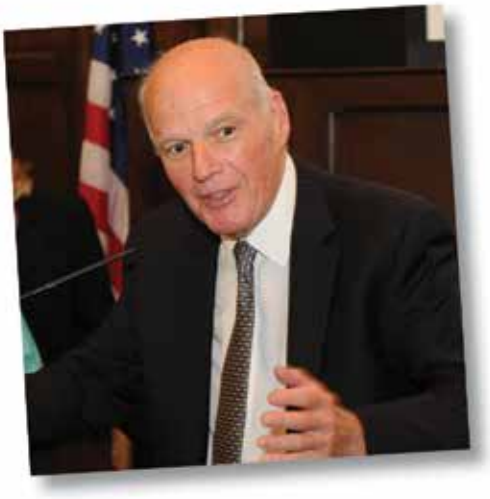

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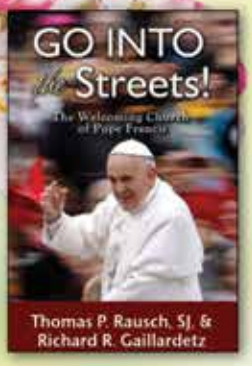

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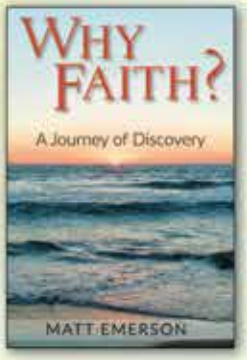

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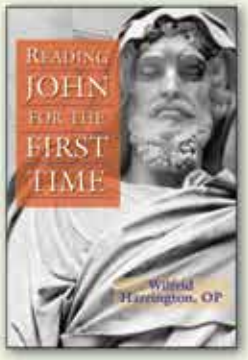

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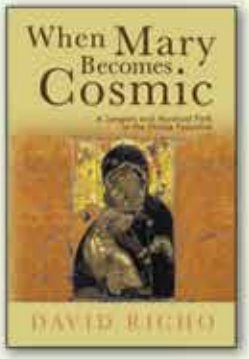

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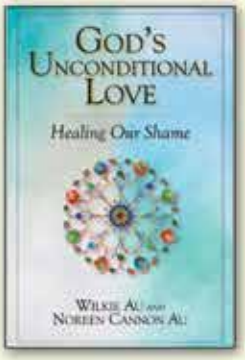

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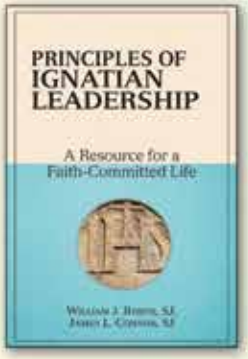

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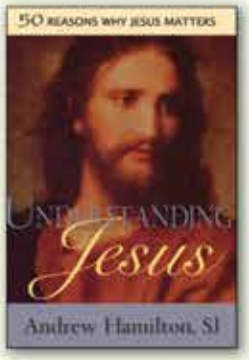

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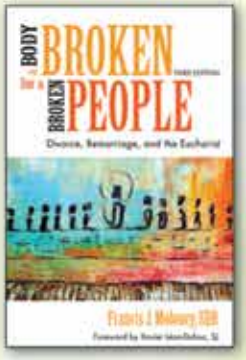

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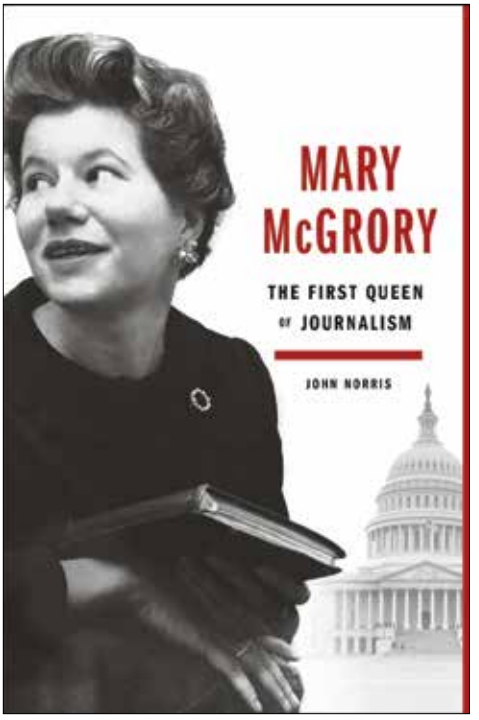
It was in 1978 that I first met Mary McGrory, the subject of the well-crafted biography by John Norris, *Mary McGrory: The First Queen of Journalism*. Time Inc. had just purchased The Washington Star. I had done some reporting for Time years earlier in Vietnam. Some of my old editors asked if I might want to leave The Detroit Free Press, where I had been a reporter for five years, and work as an editor for their new enterprise. It seemed like a good move—with a special benefit, becoming a McGrory colleague.

The Star long had a reputation for being a less formal and more rambunctious daily than its rival, The Washington Post, and it suffered from being an afternoon publication when afternoon dailies were dying throughout the country. Evening television news was killing the afternoon newspaper market.

Nevertheless, I made the move.

McGrory first drew serious attention when she left her book section editing position at The Star to cover the Senator Joseph McCarthy hearings. As told by Norris, it was the Star editor Newbold Noyes who first gave McGrory the break she needed, allowing her to enter the almost completely male-dominated field of Washington journalism. She had already been a columnist for **America** and had developed a reputation for clean, sharp prose. Now she had a chance to do some serious reporting for the paper. Returning the first day from the hearings, she struggled to find her footing. Noyes didn't like her first draft. Too much like a wire service story, he told her. He wanted something more personal and with more drama.



"Write it like a letter to your favorite aunt," he told her. And so she did. Her first Star column appeared on April 23, 1954. "It's too early yet to tell about the plot, but they've certainly got a cast there." She went on to describe the characters, their personalities, their interplay and dynamics. She was finding her groove.

Scotty Reston, the powerhouse Washington bureau chief and columnist for The New York Times, soon tried to woo McGrory aboard his team, but negotiations collapsed after Reston suggested that in addition to her afternoon reporting duties, she would need to handle the switchboard in the morning. Oh the sexism! We have indeed come a long way in just over a generation. I think McGrory, who had to fight a woman's way to the table, overturning old habits, ended up also more sympathetic to others who remained excluded.

Norris points out that McGrory was one of the first columnists of her time to understand she was competing with television and, to be effective, she had to offer something special, something lively and personal, something that would draw in readers who wanted an inside vantage. And she delivered, producing 36 columns over 36 days of hearings. By the time the political drama reached its height, with the lawyer Joseph Welch famously demanding of McCarthy, "Have you no sense of decency?" McGrory's columns were the talk of the town. Her career as a columnist had been fully launched.

From that assignment through her fascination with all things Kennedy, her flirtations with Eugene McCarthy, her Pulitzer Prize-winning coverage of Watergate, her damning observations of President Bush after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, McGrory humanized the players on the political stage that was Washington.

Well before I joined The Star I had become fascinated by McGrory's writing. She was solidly progressive, quick to take up lost causes and not afraid to tackle abusive authority. There was also both a predictability and unpredictability to her columns; you knew from where she was coming but not always where she was going.

When at the Star (we overlapped for two years, but I left The Star to become editor of The National

Catholic Reporter in 1980), I quickly tried to get to know McGrory better. I would walk by her small, cluttered office outside the Star newsroom. To my surprise she greeted me warmly, as if we had been friends for years. She would ask me to come in and sit down in front of her desk, and off we'd go speaking about whatever headline was capturing attention that day. But invariably she would bring the subject back to Vietnam.

She was fascinated that I had spent some four years there as a volunteer working with refugees and later as a local hire for Time and The New York Times. But it was my early writing for N.C.R. from 1966 to 1968 that she remembered most. She seemed most focused on the Vietnamese people, what they had thought about the war and what lessons I took from my experiences in Southeast Asia. McGrory was known as a great storyteller, but I remember her more as someone who listened well. She had a seemingly insatiable appetite for my Vietnam recollections, making me feel quite special. Thinking back over these many years I wonder how many others she made feel this way and what a remarkable—and effective—gift she had. Whether it was a personal trait or a tool of the trade, to this day I have not a clue.

It was clear from our conversations that we shared many values and had a common outlook on life. We were both Catholic and progressive in instinct. We were both idealists and instinctively suspicious of authority, which we both agreed was easy to abuse. We had witnessed it in our church and among our nation's political leaders. We had both tasted the pre-Vatican church, were not quick to throw out tradition, but recognized the need for more justice in church and society. We had both been influenced by the idealism of the 1960s—John XXIII and John Kennedy—and were troubled by the conservative reactions that began to settle in in reaction to those years. We both wondered aloud why our nation's leaders could not learn the lessons of Vietnam. The same old warriors were beginning to show up, leading wars in Central America. Would we ever learn?

Then there was simple journalism gab, journalist to journalist. I remember one Vietnam journalism story in particular that McGrory seemed to enjoy. It's worth telling once again, maybe because it fractures the myth that any person, journalist or not, can be neutral in the midst of the deceit of war. One day in a particularly destructive month during the Vietnam War, the New York Times correspondent Gloria Emerson and I had spent several hours walking through a bombed-out, smoldering village outside of Saigon. She was gathering information and I was her interpreter that day. We spent considerable time talking to sur-

vivors, some of the elderly, women and children. The scene and scenario were all too common. North Vietnamese soldiers entered the village; U.S.-supported South Vietnamese warplanes retaliated from the air, carrying U.S. bombs. Much of the village was destroyed, with the greater measure of the destruction, by far, from the bombing. In the end the North Vietnamese soldiers vanished, as they often did, and the village was left in ruins with widespread civilian casualties. Was this the way to "win hearts and minds"?

As was the habit during those wretched war years, U.S. and South Vietnam military spokesmen would gather at the end of the day in a downtown Saigon building for what the press corps dubbed "the five o'clock follies." We asked about the bombings: Who had ordered them? Did anyone count the casualties? It was infuriating.

That evening Emerson and I figured we'd had enough, and somehow we had to respond. That night, after 10, after a Saigon curfew had gone into effect keeping people off the streets, after journalists had filed their stories, we left the Time bureau and walked the deserted street below to the "follies" briefing building. Our plan: I would distract the guard, speaking to him in Vietnamese, which I had picked up; Emerson would sneak into the briefing room and with black felt pen in hand, write in large letters across three walls: "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM. THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO." The plan went off without a hitch. The next day there was outrage—and press silence. Some suspected the culprits but no fingers were ever officially pointed. McGrory loved the tale. It appealed to her mischievous nature.

She remained a journalism fixture for five decades, not only writing about presidents but also befriending them. Norris highlights that McGrory admired President Kennedy enormously and explains how she got close to

Bobby and Ted and good friends with Eugene McCarthy. He tells the story of McGrory rebuffing an advance by a jealous President Lyndon Johnson one evening in her apartment.

For those who have followed politics and journalism since the 1960s or even further back, reading Norris's account of McGrory's life and career is a bittersweet journey through decades of social change and political turmoil. It was a period in which the United States shed its innocence and Americans became comfortable with a government that was no longer embarrassed at brandishing its iron fist. Norris and McGrory take us through the Central American wars, Reagan's aid to the Contras, U.S. complicity in the death of the four missionary women in El Salvador, the first and second Iraq wars and the disputed presidential election.

Norris tells the story of the night after John F. Kennedy's death. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, at the time the assistant secretary of labor, gathered a small group of friends in McGrory's apartment. Moynihan told the others how he had been in the White House that afternoon, just down the hall from the Oval Office, when he heard the news. The staff was replacing the rug in the president's office, and the furniture had been out in the hall, with J.F.K.'s rocking chair sitting atop his desk, "as if new people were moving in."

After a long pause, McGrory declared, "We'll never laugh again." "Heavens, Mary," Moynihan replied. "We'll laugh again. It's just that we will never be young again."

The last time I saw McGrory was only a few years before her death. The former congressman and N.C.R. columnist Robert Drinan, S.J., McGrory and I had a meal together in a Georgetown restaurant. It was a special though uneventful gathering. I felt proud to be at a table with these Washington giants. We shared stories, laughed and maybe even shed a tear or two together as we looked back and considered human triumphs and failings. We had seen plenty of both. Our Catholicism, politics and journalism all bonded us in special ways. I remember some moments that night we sat in silence. Each of us had made long careers using words. And now maybe they were no longer necessary to say what was in our hearts.

TOM FOX *is a former editor and publisher of the National Catholic Reporter.*

DENIS R. JANZ

A LIFE IN LETTERS

MARTIN LUTHER
Visionary Reformer

By Scott H. Hendrix
Yale University Press. 368p $35

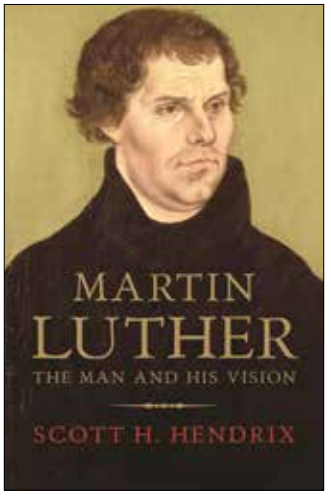
Scott Hendrix, emeritus professor at Princeton University and beyond doubt one of the leading experts in this country on Martin Luther, is a brave person. Just when the market for new Luther biographies appears to be saturated, he adds his to the mix. It takes its place alongside Martin Brecht's more comprehensive one, Heiko Oberman's more provocative one, Martin Marty's more accessible one and many more.

Moreover, Hendrix narrates the story in an entirely standard way (Note: If you are annoyed by book reviews that summarize, skip down to the next paragraph). He divides Luther's life into 18 chapters, moving from a description of the geographical-social-political-religious world into which he was born (Chapter 1) to Luther's physical decline and death (Chapter 18). In between, Hendrix gives us chapters on Luther's childhood and adolescence; the university student and his entrance into religious life; the young lecturer and preacher; his intellectual growth; the dawning of his critical consciousness; the escalation of his critique; the programmatic reform writings of 1520; his attempts to rein in more extreme proponents of reform; Luther's efforts in reshaping the liturgy and popular piety; his marriage and his response to the peasants' revolt; his disappointment over the laity's stubborn indifference to his agenda; his handling of controversy among his followers; reconciling the new movement with political authority; his unrelenting preoccupation with Bible translation; his attempts to suppress apocalyptic currents; his supervision of doctoral candidates in theology; lashing out at the Roman church, the Jews, the "Enthusiasts," etc.; old age with its accompanying sickness, pain, fear, impatience, anger and so forth; fending off new attacks from outsiders and dealing with infighting among his followers; and, finally, his personal demise.

Scanning through this sequence of topics, we can easily see that the structural form of Hendrix's account is decidedly conventional. And yet I do not hesitate to say that this book is outstanding. What makes it so is that the material is colored in distinctively new hues. Let me list a few of them.

Almost every Luther biography is enlivened by references to Luther's "Table Talk." This one is too. But it goes further, in my opinion, by mining Luther's correspondence in a new, more thorough way. Luther was a great letter writer: some 2,600 are extant. This pales, of course, next to St. Ignatius Loyola, who, as manager of a multinational corporate enterprise, wrote around 7,000. But Luther's are, I daresay, less given to bureaucratic instruction and more marked by light-hearted banter, amusing anecdotes, friendly teasing, angry outbursts, comments

on the quality of food and beer, trivia about travel difficulties and so forth.



Some are addressed to kings, popes, even an emperor; others are written to peasants, to his wife, to his four-year-old son, etc. Some are extended discussions of his innermost spiritual difficulties, some are jokes from beginning to end, some are laundry lists of everything that's wrong with the world, some contain gossip about this or that person's failures or obnoxious proclivities. Obviously then, Luther's correspondence can be mined by the biographer to illustrate a theological point, to make an abstract discussion concrete, to give a sense of the human Luther and so forth. Hendrix, as a true expert, does this extremely well: it is one of the things I enjoyed most about the book.

Another refreshing difference in Hendrix's book is his sidestepping of old, hoary, overworked controversies. Almost every biography I know of, for instance, rehashes ad nauseam the exact content and precise moment of Luther's "reformation discovery," his "tower experience." Hendrix understands that his extra-Lutheran readership is bored to tears by this. Rather, he locates Luther's decisive turning-point in 1522, when he began to understand himself as a "reformer" called to lead a movement that would go beyond piecemeal criticisms and remake medieval Christianity. Even for a reader who is a seasoned Luther scholar, this is an interesting and persuasively argued thesis.

The best biographers know that in narrating a life, it is not enough to recount the course of events, the successes and failures, the traumatic and the trivial, the influential and the ignored, the wounds suffered or self-inflicted and the like. Alongside that narrative belongs another one, perhaps more enigmatic but indispensable for understanding who the subject really was. And this is the course of the person's inner development, what many today would call the person's "spirituality." And in no way does Hendrix neglect the latter. Thus we get parallel tracks, a narrative of the external events and an account of how Luther's inner spiritual/emotional life evolved alongside it.

Perhaps it is precisely here that Hendrix is at his best. In fact, to a great extent he allows Luther to tell us in his own words about the growth of his inner self. Looking back on his starting point as a young Augustinian friar, he described himself as "holy from head to toe." Some 30 years later, facing his mortality, his self-designation was "a prodigious and hardened sinner." That in a nutshell was the trajectory of Luther's spiritual development. Christ, he said, "is not a savior of fictitious or petty sinners but of genuine ones...." If you are a "phony sinner," your Christ is a "phony savior." The paradox is that growth in holiness means a deepening sense of one's own sinfulness, that we not only fall a little short but that we are utterly undeserving. And ultimately what that means is that all is gift.

Let me conclude on a personal note. As of 2016 I will have spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness of Luther scholarship. Where, I've often wondered, is the Promised Land? This isn't it. But we're getting close!

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BETSY CAHILL

EVERYBODY LOVES DAVID

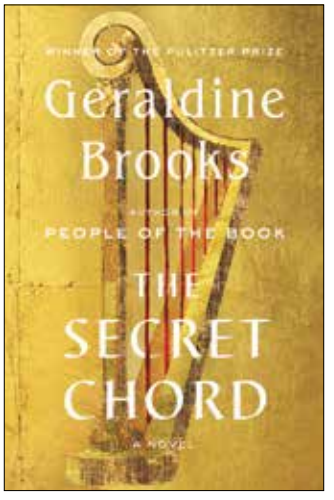
THE SECRET CHORD
By Geraldine Brooks
Viking. 320p $27.95

In the pantheon of remarkable characters in the Hebrew Bible, from wily Jacob to dauntless Deborah to weird Ezekiel, one figure stands, tall and ruddy, above them all. We simply cannot take our eyes off him. He is David: shepherd, musician, warrior, king, the beloved one of God. The principal biblical account of his life appears in the books 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel. Textually corrupt, full of contradictions and duplications, these books are a promiscuous commingling of folk tale, court history and literary creation. Their compiler conveys the sprawling events of David's life in the compact vocabulary and evocative syntax of biblical Hebrew, displaying what the literary critic Robert Alter praises as an "astringent narrative economy." The David story is a shimmering literary achievement, and it is spellbinding.

Thus it is easy to understand why the novelist and former journalist Geraldine Brooks, who has written several works of historical fiction, would be drawn to David. She cites a more personal reason, too. Some years ago while watching her son learn to play the harp, she began to think about the "long-ago boy harpist." So she went back to the Bible to find him. Seizing on a reference in 1 Chronicles to "the records of the prophet Nathan," Brooks constructs her retelling of David's life on the framework of Nathan's gathering of information for his records.

To the task of re-interpreting the

David story, the author brings a sharp journalistic eye and a highly contemporary sensibility. The first quality serves her well, as she vividly conveys the atmosphere and detail of life in the Second Iron Age, particularly its earthy violence, its brutal politics and its careless treatment of women and children.



The contemporary sensibility, however, often rubs uncomfortably against the nub of the biblical narrative. Her preference for transliterations of Hebrew names occasionally leads to some puzzling monikers: while any Hebraist will recognize the Mitzrayim as Egyptians, would a lay reader know this? The diction of these ancient characters, too, sounds strangely modern. Here is Natan, chastising David's wife Mikhal for her truculence: "'Look,' I said. 'You're here, he's the king. This is your life now. These facts won't change. Why not make it easier on yourself?'" Determined to give David's women equal air time, Brooks provides them with backstories, motives and emotions that seem more suited to 2015 C.E. than 915 B.C.E., as when she describes David and Bathsheba reveling in "the uncomplicated bliss of new parenthood." David's mother Nizevet, recalling Jesse's harsh treatment of his youngest son, cries to Natan, "I tried to feed him enough love to make up for the way his father starved him. But it was never enough. How could it be?" Sigmund Freud rests uneasy in the tents of ancient Israel.

Nowhere does Brooks read contemporary values back into ancient texts more egregiously than in the portrayal of the relationship between David and Jonathan as a passionate homosexual affair. Scholars have long differed on the nature of this bond, their views evolving as social and cultural mores change. But textually speaking, nearly every reference to Jonathan's love for David has a parallel elsewhere. Jonathan "loved" David; so did Saul, Mikhal and "all Israel and Judah." Jonathan's soul became "bound up with the soul of David;" similarly, in Genesis, Jacob's soul is "bound up with the soul" of his son Benjamin. Jonathan "delighted greatly in David;" the identical phrase characterizes Saul's attitude nine verses earlier. Yes, David laments the slain Jonathan with a phrase that suggests deep emotion: "More wonderful was your love for me than the love of women." As Joel Baden of Yale University has observed, however, this does not mean that David was gay or bisexual, as we understand it. The use of these terms reflects modern concepts of sexuality that would not have existed in the ancient world. From the biblical narrator's perspective, what signifies the emotional bond between David and Jonathan is not its physical expression but its political ramifications, "the benefits," as Baden notes, "that accrued to David as a result of Jonathan's affection."

Brooks keeps a laudably vigorous pace, although narrative transitions are sometimes creaky and Natan's foreshadowing a bit heavy-handed, particularly at chapter's end. She capably covers the full range of events in David's life but at times takes unfortunate liberties with the text. For example, drawing on the song "Hallelujah" by Leonard Cohen (from which she draws the novel's title), she describes Bathsheba bathing in the moonlight. The Hebrew is unmistakably clear here: Bathsheba bathed "late in the afternoon," "towards evening" or "at eve-

ning tide," depending on which translation you select.

A minor quibble, perhaps. But in her retelling of the David-Bathsheba affair, she rearranges the text to provide an external reason for David to remain in Jerusalem while his men go out to fight. In the biblical account, at this moment of decision, David has just concluded a highly successful military encounter. Shortly thereafter, he "sends his men out to fight" while he stays home. The verb "send" recurs several times in the Hebrew, emphasizing that David is manipulating events indirectly: he sends his soldiers into battle, sends his messengers to bring Bathsheba to him and sends Uriah unwittingly back to the front with the fatal note instructing his placement at the forefront of battle. David's morally suspect decision to stay in Jerusalem generates a cascade of sins that would bring him to his knees only when Natan traps him into acknowledging his guilt. In prefacing the Bathsheba affair with an incident that is placed much later in 2 Samuel, Brooks gives David a pass and absolves him of moral responsibility.

King David loved passionately, sinned appallingly and lived magnificently. As Robert Pinsky notes, "A life of such dimension becomes also the life of its retellings." Countless retellings there have been, from Michelangelo to William Faulkner, Joseph Heller to Handel; even Bart Simpson dreams that he is King David, who has to fight Goliath II, the giant's son. All of these retellings, in the view of this unabashed apologist for the Hebrew Bible, fail to match the literary and psychological achievement of 1 and 2 Samuel, its spartan mystery, its restraint that suggests so much richness. But each re-imagining, including *The Secret Chord*, also points convincingly to the vitality and energy of an original that survives, and surpasses, the visions and revisions of authors, painters, poets, musicians and filmmakers through the centuries. *The Secret Chord* sounds a few false notes, but if it directs us back to the mysterious beauty of the Bible, it will ring true.

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CHRIS HERLINGER

A CHRONICLER OF PAIN

VOICES FROM CHERNOBYL
The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster

By Svetlana Alexievich
Picador. 236p $16

ZINKY BOYS
Soviet Voices From the Afghanistan War

By Svetlana Alexievich
W. W Norton & Co. 224p $15.95

When Svetlana Alexievich won the Nobel Prize for Literature last year, those of us who write about humanitarian themes and subjects related to sorrows, like war and conflict, were heartened.

A fellow journalist had won—a rare feat for a prize that has tended overwhelmingly to go to writers of fiction. (The annual speculation about who will win the honor inevitably focuses on novelists like Philip Roth and Haruki Murakami.) That Alexievich was also only the 14th woman (out of more than 100 winners total) to win the prize was also something to celebrate. So was the fact that in a world where the vision of contemporary fiction seems to be getting smaller and smaller, a nonfiction writer not afraid to take on expansive themes was being honored.

But even we in the United States who cheered the announcement were at a bit of a loss to say much about Alexievich and her work. Alexievich, who lives in Belarus, is not as well known, for example, as the late Ryszard Kapuściński, a Polish journalist and author who had a real following in the United States and Europe and was sometimes mentioned as a possible Nobel candidate.

Alexievich's works translated from Russian into English include two books, *Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices From the Afghanistan War* and V*oices From Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*. The latter has won a degree of recognition in the United States, including a National Book Critics Circle Award. An English translation of Alexievich's oral history about the collapse of the Soviet Union is expected later this year.

The fact that "voices" appear in the title of both books is a key element in understanding Alexievich's oeuvre and vision. The voices of those Alexievich collects through interviews come together to create a kind of literary collage—oral history that might seem familiar to readers of the late Studs Terkel, yet arranged in a way that is artfully structured to produce a shattering effect.

In a recent New Yorker profile, Masha Gessen wrote that early on "Alexievich wanted to dispense with the author's voice and with the usual chronologies and contexts. She wanted to approximate the voices she heard in her childhood, when village women gathered in the evenings and told stories about the Second World War."

In her Nobel lecture, Alexievich expanded on that theme, saying she was surrounded by hundreds of voices. "They have always been with me, since childhood." She continued:

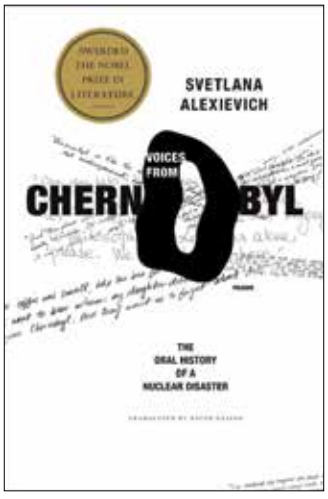
Flaubert called himself a human

pen; I would say that I am a human ear. When I walk down the street and catch words, phrases, and exclamations, I always think—how many novels disappear without a trace! Disappear into darkness. We haven't been able to capture the conversational side of human life for literature. We don't appreciate it, we aren't surprised or delighted by it. But it fascinates me, and has made me its captive. I love how humans talk.... I love the lone human voice. It is my greatest love and passion.

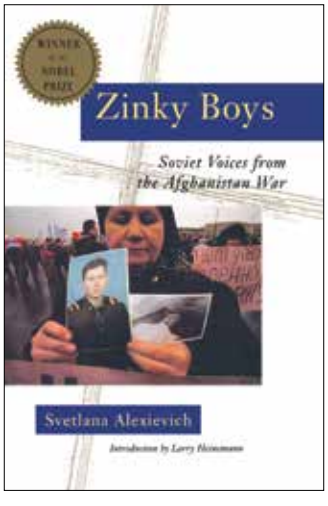
Alexievich's passion has now merited the highest possible praise and honor—but it is also hard work. Compiling these voices from hundreds of interviews is a process that can take years and produces a kind of polyphonic "novel of voices," as she has called it. "Novel of voices" has a nice ring to it; her choice of themes, though, embraces the tragic—perhaps not surprising in a culture where, as she has tartly put it, "we live among victims and executioners." Events like Chernobyl, not to mention horrible wars and the legacy of the Stalin years, produce what Alexievich calls a "novel of pain."

So, what is one to make of this nonfiction novelist of pain? It is impossible to talk of Alexievich's work without mentioning her technique. I do not think Alexievich is writing fiction. But I doubt we are reading verbatim transcripts. What emerges still strikes me as authentic because the character of so many of the voices remains rough, earthy and often opaque. That may be irritating to a reader who wants a clean, coherent, linear narrative. (Reading Alexievich is not unlike reading passages penned by a Russian, non-fiction Faulkner—and I mean that as a compliment.) But her circular fragments are the voices of real people dealing with different kinds of catastrophe.

And the catastrophes are linked. In both *Zinky Boys* and *Voices From Chernobyl*, Alexievich's voices are, ultimately, lamenting the end of the Soviet era and the confidence many people had in the "system." *Zinky Boys*—the title refers to the sealed zinc coffins in which soldiers' bodies were returned back home from Afghanistan—is, in the end, a meditation about the failures and human costs of the Soviet invasion and occupation of a neighboring country (1979). *Voices From Chernobyl*, a more searing book given the unprecedented nature of the world's worst nuclear meltdown (1986), is a book about an even greater Soviet-era failure—certainly one that caused more physical harm to more people.



A uniting theme in both books is how a people who fought heroically in World War II were reduced and marginalized from Afghanistan and Chernobyl, crises that shamed people. Those who lived through the 1930s and 1940s won the war. They weren't afraid, said one observer. "Whereas us? We're afraid of everything. We're afraid for our children, and for our grandchildren, who don't exist yet."



If some recognize and accept, if uneasily, the course of their history—one person noted that the "world is built on physics, not on the ideas of Marx"—others remain confused and angry. Some lash out at writers like Alexievich for "dwelling on tragedy," for slighting a one-time "heroic heritage." One person angrily berated her in a telephone call: "Who needs your dreadful truth? I don't want to know it!!! You want to buy your own glory at the expense of our sons' blood. They were heroes, heroes, heroes! They should have beautiful books written about them, and you're turning them into mincemeat." (A quarter century after the publication of *Zinky Boys*, there is finger-wagging. There have been grumblings in the Russian media that the Nobel honor for Alexievich, no friend of the Kremlin, either past or present, is part of a long tradition of the West poking its fingers in the eyes of whatever regime is in power in Moscow.)

Not surprisingly, the voices of those who actually served in Afghanistan are more nuanced and knowing, often displaying more empathy and understanding toward the people of Afghanistan, for example, than those at home. And, of course, the lessons they learned are the universals experienced in any war. "Within two or three weeks there's nothing left of the old you except your name," says one veteran. "You've become someone else." Says another: "There's not much humanity in a human being—that's what war taught me. If a man's hungry, or ill, he'll be cruel—and that's just about all humanity amounts to."

Of course, there are other facets of being human—and one is the way humans can, and do, live in denial. That is particularly a key element of *Voices From Chernobyl*. The accounts of the physical effects radioactive contamina-

tion had on so many, for example, are almost physically painful to read. And yet most telling is that so many people, particularly elderly people living near the atomic plant, refused to recognize the enormity of what had happened. They carried on as if nothing unusual had happened. One elderly woman told Alexievich: "I got in to see a doctor. 'Sweetie,' I say, my legs don't move. The joints hurt.' 'You need to give up your cow, grandma. The milk's poisoned.' 'Oh no,' I say, 'my legs hurt, my knees hurt, but I won't give up the cow. She feeds me.'"

It is little wonder that in her Nobel lecture Alexievich said that she has often "been shocked and frightened by human beings. I have experienced delight and revulsion. I have sometimes wanted to forget what I heard, to return to a time when I lived in ignorance. More than once, however, I have seen the sublime in people, and wanted to cry."

Shock, fright, delight, revulsion and the discovery of the sublime—these may be the same reactions readers will experience upon discovering the polyphonic and tragic vision of Svetlana Alexievich.

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RICHARD A. BLAKE

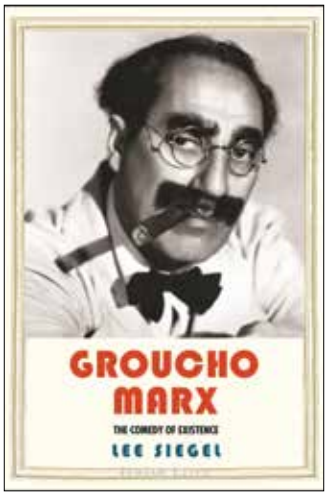
'HELLO, I MUST BE GOING'

GROUCHO MARX
The Comedy of Existence

By Lee Siegel
Yale University Press. 176p $25

"I do not want to belong to any club that would have me as a member" ranks as the most famous of Groucho's many trenchant remarks. The exact wording and provenance remain a bit fuzzy, even though the sentiment has become a bit shopworn through constant repetition. Now Groucho has gained admittance to the world of scholarly exposition through an Ivy League press. Would he pen an equally acerbic resignation from the faculty club, or would he luxuriate in the smell of red leather chairs, spilt brandy and pipe tobacco?

Lee Siegel's brief study would probably provoke both reactions. No, the author does not dwell in the rarified atmosphere of academe, and that might be a major source of Groucho's discomfort with the book. Siegel identifies himself as a journalist and cultural critic. He has published essays in periodicals like The New Republic, Harper's and The New Yorker, one of which is reworked as a chapter of the present book. He might also be identified as a professional provocateur: a writer who enjoys confronting his readers with offbeat, unpopular ideas designed to infuriate and illuminate in equal measure, as he did in his op-ed piece in The New York Times (6/15/15) explaining his rationale for defaulting on his student loans as a graduate student at Columbia.



Turning his journalist's eye and polemicist's scalpel to the legendary Groucho Marx, Siegel has produced a work of insight, to be sure, but also one so desultory in its presentation that it leaves a reader sputtering in frustration for a more coherent exposition. For example, the famous quip about resigning from the club appears early in the text and is cited three more times as part of an argument, but the context is not provided until 90 pages later. Even though the editors of the "Jewish Lives" series at Yale University Press try to keep documentation to a minimum in the interests of readability, a footnote or even a parenthetical explanation seems an obvious need here.

Groucho developed his stage persona as a loveable grouch. (Hence the name.) Siegel argues that this is not a stage persona at all. It is the real Julius Henry Marx, who looses his misanthropy and misogyny on helpless victims without mercy. His genius rested on an uncanny ability to say what he really thought about people, get laughs and become a famous and very wealthy entertainer as a result of his efforts. The thesis is more than plausible, as Siegel demonstrates with evidence from Groucho's private life.

As a boy, Julius was determined to become a doctor, but because of a weak father (an unsuccessful tailor called Frenchie because of his Alsatian background) and an overpowering mother, he had to leave school after the seventh grade. Show business provided the ladder to the financial security his father could not provide, and he could never return to his boyhood dream. His thoughts later turned to the world of letters. He became well read and published short items in The New Yorker as Julius H. Marx, but branded a mere entertainer, he never gained acceptance in the literary world. The chapter on Groucho's correspondence and eventual meeting with T. S. Eliot, when both were near the end of their careers, provides a poignant example of Groucho's striving and ultimate rejection.

Lifelong rejection and frustration

saturated the young man with bitterness. His comedy sprang from venting his rage on those who had "made it" into the higher ranks of society. While he poured insults on his adversaries, their world continued unfazed, as though he never existed and never said what he just said. Their lives went on unperturbed in a parallel universe from which Groucho was excluded.

The thesis strikes me as plausible, but is it valid? Margaret Dumont, for example, was the particular victim of Groucho's barbs in her many films with the Marx Brothers. Her characters were society ladies, who had to be insulted and humiliated, yet she remained happily oblivious to his onslaughts. Was Groucho using her to exorcise the ghost of his mother, Minnie, who ruined his chances for success? Was the pointed humor clearly misogynistic, or simply the deflation of the rich and established that delighted Depression-era audiences?

Psychoanalysis at a distance is always risky business. Siegel's role as cultural critic seems to blunt his sympathies for entertainment and comic conventions. Several times he points out that the jokes are not funny, but rather brutal. Why did audiences keep laughing at them? Perhaps Groucho was a brilliant satirist in the tradition of Roman comedy and medieval court jesters who spoke truth to power with impunity. Siegel acknowledges these traditions but sticks to his thesis that Julius created Groucho to exact revenge on the world. To paraphrase the famous Freudian line: "Sometimes a joke is only a joke." It doesn't need references to Nietzsche to clarify it, and in the process take the fun out of it.

While the other brothers faded quickly in the 1940s, Groucho reinvented himself as host of the popular radio show "You Bet Your Life." Migrating to television in 1951, Groucho dropped the painted eyebrows and mustache and sat at a desk interviewing contestants with his outrageous ad-libs, a number of which, it turns out, were scripted and placed on cue cards. The program did not primarily involve contestants guessing the "secret word," as Siegel asserts. They picked a category and answered routine quiz-show questions. If, in the course of the interview, anyone inadvertently used the "secret word," a duck-like puppet with a $100 bill in its beak would drop from the ceiling. Also, when the program became a hit, it moved from ABC to NBC, not CBS, as Siegel asserts.

In this study, Lee Siegel provides a valuable, original perspective on Groucho Marx, but it leads to as many questions as conclusions.

RICHARD A. BLAKE, S.J., *former film reviewer for* ***America****, teaches film studies at Boston College.*

'HAMILTON': IT'S ABOUT RHYME

A verse essay, to be read aloud to a hip-hop beat.

So why is "Hamilton" hot?
The one play on Broadway
whose tickets are not
find-able, buy-able,
cannot be got,
madly unfund-able,
don't give it a thought.
But you wanna go
'cause you know it's The Show,
the hip-hop romp
that will totally blow
your mind, it's so fine.
It's a matter of time.
And you'll know when you go,
when you finally see it,
sit in your dearly bought theater
se-at,
what makes it sublime
as you hear every line
is this magical thing called rhyme.

Rhyme is delight,
sound on speed,
vowels in flight,
what our ears need.
Back in our mothers
we heard her heart beat,
rhythm the metronome
that made life sweet.
When we were born
we lost the sound that
told us our story then.
We want it back again.

And so rhythm rocks us
easy & deep.
And so rhyme makes us
feel complete.

Rhyme is an echo,
rhyme is a charm,
a repetitive re-do
with power to disarm

to send us surprise,
to teach us a lesson,
to keep us apprised.
Yo, rhyme is a weapon,
a blade that is sharp,
a draw that is quick,
a shot in the dark,
a walkway that's slick,

so watch how you step,
you could lose your footing.

'Hamilton' sings/ our American song./ Teaches us things,/ the right and the wrong.

A rhyme that's adept
is more than a good thing—
it's better, it's bolder,
it's brighter, it's best,
it's the salt on your steak,
it's the zest

for life and for words
that name who we are,
the stories we've heard,
the fates of the stars
that blaze and burn out
'cause nothing can last.
Rhyme lets us shout
furious and fast,
to dress up the truth,
to make it more real,
to stretch out our youth,
to sing how we feel,
to move in time
so it doesn't move us.
Rhyme is our sign
and in rhyme we trust.

Why we love Shakespeare,
why we love Frost,
poets who write lovely poems
about loss—
why we love Tupac,
why we love Nas,
street-saavy singers
who teach us the cost
of slavery, racism,
our perilous past—it's
so dark in order to scrap it
we rap it.

Rhyme repeats history.
Wisdom demands it.
Rhyme tells our story
so that we can stand it.

"Hamilton" sings
our American song.
Teaches us things,
the right and the wrong,
the facts of our fathers
who founded our nation,
the wives and the daughters
who made their oblation
in order for us
to become what we are.
It cost us that much
to come this far.

And so we love them.
How could we not?
They're speaking our language.
It's our freedom they bought
with their blood and their brains,
with their nerve and their wit—
they tell us our story
and tell all of it—
three hours on the stage
on a New York night,
every battle that raged,
every unequal fight.
A story that's true,
that will last for all time.
It's about me and you.
And it's about rhyme.

ANGELA ALAIMO O'DONNELL *is a poet, professor and associate director of the Curran Center for American Catholic Studies at Fordham University. Twitter: @AODonnellAngela.*

FAMILY PORTRAIT. Joby Earle, Roslyn Ruff, Myra Lucretia Taylor and Melanie Nichols-King in "Familiar"

THEATER | ROB WEINERT-KENDT

SHADES OF GRAY

Two nuanced plays from Danai Gurira

The playwright Danai Gurira so assiduously resists the easy binaries that might seem inevitable in her work—African versus American, white versus black, colonialism versus nationalism—that it almost feels like a disservice to harp on the sharp contrasts between the two fine plays she recently has run on New York stages. But the contrasts are there, and they are striking. If you happened to walk from a matinee of **Eclipsed**—her searing drama about Liberia at the end of that country's last civil war in 2003, now showing at Broadway's Golden Theatre—to an evening performance of her rollicking Midwestern family comedy **Familiar**, which recently concluded its run at Off-Broadway's Playwrights Horizons, you might be forgiven for not recognizing them as the work of the same writer.

Gurira, who was born in Iowa but raised mostly in her parents' native Zimbabwe, obviously contains multitudes; she is best known to the wider public for playing a sword-wielding zombie killer on the television series "The Walking Dead." She also happens to possess both enormous storytelling brio and sobering depth, an irresistible combination. "Eclipsed" might be unwatchably grim without Gurira's knack for broad strokes and eye for comic detail, while "Familiar" would probably be a grating trifle if it did not rest on a bedrock of empathy. Individually either of these plays would announce the arrival of a promising new writer for the American stage; together they immediately put Gurira, who is 38, in the first rank of working American playwrights.

Both plays defy, or perhaps transcend, our initial impressions of them as, respectively, a dutiful war tutorial and a stock immigrant-family farce. In "Eclipsed" we are introduced to the uneasy sisterhood of four "wives," who subsist in a bombed-out concrete hovel while serving the whims of an offstage commanding officer in a Liberian militia. One of them, Number Two—they address each other chiefly with their ranking numbers—has defected to become an AK-47-toting soldier herself, while the newest arrival, Number

Four, receives her conjugal initiation matter-of-factly between the first and second scene.

It will not be her first or her gravest loss of innocence. When she later joins Number Two on the rebel lines against the despot Charles Taylor, Number Four faces the harsh flip side of female empowerment through firepower: that in taking up arms she has effectively joined the system of brutal plunder of which she was formerly a victim.

That a play full of such hard lessons and matter-of-fact atrocity—mostly described rather than shown, but no less harrowing for that—neither crumbles into cynicism nor quite stirs itself to outraged sermonizing is a tribute to Gurira and her clear-eyed director, Liesl Tommy. But it is also a tribute to an extraordinary cast headed by the mercurial Lupita Nyong'o as Number Four. That the play ends semi-hopefully, with an apparent end to hostilities, is not a comforting gloss. After deposing and exiling Taylor, Liberians subsequently elected Africa's first female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

A map of another African nation is among the first things we see in "Familiar," though it risks being swallowed up in the perfectly appointed upper-middle-class living room of a Zimbabwean-American clan as they prepare for the wedding of their favorite daughter, Tendi, to a white human-rights activist, Chris. That the family's otherwise football-loving, cardigan-wearing patriarch treasures a framed map of Zimbabwe, while his wife, Marvelous, keeps replacing it with a tasteful floral print, is among the early signposts of the explosive conflict to come. And while it puts some well-worn themes in contention—assimilation versus heritage, tradition versus individual expression—"Familiar" would not be half as entertaining as it is if it did not also put a group of well-observed, idiosyncratically human characters in contention as well.

At the extreme edges, these include Chris's plain-spoken brother, Brad, and Tendi's harrumphing Aunt Anne, on hand from Zimbabwe to perform a traditional *roora* negotiation in addition to the couple's Christian wedding. At the center would seem to be Nyasha, Tendi's sister, a singer/songwriter chafing at her role as the family's black sheep. But among the saving graces of Gurira's play is that our sympathies are regularly scrambled and reshuffled. While she is not above some broad, goofy, crowd-pleasing gestures, not to mention some shocking revelations that skirt melodrama, she garners neither laughs nor gasps at her characters' expense.

In short, Gurira's is not a landscape of heroes and villains, or of tidy final solutions. A blessed comfort with complication and nuance is among the threads that unite her plays, bold-faced as they are in outline. Even "Eclipsed," which paints a justly damning portrait of the amorality of war, finally refuses to judge the most obvious onstage antagonist, armed-and-dangerous Wife Number Two, a k a Maima (played by Zainab Jah).

Like Mother Courage in Brecht's great antiwar classic of the same name, Maima is both a product and an agent of human cruelty. That there are alternatives to the depravity she represents may be heartening enough to get us through another day, but that should not let us off the hook. To anyone with open eyes, the eat-or-be-eaten world Maima embodies and embraces looks distressingly familiar.

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

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IMITATIO

Love One Another

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (C), APRIL 24, 2016

Readings: Acts 14:21-27; Ps 145:8-13; Rev 21:1-5; Jn 13:31-35

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another" (Jn 13:34)

Psalm 145 says that "the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." God's steadfast love for humanity is the through note that brings harmony to the psalms. Even more, deep engagement with the psalms transforms the reader and brings harmony to the soul. Brian E. Daley, S.J., writes in *The Harp of Prophecy* that the church father Athanasius recognized "in this mimetic, modeling role of the psalms an anticipation of the healing effect of the Incarnation: just as the Word, in becoming one of us, not only taught us how to live by his words, but 'did what he taught,' providing us with a living image of 'perfect virtue' in his own life" (Page 20).

It was because Jesus became for us a "living image of perfect virtue" that he could give to his disciples a new commandment to love. Jesus offered himself as the model of love: "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." It is intended to be the quintessential act of discipleship by which outsiders would recognize Jesus' followers: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." It is a simple command: Love one another.

It has to be love. Simple as it is, everyone can love, from the baby to the elderly person. It is not an achievement; it is not a talent; it is not a skill; but everyone can offer it. Every act of love is complete and perfect, an example of God with us, God in us and God among us. Love has its own logic. The more it is offered and shared, the greater it becomes. Love heals the wounds of sin by offering a balm of mercy and forgiveness.

But it is not unfair to ask, if love is the mark of Jesus' disciples, why is there often so little love on display among the disciples of Jesus? Why is there not only a lack of charity but hurtful words and angry denunciations? It is God's love that will recreate us and sustain us, allowing us to love our brothers and sisters, so why are we so resistant to God's transforming love?

It is imperative that we enter into deep relationship with the love that transforms us. Father Daley writes that early Christian interpreters of the psalms were "continually amazed" by "the apparently universal ability of these poems to transform the hearts and minds of those who regularly prayed them" and to create "a harmony and order in our inner selves" (Page 20-21).

It is not just the psalms, of course, for transformation can come from meditating on other parts of Scripture, other forms of devotion, other acts of mercy, other ways of living out the Gospel. Yet the emotive aspects of the psalms, what ancient Christians noted as their "sweetness," could move people so that both the learned and unlearned, the young and the old could be transformed by the songs of God's love. Whenever love is encountered, and especially when the encounter becomes habitual, it gently transforms us into lovers.

Paul and his co-workers brought the message of love and transformation throughout Asia Minor and "made many disciples." People responded to the Gospel, but Paul knew that the making of "many disciples" is the start of the process of discipleship, not the end of it. This is why Acts tells us that Paul and the other disciples returned to the cities they had visited as missionaries and "strengthened the souls of the disciples" with the encouragement of preaching, prayer and fasting. Our spiritual transformation is shaped by daily modeling ourselves on the "living image of perfect virtue."

ART: TAD DUNNE

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Meditate on the commandment to love one another. When do you feel yourself most able to live out Jesus' command to love? When is it most difficult to live out this commandment? What spiritual practice transforms you most fully in order to love?

Jesus' love is not just a commandment for this life; it offers us a foretaste of the sweetness of the life to come. For the "living image of perfect virtue," our model for life, was raised up to life eternal, offering for us a path to follow him home. There will be, John tells us, no more death, suffering, mourning, crying or pain, for "the Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made." Love alone awaits us, the sweetest psalm.

JOHN W. MARTENS

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

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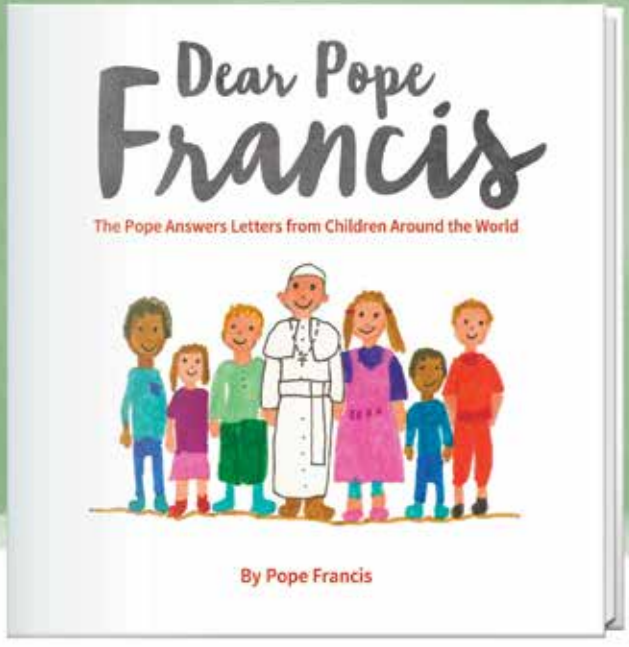

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