

America



THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC REVIEW

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Surviving in America

RACE, ASSIMILATION AND
CATHOLIC IMMIGRANTS

TOM DEIGNAN

On my desk at America Media headquarters sits a sealed glass bowl containing some dark, hardened soil from the tract of land my family tilled for more than two centuries in County Galway, Ireland. This is unsurprising, I suppose. When I try to count back through my 13 predecessors as editor in chief, I figure just over three-fourths of them were Irish by descent. (Typically, as I was composing the list with a colleague one night at one of the weathered, wooden tables at McSorely's Old Ale House in Manhattan, a nearby wit with a heavy brogue suggested that we eliminate those Jesuits with obvious Italian surnames, like Tierney and O'Hare.)

Those Jesuit editors, of course, were always great sympathizers with the cause of Irish independence and with the plight of Irish immigrants. They were, to a man, great believers in the destiny of the Irish people, which included those here in the American diaspora, those who have now made such lasting contributions to the political, ecclesial and cultural life of this country.

That much seems obvious, but there are several other interesting things to note when viewing the literally hundreds of articles this magazine published, even counting only those between 1910 and 1930, about Ireland and the so-called Irish question.

The first is to notice something that we forget—that even if things were not as bad as they had been during the Famine or other periods of Irish history, the country was still terribly poor in those years. Eight hundred years of occupation cannot be undone in just a few decades. Ireland was rural, the country was impoverished and a significant portion of the country's population was living in New York. Reading these articles, one is reminded that this was a time when subsistence or something slightly above it was all that the average Irishman could hope for.

The United States was their life raft on a sinking ship.

The second thing to notice is the close connection between the faith and Irish culture. The Irish experience, of course, had been forged in a crucible of hardship, starvation and war. For the Irish people, the cross of Jesus Christ stood at the center of that history. For centuries Ireland had united her struggle to the cross of our Lord, drawing from his passion the strength, the courage, the hope to endure. Downtrodden and alienated from herself, Ireland placed her desperate faith in the crucified one, the stone that the builders rejected, which had become the cornerstone. Thus, with their eyes firmly fixed on the hope of heaven, a long-suffering people came to believe in the promise of a new Earth.

The third thing to notice is something many of us still feel today—a terrible nostalgia for the old country, for home. It reminds us that in its true meaning—from the Greek—nostalgia does not mean sentimentality about the past, but longing for a place—the old country, the auld sod. So many mentions of Ireland in the pages of **America** make it clear that while many Irish-Americans had bid farewell to the old country, they had never really left it behind—not just because they were always getting letters asking if maybe the American cousin couldn't spare a few quid.

With Ireland now part of the European Union and with the ease of travel to the continent and even back and forth with the United States, what is most interesting is to go back to the stories of those years in the early life of **America** magazine—the magazine was founded just seven years before the Easter Rising—and hear firsthand the stories that today might be only echoes, but that might also provide a useful point of reference for those of us who are debating how to welcome the huddled masses who arrived only this morning.

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Cover: Immigrants wait to file paperwork for consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals outside the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights in Los Angeles in 2012. CNS photo/Michael Nelson, EPA

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Joan E. Denton looks at the place of **science and creation in the Bible**. Plus, Arthur Fitzmaurice offers a video reflection on the response of **L.G.B.T. Catholics** to Pope Francis. Full digital highlights on page 18 and at americamagazine.org/webfeatures.



Deal-Breakers in Congress

The longest-serving Jewish member of the House of Representatives, Sander Levin, Democrat of Michigan, on July 28 threw his support behind the Obama administration's nuclear accord with Iran. That should be enough to give the Iran deal a chance to get through the Washington gantlet. With other negotiation partners hopeful now that a workable plan on Iranian nuclear enrichment has been reached, a repudiation of the accord in Congress would confirm the United States as the unreasonable aggressor in the stand-off with Iran, and with good reason.

While some in Congress are legitimately skeptical of the deal, many more did not even bother to read it before attacking it, picking up a well-worn script and knuckling under to pressure from lobbyists who refuse to acknowledge the net positives the deal offers both the United States and its ally Israel. Many of those in Congress and the U.S. media who would kill the Iran accord are the same people who glibly supported the ruinous intervention in Iraq. Now they seem all too willing to block a diplomatic course that offers some hope for long-term peace and improved security in the region.

Those who are eager to break the Iran deal should answer one simple question: What is the alternative? There is no "better deal" on any reasonable horizon. Their Plan B would steer the country back onto a course that would almost inevitably lead to yet another disastrous war in the Middle East. As the U.S. bishops have frequently urged, this deal, and the peaceful path of diplomacy and dialogue that has led to it, should be given a chance to work.

Killer Robots

As the people in the troubled tribal regions of Pakistan and other Middle Eastern hotspots grow accustomed to the steady hum of American drones, the next generation of remote weaponry is visible just over the horizon. And those who understand this technology are worried. On July 27, Stephen Hawking, Elon Musk and over 1,000 experts on artificial intelligence called for a pre-emptive international ban on fully autonomous lethal weapons, warning that the deployment of such systems "is feasible within years, not decades."

A directive issued by the U.S. Department of Defense in 2012 bans for up to 10 years the use of weapons that select targets without direct human control. In certain circumstances, however, high-level Pentagon officials can waive the moratorium, and the guidelines do not apply to

the Central Intelligence Agency. Human Rights Watch called the policy a positive step, but called on the United States to embrace a "permanent, comprehensive ban" as we work toward a legally binding global convention against fully autonomous weapons.

If preventing a nuclear Iran seems a herculean task, stemming the proliferation of "killer robots"—easier to replicate and harder to monitor than uranium enrichment—will be all but impossible. Further, as Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Holy See's permanent observer to the United Nations, said in an address on the topic, "The encounter with the face of another is one of the fundamental experiences that awaken moral consciousness and responsibility." By putting ever greater psychic and physical distance between the two sides, these weapons create the illusion of surgical warfare while dehumanizing killer and victim alike.

Climate Talk in 2016

On August 3, President Obama announced a new Clean Power Plan, aiming to reduce the United States' carbon dioxide emissions by 32 percent by 2030. Responses to climate change are also shaping up to become a key issue in the 2016 elections, as Democratic candidates are arguing over whose clean energy proposals are bold enough to be credible, and Republicans have begun critiquing many of these goals as wrongheaded or unachievable.

Significant reductions in carbon emissions are a worthy goal, and plans to achieve them through cleaner power deserve our consideration and support. It would be a mistake, however, to think that setting goals for the right mix of energy generation 15 years from now is a sufficient response to climate change and the need to "care for our common home," as Pope Francis puts it in "Laudato Si."

A deeper engagement with what this care requires is needed at all levels. Locally, we must prioritize sustainable energy use, even if it costs us more. Archbishop Blase Cupich's recent commitment for the Archdiocese of Chicago to track its buildings' environmental impact offers a model that should be widely followed. Nationally, we ought to welcome debates not only about energy policy, but also about what model of growth should be encouraged. Globally, the issue is not just sustainable energy but sustainable development more generally, and a just sharing of responsibility between industrialized and developing economies. Decisions about sustainable energy usage are a fine starting point, but they are not nearly ambitious enough to be the end goal.

Selling the Unborn

A series of undercover videos released by the Center for Medical Progress in July has brought renewed attention, in chilling and often gruesome detail, to a seldom discussed aspect of the abortion industry: the procurement of and trade in fetal tissue. The C.M.P. footage reveals Planned Parenthood executives and physicians discussing the processes and pricing used for obtaining fetal tissue from abortions, at times in flippant or casual ways.

Responding to the videos, Cardinal Seán O'Malley, O.F.M.Cap., archbishop of Boston and chair of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, suggested that the C.M.P. exposé should "direct our attention to two larger issues": abortion itself—"a direct attack on human life in its most vulnerable condition"—and "the now standard practice of obtaining fetal organs and tissues through abortion."

"Both actions," he said, "fail to respect the humanity and dignity of human life," contributing to the "throwaway culture" frequently deplored by Pope Francis.

A powerful narrative has been emerging of late from within the pro-choice camp, moving from the "safe, legal and rare" formula of the Clinton era into an abortion-positive position: research that suggests—dubiously—that women do not regret abortions; abortions captured live that portray it as an essentially carefree medical procedure; Twitter campaigns to "normalize," even celebrate the experience. The intent of these efforts is to silence what flagging cultural conscience remains over the morality of abortion. But C.M.P.'s hidden-camera operation tears off the rhetorical veneer and exposes abortion and the gruesome commodities market it feeds for what it is: an obliteration of human dignity.

In the cultural field that enwraps Planned Parenthood's mission, the sanctity of life has to be completely nullified in order for the work to proceed at all. Why should anyone be surprised when other comparably smaller imaginative leaps—the commodification of human flesh, for example—accompany the process of total dehumanization?

The political discussion, and Planned Parenthood's explanations and defenses of its practices, have focused on the legality of fetal tissue sales. As important as that question is, it is tangential to the more significant moral challenge raised by the commodification of the bodies of aborted human fetuses. From this perspective, whether Planned Parenthood is receiving \$75 per specimen or \$1,000 or only \$5 is beside the point.

Planned Parenthood is being compensated for treat-

ing the body of an aborted fetus as a source for parts, and they are responding by maximizing the value of a scarce resource. The great moral tragedy is that what makes these tissues uniquely valuable—the fact that we share with the fetus a common humanity—is precisely what is being denied in the process of obtaining them through abortions.

In the first C.M.P. release, a doctor tries to make ethical sense of Planned Parenthood's role in bringing fetal remains to market. She explains that many women are "happy to know that there's a possibility for them to do 'this extra bit of good.'"

No doubt many women, faced with the difficult circumstances that led them to have an abortion, are relieved to hear that some apparent good can be achieved by donating tissue from the abortion for research. But the videos make very clear—even to those who do not believe that abortion is wrong—that behind the scenes, once an abortion is completed and the "donation" is being processed, Planned Parenthood is no longer motivated by the wishes of its client. It is instead focused on accommodating the needs and goals of the tissue procurement company and the demands of its market.

When a technician looks for marketable tissue, there is no longer any discussion about the needs or rights of women seeking abortions. There is no longer any discussion of a woman's autonomy in choosing to donate tissue from an abortion or the viability of a fetus. There is no longer consideration of the person, either the woman or the unborn. There is only a dismembered 11.6-week-old fetus in a pie plate, its body already destroyed, now being scavenged for further value in order to "see how much we can get out of it."

If that disgusts you, it ought to. The videos demonstrate, without any buffer, the faulty moral logic used to justify abortion. The physical and emotional revulsion we feel while watching these videos is evidence of the movement of our conscience telling us that these are not just collections of tissues, but persons with livers, brains, hearts—and souls.

But these disturbing images ought also to lead to a larger question: not only how to avoid and outlaw the practice of harvesting fetal tissue for profit, but of what consideration and compassion we owe the child and its mother both, beyond offering the illusory comfort of "donating" the body of an unborn child she feels unable to welcome into life.



REPLY ALL

Editor's Note: This week's Reply All section is dedicated to the many thoughtful responses to "After Obergefell" (Editorial, 7/20).

Humility and Truth-Telling

I found much prudential and sensible pastoral exhortation in *America's* editorial on the Supreme Court decision regarding same-sex marriage. And that, in my view, is both its strength and its weakness.

Appeal is made to Catholics to proceed in the decision's aftermath with "humility" and "respect," as they engage in the public conversation. Such virtues are, indeed, indispensable. But so are their sister virtues of "truth-telling" and *parrhesia* (a favorite of Pope Francis), which the editorial largely neglects. Thus the editorial runs the risk of being read to support the disjunction between the "pastoral" and the "doctrinal" that has bedeviled discussions of the coming synod. Citing Cardinal Marx does not dispel the concern that this disjunction may, in fact, be operative.

The editorial does acknowledge that "the Gospel makes radical de-

mands on every dimension of human living." It would have been considerably strengthened had this perspective been elaborated and, in particular, had it been stressed that such demands very much embrace the sexual dimension of human living.

The editors persuasively quote Pope Francis that "the first proclamation" must be: "Jesus Christ has saved you." The challenge we face as church, however, especially in North America and Europe, is to proclaim this good news to a culture that too often reduces "salvation" to a therapeutic and individualist "flourishing." Francis himself understands this. Hence the importance of his discernment of the counterfeits of authentic human flourishing in Chapter Three of "Laudato Si," "The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis," and his insistence in Chapter Four on the imperative for an "Integral Ecology."

As it stands, the editorial's well-intentioned pastoral accommodation can slip too easily into cultural capitulation (of the sort one seems currently to be witnessing in a number of Catholic universities).

(REV.) ROBERT P. IMBELLI
Newton Centre, Mass.

Thanks to Faith

I commend you for your outstanding editorial on the recent Supreme Court ruling. Your remarks are thoughtful, balanced and forward-looking. I have one complaint, however. You say that the ruling "is part of a larger phenomenon—the transition...to a thoroughly secular, postmodern social politics." Such comments are common, but that doesn't make them accurate.

There is much social science research to demonstrate the continued interest in and commitment to authentic spirituality. Public initiatives and personal practices both confirm this. So the larger phenomenon is not a move from sacred to secular but from ecclesiastical/hierarchical to egalitarian/charismatic approaches to the integration of the transcendent into ordinary life.

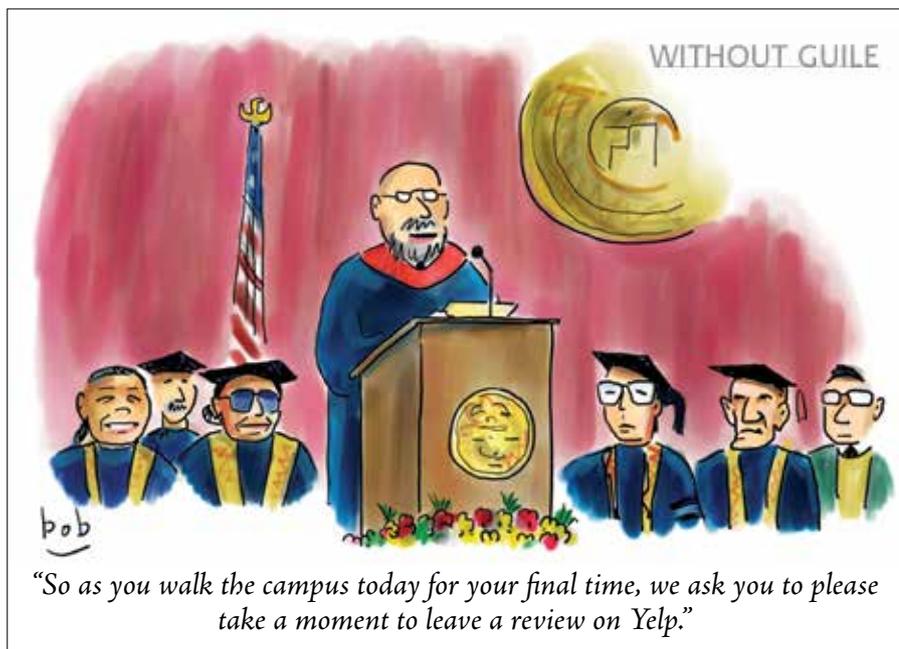
It is clear that many supporters of the Supreme Court decision ground that support precisely in their conviction that this is what Jesus would do. That's not secularism. That's Christian—yes, Catholic—spirituality, alive and well!

TIMOTHY E. O'CONNELL
Chicago, Ill.

Higher Law

Obergefell underscores the dilemma of a church at the crossroads, a church required to present a nuanced articulation of its beliefs and values not only to an increasingly secular society but to its own disparate members separated by levels of religious education, sophistication and generation. Yet the church's words will mean little without meaningful actions. Its instruction should be, when necessary, accompanied by compassionate outreach to assist traditional and same-sex families alike. Following Pope Francis' lead, the church must become a sympathetic listener and partner employing a dialogue of concern and encouragement in lieu of pontification.

Nevertheless, in reframing its po-



sition the church, unlike the courts, must answer to a higher authority and cannot simply accede to emotions fed by consensus and popularity. Indeed, its task is countercultural: the church must attempt to interpret the will of a loving God who empathizes with human needs yet gently directs hearts toward a greater good consonant with his eternal vision. With due humility the church must compassionately articulate not only God's design for human sexuality but also his abundant graces necessary to sustain it.

CHARLES BUTERA
East Northport, N.Y.

Seeking Understanding

I read and re-read this editorial. I always seek logic and reasoning that speaks to my heart. This was a difficult read, as I already have empathy for people with same-sex attraction. I pray for them and ask them to pray for me. Roe v. Wade legalized abortion and this ruling legalized gay "marriage." My logical conclusion is we are next looking toward legalizing assisted death. In my view all these laws are fulfilling Satan's mission of a culture of death. Perhaps Pope Francis will help us to understand and pray for life. He does speak with his example of compassion. In this way we may understand and be straightforward with being in society. The editors of this essay were speaking in a tone difficult for me to hear.

MARIE GOIHL
Online Comment

Set Politics Aside

I am a baby boomer and lifelong Catholic. In recent years, I have become frustrated by the insertion of partisan politics into my local parish to the extent that I changed parishes. I attend Mass and retreat-type activities to meet God, meditate on life, connect with others and pray. This past Sunday,

a deacon gave a sermon in which he decried secularism and the "recent court decisions." Many Catholics have been able to separate the right of civil marriage from the sacrament of matrimony within the Catholic Church.

The editorial calls for reasonable consideration of the issues of our times and basic human respect. Thank you for publishing it and keeping in mind that we are all one human family. The institutional church will lose me if it continues to permit politics in the Mass and in the holy services and ministries of the parish. I was taught many years ago by a Catholic nun to think for myself and form my conscience based on Catholic teaching, as well as to live a life nonjudgmental of others. How thankful I am for her wise teaching.

MARILYN ENG
Online Comment

Am I Welcome?

As a gay Catholic, I know that the Spirit is still working in people to fully understand who and what they are. I have participated in church life my entire life. But last weekend when the bishop posted a letter in the bulletin that was complete rhetoric and not welcoming to gay members, I have to question the line about dialogue in the church. Where is the support, the love, the compassion that I get from Christ in the church? More than ever, I feel isolated from the church, but am I not still part of the hands and feet of Christ? Let's pray that the church can honestly say, "All are welcome."

TIMOTHY HOOD
Online Comment

Rights, Not Policy

This editorial does not clarify anything but rather confuses once again the role and function of civil society. The Supreme Court ruled on the constitu-

tionality of these laws, not on public policy. The issue of civil marriage is not a "public policy" issue, as the editors assert, it is a matter of civil rights under the Constitution of this nation. Nobody's civil rights should ever be up to the discretion of other citizens, elected representatives or the church.

CHRIS NUNEZ
Online Comment

What We Fight For

Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God and said that the consequence was that we would have to become gods, determining our own moral values. This we have done in Roe v. Wade by redefining what counts as human. Now we've done it in Obergefell by redefining what marriage is. If we as a society can do this, what can we not do?

Of course, the Holy Spirit still speaks, but those claiming to speak with the Holy Spirit must submit their claims to tests. If The Huffington Post and Pope Francis are in conflict on same-sex marriage (as they are), I would be pretty suspicious of the claim that the Spirit is inspiring the former and not the latter. And if the claim "We can still be inspired and open to learning more about sexuality" simply becomes an excuse to defy consistent church teaching, then again, perhaps we should be suspicious. That risks coming awfully close to gnosticism.

Finally, when a culture so thoroughly rejects God as ours has done, then battle is the only moral option. This does not mean fighting against people. It means fighting for people who are victims of the same culture. Because when we redefine what counts as life, what counts as marriage, a person and dignity (euthanasia), then all society suffers from this culture whether it knows it or not.

RAYMOND J. DANSEREAU
Online Comment

Letters to the editor may be sent to **America's** editorial office (address on page 2) or letters@americamagazine.org. **America** will also consider the following for print publication: comments posted below articles on **America's** website (americamagazine.org) and posts on Twitter and public Facebook pages. All correspondence may be edited for length.

UKRAINE

‘Between Hammer and Anvil,’ A Humanitarian Crisis in Europe

A Ukrainian bishop said a Russian-backed separatist rebellion has plunged his country into its worst humanitarian crisis since World War II. He warned that “millions of refugees” could soon head for Europe to escape starvation.

“Huge numbers are now caught between hammer and anvil; the separatists aren’t looking after them, and the Ukrainian government won’t care for them because they haven’t declared which side they’re on,” said Auxiliary Bishop Jan Sobilo of Kharkiv-Zaporizhia. “Not since World War II have we seen such poverty and destitution,” he added, speaking on July 29.

“People are continually arriving at our Catholic communities asking for food, medicines, money and shelter,” he said, noting they included young widows with small children, whose husbands have stayed in the war zone or been killed.

The bishop spoke as the Catholic relief and development agency Caritas Internationalis also warned of growing starvation and desperation in separatist-controlled eastern Ukraine. Bishop Sobilo said lack of water currently posed the biggest problem in eastern Ukraine, where food prices were three times higher than in the rest of the country. He added that local children would be unable to start the new school year because most schools were closed. He added that Ukrainian authorities have hushed up a spiraling rate of suicides.

“Whereas family members and friends were ready to help for a month or two, most have now exhausted their money and savings and had to ask the refugees to move on,” Bishop Sobilo said.

“Many elderly educated people, who previously had jobs, have been unable to face begging on the streets and have thrown themselves from windows and bridges. Such people often have no means of survival and no one to turn to and have ended up starving.”

Although Russian President Vladimir Putin has denied direct Russian involvement in Ukraine, church leaders repeatedly have accused Moscow of military intervention in the war. A United Nations report in June said more than 6,400 people have died and 16,000 have been wounded.

In an interview on July 28 with Dom Radio, based in Cologne,

Germany, Andrij Waskowycz, president of Caritas Ukraine, said 700,000 Ukrainians had now left the country, while 1.4 million more were internally displaced by the fighting and lacked basic necessities.

He said a cease-fire agreement in February had failed to prevent daily skirmishes and conflicts, adding that at least 100,000 people were now without water in the separatist-controlled Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

According to Bishop Sobilo, church leaders had been promised access to Catholics by separatist forces, but have been barred from visiting the “occupied territories” by the Ukrainian troops who control the makeshift borders.

“This is a war of oligarchs, and any future peace will depend on the conversion of those oligarchs in Russia and Ukraine who’ve kept the conflict going with their lies,” the bishop said.

“The West should get ready to ac-

CITY IN RUINS. Reviewing Mariupol’s burned out city hall.



cept the millions of homeless, hungry refugees who will soon head across central and western Ukraine toward Europe,” he said. “Pope Francis has urged help for refugees from Africa, and we now have parts of Africa right here. Unless solidarity is shown with them, countless innocent people will die simply because they happened to live in an unlucky place during a conflict ignited by those with a personal interest in war and suffering.”

IMMIGRATION

Court Challenges Family Detention

Imigration advocates hailed a court ruling on July 24 that could mean the end of an Immigration and Customs Enforcement policy to lock up families in compounds run by for-profit prison companies while they



pursue asylum and other types of protection from deportation.

Judge Dolly Gee of the Central California District Court found that I.C.E.'s strategy—enacted last summer—of detaining women and their children as a deterrent to others who might try to cross the U.S.-Mexico border violated a court settlement reached in 1997. In her ruling Gee said she found it “astonishing that the defendants have enacted a policy requiring such expensive infrastructure without more evidence to show that it would be compliant with an agreement that has been in effect for nearly 20 years or effective at achieving what defendants hoped it would accomplish.”

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Center for Migration Studies issued a scathing report in May based on bishops' visits to two family detention centers in Texas. It decried conditions and recommended disman-

tlng the whole system, replacing it with less drastic ways of keeping track of immigrants who are awaiting the outcome of legal cases.

Auxiliary Bishop Eusebio L. Elizondo of Seattle, chairman of the U.S.C.C.B. Committee on Migration, welcomed Gee's ruling and urged the administration to comply quickly.

“Appealing the decision would only prolong a flawed and unjust policy of treating this vulnerable population as criminals,” he said in a statement released on July 27.

The National Immigrant Justice Center also urged the administration to comply immediately. “Rather than double down on a costly policy that has been plagued with problems, including suicide attempts, inadequate medical and mental health care, prolonged periods of detention, and extremely limited access to counsel, [the Department of Homeland Security] must use the least restrictive alternatives to detention to mitigate concerns about flight risk,” said a statement from the center.

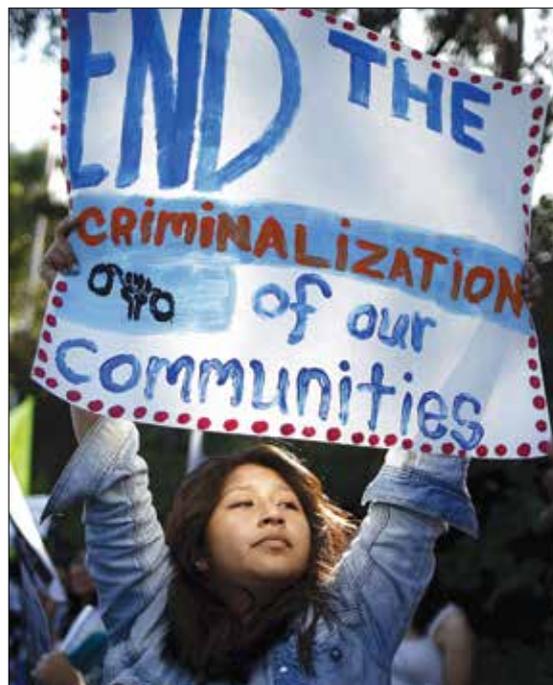
More than 55,000 families were among a surge of Central American immigrants across the U.S.-Mexico border last summer. Along with 57,000 unaccompanied minors, the families were fleeing violence and other dangers in their home countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

Most of the families in the centers have met the first legal hurdle in applying for asylum. Of the tens of thousands of other families apprehended at the border, most have not been detained but were released on bond pending adjudication of their attempts to be allowed to remain. But some families have been held in the centers

for more than a year.

The judge ruled that children who are picked up by the Border Patrol while traveling with their mothers should be treated with the same level of care as those who arrive on their own. She said I.C.E. failed to provide any evidence to support the agency's argument that it was necessary to detain families as a deterrent. She ordered the administration to release children and parents unless there is a determination that there is “a significant flight risk, or a threat to others or the national security...which cannot be mitigated by an appropriate bond or conditions of release.”

She also ordered I.C.E. to come up with standards for conditions under which immigrant children, including those with their parents, are held in even temporary conditions. The conditions addressed by Gee's order included frigid, overcrowded holding cells, inadequate medical care and other problems.



DETENTION PROTEST. An immigration advocate demonstrates in Los Angeles on July 10.

Bishops Support Minimum Wage Hike

U.S. Catholic leaders have called on Congress to ensure that the federal minimum wage is raised to “improve the financial security of millions of American families.” In a letter, dated July 28, Bishop Thomas Wenski, chair of the U.S. bishops’ Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and Sister Donna Markham, President of Catholic Charities USA, note that a full-time worker, currently earning the federal minimum wage, “does not make enough to raise a child free from poverty.” As pastors and service providers, they say they see how each year “it becomes more difficult for low-wage workers to make ends meet.” Quoting from Pope John Paul II’s encyclical “*Centesimus Annus*,” they stress that society and the state must guarantee wage levels “adequate for the maintenance of the worker and his family,” as well as ensuring “adequate legislative measures” to stop exploitation of the most vulnerable. Protecting low-wage workers and promoting their ability to form and nurture families, the two Catholic leaders insist, are shared responsibilities and critical to building a more equitable society.

Planned Parenthood Protests in 65 Cities

As hidden-camera videos of Planned Parenthood staff strategizing to market fetal tissue and organs continued to be released on the Internet, rallies took place in 65 cities across the nation. Pro-life advocates from across the Salt Lake Valley in Utah demonstrated peacefully in front of a Planned Parenthood affiliate on July 28, calling for state and federal officials to investigate and defund Planned Parenthood. The crowd

NEWS BRIEFS

Concerns about a potential humanitarian emergency were mounting in late July as people of Haitian descent began to be **forced out of the Dominican Republic** and into tent cities along the border with Haiti. • A decision by the Boy Scouts of America on July 27 to **allow gay troop leaders and employees** to serve at the national level does not affect local leadership decisions and permits religiously chartered troops to choose leaders whose values are consistent with those of the sponsoring faith. • Deploing an “**illegal and un-American phenomenon**,” the Council on American-Islamic Relations on July 31 called on the U.S. Department of Justice to address the growing number of businesses nationwide that have been declared a “Muslim-free zone.” • In an op-ed piece published on July 29 in *The Daily News* of New York, Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan **deplored anti-immigrant rhetoric** emerging in the Republican presidential campaign, warning, “Nativism is alive, well—and apparently popular!”



Decision on gay Scout leaders

joined pro-lifers nationally in holding a “Women Betrayed” rally, an effort organized by Students for Life of America and its partner organization, Pro-Life Future. “We came out today to demand that our representatives in Washington, D.C., and Salt Lake City hold Planned Parenthood accountable for their actions, and we are not alone in our fight,” one protestor told the crowd in Salt Lake City.

Secret Catholics at Jamestown?

A reliquary discovered in the grave of Gabriel Archer, a founding member of Jamestown has raised the possibility that there were crypto-Catholics among these early settlers. David Collins, S.J., associate professor and director of doctoral studies in the history department at Georgetown University wrote in a blog post on America Media’s website: “Given the Anglican identification of

the early settlement and the animosity of the Anglican establishment toward Catholicism, a secret Catholic among the settlement’s leadership would be historically significant—a seeming contradiction to conventional historical understanding of the British Empire in general and the 13 colonies in particular as Protestant, in contrast to Catholic New France to the north and Catholic New Spain to the south.” He added: “Captain Archer’s Catholicism, if it is ultimately proved, is exciting because of who he was in Jamestown. But rather than teaching us something new about Catholicism in British colonial North America, a best hope is that it will help popularize a growing scholarly insight into the significant Catholic presence in British colonial North America. These Catholics included English gentry, Jesuit priests, Irish field hands and maids and African slaves, among others.”

From CNS, RNS and other sources.

Making Room for All at Mass

If you attend Mass in Chicago, you might encounter a blind lector reading the day's Scripture from a Braille lectionary while accompanied at the altar by a guide dog. You might receive communion from a eucharistic minister seated in a wheelchair. Through the SPRED (Special Religious Education) program, about 160 parishes have trained catechists working with parishioners with special needs. Forty-three parishes offer worship services adapted for people with developmental disabilities and their families periodically throughout the year. For the deaf community, there is a sign language Mass every Sunday at St. Francis Borgia Church.

The Archdiocese of Chicago has long been in the forefront not only in addressing the needs of Catholics with mental and physical challenges, but also in ensuring they play an active role in the life of the church. So it seems fitting that one of the most comprehensive sets of tools for teaching children with autism and other special needs about the Mass and sacraments should also come from Chicago.

The adaptive "Finding God" series of learning kits comes from Loyola Press, a publisher of books on spirituality run by the Midwest Jesuits. The series draws upon Loyola's "Finding God" books, which catechists have used for years to teach children about the faith. The "adaptive" series engages a multi-sensory approach that is more consistent with the way children with developmental challenges learn. It in-

cludes the use of music, puppets, floor puzzles, movement mats, flip books and other simplified learning tools.

The series is largely the work of Joellyn Ciciarelli, the vice president of new product development at Loyola Press, in collaboration with the National Catholic Partnership on Disability. Ciciarelli learned about communicating with children from one of the best teachers: Fred Rogers of

**'Honor children
wherever they
are at whatever
developmental level.'**

"Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" fame, with whom she collaborated on his "Grow and Learn" book series.

"Fred Rogers taught me to honor children wherever they are, at whatever developmental level they are," Ciciarelli says. That is the guiding principle behind the teaching kits. "We believe all children can learn," she says. "All children can pray, and all children can find God."

An estimated 2.8 million school-age children in America have special needs stemming from autism or another developmental challenge, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Many families struggle with how to pass on their faith to special needs children, Ciciarelli says. And despite greater social acceptance, some parents still hesitate even to bring their developmentally challenged children to church.

"I've looked around for a long time and I've never seen materials like this before," Grace Urbanski, head of chil-

dren's ministry for the U.S. Office of the Apostleship of Prayer, says of the adaptive "Finding God" series. Urbanski's late brother Mark was blind and suffered from a series of mental and physical challenges.

The lessons are tailored for children who may not speak, but who gesture; who can't read, but will respond to visual cues. "We have lessons that don't require the child to read or even speak, but that reinforce in wonderful, simple ways the concepts of our faith," Ciciarelli says. In first Communion lessons, for instance, children are encouraged to feel the metal patens, touch unconsecrated hosts. After Loyola Press issued its first Communion kit, parents, pastors and catechists clamored for more. Adaptive lessons on reconciliation and confirmation followed, along with Spanish language versions.

"I had a grandfather come up to me who had tears in his eyes. He said he has a 27-year-old grandson with Down Syndrome. He told me that because of our materials, his grandson was [recently] able to take Communion for the first time. That to me meant more than anything," Ciciarelli says.

The adaptive series in many ways reflects the mandate of St. Ignatius Loyola to spread the Gospel to all people, especially those who are most marginalized by society. It is a message that also comes from the top of the church. Last fall, Pope Francis held a three-day council in Rome examining autism. Ciciarelli attended with other members of Loyola Press.

"The pope said people with special needs can't be isolated, that they belong," Ciciarelli recalls. "That's a step further than saying they are included, because when you belong, that's saying you are already a part of the church and you will always be a part of the church."

JUDITH VALENTE

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



Diplomacy Deficit

The nuclear deal with Iran now being debated in Congress represents a rare victory for diplomacy. Americans don't care much for diplomacy these days. With so much power at our disposal, we prefer threats, economic sanctions, military posturing and coercion to the quiet cultivation of allies and influence. Chas Freeman Jr., a 30-year career diplomat who wrote the entry on diplomacy for the Encyclopedia Britannica, remarked in an interview a few months back that even many in our diplomatic corps fail to grasp the necessity for diplomacy or understand its basic principles.

Ambassador Freeman has had a long and distinguished career, which includes being the chief U.S. interpreter during President Nixon's first visit to China in 1972 and serving as U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia during operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield. He has had a front-row seat at significant junctures in our history, and when he says, as he did in June in a speech to the Academy of Philosophy and Letters, that "Judging by results in the complex post-Cold War era, diplomacy is something the United States does not now understand nor know how to do," it seems important to learn more.

In his speech "Too Quick on the Draw: Militarism and the Malpractice of Diplomacy in America," Freeman ascribes Americans' disregard for diplomacy to our atypical experience of war. Many wars are fought for limited objectives, which end in a negotiated agreement that reconciles the defeated

to a new status quo that, it is hoped, establishes the basis for a better, lasting peace. But the Civil War, World War I and World War II were wars of subjugation and conquest, in which the United States demanded unconditional surrender from its opponent. Peace terms were imposed, not negotiated, and what followed was a complete restructuring of the defeated side's society.

Our more limited wars in the 20th century did not change that departure from diplomatic norms. In Korea an armistice signed in 1953 has still not been translated into a peace. Our first war against Iraq did not end in an agreement negotiated with Saddam Hussein but with the United States using the U.N. Security Council to impose onerous conditions on Iraq that he never accepted. In Grenada and Panama, and in Iraq in 2003, the United States imposed regime change. "Our military interventions have nowhere produced a better peace," Freeman says. "Americans do not know how to conclude their wars."

The unexamined assumptions underlying our national security strategy lead American leaders to regard belligerence rather than persuasion as the key to peace. Smashing the enemy militarily, not resolving the issues that lead to conflict, is regarded as the desired objective. During the Cold War, the United States relied on military deterrence to contain the Soviet Union. With nuclear war at stake, freezing situations in place seemed a safer course than taking steps to adjust

to them, alleviate them or take advantage of them. Preserving the status quo took priority over diplomatic agility or answers.

The Cold War is over, yet Freeman says the United States has yet to adapt to the new conditions confronting it. It has discarded efforts to lead by example or persuasion, but its embrace of militarism has not made Americans safer nor advanced U.S. interests. To

the contrary, it has been disastrous.

Freeman's speech deserves reading both for its own sake and for its relevance to the debate over the nuclear agreement with Iran. Critics in Congress argue that the accord is not tough enough, but what measures would be tough enough to satisfy them and still win Iranian

American
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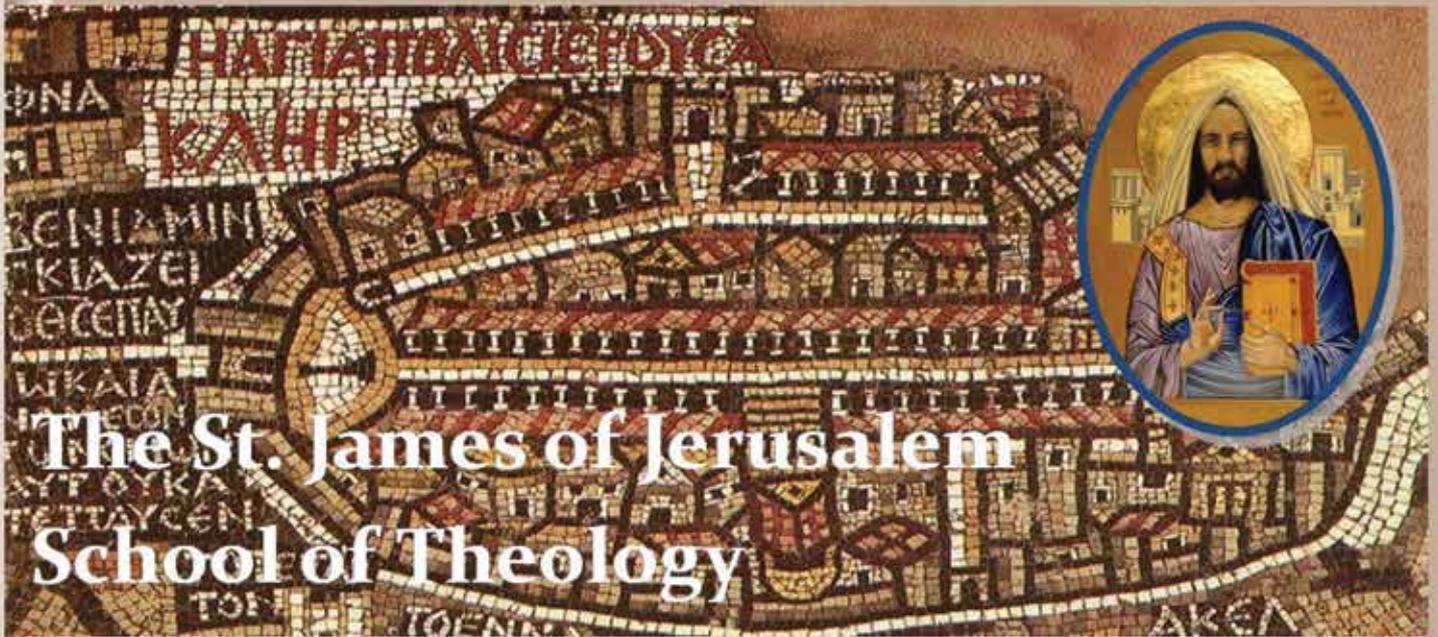
acceptance? A negotiation is an agreement, not an ultimatum, and that fact is what seems to frustrate them. We have not pulverized our enemy; therefore the agreement must be inadequate.

Listening to the discussion, one might think we are all militant amnesiacs. Americans should keep in mind that Iran is not a threat to the United States and its threat to Israel has been exaggerated, that the extent of Iran's nuclear program has been consistently overstated by our politicians and that any addition to the world's nuclear club is undesirable. But a situation in which states with nuclear weapons make no attempt to get rid of their own weapons while denying them to others is ultimately unsustainable.

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



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Life Cycles

Understanding the connections between the land and the body

BY MARC BARNES

Our painful attempts to live a fulfilling sexual existence could be helped by a consideration of the world of agriculture. This idea is hardly novel, and it owes much to that fine essay by Wendell Berry, “The Body and the Earth,” but I think we have yet to tease out the essential connections uniting the body and the land.

Sexuality and the land both have a life of their own. The cycles of the land, determined by soil, weather and biology, exist quite apart from the decisions of the farmer. Nor do we control the cycles of sexuality, which are governed by desire, fertility and menstruation. The land embodies a particular geography, forcing the farmer to work creatively with hill, creek and grove. Sexuality has its own geography too; it determines our shape, breast, beard and hip. It is ours, and not ours. Puberty, so amusing to adults who have forgotten its embarrassment, is a painful recognition of this fact, that there is within me a life that “goes on without me”—and gives me pimples. This is the “otherness” of both sexuality and the land. It is that which presents itself as primordially given.

The otherness of the land is now being greeted with enthusiasm by organic farmers and advocates of permaculture, a system of farming that seeks to work “with, rather than against, nature” (Bill Mollison). A new breed of philosophical farmer is interested in the harmonious and sustainable use of the land as a rebuttal to industrialized farm systems. The otherness of sexuality, on the other hand, remains a source of suspicion. The moralizing religious person and the secular feminist are in agreement here. Both see the otherness of sexuality as encroaching on the person. The moralist sees sexuality as encroaching on the life of the spirit, a separate demand of the sinful flesh and an embarrassment to be repressed. The advocate of contraception and legalized abortion sees the body’s cycles and fertility as encroaching on the life of work and fulfillment, a separate demand of biology and an inconvenience to be repressed. The former advocates fasting, mortification and prayer, the latter—ethinyl estradiol. Both shudder in the face of a force within us that goes on without us, quite without permission, a life that belongs to us, and yet, terrible thought, we belong to it.

MARC BARNES is the author of the blog *Bad Catholic*, at *Patheos.com*, and president of the *Harmonium Project*, a nonprofit focused on achieving urban revitalization through the restoration of the arts.

This is why the sexual revolution, far from ushering in an age of freedom, inaugurated an age of control. Control is our method of making that which has its own life absolutely ours, stripped of all otherness. This is obvious in reference to the state: the totalitarian state controls its subjects, stripping from them the life that goes on apart from the state by implementing instruments of power—secret police, spies, propaganda. So the modern sexual existence implements techniques of power—pornography, menstrual suppression, abortion, surgery—to strip sexuality of its otherness and render it absolutely subject to our desires. And the logical tendency of sexual control really does aim towards this absolute. Trans-humanists dream of “the end of sex” and “the inevitable rise of the artificial womb” (to quote two recent headlines), pining for an absolute control over pregnancy. The more enthusiastic advocates of contraception look to a future of total fertility control, where, through implants and IUDs, women will be semi-sterile—fertile only when they choose to be. Here, everything that presents itself as given, as a possible surprise, is reconfigured so that it becomes the outcome of a willful decision. Every outcome can be traced to our rational choice. Nothing is given.

If this all sounds wonderfully progressive, we ought to recall that the average sexual life fits somewhere on a scale of “stressful” to “unendurably frustrating,” that many women appear to be less satisfied and happy after the sexual revolution than before (“The Paradox of Declining Female Happiness,” *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, American Economic Association), and that the price of trans-mutating our dominant relationship with our own sexuality has been, paradoxically, an increased dependence on structures of power to maintain this control.

The independence that contraception, sterilization and abortion give us from our own fertility is achieved by a simultaneous dependence upon pharmaceutical companies, surgeons and abortionists. The independence pornography gives our sexual arousal from actual encounters with another is achieved by an increased dependence on the pornography industry, on its stars, producers and slaves. The freedom the ever-growing system of gender theory gives us from binary sexual identities is bought at the price of a dependence on academics to define and distinguish the pansexual from the omnisexual, the nonsexual from the asexual, the biromantic or the two-spirited from the polyamorous and bisexual.



The freedom of divorce is a dependence on the legal system, and the independence surgery gives us from our bodies is simultaneously a dependence on surgeons—and the means to pay them. Every liberating innovation in the erotic sphere has brought with it a chain of increased dependence on the impersonal structures of power behind it. The will to power has made us powerless; and it is the poor, who cannot afford many of the expert services and technologies required to dominate our sexuality, who most suffer the consequences of a culture of sexual dependency.

Unsustainable Use as Disrespect

How, then, are we to live? With an eye on agriculture. For it would be absurd if the farmer took the same tack of stark dominion, saying: “This land that belongs to me has a life of its own. I will control that life, and thereby be the sole master of my property. I will no longer be a slave to its ecology. My power will be the sole source of its fruits.” No; it is obvious that the otherness of the land is precisely what enables the farmer to farm. The farmer places his seeds in the soil he did not create, under the sun he cannot command to shine. He uses what is given, and only because it is “already going

on” can he use it at all. His is a work of cooperation with the land, not sheer mastery over it. Even the most brutally technological agricultural practices rely, at base, on processes beyond the farmer’s control. Planting crops without rotating them, plowing without regard to the particulars of geography—these efforts abase the unique life of nature, forcing it to comply with the monochrome will of man. They are idiotic efforts that end in dust bowls, for it is the unique life of the land that enables us to use it in the first place. Unsustainable use does not respect the otherness of that which is used. It is a phenomenon of hypercontrol, one that denies the life that goes on apart from our power and desire.

So too, the unsustainable use of our sexuality is really the destruction of the grounds for our enjoyment of it in the first place. It is precisely the otherness of sexual arousal, for instance, that makes it enjoyable, the fact that the body responds to another without asking permission. This is the adventure, surprise and danger of erotic feeling; that it can neither be forced nor summoned up by the sheer power of choice, but comes as a blessing and a gift. The indulgence of pornography and masturbation makes erotic feeling and sexual pleasure the outcome of our willful decision. It is al-

ways chosen, done to oneself, administered in a controlled time and place, with total power over its indulgence, actively opposed to the other-orientated nature of sexuality. With the advent of Internet pornography, our power to control attains a new height—we sit before an infinite array of possible stimuli. A real person cannot compete with pornography, not because he lacks this or that arousing trait, but because a real person is an *other*, a unique private life. A real person checks our growing desire for control by asserting, like the land, a unique life of his or her own.

Our sexuality cannot sustain being reduced to our total control any more than the soil can sustain a single high-yield crop. More and more evidence points to the conclusion that addiction and erectile dysfunction, not some wild freedom, are the fruits of male pornography use. Pornography becomes boring, pleasure decreases and the capacity for sexual activity is diminished, for we have destroyed the very means by which pornography was pleasurable in the first place—responding powerfully to something other than ourselves.

Sustainable Use as Cooperation

No matter how much a farmer may wish to grow a single crop, he knows that the soil will be harmed by it, and the very possibility of future growth will be ruined, so he plants in harmony with the life that goes on without him, rotating his crops. He does not see the land as a mere extension of his will, but as embodying a life of its own.

So too, a sustainable sexual existence respects the otherness of sexuality. It is not merely an extension of our power. It goes on without us, intimately bound up with other people, with the given—the body we did not ask for, the kiss we do not deserve, the child we cannot will into or out of being. Control (from *contra*, “against”) opposes the otherness of what is used, and thus cannot be the foundation for a happy sexual existence, which is a phenomenon of otherness. A new method is needed, one of cooperation and harmony.

To operate in harmony with our sexuality is not to succumb to its unique life. Yielding to every sexual drive is simply another way of destroying the otherness of sexuality. If by rigid control we destroy the otherness of sexuality and make it synonymous with our own power by succumbing to every sexual feeling and drive, we make ourselves synonymous with our sexuality. In both cases, diversity is reduced to identity, and the possibility of harmony is destroyed by the pretense that, really, there is only one note playing. Instead of a marriage of body and soul, in which the partners celebrate a real unity without abasing their autonomy,

we advocate on the one hand an angelism, in which the spirit of man rules the body as a tyrant rules a rebel, and on the other a bestialism, in which the life of the body crushes the freedom of the soul.

What is needed is a sustainable attitude toward sexuality that respects its otherness without merely succumbing to it. If our body presents itself as a difficulty, our impulse should not be one of power, the eradication of that difficulty, but a cooperation with the body along with its difficulties, that we might sustain and not destroy. It is not by accident that Pope Francis, in his encyclical “*Laudato Si*,” connected sexuality and the land, arguing that “thinking that we enjoy absolute power over

our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology” (No. 155).

Sexuality and Ecosystem

A further point may be made here. There is an intimate connection between the fact that something is other to us and that it is embedded in an ecosystem. An ecosystem is the complex network of an organism in relation to its environment. Taken in a broader sense, we consider a thing as embedded in an ecosystem when we contemplate the multitude of relations that make it up. This consideration is at the same time a recognition of the otherness of the thing. How clear this is in our encounters with other people! What makes our friend stand out as “his own” or “her own” more than contemplating his multitude of relations, that she grew up under the eye of a particular father, that his grandmother means the world to him, that she struggles to relate to her sister, that he mourns the death of his brother? Precisely by seeing a person as part of an ecosystem that exceeds our knowledge, as a center of a history and a narrative made up of relations that will never be ours, we begin to see him as “other” to us.

So too with the land. The whole work of ecology is to mark out the web of relations in which all things are embedded, especially those relations that exceed our power and particular ends. The fish is not just our food—it is the bear’s and the eagle’s; it is a filter of water and itself a feeder, supplying this tribe with a ritual and that city with food. To respect a thing in accordance with its multitude of relations, those known and unknown, is to respect a thing as other, with a life of its own—an existence that affects and is affected quite apart from our designs. All unsustainable use, then, disregards a thing as existing in relation to other things.

The unsustainable use of our sexuality is really the destruction of the grounds for our enjoyment of it in the first place.

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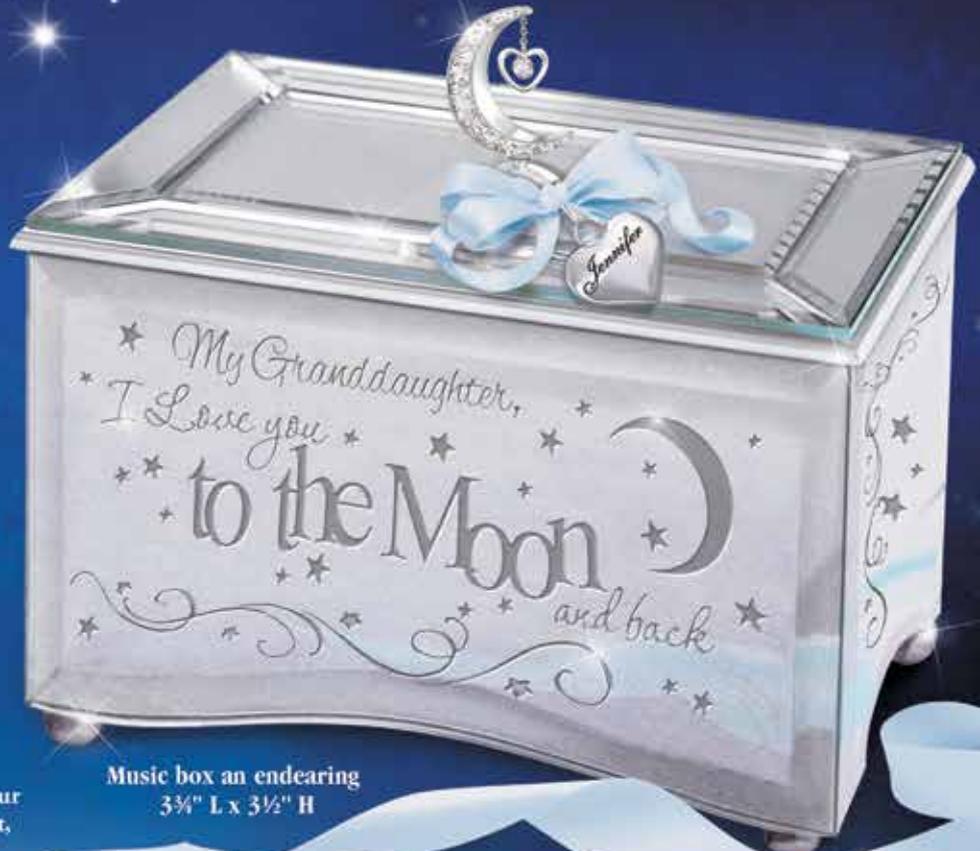
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We are shocked to learn that condoms, by reducing female exposure to the prostaglandins contained in male semen, may reduce the bonding effect of sexual intercourse (“Does semen have antidepressant properties?” Archives of Sexual Behavior); but this is only because we deny that sexuality is embedded in a relationship with human bonding as much as with human pleasure and procreation. We resist any studies that posit a link between oral contraceptives and blood-clotting, but this is only because we do not consider sexuality ecologically, fundamentally related to a total system, embracing the cardiovascular system as much as the mammary glands. Instead, the scope and breadth of sexuality is limited to the end we most desire to control—our fertility. That oral contraceptives have been shown to alter a woman’s attraction to “genetically compatible” men (“The Scent of Genetic Compatibility,” Ethology), that, when using hormonal contraception, women in relationships “reported significantly lower levels of intrasexual competition” (“Hormonal contraceptive use lowers female intrasexual competition in pair-bonded women,” Evolution and Human Behavior)—these strange and fascinating connections should be no surprise to one who strives for sustainability, taking sexuality as it offers itself, embedded in a multitude of relations that “go on without us.”

I do not mean to limit this anti-ecological phenomenon to our use of contraception, though it is easier to point out

because studies have been exploding around that topic for several years. It is present in pornography, which tends to reduce our sexual existence to enjoying only the comfort and pleasure of the sexual drive. It is present in divorce, whose ecological relations to economy, culture and child psychology are still being drawn out. It is present in abortion, hook-up culture and artificial reproductive technologies. Should we be offended that our sexual life exceeds our direct control by branching out into diverse relations, those known and unknown? No more than the farmer should be offended that the land is embedded in a web of relations, which it is his task to learn and sustain, not merely for the good of the land, but for his own good and success as a farmer.

To live in harmony with our sexuality, as opposed to using sexuality for ends that limit, control and deny its total reality, is simply to live a more holistic, integrated existence. The project of sustainability is difficult, precisely because it requires a deep understanding of what we use, an attitude of care and respect toward its unique life, and a willingness to deny ourselves and our immediate desires in favor of a greater good—the total integration of our sexuality with our person. But a joy rises precisely amid this difficulty, because just as democratic harmony puts an end to any temptation toward control and mastery in the state, so the harmony of the person with his or her sexual existence inaugurates a season of personal freedom and the end of mere control. ▲

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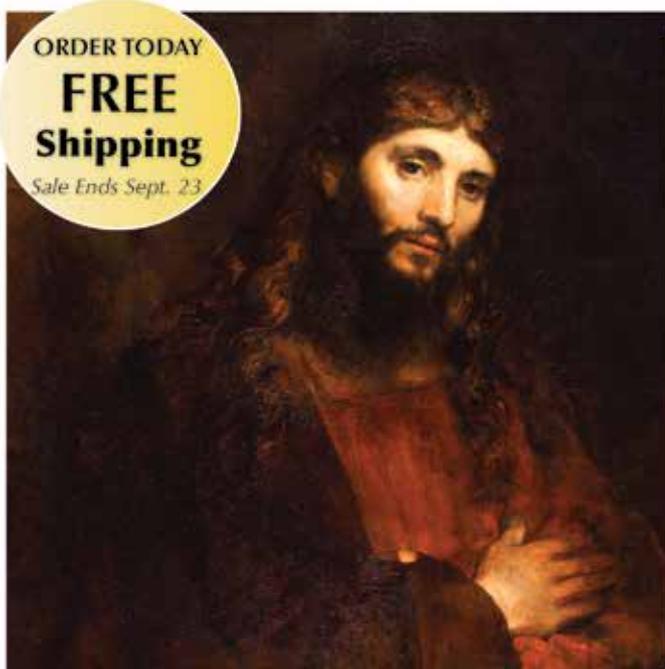
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Surviving in America

Race, assimilation and 19th-century Catholic immigrants

BY TOM DEIGNAN

In a New York Times Op-Ed late last year, the political science professor Zoltan L. Hajnal argued that President Obama's executive actions on immigration might not actually give Democrats the political boost many pundits predicted they would. In fact, Prof. Hajnal—co-author of a new book titled *White Backlash: Immigration, Race and American Politics*—argued that Democratic support for immigrants was “for many whites...a powerful motivation to vote Republican.”

History actually suggests that neither conventional political wisdom nor Prof. Hajnal may be quite right. Authors such as Jonathan Reider and Samuel G. Freedman have argued that immigrants and their children do indeed lean conservative, but only after several generations, mainly because, for the first time in their lives (as Freedman put it in *The Inheritance: How Three Families Moved from Roosevelt to Reagan and Beyond*), these families finally “had something to conserve.”

At a time of heated debate over immigration and assimilation, it is curious how few observers look to past American struggles with these topics. Consider another recent book, by Aviva Chomsky, titled *Undocumented*. Chomsky makes the academically fashionable case that immigration only recently “became” illegal because of anti-immigrant sentiments.

Readers could be excused for believing nativism is a relatively new phenomenon, since Chomsky barely mentions earlier immigrant experiences in the United States, documented or otherwise.

But if history matters at all, then the experiences of 19th-century immigrants certainly deserve more attention, given the profound impact they, their children and grandchildren—the “unmeltable ethnics,” in Michael Novak's memorable phrase—had on American urban life. Much attention has been paid to whether or not 21st-century immigrants are

assimilating swiftly enough. And yet, there has been precious little substantive analysis of how—or even if—the offspring of 19th- and 20th-century immigrants have properly or fully assimilated.

Other than ignoring them completely, the dominant trend among historians when it comes to 19th-century European immigrants—particularly Catholics—is to note that they strove to “become” white. They were first marginalized, the



PROMISED LAND. New immigrants in line at Ellis Island in 1910.

argument goes, but in “choosing” or “fighting” to obtain “white privilege,” Italians, Irish, Poles and other ethnic Catholics went on to exacerbate America's terrible racial problems.

This is a far-too-narrow reading of complex issues that continue to bewilder pundits and shape politics and culture in the 21st century.

Race and Politics

What about class and religion? What about the travails of immigration and the anxieties of assimilation? We ignore these broader topics at our own peril. The United States currently is absorbing its largest waves of immigrants in a century, an influx unprecedented in its diversity. Nearly 20 nations

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THE HEART OF TEXAS. Migrants sit at the Sacred Heart Catholic Church temporary shelter in McAllen, Tex.

have sent more than 500,000 immigrants to the United States in recent years, including heavyweights like Mexico (11 million) and China (2.1 million), to go along with India, El Salvador (both over one million), Guatemala and the Dominican Republic (each nearly one million). If we fail to acknowledge the past's complex interplay of race and class, religion and assimilation, then we run the risk of repeating the same mistakes—or making new, more perilous ones.

Consider a much-praised new book, *All Eyes Are Upon Us: Race and Politics from Boston to Brooklyn, The Conflicted Soul of the Northeast*, by Jason Sokol, a professor at the University of New Hampshire. Prof. Sokol focuses on race relations in post-World-War-II Brooklyn, Massachusetts and Connecticut—from Jackie Robinson's breakthrough right up to the trailblazing elections of Governor Deval Patrick of Massachusetts and President Obama.

Though he compares racial conflict in the North and South, Mr. Sokol never really analyzes the radically different ways both regions evolved. His focus is on the latter half of the 20th-century, yet there is no way to understand the post-war urban Northeast without exploring the immigration patterns as well as the class and religious conflicts that created, say, the post-war Brooklyn, or Boston, that embraced (or rejected) Jackie Robinson.

The Church and the Machine

In the mid-19th century, as immigrants poured into America already teetering on the edge of a civil war, it was the northern Democratic Party that embraced the newcomers. Urban Democratic machines were corrupt and aligned with southern slave owners. Nevertheless, in the large Northern cities, they—along with an activist and rapidly-expanding Catholic Church—also gave desperate, starving people access to some kind of social power. As Terry Golway, the his-

torian of Tammany Hall, writes in *Machine Made*, Northern political machines “achieved their rarefied status in politics not by slapping backs and pouring pints but by devoting themselves to the unglamorous work of forging relationships, listening to constituents and providing services.”

On the other side of the aisle was the newly formed Republican Party, a broad, diverse coalition of abolitionists and urban reformers, yes, but also ex-Whigs and (more importantly for this discussion) anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic

nativists, including former members of the infamous Know-Nothing party.

The New York City Draft Riots of 1863—a horrific spasm of violence initiated by anti-war immigrants and laborers, which left scores of African Americans dead and compelled many others to leave the city—only hardened the views of certain urban reformers. They believed that ethnic working class Catholics could never be properly assimilated, much less converted to progressive American views.

When, a decade later, blood again ran in the streets of New York following deadly clashes between Catholics and Protestants that became known as “The Orange Riots,” wealthy Republicans including diarist George Templeton Strong knew whom to blame: the “base and brutal Celts.” Similar views were reflected in the wildly popular political cartoons of Thomas Nast, who exposed corruption and (sometimes) spoke out for African American rights but whose vile, nativist, anti-Catholic cartoons might well be at home in the pages of Charlie Hebdo—minus the irony and satire. In short, first- and second-generation Catholics viewed their political opponents as upper-class hypocrites, happy to congratulate themselves for their racial high-mindedness, all the while dismissing working-class ethnic minorities as disloyal papists or violent, backward-thinking drunkards.

Too many histories ignore these complex but powerful conflicts, even though they endured well into the 20th century. Subsequent progressive crusades—Prohibition, exposing the political machines—were typically shot through with barely contained class, ethnic and religious hatred. This hatred culminated in the 1920s, with Al Smith's doomed presidential campaign and the rise of the anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant (as well as racist) Ku Klux Klan, which grew to two million strong.

Catholic Racism

Let us be clear: In a better world, marginalized white Catholics might have made common cause with the descendants of slaves, who consistently saw their human rights violated in the most horrifying ways. But America's original sin of racism had many consequences; realistic hope that those clustered at the lower end of the North's economic ladder would build effective coalitions was one of them. Class tensions and labor competition intensified racial conflict, but there is no need to minimize the racism of white immigrants and their children. Yet, as John T. McGreevy, professor of history at the University of Notre Dame, wrote in *Parish Boundaries*, there also is some value to "understand[ing] Catholic racism, not simply catalog[ing] it."

Furthermore, the role of the Roman Catholic Church in helping immigrants and their children emerge from abject poverty is easy to underestimate and even easier to sneer at, especially for those who (even today) decry what they view as the church's illiberal, even reactionary, doctrines. But theology was not all that was on the minds of struggling, big-city Catholics. Food and shelter, along with salvation, were available in precious quantities, from the cradle to the grave, in working class parishes invariably described (by Sokol and many others) as "insular." What may seem pejorative to some may be complimentary (or at least necessary) to those who actually lived there. As Gerald Gamm noted in *Urban Exodus*, Catholics were particularly bound to (and, inevitably, defensive of) their turf, since parish lines were set and fixed in ways different from, say, synagogues, which could more easily follow their congregants if they chose to move. The Chicago novels of James T. Farrell and the cuddly Bing Crosby priest movies of the 1940s do not have much in common, but what they do depict is an "insular" Catholic world unto itself. This is, for better or worse, what made it possible to survive in America, from the Irish Famine through The Great Depression.

Postwar America

Which brings us to the end of World War II, when it is generally believed these "old world" values and conflicts were on the decline. It cannot be denied that the post-war years were a golden age, in many ways, for urban Catholics. Nevertheless, readers looking to the bestseller lists in 1949 would see *Catholic Power and American Freedom*, a respectable screed against papist influences in the United States. The book's author, Paul Blanshard, was a writer for the

(progressive) magazine *The Nation* and served as a commissioner for (Republican, anti-machine) New York City mayor Fiorello LaGuardia.

That same year, Eleanor Roosevelt—another progressive, but a Democrat, thus foreshadowing the seismic political shifts of the 1960s—dove into a fierce debate over federal aid for parochial schools, leading to charges that the former first lady was "anti-Catholic." Finally, Tammany Hall Irish immigrant William O'Dwyer ran for mayor, defeating an aristocratic fellow named Augustus Newbold Morris, a machine-bashing Groton School and Yale graduate whose family had been in New York since the Colonial era.

It was into this still-simmering cauldron of ethnic, religious and class tension that the Brooklyn Dodgers and their fans welcomed Jack Roosevelt Robinson. Or not.

"[There] was a lot of bigotry among...the Irish, the Italians, the Swedes.... It was a lot of union guys saying 'Sure, first they get into baseball, and then

they'll be taking my job,'" Sokol, in *All Eyes Are Upon Us*, quotes one Brooklyn native saying. Another, identified as an "Irish American," adds: "The Irish and Italians...were upset when Robinson came to the Dodgers. They were outraged."

As disturbing as these quotes are, they also beg to be interpreted for what they might reveal about class, labor and ethnicity. Right up to the 1990s, Sokol notes, "white Catholics" were reliable voters for Rudolph Giuliani, a white conservative, rather than David Dinkins, a Democrat and an African American.

Yet Prof. Sokol—and many others—never really wrestle with the roles class, ethnicity and religion might have also played in these voters' political decisions. Alternatively, consider a disturbing detail from *Common Ground*, J. Anthony Lukas's masterful look at South Boston—graffiti which reads: "Gays Suck. Liberals Suck. Brits Suck. N***ers Suck."

Can such ugly sentiments be defended? Of course not. Yet to pretend such repugnant sentiments do not reflect a vast range of issues beyond race is not only to be willfully ignorant but might well contribute to a hardening of these feelings.

Historical Amnesia

At one point, Dr. Sokol contrasts northern and southern views of history: "The past was an encumbrance to unload.... Agony and anguish were the names for the southerner's ordeal." But in the Northeast, "the past...was something to affirm." That might seem true for a descendant of, say, John

In a better world, marginalized white Catholics might have made common cause with the descendants of slaves.

Winthrop, whose 1630 sermon to fellow Puritans lends Mr. Sokol's book its title. But for the children and grandchildren of Catholic immigrants, the past was decidedly more hard-scabble.

This was so much the case that these histories could be called upon for distasteful reasons. Prof. Sokol quotes one Massachusetts voter who says: "My parents came here from Europe with nine children. I worked days, went to school at night...but [Edward Brooke voters] don't work like we did. They want everything handed to them."

White ethnic Catholics are certainly guilty of their own hypocrisies. Many pundits and voters with decidedly eth-



"Among the Immigrants—Getting on the Train at St. John's Park," by Stanley Fox, c. 1850

nic names want, inexplicably, to slam the doors on today's immigrants. Others have convinced themselves their ancestors made it in America without "handouts," forgetting those mighty charitable organizations, Tammany Hall and the Catholic Church. Even today, some Catholics speak of Muslim immigrants in language shockingly similar to that which was used against their own "disloyal" ancestors.

Why the selective memory, the historical amnesia, on the part of both white ethnic Catholics and historians? There are no simple answers. Therefore, too many people choose to avoid the questions entirely. This only prevents us from fully exploring the postwar white Catholic experience—including its fascinating diversity, from Senator Joseph McCarthy to Mario Cuomo to the Berrigan brothers to Congressman Vito Marcantonio.

The 21st Century

All of this raises the question: Why is any of this important in the 21st Century? There are at least two reasons. First, the illiberal/reactionary white ethnic Catholic has remained a remarkably durable—albeit two-dimensional—archetype.

In the classic film "Blackboard Jungle" (1955), high school hooligan Artie West (identified by hero teacher Glenn Ford as "Irish American") is a racist psycho who wreaks havoc on

the very concept of the melting pot. The film's conflict is not resolved until an American flag is used to physically disarm the forces of reaction. This might seem a tad heavy-handed, though it stunningly foreshadowed (in reverse) the Pulitzer Prize winning photograph "Soiling Old Glory" from 1976, when opponents of busing students as a way to integrate schools racially attacked an African-American person with a flag. Later films, including "Saturday Night Fever" (1977), "Do the Right Thing" (1989) and "Summer of Sam" (1997), are all populated by familiar, backward-thinking, "insular" Italian Catholic goons.

And in 2015, the august pages of *The New York Review of Books* praised Atticus Lish's new novel *Preparations for the Next Life* as "astounding" and "transcendent." In the book, a vulnerable Chinese immigrant and a troubled Iraq war veteran are menaced by an Irish union carpenter and his seething son. For the record, recent gorgeous novels by Matthew Thomas (*We Are Not Ourselves*) and Alice McDermott (*After This*, among others), render these folks with decidedly more complexity. But too often working-class white ethnics are presented not so differently than they were in the days of Thomas Nast.

Meanwhile, the issues of race and assimilation remain front and center in urban America. Consider the ongoing tensions between police and minority communities. Observers—whether radical protesters or sober analysts—generally acknowledge two things: the persistence of police brutality and the changing demographics of urban police departments. This became tragically evident when two Brooklyn police officers—one Hispanic, the other the son of Chinese immigrants—were assassinated in December 2014 in the wake of high-profile police brutality allegations.

To some, the changing face of police officers will eventually help to heal the cop-community problem. "I am all but certain the Asians, Latinos, blacks and other so-called minorities on the force vote and think differently, in significant social ways, from the Irish and Italian cops at the forefront of the union," Bedford-Stuyvesant native and Brooklyn College teacher Ron Howell wrote in a *New York Daily News* op-ed article late last year. That's one possibility.

Another possibility is that there is—and has always been—a lot more to urban conflict and politics than skin color. Time will tell how new immigrants and their children—finally with something to conserve, living in the same residential enclaves that produced earlier generations of white Catholic police officers—balance their old-world traditions with the new-world realities of the 21st-century.

But one thing is for certain: Until we establish the far-reaching consequences of how previous generations of immigrants "melted" (or did not), it is going to be difficult to forthrightly analyze the assimilation of today's immigrants and their children. ▲

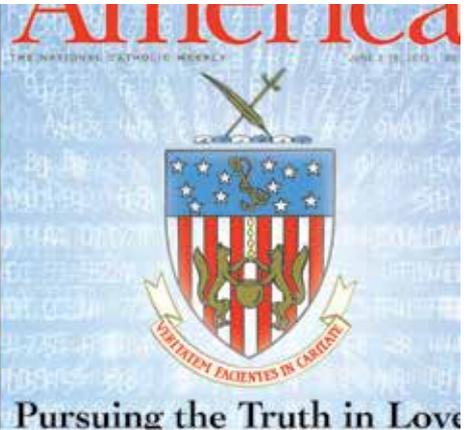
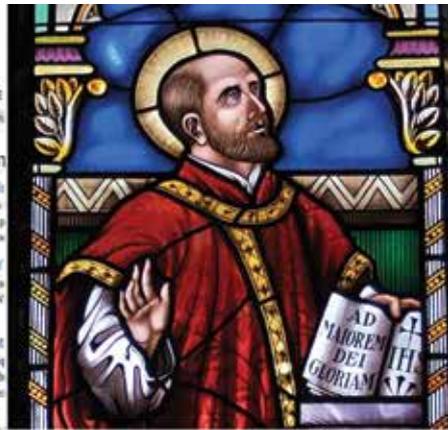


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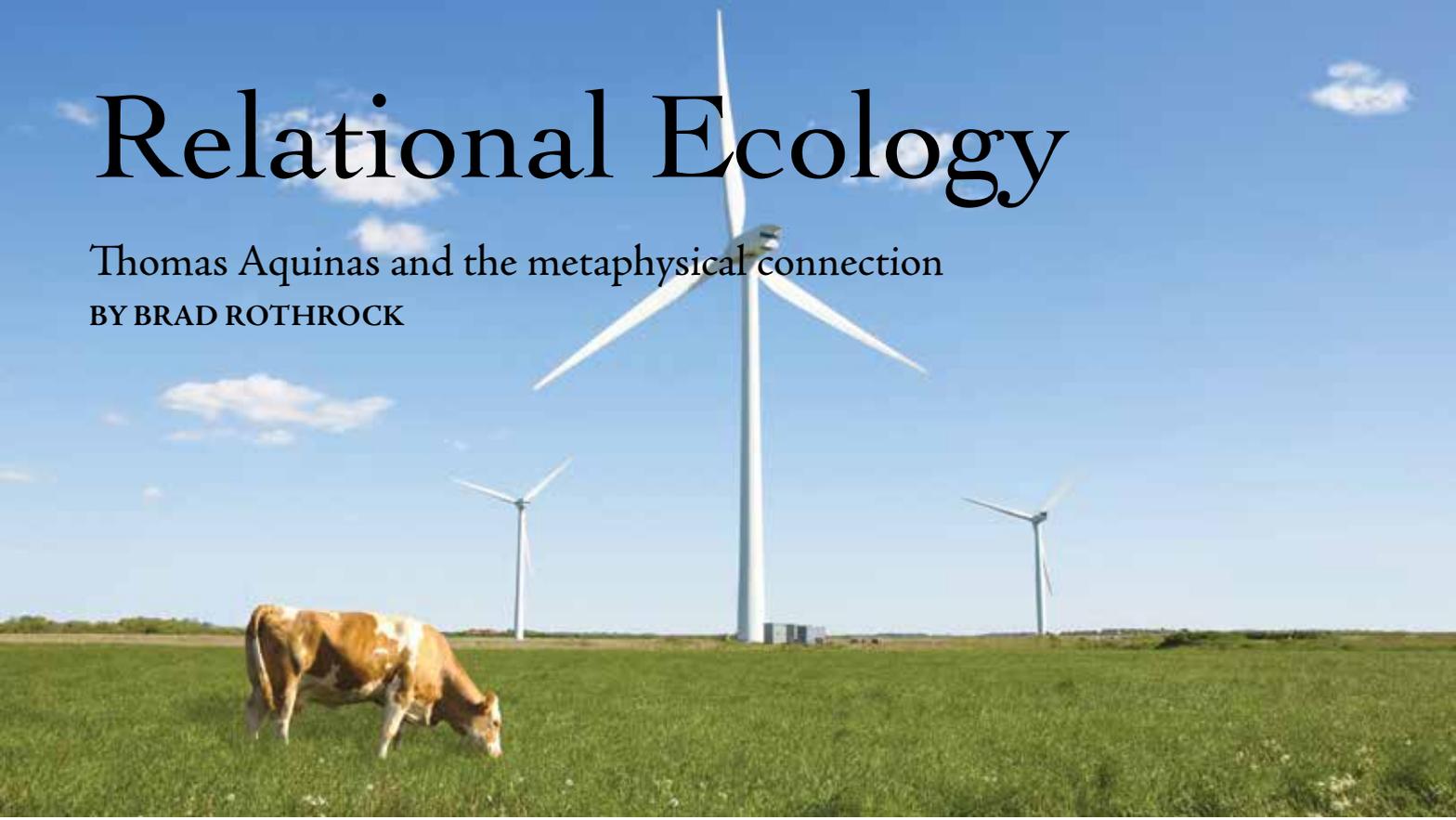
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Relational Ecology

Thomas Aquinas and the metaphysical connection

BY BRAD ROTHROCK



What do a cow, a human being and the ozone layer have in common? What sounds like the opening of a joke is actually quite serious. Our ability, or lack thereof, to understand and envision the interconnection of all creation bears directly on the kinds of decisions the global community makes about the environment. Just as environmental issues have increasingly become important topics in the political and cultural arenas of the government and the media, so too are they moving to the center of discussion and reflection in the life of the church. As Pope Francis states in his encyclical “*Laudato Si*,” “I urgently appeal...for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all” (No. 14). Indeed, the wisdom of our faith tradition has much to offer in the way of reflection on creation.

Something Rather Than Nothing

There is a related, if nevertheless distinctive, kind of thinking, however, that understands the threads of commonality running through the universe in a way that can appeal to those of varying faith and philosophical traditions and, perhaps, to all people of goodwill. I am speaking of metaphysics, understood here as the exploration of existence and the sufficient reasons for why there is something rather than

nothing. With its ability to draft a holistic vision—wherein all of the many different kinds of beings we experience in our world can still be considered similar by virtue of having sprung forth from one common source of existence—metaphysics contributes a perspective that incorporates and yet transcends the empirical or scientific bases for environmental care and protection. While science can locate the measurable similarity among differences between various forms of life and matter as well as the natural effects of such relations, metaphysics locates the spiritual or immeasurable similarity among differences in all that exists and as such is able to reflect on the immaterial or spiritual effects of these relations. Metaphysical thought provides the opportunity to ask a host of questions about ecological justice that scientific exploration and thought alone cannot surface, questions to which I will return below. In fact, I fear that without some kind of metaphysical language and perspective we will miss out on the fullness of the spiritual dimension of our relationship with and in the environment.

While metaphysics in its more academic form can be rather complex and is not without its critics, by creatively drawing on some basic concepts from the work of St. Thomas Aquinas it is possible to give a brief sketch that illuminates some of the contributions metaphysics can make to environmental thought and action, while at the same time bracketing its more intricate nuances and philosophically based controversies. The brief sketch that follows is much indebted to the work of both W. Norris Clarke, S.J. (1915–2008), and Bernard Lonergan, S.J. (1904–84). Investigating

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the writings of either of these figures will satisfy those who might be interested in further exploring the complexity, controversy and exciting possibilities of metaphysics.

What or Who is God?

St. Thomas Aquinas understands the source of all existence as that which is intended by the word *God*. Reflecting on the data available from the world of our experience, it is evident that nothing in this world is the source of its own existence. An individual human being, for instance, was born from a mother, who in turn was born from her mother, born in turn from her mother and on and on back to some original form of life. Similarly, all other things that we can point to or measure in our world did not make themselves come into existence—that is, they did not create themselves in the technical sense of the term (although there may be new combinations of things made from pre-existing materials, like clothing made from cotton or cars made from metals, for example). Ultimately, from what we know now, everything in our universe can be traced back to the Big Bang, before which existed the raw materials and laws that allowed for the explosive unfolding of time and space.

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**Existence is something
received and
participated in, not self-
initiated or chosen.
But from where or from
whom does creation
receive its existence?**

But if it is true that nothing in our universe created itself, how do we account for the existence of the raw materials and the laws that were necessary for the Big Bang? We can reasonably say that somewhere along the line, and sustaining that line all the way through and into the present moment, is the creator, ground and sustainer of all existence. Without such a unique, single, and originating creator of existence there would be nothing but a chain of causes without a cause, that is, the creator of existence would itself have to have a creator, but then that creator would have to have a creator, and that creator a creator and on and on. If this were the case, there would be no actual existence, just a chain of causes without any effects.

Further, as the cause or creator of all existence, God is not a "part" of the universe. This does not mean that God is not somehow present *to* and *in* creation but that logically God's presence is not as one of God's own creations. By analogy, we can think of an artist who, as the origin and cause of a piece of artwork (which is produced from pre-existent materials), is not a part of that work but is nevertheless somehow present *to* and *in* that work, whether this presence is reflected through the ideas that are manifested in the final piece of art or even through particular brush strokes or other such marks. Likewise, God as creator is not subject to the same kind of existence as that which God creates. Indeed, God is not "subject" to anything. This is to some extent what we mean when we say that God is spirit; because God is the creator of everything, God is not confined or limited in any way, whether by matter, by physical laws, by language, by symbol or by anything else. God is not just like us except bigger, stronger and better. Rather, God is the unlimited, uncaused and uncreated creator, the reason for the existence of anything and everything that we can know, experience, define, measure, imagine, feel, think, dream, produce, destroy and on and on.

Related Reflections of the Source

Yet even though the creator is not the creature, as implied in the example of the artist above, effects always somehow reflect or resemble their cause, because the cause is always somehow present *to* and *in* the effects. As another example, consider parents and their child. The parents are somehow present *to* and *in* their child, and not just biologically or materially. This is not the kind of cause and effect by which one thing simply reacts to another, like one billiard ball striking another and causing it to move. Rather, it is the kind that produces something, as is the case with artists or parents. Thus, we can say that creatures somehow resemble or reflect the creator. It is

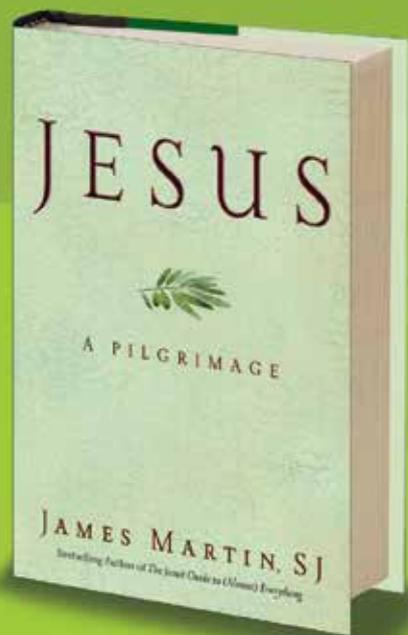
this resemblance that unites everything in the world of our experience. This resemblance or image that all creation bears of God accounts for the unity of all things as a universe.

This unity remains, even though everything is an image of God in its own distinct way. Everything that “is” is actively in existence, is in the *act* of existing, of *being* present, of *standing* out from nothingness. Existence is a verb, a dynamic activity in which we and all things that “are” participate. We participate in existence precisely because nothing in the world of our experience is the source of its own or anything else’s existence. Instead, it is reasonable to say that the existence of the many kinds of created beings we experience is “donated” or “given” to them. Existence is something received and participated in, not self-initiated or chosen. But from where or from whom does creation receive its existence? Creation receives its existence, rather obviously, from the very source, cause or origin we have been talking about all along, that is, God. God, in this sense, is the unlimited source and fullness of existence who generously gives, donates or creates our limited, different ways of existing. The existence of creation is limited because we creatures always exist *as* something, as some *kind* of thing: a cow, or a human being or the ozone layer, for instance. We are not pure, unlimited existence itself. This is what we mean when we say that nothing in the

world of our experience is or can be the source of its own or anything else’s existence. Rather, we creatures are graciously given a limited kind of existence as a participation in the unlimited act of existence itself, and as St. Thomas Aquinas famously says of the latter in the *Summa Theologiae*, “and this we call God.” By the very act of existing, everything in creation similarly bears the image of God, who can also be called the act of existence itself, and it is this similarity that forms the ground of our unity.

The Consequences

Even though limited creatures exist in a variety of ways, all of us—from the humble cow, to the amazing human being, to the ozone layer—are connected in a relationship grounded by our having sprung forth from the very life of God, in and through whom we receive and share in our existence as creatures. Everything that “is” calls out or signals this relationship by its very presence and tells us something of itself and of God by its way of existing. The uniqueness of the human way of existing—that is, human *being*—is that we can consciously and intelligently pick up these signals (and here I understand the human body, emotions, reason and spirit as interdependently caught up in our particular kind of intelligence). We can interpret these signals as meaningful, as



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telling us something of the purpose and value of creation, including ourselves, as God intended it.

Of course this ability is not infallible. We can, as we do so often, misinterpret or warp the meaning of things, reading our own biases and prejudices into existence. Our interpretations are always historically bound and conditioned by our unique perspectives based on our experience of things like gender, race, nationality, social status, wealth or poverty and so on. This does not mean we can never attain at least some kind of grasp on reality, what the philosopher Charles Taylor calls the “best available account.”

Indeed, the starting point for reflecting on the environment in the light of metaphysics begins with acknowledging both the limitations and the possibilities of arriving at the truth of our relationship with and in the environment. This tension between limit and transcendence can propel us to reflect further with questions like: Have we grasped the purpose and value of creation as a web of relationships that share in an utter poverty, an utter dependence on the transcendent for their very existence? Have we reduced the purpose and value of existence to entirely human terms, to calculating the meaningfulness of creation according to how it might profit us? If everything is united, even in the midst of a wonderful diversity, what does this say about our treatment of the environment? What might such unity mean for an overriding anthropocentrism that sees human beings as the center of all existence? Is there a certain moral responsi-

bility we can reasonably claim for our treatment of the environment and of nonhuman animals? Do not the environment and nonhuman animals image God and therefore bear a dignity analogous to such claims for human dignity?

I hope such questions begin to reveal the kind of judgments and decisions that are necessitated by a metaphysical exploration of the environment as well as possible structural and practical implications that might emerge. Moving from our experience of the world to an attempt to understand that experience always leads to some kind of judgment, to “Yes, this is true; everything is connected in a web of relationships,” or perhaps to “No, this isn’t reasonable; some other explanation is needed.” Either insight leads to some kind of decision, and acting on our decisions leads to progress or decline. When the potential consequences of such decisions involve the global community, however, we need to be especially careful about what we affirm or deny.

While Catholics also can and should look to sources of Christian revelation to support ecological justice, metaphysics is able to engage people across a range of faith and philosophical traditions. It offers an inspiring snapshot of the universe, providing a holistic image for understanding the universe’s interconnectedness. Such understanding can give rise to the desire to care compassionately for all things, imitating and reflecting the generous source of creation from which everything proceeds and on whom everything depends. 



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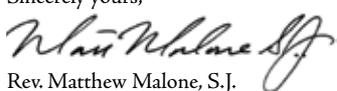
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Somewhere, a Unicorn

Missionary notes from the 17th century

BY EDWARD W. SCHMIDT

A book came my way a few months ago, a literally weighty tome of almost seven pounds, quarto sized, two and a half inches thick. The book is *The Codex Canadensis and the Writings of Louis Nicolas*, a beautiful, scholarly work with 555 numbered pages of text and illustrations. I found it through a Google news search with the keyword “Jesuit,” a search I often make when I first check news, email and The Jesuit Post at the start of a workday. I got on Amazon and placed my order, and a few days later I was leafing through the challenge, the mystery, the humor and the inspiration this book brought my way.

The *Codex Canadensis* is an album in the collection of the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, Okla. It comprises two maps and 79 plates, with drawings of native peoples, flora and fauna, and hand-made objects from Canada of the mid- to late 1600s along with commentary. Plates I and II show the royal mace and the crown royal of France. Each plate appears on the right hand page; the left translates the accompanying text.

After the plates, an English text gives a translation of the *Histoire Naturelle des Indes Occidentales*, a manuscript in the Bibliothèque de Paris that describes the people, natural phenomena and objects found in Canada in the late 1600s. A modern French version follows. Copious footnotes accompany these texts.

Before this old material, however, the book begins with a long scholarly introduction that lays out a mystery and an argument toward solving that mystery. The mystery is the authorship. No name appears as the author either of the *Codex* or of the *Natural History*; but Louis Nicolas was the author of an Algonquin grammar, and internal evidence suggests his authorship of the *Natural History* too. Then, though lacking direct proof but with heavy circumstantial evidence, the scholars suggest that Louis Nicolas was also the source of

the drawings in the *Codex*. And through the text and the commentary, a picture of life on this frontier emerges that is sometimes funny, sometimes gross, always informative and in a few places inspiring.

Louis Nicolas was a young French Jesuit filled with energy and zeal. Born in 1634, he entered the Society of Jesus 20



ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE CODEX CANADENSIS AND THE WRITINGS OF LOUIS NICOLAS

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years later. Ten years after that, in 1664, he arrived in Canada as a missionary. Hints in a number of places, though, suggest that he had made a first trip to Canada in 1661—crossing the Atlantic several times as a scholastic and thus setting a challenge for his peers of later centuries.

Not yet ordained when he arrived in Canada in 1664, he began studying native languages. A report to Rome described him as “profectus in litteris et in theologia parvus”—proficient in languages and weak in theology. Before pronouncing his final vows as a Jesuit in 1667, he spent much time among the native peoples for months at a time. In August of that year, he joined Claude Allouez, S.J., on a missionary trip to Lake Superior. As an eager observer of nature and of the human society he encountered, he was fascinated, judgmental and respectful. But for all his zeal, he was unmanageable and unable to settle down. He seems to have gotten involved in the fur trade with unhappy results. In the fall of 1669, Father Allouez would not let him return to Lake Superior; his replacement was Jacques Marquette, S.J. After further travels in eastern Canada and the area of today’s New York State and further controversies, Nicolas returned to France by 1675. He left the Society of Jesus in 1678, and his name does not appear in records after this. He may have continued life as a parish priest.

The English version of the *Natural History*, including the footnotes, fills 126 pages. Nicolas classifies the plants and animals in a prescientific, pre-Linnaeus way, categorizing according to size and usefulness to people, referring to ancients like Pliny and Aristotle and comparing trees and fish and birds with their counterparts in France. Along with commentary on trees and animals, he describes many facets of everyday life. He greatly admires some aspects of the American Indian culture. Just as hunting is the pursuit of “the nobility in the most illustrious and flourishing state in the world, under the blessed reign of Louis le Grand,” so too the American native men “devote themselves with a passion to war and hunting, which are the genuine and highest mark of the oldest nobility.” But there is a counterbalance. Because the threat of hunger creates a never-ending need for hunting, gathering and preservation, leisure time for refinement is lacking. It is the women’s job to smoke meat

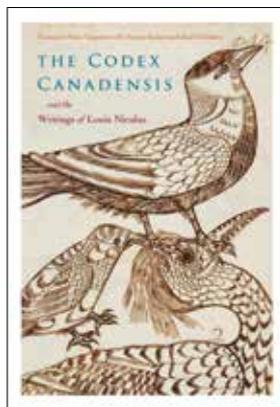
As an eager observer of nature and human society, Nicolas was fascinated, judgmental and respectful.

to preserve it for the winter, and they must work fast. After describing their looks, like the “Furies,” and the cabins full of animal hair and children covered with grime, he notes that a boy “soils himself on his mother’s knee, and she wipes him with her hand and continues with her work without bothering to wash her hands.” No time for niceties.

Goldfinches and Willow Trees

As a good storyteller, Louis Nicolas cannot pass up an amusing anecdote, sometimes stretching thin any relevance to the topic at

hand. After describing a red-headed American bird that has “some similarity to our canaries and our goldfinches,” he tells a story supported by “more than two or three thousand witnesses.” In 1676 at a certain monastery in France there was a male goldfinch in a cage; this caged bird had an enchanting song



and attracted a free male finch, which could not get into the cage: “These two birds kissed each other by touching their beaks. This love lasted three or four months until one of the monks...gave these two birds to his general. I do not know whether the two birds left each other afterward. My pen cannot express how remarkable I found this.” The scholarly introduction notes that for Nicolas an event like this was not trivial: “These goldfinches were important because of the similarity of their behaviour to that of human lovers. Nobody seems to have been troubled by the fact that the two birds were male!”

Another anecdote wanders farther still from relevance to scientific natural history, trivial to anyone other than its subject. Nicolas is discussing willow trees. They grow along riverbanks but are not plentiful, he notes. They are not cultivated, and the wood is not used, so “it is not as good as ours.” Since willows are not cultivated, “one never sees any that from a distance look like well-ordered rows of soldiers, like those that formerly frightened the unfortunate Marquis d’Ancre, who, knowing that he had powerful enemies at court, on seeing from a distance from his coach and thinking that they were men waiting for him to kill him, was so frightened that he did in his breeches something I will not say.” The marquis was real and had his reasons to fear, but this anecdote does not appear in his Wikipedia entry.

The Codex Canadensis and the Writings of Louis Nicolas was edited by François-Marc Gagnon and translated by Nancy Senior and Réal Ouellet, published by McGill-Queen’s University Press. The original documents are archived at Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, Okla.

And the marquis has little to do with Canadian willows. But Nicolas could not pass up a good story, and obviously neither could I.

Nicolas grows lyrical in describing bears and may have been the first to introduce polar bears to his readers. On folio 73, Nicolas tells of his receiving a gift of two bear cubs; through extreme punishments, he succeeded in taming them, to the amusement of neighbors: "They would play with dogs and small children, they would do a thousand amusing tricks, a hundred pretty jumps and kicks." (His Jesuit brothers at the residence at Sillery were not so amused.)

He tells of the young Frenchman who was so hungry that he ate a dog's liver, despite warnings that his skin would fall off. "His skin fell off several days later as he had been warned. He found that he had changed his skin like a snake. Americans have a long experience of this effect."

He mentions a weasel and offers scholarly Greek names; he then mentions an animal "of the same nature that Erasmus spoke of, and said that *fugiens, pessime pedit*." The Latin text has an unfortunate typo, but I leave this as a scholarly challenge.

He presented two chipmunks to "His Majesty, who is moved by the noble desire to learn and to see everything that is beautiful, curious and rare in nature" but could not get some flying squirrels to him. He also presented a pair of snowshoes to the dauphin.

Nicolas, known to be vain, writes with sarcastic contempt of the purposefully ignorant types who are so stubborn that they "insist there is no unicorn anywhere in the world." Such are the folk who "have never lost sight of their parish church tower, and who hardly know how to get to the Place Maubert or the Place Royale without asking the way." Nicolas is defending his drawing of the dead unicorn that he saw—he does not tell where or when—which fits the description by Monsieur Thévenot, following Lodovico Berthamano. So there! With the dismissive contempt of a Fox News or MSNBC commentator, he heaps his scorn on those untraveled, uneducated and unread unbelievers.

'Drunkards on Human Blood'

For all its sometimes strangeness and sometimes fun, the text is in places inspiring. The missionaries shared the rugged life of the people to whom they preached the Gospel. They shared the pain of paddling their canoes. They shared the cold and the wet, the dirt and the misery. Nicolas is not just telling a tale when describing the mosquitoes, "little tyrants" that are worse than those in France called "thieves of patience" and "drunkards on human blood." Here in Canada, "If someone is forced to stop for a single moment, these thieves of the greatest patience attack him so quickly...that there are very few people who can keep their patience. It is very difficult to drink, and it is even harder when the traveler

has to stop to answer the call of nature. If he suffers only a million bites he is fortunate, although it seems that his bottom is on fire, no matter what fly-chasers he carries." This is not an amusing anecdote. This is painful experience.

In a section on fish, he digresses to extol the strength of one group of native peoples: "These Indians are always exposed to all kinds of weather, like animals. They are hunters, fishermen, great navigators, brave warriors, indefatigable travelers, etc." He then notes how the missionaries experience this life:

One can judge from this what sufferings are endured by those who have the charity to follow them to teach them to know God, in travels of a thousand or twelve hundred leagues at once, coming or going with a paddle eternally in their hands like convicts, with bare feet on portages, loaded with baggage like porters, with snowshoes on their feet in the winter in the snow, pulling a sled bearing all the clothing, food, and everything necessary for saying Mass, exposed with no shelter or house to all kinds of weather, to rain, wind, shipwreck, cold, heat, snow, ice, hail, freezing weather, fog and frost so cold that often big pieces of ice form on the hair and the beard as well as on the eyelids and eyelashes and on the whole face; sleeping very uncomfortably still dressed and on the ground; and if amid all this misery one becomes ill, one is more miserable than a dog.

But Nicolas is not complaining. Elsewhere, after remarking about surviving the winter with boiled meat and broth as his only food and explaining that a child with open sores did the work of stirring the broth 20 times a day, he notes:

it is necessary to get used to living like this or else renounce the noblest calling on Earth, which is to preach Jesus Christ to these infidels who have no knowledge of Him. By the grace of God, one can adapt to this way of life so well that the only discouraging thing is not to have any of this well-prepared meat to eat or this good consommé to drink. That is the life that Jesuit missionaries and those who follow their example lead in this country.

In the end, it is about mission. Months of living on broth, or months of facing classrooms filled with sophomores. Carrying one's snowshoes or one's essays to correct. Portages to clear or retreats to preach; mosquitoes to swat or texts to edit. Good health or bad; wealth or poverty; honor or discredit; long life or short; the 17th-century Canada of the *Codex* and the *Histoire Naturelle* or 1,000 sites for mission today. The accidentals do not matter. The substance matters, the commitment, the faith, the trust. Yes, it is about mission. ■



Man of the People

Pope Francis believes in people power. He believes in the ability of ordinary people to bring about significant change in the world today.

He stated this clearly in an hour-long talk, entirely written by him, to the second World Meeting of Popular Movements at Santa Cruz, during his visit to Bolivia. Addressing representatives of thousands of movements, he declared that change is urgently needed in the world today and told them, “You are sowers of change!”

Then, in words that brought thunderous applause, he said: “The future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of great leaders, the great powers and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of peoples and in their ability to organize. It is in their hands, which can guide with humility and conviction this process of change.”

When the applause died down, he added, “I am with you!” This is typical of the man who as archbishop of Buenos Aires did not hesitate to give public backing to a nongovernmental organization engaged in combatting human trafficking. As pope he has relentlessly continued that effort, aided by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences, seeking to engage ever wider sectors of society within and outside the Catholic Church.

Francis has sought to encourage grassroots movements and organizations worldwide in their efforts to improve the lives of millions of people

who live in poverty and misery. For this reason he asked the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace to convene the first World Meeting of Popular Movements, and spoke at that gathering in the Vatican in October 2014. Then at Santa Cruz, addressing their second World Meeting, he not only praised their global struggle to ensure a home, work and land—“sacred rights”—for the many millions that lack these. He also urged them to join together in common action to protect “Mother Earth.”

For more than half a century popes have expressed varying degrees of support for the movements and organizations of civil society, but Francis is the first pope to give them total backing and encouragement. He is convinced that the Holy Spirit is active in these movements too, and that they can bring about substantial change in the world, including structural change in the economy.

In the encyclical “Laudato Si,” he seeks to mobilize people at different levels of society, as well as the popular movements, to respond to climate change by working for a truly human ecology that cares and protects both people and the created world. He has tried to mobilize bishops worldwide for this cause too. A significant number on all continents are responding enthusiastically, but many have yet to join in. If they all respond, the impact could be great indeed.

Among the follow-up initiatives to the encyclical, Francis had the Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences invite mayors of large cities to the Vatican to

discuss how best to promote sustainable development and protect “our common home.” Over 60 attended the event (July 21-22) from many countries, including the United States. Francis interrupted his vacation to come and address them.

While attempting to influence world leaders, Francis is at the same time working to mobilize people at the grassroots level in the hope that they can push governments to take courageous decisions at the forthcoming U.N. summit meetings on sustainable development goals (in New York in September) and climate change (in Paris in November-December). Aware that past summits failed in this respect under pressure from vested economic interests, he is doing what he can to

ensure the same does not happen again.

Hence he issued a call to action at the Santa Cruz meeting, saying: “We cannot allow certain interests—interests which are global but not universal—to take over, to dominate states and international organizations, and to continue destroying creation. People and their movements are called to cry out, to mobilize and to demand—peacefully but firmly—that appropriate and urgently needed measures be taken. I ask you, in the name of God, to defend Mother Earth.”

Saying the Catholic Church “cannot remain aloof from this process,” he called on local churches worldwide to join hands with the popular movements in this struggle.

GERARD O’CONNELL

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

The Very Gate of Heaven

Looking for God with my 4-year-old daughter

BY KAREN BEATTIE

“Where is God?” My 4-year-old daughter asks me as she looks at me from the floor with her inquisitive, chestnut eyes. I am on the couch, and she sits at my feet playing with Legos.

She startles me with her question. She is a happy, gregarious child, not prone to contemplation—she’s too busy bouncing off the couch and spreading her 576 toys across the floor of our small condo. But in the midst of this hurricane-force toddler there is obviously an eye of the storm, a calm place where she holds all her big questions. Once in a while she releases them into the universe.

I didn’t know what to tell her. The cliché answer “in heaven” just didn’t seem adequate. The answer “He’s all around us” seemed too vague. So I gave her an answer I hoped a 4-year-old could understand: “It’s hard to see God, but we can see him in the people we meet, and we can see his handiwork in the trees he created and the people who love us.”

I didn’t want to tell her that sometimes I’m not even sure God exists.

In her Catholic preschool she has learned to pray the Sign of the Cross. “In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!” she says definitively, in her tiny munchkin voice, with her brown hand the size of a dinner roll scrunched up and touch-

asked me, “Where is my home?” I assured her that her home was with us, right here, forever. Two years later, we stood before a judge in a wood-paneled courtroom and she officially became our daughter.



Our New Family

Along with adopting Desta, we also committed ourselves to do whatever is in her best interest when it comes to her relationship with her birth family.

The first time I met her grandmother, whom I will call Grandma G, was on a conference call during a court-ordered mediation a few months after Desta was placed with us. The court had ordered all of us—the birth mom, the birth dad, lawyers for all involved, the guardian ad

litem, the social workers—to meet in order to iron out some issues. We all sat around a huge beige conference table in a nondescript room in the Juvenile Court building south of Chicago’s Loop.

Grandma G was at work and called in for the meeting, so I heard only her voice over the speakerphone. But even though she wasn’t physically present, her presence was the largest in the room.

“Who are these people Desta is now living with?” her voice boomed through



ing her forehead, heart and then her shoulders. She’s proud of herself.

I feel guilty she’s learning all about God at school and not at home. I wonder if I am shirking my parental responsibilities, because we seldom pray before meals, and at night I am too exhausted to pray with her before bedtime. I often feel as if our toddler is the spiritual leader in our home.

She came to us as a foster child when she was 2½ years old, after having lived in another foster home for two years. Shortly after she arrived, she

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ART: MICHAEL KRAIGER

the phone. “Why was she moved from her other foster home, and how do I know she is O.K. and they are treating her right?”

The social workers tried to reassure her that Desta was in good hands—that the move had been planned and communicated for quite some time. But Grandma G was having none of it. She was angry.

I was scared of her. *I hope I never have to meet this woman*, I thought.

But a few months went by and although legally not required to have visits with Grandma G, we decided to do so for our daughter’s sake. So one day I took Desta to McDonald’s PlayPlace near our home to meet Grandma G.

I was nervous. David, my husband, couldn’t join us because he had to work. I made sure Desta was dressed right and her hair was all in place. I wondered if Grandma G would yell at me. I wondered if our meeting would be awkward and tense.

Instead, she walked in and gave me a big hug. She wore dangly feather earrings and a blinged-out baseball cap. “I didn’t know you’d be so pretty!” she said to me, laughing. She was carrying bags of presents for Desta. She had me at “pretty.”

Grandma G loves to laugh. She has a mischievous sparkle in her eyes, just like Desta. They have the same nose and high, defined cheekbones, too.

Although our visits went well, over the months our relationship was often tentative. After one visit with her, I got a text: “Why did you dress Desta like a homeless person?” She didn’t give me a chance to explain that Desta had had an “accident” at daycare and her teacher had dressed her in clothes from the school clothes bin.

But over time, her anger and defensiveness seemed to melt away. She brought gifts or \$10 bills for Desta—doting on her like any other grandmother would. We became allies in caring for Desta. We collaborated on buying clothes for her: “What does she

need? What size shoe does she wear now?”

Flesh of My Flesh

Often, I look at Desta’s skin, her soft brown skin leaning up against my white skin as she watches “Dragon Tales.” I love her velvety skin against mine. She often begs for someone to cuddle with her, and I stop what I’m doing and sit down with her on the couch, her warm body against me, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh. Our skin doesn’t match, but in the two and a half years she has been with us, she had become mine as truly as if she had grown in my womb.

When I put her to bed at night and we cuddle before she falls asleep, she insists on laying her entire body on top of mine. She often puts her head under my shirt and pretends that she’s “in my tummy” and that I’ve given birth to her.

Once, shortly after our adoption was final, I was trying to get her to stop squirming during Mass. Frustrated, I sat down and plunked her on my lap in an attempt to get her to stop disturbing those around us. She took my face in her pudgy hands, squeezed my cheeks together and whispered loudly in my face “I love you forever and ever and ever.”

Last August, on a Sunday, we went to the South Side of Chicago to go swimming. It was a perfect day. The sky was clear blue and it wasn’t too hot and we left after lunch to drive down to the South Side for a visit with Grandma G. We were late, as usual, and we got lost and drove through neighborhoods that we could tell were bad: boarded-up two flats, people loitering on the sidewalks, potholed streets, empty city lots tangled with weeds and trash. The hot summer air was heavy with desperation. The unfamiliar streets and our tardiness made us testy.

“Why did you take this route?” my husband demanded.

“I dunno—I took a wrong turn, I guess.”

Grandma G lives in a safer, working class suburb bordered by neighborhoods like this. In Chicago, there’s only one or two blocks—a hairbreadth—between the safe and the scary. And between despair and hope.

We cross the border into Grandma G’s neighborhood. We make it to the pool before she arrives with her entourage. Grandma G always brings people with her—her husband, other grandkids, friends of grandkids. Our visits are always a community affair and we never know who’s going to show up. I have come to realize we are all kin.

Desta wears her pink goggles and Hannah Anderson swimsuit. She and I swim and splash, with Desta practicing her “scoop and kick” that she learned in swimming lessons.

Two of Desta’s cousins are a bit older than she is, but she adores them and wants to swim with the “big girls.” So we are there for an hour, and Desta swims and splashes and practices her “scoops and kicks” while the other girls jump and do handstands and swim underwater like guppies.

David and I are the only white people in the pool.

Sharing Something

Grandma G and her husband both have jobs, but they are surrounded by a community of people who can’t find work and who experience gun violence on a regular basis. In the swimming pool Grandma G gives me the latest news on extended family and friends who form her community.

Systematic injustice and poverty have created such a mire of quicksand that no matter how hard they might try they cannot seem to get themselves out. This is a world I don’t know very well, but I am learning about quickly.

From what I can tell, Grandma G and her husband share their resources, trying to hold up not only themselves, but all of those around them. I have learned from her—learned how beautiful it is to be generous, even when

your own resources are stretched to the bone.

In one of my favorite movies, “Before Sunrise,” the character Celine says to Jesse: “I believe if there’s any kind of God it wouldn’t be in any of us, not you or me but just this little space in between. If there’s any kind of magic in this world, it must be in the attempt of understanding someone sharing something. I know it’s almost impossible to succeed, but who cares really? The answer must be in the attempt.”

Where is God? Sometimes I doubt he is anywhere. But then I see glimpses of him on the borders, the in-between

places, in the conversations between two people, and at the tipping point between joy and sorrow, darkness and light, rich and poor. “You were here all the time, and I never knew it!” Scripture says in Gn 28:16-17, “This is nothing less than the house of God; this is the very gate of heaven.”

The same week we went swimming, Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson, Mo. People were protesting on the streets. As I watched from a distance, I wanted to drive to Missouri and join the protests. But instead I drove to the South Side of Chicago to go swimming with Grandma G.

At the pool there was shrieking and laughing, and as the kids splashed, the chlorine water turned to crystals against the azure sky. We squinted our eyes against the blinding brightness of the late summer sun reflecting off the water.

Grandma G and I laughed, and we watched the kids dive and spring up from the water like corks. I was standing in the crystal water holding Desta, her wet skin as slippery as a baby seal’s. In the midst of the loss and despair and hope, and shrieking and laughter and joy, I leaned down and whispered into her ear, “God is right here.”

American Idyll

The reality of building community

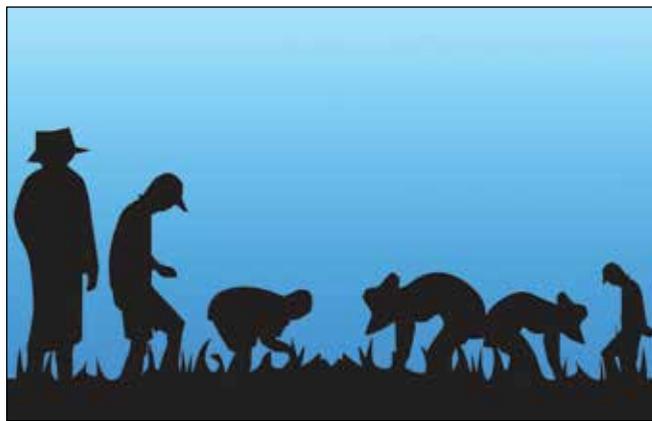
BY ERIC ANGLADA

“We just got a call from a producer for a reality TV show,” announced a member of our Catholic Worker farm community to a few of us working in the garden. Skeptical, we kept our hoes moving, preparing to sow the first seeds of spring. We wondered aloud if this was some kind of bizarre prank. “They sound pretty serious,” she said. “They want us to be featured for a show on intentional communities.” We laughed. “What are they going to do,” we joked, “film us splitting wood and weeding vegetables all day?”

The schmoozy, fast-talking New York producer was persistent. As she called with greater frequency and desperation, I began to reflect more on why a film crew would possibly want to spend a few months chronicling

our lives.

Our Catholic Worker farm in Iowa, where 14 of us raise food organically and strive to live spiritually integrated lives, is home to me, my wife and three other families. We are grounded in the dignity of manual labor. In our chapel, where we meet for prayer before the start of our day, hangs a luminous icon of Sts. Isidore and Maria, patron saints of farmers. We are striving for an existence that is more—to use a trendy word—sustainable. More than half of our diet comes from our own land. There are solar panels and an outdoor solar shower. We use our 90-year-old wood-burning cook stove to heat our home and cook most of



our meals. I keep up with our woodpile and tend our flock of chickens, while others mind our Jersey cows and care for our handful of beehives. All of us garden in our no-till, raised vegetable beds and help host retreats for those on the margins.

What appeal could such a place have to young adults drawn to the drama of reality TV? I believe it has something to do with our culture’s overly roman-

tized view of farm life—as a kind of “American Idyll”—which stems from the yearning to reconnect to what has been lost amid our frenetic, distracted lives. As evidenced by the fact that seven out of 10 U.S. workers admit to being either “not engaged” or “actively disengaged” from their work, many have chosen the path of financial security at the cost of freedom and spiritual fulfillment.

My own odyssey to the “simple life” on a Catholic Worker farm didn’t happen overnight. I look back and recognize lots of small decisions that hardly felt momentous at the time but that now form the foundation of who I am. I started growing flowers in my apartment. I spent a summer providing hospitality for homeless women. I volunteered weekly at a thriving urban farm run by hip activists, turning

compost and plucking weeds against a bleak backdrop of vacant lots, prostitutes and heroin addicts.

Before long, I was devouring the writings of the poet and farmer Wendell Berry and the “Easy Essays” of Peter Maurin, the peasant philosopher and co-founder of the Catholic Worker. I became enthralled with their compelling argument that the urgent task of our age is to renew the vital links between health and holiness, land and the common good. After an encounter with a young family in Iowa who were looking to build a community on their farm, the next step along my path became clear. I packed my things into a friend’s truck and moved to this quiet valley dotted with crags and springs that teem with watercress.

Of course, our homestead is not a utopian fantasyland. Community has been an ongoing school of sorts, in which we are learning how to collaborate, navigate conflict and support one another. Inspired by a nearby monastery’s practice of “chapter of faults,” we’ve created a ritual in which we cultivate a prayerful space to work out inevitable tensions. But we believe the hard work is worth it, as it is through community that we can help each other live into the world we long for, a world where creation might flourish more fully.

So though we debated whether or not to participate in the proposed show, wondering if viewers might benefit from observing our successes and failures in pursuing a holistic way of life, we ultimately decided that such an experience could not be fully transmitted through the weird world of reality TV. Our lives can only truly be communicated through the messy, earthy and occasionally ethereal real world. And while one could travel to our obscure hollow to experience what an alternative path might look like, it is more imperative that each of us create such openings in our own place and time. **A**

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IDEAS | JONATHAN MALESIC

TAKING SIN SERIOUSLY

The theology of Louis C.K.

STAND-UP GUY. Louis C.K. performs for servicemembers in Kuwait, Dec. 18, 2008.



PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/SPC. ELAYSEAH WOODARD-HINTON

St. Augustine was a comic genius. Is there a funnier one-liner in all of theology than his prayer in the *Confessions*, “Lord, give me chastity, but not yet”? He was high-minded but rangy, embracing sexual and scatological humor in *City of God*, where he notes with no little envy that “some have such command of their bowels, that they can break wind continuously at pleasure, so as to produce the effect of singing.”

A prime candidate to be named Augustine’s comedic heir today is Louis C.K., whose sitcom “Louie” has now completed five seasons on FX and who has recorded numerous stand-up specials. Both the show and Louis C.K.’s act plunge deep into TV-MA territory, yet rarely in a way that seems gratuitous. Like Augustine in that prayer, the comedy of the 47-year-old Louis C.K. paints a picture of a man who can see the moral order of things but cannot will himself to act in accordance with it. Louis C.K. jokes, for example, that he should offer his seat in first class to the uniformed soldier flying to a combat zone, but he convinces himself that just by having that thought, *he’s* the moral hero in the cabin. Actually getting up out of his seat would be unnecessary.

Louis C.K.’s comedy argues that, at times, we are all this laughably weak-willed and self-deceptive. Our ideals can be sublime, but our fat, failing bodies betray us; and this condition begins at birth. Augustine’s doctrine of original sin is of a piece with his conviction that “the only innocent feature in babies is the weakness of their frames; the minds of infants are far from innocent.” Or as Louis C.K. puts it in his hour-long, stand-up comedy special, “Live at the Comedy Store”: “Babies are selfish. No baby ever goes, ‘Waaah! But how are *you* doin’ though?’”

In analyzing the nature of sin so carefully, Louis C.K. (whose Hungarian surname, Székely, is pronounced *see-kay*) is doing something different from other comedians with

Catholic upbringing and sensibilities. He is not simply making good-guy jokes about Mass, nor is he eviscerating belief. Louis C.K. is doing something more radical; he is doing theology.

In a monologue on “Saturday Night Live” last year, Louis C.K. joked about the shortsightedness of many atheists, who look around for God and become convinced he doesn’t exist because they don’t see him. He isn’t in plain sight, and they don’t think to search for him, as Augustine did, in the less-obvious places. Louis C.K. asks atheists, “Did you look in the downstairs bathroom?” In a bit recorded for his sitcom “Louie,” Louis C.K.’s analysis of the binding of Isaac—in which he describes God as like a bad, capricious girlfriend to whom the long-suffering Abraham remains faithful—is on a level of insight somewhere between Woody Allen’s and Kierkegaard’s. Of course, neither this impatience with smug unbelief nor this acute biblical interpretation means that Louis C.K. is himself a believer. He is an avowed agnostic, but he seems to believe just enough to continue seeking understanding. Through his work, he often points out the connection between the good, the true and the beautiful—a connection that we, fallen humanity, often refuse to accept.

As the head writer for “Louie,” Louis C.K. has contributed to one of the most convincing arguments for premarital chastity I have ever heard. In this second-season episode, Louis C.K.’s character, Louie, a fictional version of himself, is invited onto a late-night talk show to debate with a young Christian on woman the pros and cons of masturbation. (He’s pro.) Later, he meets up with the woman again for a drink, and she sits with him on her hotel-suite couch and imagines aloud what it could be like if they fell in love but never touched each other. Their romance could smolder and grow, and on their wedding night they could have a kind of sex “where there’s no shame and there’s no fear, where you can put all of yourself into a woman and leave nothing behind. Just you and me, you and your body, me and my body, touching, being close, before God.”

For Louie, the argument is a turn-

On the New Physics

I/Blaise Pascal

“The silence of these infinite spaces frightens me:

The dark dissolves to numbered points and emptiness.
I’ve tried to write of it, but the imploding blank

Swallows what words I speak, absorbs the light I seek.
I prayed. I knelt, but the rings round the plafond shrank,
The stars withdrew. All things dissolve at my caress.”

His niece with swollen eyes lies flat, too ill to speak.

At last, the priest comes with his holy thorn to press
It to her cheek, while muttering hushed prayers of thanks.

When all that’s through, Pascal will trail him out, impressed
But turned in thought back to experiments with a tank
And pump that prove there is a nothing we can see.

II/Henry Adams

Within the twitching finger, no rhythm stirs the nerves;
Beneath the monastic mountain, the eternal atoms swerve.

The patterned carpet’s obverse, reveals a tangle of threads
No more wisely woven than the hair the body sheds.

I see machines in sunlight winding up the earth,
As if the prize of energy were an everlasting birth.

In every book I thumb through, at night beneath the lamp,
I feel the heavens’ dry wind, the grave’s retentive damp,

And know that we have outlived the play of light on stone,
To founder in the factory that rends sinew from the bone.

JAMES MATTHEW WILSON

James Matthew Wilson is a runner-up in the 2015 Foley Poetry contest. His most recent books are *Some Permanent Things* and *The Catholic Imagination in Modern American Poetry*.

on. And why not? She is describing something sacramental. Grace *should* make us desire it. But we rarely desire it properly. The character exemplifies this as the camera cuts away from the conversation, and we see next that he has escaped to the hotel bathroom to attempt the very act he has just been debating on television.

In this way, the comedy of Louis C.K. plunges into moral depravity in order to discover its illogic. By contrast, George Carlin's comedy understood sin only on a third-grade level, as an action that breaks the (to him, absurd) rules. In Louis C.K.'s comedy, sin is perverse desire. It is a profound Augustinian thread. Following it leads to some of Louis C.K.'s best insights but also to his darkest and most questionable material, as when he speculates about the moral calculus behind bestiality, child molestation or murder in an imagined society in which killing someone is just a misdemeanor. You wouldn't want Louis C.K. headlining

the Knights of Columbus dinner, but then, you might not want Augustine there either.

Augustine saw a way out of sin, of course. His rigorous examination of conscience leads to his awareness of a need for God's grace. And knowing that God has already bestowed that grace is a cause for joy. Louis C.K.'s comedic universe does not include supernatural grace or a city of God. The God of his comedy is appalled at our ingratitude. As Louis C.K. joked about the afterlife in a monologue for "Saturday Night Live," God must be thinking that he created this entire universe for us and can't believe we expect *another*, even better place where we live forever too.

In Louis C.K.'s comedy, grace is instead shared between parents—or parent-figures—and children. Both his sitcom and standup act have evolved as his two daughters have grown up and as he rethinks his own childhood through the lens of theirs. The pinna-

cle of grace in his comedic world often comes in moments when we acknowledge a moral failure and the other person acknowledges that we knew what was right but weren't strong enough to do it. During an interview on NPR's "Fresh Air," Louis C.K. describes such an encounter in his own life.

It happened when Louis C.K. was a teenager who used drugs heavily, which led to a meeting with a social worker. This man offered Louis C.K. "a clean slate." As Louis C.K. explains in the interview, "It's like what Catholics look for from confession: a place to just say, 'Look, I've done all this bad stuff.' And then [the priest] can say, 'Yeah, I get it; it's the kind of stuff that people do. It's not the end of the world, and by the way, you were handed kind of a bad deal, so I get it. Try—try harder.'"

JONATHAN MALESIC teaches theology at King's College in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. His writing has appeared in *The New Republic* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Twitter: @jonmalesic.



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FREING THE SACRED SELF

I am no expert on autism.

What I know about it, I have learned from watching friends and colleagues raise their autistic children, an experience that has moved me deeply and filled me with admiration. I have also learned a great deal from reading. Fortunately, there is a robust literature devoted to this challenging disorder, ranging from poems to blogs to memoirs, as well as a steady stream of scientific studies. It is a paradox that we have never known more about autism, and yet we are as far as ever from understanding its causes or discovering a cure. In the absence of this, while medical science continues its work, what can the rest of us do?

One response to this challenge is to take up a subject that is daunting and difficult and make something beautiful of it. This is precisely what Michael Bergmann, an award-winning filmmaker, and his wife Meredith Bergmann, a production designer, have done in their new feature film, "Influence." In addition to being artists (Meredith is also a sculptor and poet), the Bergmanns are particularly suited to take on this material as they are the parents of Daniel, their 19-year-old son, who has autism.

"Influence" is not a documentary; instead, it is a fictional drama inspired by the couples' journey through autism and loosely based on their own lives. The film tells the story of Francis and his first date with Laura, a young autistic woman he was smitten with while visiting an art gallery with his parents. It is a classic coming of age story, yet this date is like none we've seen before, as both Francis and Laura need the

assistance of their parents to communicate. They accomplish this through spelling—a painstaking process wherein each parent guides the child's hand, helping him/her to point to the letters on a handheld alphabet board. The parents serve as intermediaries, articulating the words the child spells out. What follows is an absorbing tale of ardent young love, conflicting parental desires to allow their children to become independent and to protect them, and the power of language to free human beings (autistic or not) from the prison of self.

The Bergmanns' film is beautifully made. Set entirely in their Manhattan apartment, "Influence" has the intensity of a stage play. Undistracted by scene changes, the audience's attention is fixed on the characters as the drama unfolds in the living room of their lives. The small, meticulously appointed apartment, with its many books and original artwork, attests to the parents' devotion to literature, learning and the arts. In fact, the only pursuit to which they are more devoted is raising their son, tirelessly attending to him, stimulating him and providing outlets for his lively mind. In contrast to the static and deliberately claustrophobic setting are the passion and pent-up energy of the characters. This is especially true of the two young people at the center of the drama, played with such compelling vulnerability by James Kacey and Rachel Zeiger-Haag that it is difficult to believe the actors do not have autism.

The film offers a powerful fictional story—but it also offers an intimate glimpse into the lives of the artists who created it. We witness first-hand the consuming nature of parenting a child with autism, the frustration of their child, but we also get a rare glimpse into the joy of their family life despite the challenges of the condition.

"Influence" is charming, humorous and inspiring, but it does not offer easy answers. In counterpoint to the near-miraculous breakthroughs in communication, doubt casts its shadow. To what extent are these conversations illusions? Might the ideas expressed by Francis and Laura actually originate in the parents, who deftly guide their children's restless hands from letter to letter, thought to thought? This leads to

To what extent is the autistic person in possession of an autonomous self?



the most troubling question of all—to what extent is the autistic person in possession of an autonomous self?

Michael and Meredith Bergmann's film bravely explores this rough terrain, initiating the audience into the world of autism—one governed by uncertainty, isolation and fear. In the words of Michael Bergmann, "Influence" is "a postcard from a place we didn't know existed." Francis and Laura are, finally, a mystery—to their parents, to each other and to themselves. And aren't we all? The film slowly leads us to the recognition that Francis and Laura are our own children, infinitely precious and deeply loved. Francis and Laura are us.

ANGELA ALAIMO O'DONNELL

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

FAITH LOST, TALENT FOUND

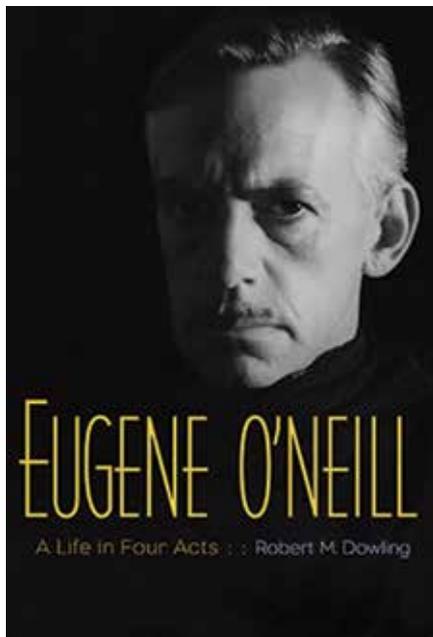
EUGENE O'NEILL A Life in Four Acts

By Robert M. Dowling
Yale University Press. 584p \$35

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill never wanted for adversity or drama. The neglected offspring of a detached but overbearing father and a sullen, morphine-addicted mother, he was marked in adult life by alcohol-fueled depression, tempestuous serial romances and bouts of misogynistic rage. Yet according to Robert M. Dowling, author of this appreciative new biography, it was O'Neill's loss of his Catholic faith at the age of 14 that forged him into an expositor of human misery whose skill wrought comparisons to Aeschylus and Shakespeare and won him multiple Pulitzers and a Nobel Prize. Far from a "natural-born genius," Dowling contends, O'Neill's triumph as a playwright was the hard-won product of facing down the "spiritual void" by writing plays that "gave him the opportunity to explore what, in the end, might restore meaning to his existence."

It says much about Eugene O'Neill that his WASP-ish classmates at Princeton—where he spent the 1906–07 year building an academic record that triggered his dismissal—remembered him as a fierce defender of Catholicism despite his confirmed atheism. He was an inveterate ally of the outsider. When the United States flexed its military muscle abroad in the early decades of the 20th century, O'Neill cast his lot with nonviolent opponents of American imperialism; and when it came time to vote, his sympathies ran toward the four-time socialist candidate for president, Eugene V. Debs. Though he had roots in privileged Connecticut, his chosen companions were the misfits and outcasts

of New York's Bowery and Cape Cod's Provincetown. His earliest productions explored the hardscrabble lives of seamen, a community invisible to most Americans. His subsequent work of-



fered incisive critiques of American race relations, colonialism and the plutocrats who loomed large at the time of his first Broadway success in the 1920s.

O'Neill is popularly remembered for his later works, laden with heavy notes of existentialism and autobiography, plays like "The Iceman Cometh," which premiered in 1946, and "A Long Day's Journey Into Night," posthumously produced in 1956. But Dowling gives appropriate weight to earlier plays and, in doing so, enriches our sense of O'Neill as both an artist and a man. O'Neill's acclaimed 1920 play, "The Emperor Jones," skillfully incorporated both the jarring style of European expressionist theater and the horrific news accounts of an American military misadventure in 1919 that claimed some 3,000 Haitian lives. "Marco Millions," a 1928 come-

dy echoing themes of Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*, employed the 13th-century Asian journey of Marco Polo as a vehicle for poking fun at modern big business. And then there is "Exorcism," a one-act account of the playwright's own 1911 suicide attempt, recently rediscovered by Dowling some 90 years after O'Neill believed he had destroyed all copies. In "Exorcism" we have a clear view of how the 23-year-old O'Neill saw himself: angry, embittered, incapable of accepting love.

As much as it is a chronicle of O'Neill's life and work, Dowling's book is also a narrative of American theater's fall and rise. When O'Neill's plays first reached the stage in the 1910s, the theater world was unabashedly a business enterprise focused on delivering undemanding entertainment without creative vision. Ironically, O'Neill's father, the actor James O'Neill, who funded his son's often prodigal endeavors well into adulthood, exemplified this decline. Choosing commercial success over creative integrity, he spent decades on end performing a single part in a wildly popular melodrama, "The Count of Monte Cristo," which generated huge cash rewards but forestalled a promising artistic career. As Dowling demonstrates, the playwright O'Neill's firm insistence on producing serious works about people on the margins and tracing the quietly unfolding calamity that pervades human experience was an early sign of renewal that paved the way for later giants like Arthur Miller, August Wilson and Tony Kushner.

In the end, it is difficult to judge how critical a role O'Neill's early loss of faith may have played in securing his towering legacy. Others have confidently declared that his abuse of alcohol, his sad relationship with his mother or his disdain for his father's selling-out supplied the key to success. But Dowling, who testifies to his own longstanding and deep-rooted unbelief, is right to take seriously the mysterious power that faith or its absence can have upon an artist's

oeuvre. We live in a world where critics regularly overlook, sometimes willfully, the subtle shadings and dimensions that belief or unbelief may bring to a work. As for O'Neill, when asked in 1935 if there was any truth to rumors

that he had recovered his Catholic faith, he simply replied, "Unfortunately, no."

JAMES P. McCARTIN is director of the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture in New York City.

Cromwell for a time remained loyal to his patron but then gradually slid into the position vacated by Wolsey, joining the privy council in 1530 and then assuming other offices. But Cromwell never enjoyed the freedom of action that Wolsey had; Henry now became a much more "hands-on" ruler.

Cromwell then played a major role in convincing Henry that the only way to solve the issue of the divorce was to break with Rome. He was crucial in drawing up the legislation for parliament that ended with the Act of Supremacy of 1535. And he then

took the lead in forcing acceptance of the new arrangement on the population. Unprecedented was the requirement that every Englishmen swear an oath acknowledging the new situation. Between 1540 and 1552, 883 persons were accused of treason for refusing to do so, and 308 were executed, including Bishop John Fisher and Thomas More, for whom

Cromwell had a grudging respect. The fate of More, Borman suggests, should have alerted Cromwell to the precariousness of his own position.

Cromwell was quick to notice that Henry was tiring of Anne Boleyn, especially after she failed to deliver the expected male heir. Initially Cromwell and Anne had cooperated on the divorce, but differences had developed between the two of them. Cromwell now framed Anne on charges of adultery, and Henry married his new inamorata, Anne Seymour, 10 days after Anne Boleyn's execution. Anne Seymour died shortly after giving birth to the long-desired male heir, Edward VI.

Meanwhile Cromwell initiated reforms that made England a more united kingdom and qualified him as one of England's greatest social and political reformers, according to Borman, pro-

ROBERT BIRELEY

THE KING'S MAN

THOMAS CROMWELL The Untold Story of Henry VIII's Most Faithful Servant

By Tracy Borman
Atlantic Monthly Press. 464p \$30

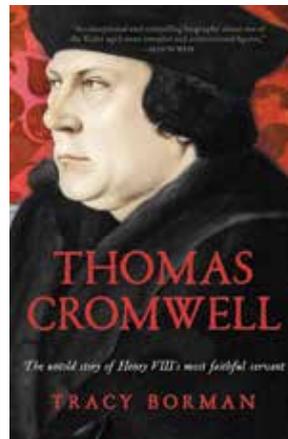
Thomas Cromwell stands out after Henry VIII himself as the most prominent figure in the Henrician Reformation of the 1530s. Tracy Borman recounts persuasively and engagingly the tale of the meteoric rise of this complex commoner to the highest offices and dominant influence at the court of Henry and his just as meteoric fall from grace and execution. Industrious, determined on wealth and power, brutal but also loyal to the king whose government he sought to consolidate and a friend to poor and ordinary people, he mastered for a time the intrigues of the court and the volatility of Henry, who is the real villain of the story. "A master of diplomacy and deception," Borman writes, he was "the ideal courtier," careful never to absent himself from court for any length of time lest his enemies dislodge him.

Born in Putney, a village west of London, in about 1485, Thomas was the son of a successful tradesman of modest means. His common origin, similar to that of Cardinal Wolsey, Henry's earlier first minister, stirred consistent resentment and opposition among the king's normally aristocratic councillors, just as it had for Wolsey, "the butcher's son." Little is known of his early years. He appears to have been largely self-taught. Later he displayed

a detailed knowledge of the law, even though he never attended law school. In about 1503 he crossed the channel and spent nearly a decade on the continent, holding varying positions in the Netherlands, France and Italy, where he acquired a fondness for things Italian that remained with him all his life.

At one point he found a way to approach Pope Leo X in Rome, as the pope traveled through the city, to request an indulgence for the people of Boston. The pope, impressed by his boldness, immediately granted his request, and the incident, suggests Borman, gave him confidence in dealing with major figures. By 1514 he was back in England and had entered the service of Cardinal Wolsey, who became Henry VIII's chancellor in 1515, and Cromwell eventually became the principal advisor to the cardinal, especially in legal matters, while also developing a lucrative private legal practice.

Meanwhile, by 1527 Henry had tired of his Spanish wife, Catherine of Aragon, who had failed to deliver a male heir, and he had promised to marry the much younger Anne Boleyn, with whom he had become infatuated. Wolsey was expected to obtain the necessary divorce from Pope Clement VII, and when he failed to secure it, he fell from favor and was dismissed.



posing reforms in education, poor relief and trade. He saw to the passage of the main Reformation legislation through Parliament as well as many other laws that greatly enhanced the status of the institution. He was instrumental in the suppression of the rebellious Pilgrimage of Grace in 1537, and he strengthened royal control in the North, Wales and Ireland. He also oversaw the suppression of the monasteries, which greatly enriched the royal treasury.

By 1538 Cromwell's star had begun to set. Chiefly responsible for this was his arrangement of the next marriage of Henry, with the German princess, Anne of Cleves, whose appearance and body odor Henry found repulsive and whom he eventually sent back to Germany af-

ter securing an annulment. In addition, Cromwell had begun for a time to advance Protestant ideas to which Henry objected and had embarked on a policy of alliance with Spain without Henry's knowledge. His aristocratic enemies at court were always ready to pounce on him, and his pleas for mercy elicited no response from Henry. Convicted of treason, he was beheaded on July 28, 1540, professing the Catholic (not the Roman Catholic) faith. The same day Henry took his next wife, Katherine Howard.

ROBERT BIRELEY, S.J., is professor of history emeritus at Loyola University Chicago and the author, most recently, of *Ferdinand II, Counter-Reformation Emperor, 1578-1637*.

tural expression found in Christianity is an essential part of God's plan. And the relationship between faith and reason cast in Hellenistic philosophy is part of divine revelation. At the same time he acknowledges the errors of Catholic missionaries in the past who sought to eradicate the religions they encountered.

Worldwide religious pluralism is thriving and becoming increasingly important. But Ratzinger regards it as an ideological expression of relativism, the logical outcome of the Enlightenment because it granted equality to all religions and denied all truth to any one of them. He believes religious pluralism, relativism and secularism are all a lethal threat to Christianity.

Ratzinger witnessed that in Nazi Germany mistaken ideas about human nature led to the disasters of the Second World War, including the horrors of the Holocaust. So his urgent concern for holding to the truths of the faith is not simply an authoritarian stance. It has much deeper roots. The survival of Christianity in Europe is at stake. He agrees that dialogue is aimed at discovering the truth together, but insists that dialogue is useless if the dominant philosophy is relativism, which puts all religions on an equal plane.

The ecclesiology of Ratzinger, of course, has played a dominant, normative role for over three decades—from the time he was appointed cardinal prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1981-2005) up through his time as Pope Benedict (2005–13).

Ratzinger would hold that in a relativist climate, Christian revelation and the mystery of Jesus Christ and the church lose their character of absolute truth and salvific universality.

But many other theologians, especially Asians, have been exploring a much more inclusive foundational approach to all religions. They have been expounding a theology incultur-

PATRICK HOWELL

FEAR OF MODERNITY

ARE NON-CHRISTIANS SAVED?

Joseph Ratzinger's Thoughts on Religious Pluralism

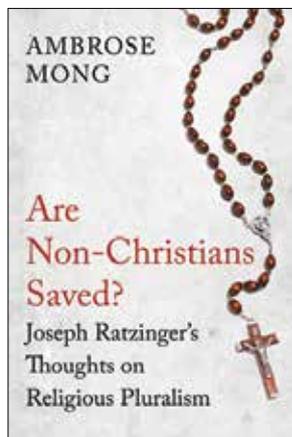
By Ambrose Mong
Oneworld Publications. 384p \$30

The influence of a particular pope lingers on long after that particular pope has died or resigned. The pope most often cited in the documents of Vatican II, for instance, was Pius XII. Similarly the influence of Joseph Ratzinger—Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI—will endure far beyond his life time. Reportedly, towards the end of his papacy Benedict considered his theological writings far more important and enduring than whatever he might have been able to accomplish as pope. This perspective accounts for why he published three

major theological works on Jesus of Nazareth even while he was pope and why so many other dimensions of his leadership unraveled in the last few years of his reign.

In this carefully nuanced book, Ambrose Mong, a Dominican priest, explores Josef Ratzinger's writings about the foundations of Christianity, the challenge of modernity and the corrosive effect of relativism. Mong's agenda is to set Christianity free from its own cultural limitations and reliance on Western philosophy so that a genuine Asian Christianity might flourish in the fertile soil of the rich cultures of the East.

Ratzinger, of course, sees it all quite differently. He assumes the normative status of Western philosophical and theological thought. He holds that the Greek intellectual and cul-



ated in the Asian priority of harmony, family and beauty over orthodoxy and certitude. They affirm a kingdom-centered understanding of the church that indicates the church should serve the reign of God; it is not identical with it. Interfaith cooperation urgently needs to occur so that all people of faith work together to alleviate the extreme poverty in Asia. In the words of Michael Amaladoss, S.J., dialogue needs to lead to “a holistic liberation of the human

person-in-community.”

Father Mong spends fully 60 percent of the text explicating the context, culture, experience and philosophical stance of the theology of Josef Ratzinger. He skillfully sets Ratzinger in the context of the major European philosophical stances—from Kant to Habermas. Then in the last chapters he takes up the specific theological contributions of the Sri Lankan priest Tissa Balasuriya, the Belgian Jesuit Jacques

Dupuis and the Vietnamese-born Peter Phan, who write from an Asian perspective. Mong skillfully unfolds the contributions of each by setting them in dialogue with other Asian theologians, and he demonstrates how they break the tight mold Ratzinger imposed on Christianity from his Western context.

All three of these theologians received so-called notifications, or warnings, about their theology, most often because they allegedly veered into relativism and syncretism. But Phan, for instance, countered that his theological reflection on religious pluralism aimed to correct past mistakes of Christian missiology, especially its attitude of Western superiority and its imposition of the Christian faith and Western culture through power and control.

These high-level suspicions took their toll on Dupuis, who took several months off from his teaching at the Gregorian University to write a defense. He died three years later.

Most readers of *America* are familiar with the famous declaration by Karl Rahner, S.J., in 1969 that the Second Vatican Council marked the beginning of the church’s “official self-realization as a world church.” Rahner identified three great epochs in church history. The first was the short period of Jewish Christianity. The second, the time of the Hellenistic, European church, extended from the first century up until the council. Only now have we begun the transition from a Western church to a world church.

The first transition was tumultuous, even acrimonious, as witnessed in the Acts of the Apostles. As we transition into a world church, Father Mong suggests a pathway of understanding and interfaith dialogue that will enrich the church that we are becoming and perhaps result in a greater harmony, even as all people of faith seek the truth together.

PATRICK HOWELL, S.J., is a professor of pastoral theology at Seattle University and the publisher of the periodical *Conversations*.



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Translator

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

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TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), AUG. 23, 2015

Readings: Jos 24:1–18; Ps 34:2–21; Eph 5:21–32; Jn 6:60–69

“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21)

Ancient Roman society was profoundly hierarchical, and this can grate on readers today when they encounter certain biblical passages. Prime among these are ancient household codes, which delineate the duties and responsibilities of family members to one another. Part of the purpose of these passages in their historical context was to show how Christians fit within ancient Roman society.

Margaret Y. MacDonald, one of the pre-eminent interpreters of the household codes today, writes in her book *The Power of Children* about how “discussion of the apologetic functions of the New Testament household codes has frequently led to consideration of how the codes may be framing messages intended to be communicated directly or indirectly to the neighbors of believers who are wondering what exactly is going on in these household cells.” But she goes on to say that “what is emerging especially clearly is not simply the accommodating nature of the household codes, but elements of resistance that stand out more sharply when ideological correlations are noted.”

The “elements of resistance” in the Letter to the Ephesians are grounded in the family’s allegiance to Christ above allegiance to the Roman emperor, for subjection to one another is “out of reverence for Christ,” not out of concern for the good order of the empire. Christians certainly wanted to make clear that they did not intend to subvert

the basic harmony of Rome; but the fact that their family life was based in obedience to Christ, the true Lord, did indeed manifest an element of subversion.

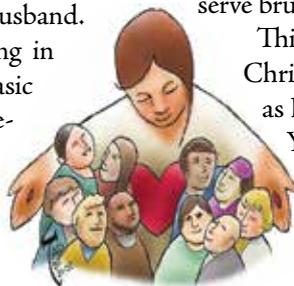
The second “element of resistance” in Ephesians, however, has to do with the relationship of wife to husband. On the surface, the teaching in Ephesians promotes the basic hierarchical relationship between husbands and wives in the ancient Roman Empire: “Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife.” Some Christians read the passage today as a statement about a wife’s inferiority and subordination to her husband. But this passage calls husbands and wives to “be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” The passage is not about the objectification of women.

Ephesians cites Gn 2:24 when it speaks of the unity of husband and wife. Recall that when Jesus spoke of marriage in Mt 19:4 and 8, he too cited Genesis, proclaiming that unity was intended “at the beginning” of creation for male and female. Yet Jesus’ teaching applies not only to divorce but to the wholeness and oneness their primal relationship was intended to celebrate. The unity of man and woman that God established in the garden was not marked by domination and objectification but by mutuality.

Reflect on Christ, the letter says, as the example for husbands to “love your wives, just as Christ loved the

church and gave himself up for her.” The husband’s model is the *kenosis*, the self-emptying of Christ for the church. And wives are to “be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.” But subjection to Christ is subjection to the one who offers himself for us, who loves us until death. This is marriage as idealized through Christ, but in neither element of this relationship is there room for objectification of the other or claims of superiority, since we are called to “be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” True relationships never serve brutish whims.

This is the same unity that Christ creates with the church, as Ephesians notes throughout. Yet even in this profound marriage between Christ and the church, there can be confusion and disagreement. When Jesus tells his



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Whether as church or in personal relationships, how can we be subject to one another?

disciples that they will eat his flesh and drink his blood, they respond, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” It is only by being subject and open to the Spirit that we are able to grasp Jesus’ teaching, that it brings us to life. Openness to the other, even when understanding is missing, brings about unity.

When asked if they too wished “to go away,” Peter answered Jesus, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.” But in order to bring this unity to the church, Christ himself, subject to the will of the Father, offered himself for us. Our unity is not a participation in an object, but subjection to the “head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior.”

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Just Do It

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), AUG. 30, 2015

Readings: Dt 4:1–8; Ps 15:2–5; Jas 1:17–27; Mk 7:1–23

“But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers” (Jas 1:22)

The relationship of Christianity with the law has often been conflicted, stemming from the apostle Paul’s complex teachings regarding the Torah and Jesus’ own words, like those from the Gospel of Mark. There Jesus cites Isaiah to the Pharisees and scribes, “In vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines,” and then adds, “You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.” But note in Jesus’ teaching that he does not deny the validity of “the commandment of God,” but criticizes the abandonment of it for “teaching human precepts” or “human tradition.”

The Christian reception of the Torah, God’s law, is therefore confusing for Christians and others today. Many Internet memes note that the church accepts some Old Testament laws, like the Ten Commandments and prohibitions regarding homosexual behavior, but not those about mixing fabrics or eating shellfish. While Jewish theology has never accepted a division in the Torah between moral laws and ceremonial laws, understanding all of the law as a seamless garment, later Christian theologians, like Thomas Aquinas, did so.

Yet these later discussions and distinctions, which understood certain Old Testament laws as fulfilled in Jesus’ mission, should not allow us to treat our obedience to God’s law as provisional or insignificant. As much as most of us hate to be told what to do regard-

ing certain behaviors, this is precisely what God does.

Fine philosophical and theological distinctions regarding the law are not insignificant, but both Jesus and James, the brother of Jesus to whom the letter of James is attributed, warn against a legal casuistry that renders moot the question of what God wants us to do.

Jesus warns us against our hearts being turned against God and our fellow humans, saying: “It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

The starting point regarding excising sin is always a searching, personal moral inventory, since whenever we sin it is because we have given ourselves permission, in however subtle a way, to do what we desire. Just this once. No one will be the wiser. Who will know? I deserve this. After all, everyone does it! As Ronny Cammareri says in the movie “Moonstruck,” “I ain’t no freakin’ monument to justice!”

The Letter of James continues Jesus’ theme of converting our own hearts in order to follow God’s law. James writes, “Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the im-

planted word that has the power to save your souls.” The phrase “implanted word” suggests Scripture, naturally, but at an even deeper level of growth suggests that our source of conversion is Jesus, the word (*logos*) made flesh, planted in us, able to root us and ground us in God’s ways, which are found in Scripture.

For Jesus is not just the word made flesh but the law (*nomos*) made flesh. As James goes on to say, “Those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.” This perfect law (*nomon teleion*) is Jesus himself, and Jesus offers a law of freedom, *eleutheria*, which seems initially to be a contradiction. How can the law that restrains us give us freedom?

The law of freedom indicates that doing God’s law fulfills human desires

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Listen to the teaching of Jesus and James. What do you need to do?

perfectly, blessing us, since it responds to our deepest needs regarding who we are and what we are intended to become. James says that if we do not do the word, but only hear it, we “are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like.” Why? Because we only become who we are intended to be by doing what God wants us to do. We come to know ourselves by understanding God’s law, our purpose for ourselves. We know ourselves by just doing it.

JOHN W. MARTENS

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