

# America

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THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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The Office for Mission and Ministry at

## Villanova University

announces the presentation of the

## Civitas Dei Medal

### Lisa Sowle Cahill, PhD

Boston College

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The award will be presented on November 2, 2017 at 4:30PM in the St. Thomas of Villanova Church. All are welcome.



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# Out of Many, One

“Loyalty to our nation,” President Trump told us last week, “demands loyalty to one another.... When we open our hearts to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice, no place for bigotry, and no tolerance for hate.” Commentators spent several days parsing those words, which formed the introduction to President Trump’s announcement of a new-ish U.S. policy in Afghanistan. Some felt that his appeal to national unity was an indirect attempt to atone for his abysmal performance in the wake of the tragic events in Charlottesville. Perhaps. Yet prescinding from their tactical success, or lack thereof, we should examine the plain meaning of the president’s words, for they reveal that Mr. Trump’s administration is not, as many imagine, an unsettling departure from the public consensus but rather an unsettling expression of it.

To see what I mean, consider this tidbit of intellectual history: “Sometime around 1700,” the late Kenneth Minogue observed, “a lot of people, particularly the intelligentsia, abandoned the [traditional, Christian] belief that we live in a fallen world and adopted the idea that we live, not in a fallen world, but in an imperfect society.” This fundamental shift away from a self-conception rooted in the meta-narrative of creation, fall and redemption, said Minogue, ushered in modern political thought and the political idealism that accompanies it. Political idealists believe that our imperfections are largely explained by our participation in one or more systems and that the work of perfecting society is mainly about creating a better system than the one we have. This gave rise in the 19th and 20th centuries

to various programs for a more perfect society, those famous “-isms” of left and right, which, not coincidentally, accompanied the most violent century in human history. In hindsight, it’s relatively easy to see how.

A fallen world requires a divine redeemer. An imperfect society just needs a better plan. In a fallen world, our redemption comes to us as merciful gift. In an imperfect society, our redemption lies in self-improvement. You see the problem: Either way, we need a messiah. According to traditional Christian theology, in our fallen world the messiah is the son of the living God. In an imperfect society the messiah is civil society, or, as is now much more the case, the nation-state.

This false messianism is not the exclusive domain of left or right. In different ways it operates almost everywhere in contemporary political life. For the left, it appears most often in debates about economics; for the right, it is most evident in discussions about national security. As much as our cable news debates seem to indicate otherwise, there is then a kind of public consensus at work, namely, that the nation-state has a pseudo-messianic role to play, either in effecting a more perfect society or creating hegemonic world order.

This impoverished meta-narrative is precisely why our politics is increasingly moralistic and combative. As I have previously observed in this space, in an imperfect society, one closed off to the transcendent, there are no goals beyond human flourishing. The political stakes grow higher and higher, as our politics becomes a battle for control of the means of our self-perfection,

a dangerous zero-sum game that is equal parts cynical realism and tragic fantasy. This is an especially dangerous game for Christians, for the shift from fallen world to imperfect society, writes William T. Cavanaugh, serves to “marginalize the body of Christ in favour of an imagined community, a false public body,” not civil society, but a single space, “centred in the state.”

Which brings me back to the president’s remarks. However disturbing the rest of his speech might have been, Mr. Trump’s most unsettling words were, unfortunately, the ones he intended to provide comfort. “When we open our hearts to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice....” These words should give us pause, for the role that the president assigns to patriotism here is, in the Christian tradition, assigned to the grace of God.

By accepting “the myth of the state [and its attendant symbols] as peacemaker, as that which takes up and reconciles the contradictions in civil society,” writes Cavanaugh, the church compromises its prophetic witness to the one redeemer, whose grace we require to perform the truly radical acts of mercy and justice he asks of us. At the same time, we risk complicity in the injustice and violence perpetrated in the name of the nation-state. Thus, we risk our souls. Modest love of country is a virtue. But when the idolatry of nationalism displaces the virtue of patriotism, people—often quite a few people—get killed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Matt Malone, S.J., editor in chief;  
 Twitter: @Americaeditor



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A French soldier stands in front of Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris amid a procession on Aug. 15, the feast of the Assumption.

(AP Photo/Francois Mori)

Cover: Charlottesville, Va., by Casey Kilmartin. Proceeds from the sale of this photo will go to the Southern Poverty Law Center.

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# Should the United States intervene when other countries are in crisis?

Eighty-one percent of **America's** reader sample said that, under specific circumstances, the U.S. military should intervene when other countries are in crisis. At 75 percent, genocide was cited more often than any other answer as a reason for the United States to provide military intervention. Megan DeFrain of Springfield, Ill., explained: "Military intervention should be the very last option, but it is sadly sometimes necessary. If the lives of millions of innocent people are at stake—as in the case of evils like nuclear threat or genocide—the United States has an obligation to defend people." Alina Sierra Sedlander of Metairie, La., concurred: "It is our moral responsibility to stop genocide."

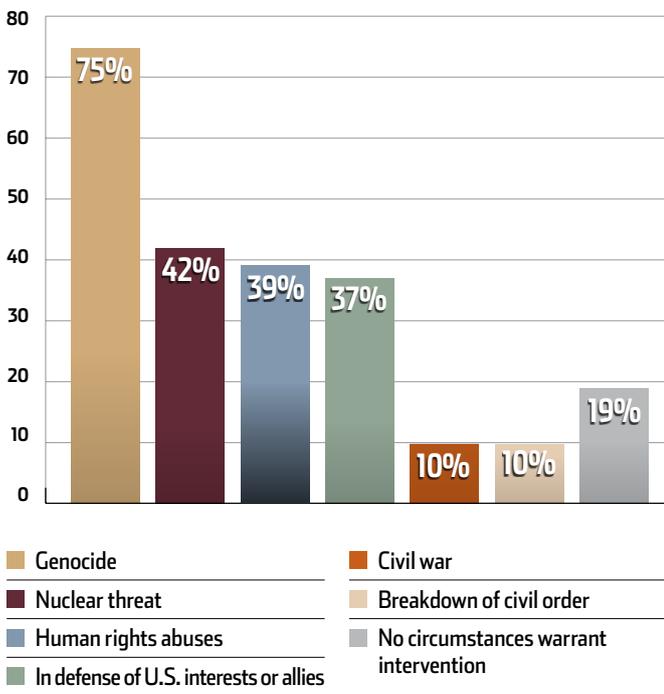
When asked what form military intervention abroad should take, 70 percent of respondents to our survey told us that counterinsurgency strategies should be used. Denise Hansen of Millville, Del., said that these strategies should be used in the case of genocide and noted that al-

ternative forms of intervention, like drones and airstrikes, "have collateral damage in the form of civilian deaths. That's not acceptable."

Air power (52 percent), boots on the ground (50 percent) and cyberattacks (50 percent) received comparable rates of approval from readers. Matthew Scott of New York, N.Y., selected all forms of military intervention listed as potentially appropriate. "A range of options should always be considered," he wrote, "with the principal considerations being maximizing both the efficacy in accomplishing the mission and the safety of American soldiers."

Nineteen percent of readers told **America** that no circumstances warrant U.S. military intervention abroad. Leo Bistak of Parma, Ohio, wrestled with choosing this answer. "I am torn between no intervention and intervention to save people," said Mr. Bistak. "After all, war is a failure, not a positive venture."

SHOULD THE U.S. INTERVENE WHEN OTHER COUNTRIES ARE IN CRISIS?



WHAT FORM SHOULD THIS INTERVENTION TAKE?

Air power/drones	52%
Boots on the ground	50%
Counterinsurgency strategies	70%
Cyberattacks	50%

*"We have no less of an obligation to people in other countries than we do to citizens of our own. Any situation in which innocents are being unjustly targeted is cause for intervention."*

**Andrew Groble**  
Wis.

*"My opinion is that we should only intervene to uphold the cause of the innocent (genocide, human rights abuses, nuclear threat) and to defend our allies and interests (not just economic interests, but threats to the allies themselves and their sovereignty)."*

**Lee Wilkins**  
Auburn, Ala.

Results are based on reader responses to a poll promoted on Facebook, Twitter and in our email newsletter. For questions in which readers were able to select multiple answers, results add up to more than 100 percent.

### Make College Affordable

Re “Student Debt Blamed for Falling Homeownership” (Editorial, 8/21): The problem is the very high cost of college and limited prospects for those without a degree. A few elite schools pledge to offer enough aid to make college affordable, sometimes without debt. But the vast majority don’t, including Catholic colleges.

**Chris Martens**

Online Comment

### Maybe One Day

Re “Remembering 9/11,” by Matt Malone, S.J. (Of Many Things, 8/21): I know the exact moment when I learned that the Twin Towers had been struck. I was a teacher in New York City and was responsible for over 300 children that day. The panic, the horror and the prayers to God by so many who wailed to the heavens will never be forgotten. After all of my students were dismissed, I began my own journey home. I was stunned to see the avenues filled with people covered in dust—some with shoes, some without and some with clothes in shreds. These were the survivors of that day. They resembled the walking dead. I cannot forget any of the images that still live vividly in my heart and mind. Forgiveness? I am 16 years removed, and I am not yet able to forgive the men who orchestrated and carried out the attacks. Maybe one day I will be.

**Carol Cox**

Online Comment

### College Idolaters

Re “Catholic Campuses Should Look Outward to the Larger Church,” by Patrick T. Brown (8/21): There is some very sound food for thought here, with a keen eye on the amenities war and other signs of the insularity of Catholic colleges from the larger church. I wonder if one more disconnect is the relationship between parent satisfaction for tuition payments and the stature of their child’s college as an icon in their lives. Often the parents are as idolatrous as the students in their view of college.

I do not know how many are worried about the blending of the local parish community with that of the college. My experience has been that the religious formation of the college’s campus ministry program touches the hearts of students more deeply than most parish experiences.

**Barry Fitzpatrick**

Online Comment

### Right to Name

Re “Cardinal Bo on Myanmar’s Delicate Path to Democracy,” by Gerard O’Connell (8/21): Dealing with the legal status of the Rohingya on a case by case basis, the solution Aung San Suu Kyi is reported to support, has proved to be a bureaucratic nightmare because the military confiscated people’s identity information and the government is not operating in good faith. Cardinal Charles Maung Bo should continue to build public support for full pluralism in Myanmar, with visible and widely televised activities that bring all ethnicities together. It is an international right for people to name themselves, and there should be no hesitation about naming the Rohingya the way they prefer. To refuse even to say their name is to become complicit in their social erasure.

**Paul Carroll**

Online Comment

### A Formidable Senator

Re “The ‘Al Franken Moment,’” by Bill McGarvey (8/21): From watching Senator Al Franken on television it is pretty clear he does his homework and cares about all U.S. citizens. That he combines his intelligence with compassion and has some media skills makes him a formidable figure. It is not great political power, except for getting conservatives in an uproar. For those of us who have traditional Catholic values but also support working people, Mr. Franken exemplifies what we think politics should be about: not winning or money but improving people’s lives.

**John Wilkins**

Online Comment

### What Is the Solution?

Re “A Good Job Is Hard to Find,” by Rachel Lu (8/21): There are a number of valid observations here about how protectionism is expensive and may not be helpful in the long run. But what, then, is the solution to the labor crisis that Catholic social teaching inspires? “Rerum Novarum” discussed the mutual duties of labor and capital. St. John Paul II was, of course, well acquainted with the economic need for the solidarity of labor unions, yet the word *union* appears only one time in Ms. Lu’s piece—in connection with the word *collapse*. While there is no doubt that as long as there is a labor force, there will be jobs, this does not guarantee that the tasks left for human labor will pay a living wage. How can the common good be served?

**Peter Voekl**

Online Comment

## Catholics Must Combat Racism and Bigotry at Every Turn

On Saturday Aug. 12, 2017, a “Unite the Right” rally was organized by white nationalists in Charlottesville, Va., in opposition to the planned removal of a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee by the city of Charlottesville. Participants in the rally, many drawn from far distances, chanted Nazi-inspired slogans like “Blood and Soil” and “Jews will not replace us!” A day fraught with tension was then tragically punctuated by bloodshed, when a driver, later identified as a member of a white supremacist movement, drove his car into a crowd of peaceful counterprotesters and one person died, while more than two dozen were injured.

It should seem obvious—an automatic reflex—to condemn the white supremacy, racism and hate that led directly to this unconscionable violence. It certainly is to our fellow Americans whose lives are haunted daily by the speC.T.E.rs of racism and anti-Semitism. Yet it was not obvious to the president of the United States. At least twice Mr. Trump publicly expressed a moral equivalence between the hatemongers who had organized and led the demonstration and the contingent that had assembled to stand up to bigotry and intolerance. It is not possible to parse this failure of leadership in any way but to conclude that the president is either unable or unwilling to provide the moral witness his office requires.

It therefore falls to the people to act. In the face of bigotry there can be no ambivalence. We must denounce in sure and certain terms all forms of white supremacy, anti-Semitism and violence, which stubbornly remain a part of the American experience. We

must also acknowledge that this legacy of racism and oppression manifests itself today in unjust social and economic realities that tear at our nation’s social fabric and put lives, especially the lives of people of color, at risk.

“We stand against the evil of racism, white supremacy and neo-nazism,” a statement of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops said over the weekend. “We stand with our sisters and brothers united in the sacrifice of Jesus, by which love’s victory over every form of evil is assured.”

We join the bishops in condemning these odious ideologies of oppression and remember Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s clarion call for action: “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” We also harken to the words of St. Ignatius Loyola, that “love manifests itself more in deeds than in words.” Above all, then, now is the time to act, peacefully, in our churches, our local communities and legislative bodies and, particularly, in the human interactions of our daily lives. For all Catholics, but especially white Catholics, taking these actions may require deep and even painful conversion: “History, like prayer, matters when addressing the deep roots of racism in the Catholic Church and in Catholic families,” Michael Pasquier wrote in *America* in 2016. “[But] thinking about the past and kneeling in prayer can be a lot easier than living in the present and turning faith into action.... [As Catholics] we will have to admit to some terrible sins, sins that we were born and raised into, sins that

we have kept alive in what we have done and in what we have failed to do.”

The way forward is not the *lex talionis*, piling hate upon hate. The way forward is the way of the penitent and prophet. We must act boldly on behalf of those who are persecuted, or who are in danger of persecution. But we must proceed in humility, from the lived acknowledgment that we are sinners redeemed in Christ and that we are called to reconcile in turn. Christian duty requires us to clearly name and denounce evil. It requires us to act against that evil at every turn. It also requires us to seek to love the evil-doers and not to give up hope that they may realize their errors and seek redemption. That will be, perhaps, the most vexing work of all.

The just world we are called to create will require from each of us nothing less than the radical acts of love and mercy to which the Gospel testifies. Let us ask, then, for the abundant grace to act, in peace, for justice. Let us pray, let us plead, for the courage to act now.

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## American Gladiators

As another year of N.F.L. football approaches, a shocking report about brain injury has been rapidly buried under media hoopla for the coming season. On July 25 a study released in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* revealed that chronic traumatic encephalopathy (C.T.E.) was found in an astonishing 99 percent of former N.F.L. players’ brains that were donated to science after their deaths. The brain disease has been linked to memory loss, depression, anxiety, loss of impulse control and even suicidal behavior.

The N.F.L. has acknowledged a link between football and C.T.E. and in 2015 established a fund for players who suffer serious medical conditions from repeated head trauma. But this after-the-fact compensation (without concerted efforts toward prevention) suggests that we are fully admitting that football players are little more than doomed gladiators, destroyed in public spectacles for our amusement.

The N.F.L.'s warriors are at least wearing helmets. On Aug. 26, a boxing match between mixed-martial-arts champion Conor McGregor and veteran boxer Floyd Mayweather, hyped as The Fight of the Century, was to feature the normal required head-gear for professional boxing: none at all. Both fighters are guaranteed two things: a huge payday and certain head trauma.

Presuming we are unwilling to outlaw these spectacles, we must mend what we will not end. In an era of "helmet cams" and millisecond-measuring replays, surely new technologies can also be brought to protective gear to make it more effective. Surely too the dynamics of these sports can be preserved while new rules are implemented that better protect our athletes. They are worth the cost.

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## The decline of unions is part of a bad 50 years for American workers

The current imbalance between supply and demand in the labor force should be good news for American workers still waiting to see a few extra bucks in their pockets after decades of income stagnation. Unfortunately, the nation's 4.3 percent unemployment rate is not translating into fatter paychecks. Wages for most U.S. workers are still stagnant. In a tightening labor market, people are essentially working for less money than they did in the 1970s, at least when inflation is taken into account. What is going wrong?

According to some economists, part of the downward pressure on wages comes from the vast reserve of workers who, despite that low official rate of unemployment, remain on the sidelines of the formal economy. These discouraged workers are no longer tracked by the Bureau of Labor Statistics because of their long absence from the labor force, but many are still competing for full-time jobs. At the same time, mismatches between skills and job openings, as well as less direct effects on employment capacity (like the nation's opioid epidemic), are keeping many U.S. workers from jobs with good wages.

But there are deeper issues that contribute to the withering of worker income and to destructive inequities in wealth distribution. The long-term decline of organized labor surely has had an impact. (See infographics on Page 14.) In the not-too-distant past, organized labor could produce sizable ripple effects beyond its membership. Even nonunion workers benefited when organized labor pushed wages higher or scored improved job benefits

or working conditions. Labor's decline, in fact, just about matches up to the swan dive of middle-class income in the United States since the 1970s.

In the public sector, with 34.4 percent of workers represented by a union, organized labor is an embattled, if stubborn presence. But in the private sector, unions have essentially been eradicated. Nationally, organized labor represents just 6.4 percent of the workforce.

Without organized labor on the watch, upper management has claimed an increasing share of national income. In 1965, corporate C.E.O.s could anticipate earning 20 times more than one of their line workers; now, after peaking at 376 to 1 in 2000, that ratio is an astonishing 271 to 1. From 1978 to 2014, top management compensation increased by just under 1,000 percent—double the stock market's growth and about 10 times the compensation growth experienced by workers over the same period. Class warfare indeed.

Catholic social teaching has wrestled with such inequities in a number of ways, among them by calling for a just wage and a preferential option for the poor as mechanisms for mitigating imbalances, and even challenging the notion of private wealth itself with the concept of the universal destination of goods—under which, as St. John Paul II said, property “must always serve the needs of peoples.” But rarely has economic inequity been challenged as directly as it has been by Pope Francis. In “The Joy of the Gospel” he wrote: “Inequality is the root of social ills” (No. 202). In a 2013 speech at the Vatican, the pope targeted disparity as a “new,

invisible...tyranny...which unilaterally and irremediably imposes its own laws and rules.”

He is right to be concerned.

Concentration of wealth is quickly followed by outsized political clout, closing a circuit that only exacerbates economic inequities. Because of this confluence of wealth and power, tax, spending and labor policies that favor the already wealthy become codified in Washington and state capitals around the nation. Among them has been so-called right-to-work legislation.

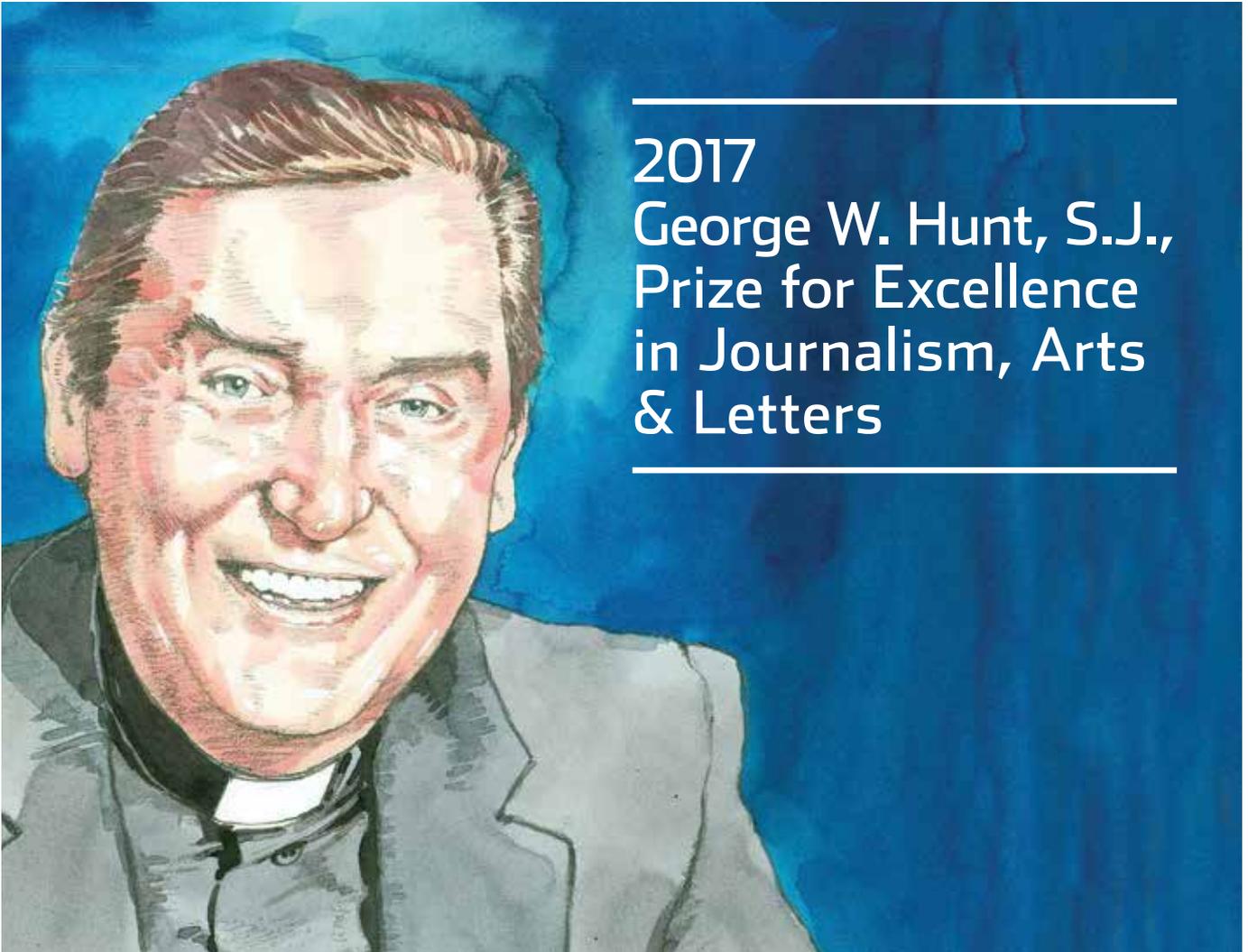
In right-to-work states, workers may still form unions, but employees are not required to pay the dues that support them. That means “free riders” can enjoy whatever wage or benefit improvements unions are able to negotiate without joining their locals. In practice, right-to-work legislation has been a union killer. And once the unions and the power of collective bargaining they represent are out, no civic entity represents workers when the rewards of a robust economy are divvied up.

That legislative model is now being applied at the federal level. The National Right-to-Work Act, introduced most recently in Congress in February, has been gaining co-sponsors.

The president's signature on a national right-to-work law could be the coup de grace for organized labor in the United States, a loss that will accelerate the wealth inequity that is already proving economically and socially ruinous.

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*Kevin Clarke is a senior editor and the chief correspondent of America. Twitter: @clarkeatamerica.*



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# LAWYERS LEAD, PASTORAL WORKERS LAG ON PAY SCALE IN CATHOLIC CHURCH

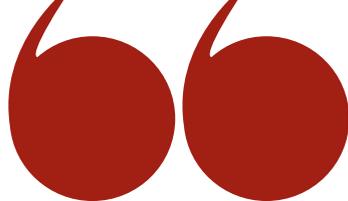
By Michael O'Loughlin

Among the many laypeople helping to run the Catholic Church in the United States, the highest paid positions tend to be administrative: lawyers, finance directors and communications professionals. At the low end of the pay scale are pastoral positions, like vocation directors and ministers serving prisoners and college students. As for priests, their salaries and other benefits, like housing and car allowances, are on the rise.

Those are the findings of a recent report commissioned by the National Association of Church Personnel Administrators and the National Federation of Priests' Councils, conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University.

According to the report, there is a large gap between the median salaries of administrative positions and pastoral positions. The highest salaries in Catholic archdioceses and dioceses among lay employees are for lawyers, with a median salary of \$141,091, while the lowest paid position for lay workers is that of vocation director, whose median salary is \$26,348.

Mary Santi, the chancellor and executive director of human resources for the Archdiocese of Seattle, said it is important to note that lay employees in administrative positions often see their work as a form of ministry. "People who work as finance officers or as H.R. directors, we see ourselves as working in ministry, it's just a different form



## *The national median total taxable income for priests is \$45,593. ●●*

of ministry from someone who works as a director of religious education for a diocese,” she told **America**.

Newly ordained Catholic priests can expect a salary somewhere in the mid-\$20,000 range, with median salaries varying slightly depending on geography. The maximum salary for priests ranges from \$29,744 in the West region to \$44,417 in the Midwest. Diocesan priests do not take vows of poverty and according to canon law they should be paid enough to “provide for the necessities of their life” as well as to donate to charitable causes.

Michal Kramarek, a researcher at CARA, pointed out on the organization’s blog that salary is just a part of a priest’s overall compensation.

“The salary is the first, and often most substantial component of diocesan priests’ taxable income,” he wrote. “The second component, other taxable cash income, constitutes about 20 cents of every dollar of priests’ income and includes, for example, an allowance for housing and food as well as Mass stipends, retained stole fees, and bonuses.”

The national median total taxable income for priests is \$45,593, according to the report, less than half the median salary for men in the United States with a similar level of education. Mr. Kramarek noted that the median salary for U.S. priests has risen about 9 percent since 1996. By comparison, the average compensation for full-time Episcopal priests is \$75,355 per year, according to a 2015 report by the Church Pension Group.

The Rev. Tony Cutcher, president of the National Federation of Priests’ Councils, told **America** that he hopes the report “invites church finance administrators to put faces to the numbers they’re working on, that they see that if we truly are a Eucharistic church, then the very thing that gives us the Eucharist, priests, need to be taken care of in a very special way.”

Father Cutcher said he was surprised to find that priests generally do not receive any additional salary when assigned to lead multiple parishes, an increasingly common scenario as dioceses struggle with priest shortages. “There’s virtually no difference wage-wise from pastoring one parish or five parishes,” he said. “There was no compensation for the extra stress or the extra time those things take.”

Though there are exceptions, nearly all Catholic priests in the United States are single and do not have families to support, which Father Cutcher said leads many to believe that the salaries and benefits priests receive are generous. He shares that view, more or less, but

notes that the survey does not address how priests spend their resources. He said many priests care for elderly parents or disabled siblings, for example, and others give parts of their income to charity.

But A. J. Boyd, a theologian and lay ecclesial minister based in Rome, argues on his blog that benefits for priests, such as highly subsidized seminary education, begin long before they run parishes. Plus, there are the other benefits not available to lay employees.

“There is no question the priest in such a scenario is ‘wealthier’—enjoying a higher standard of living, a nicer house, with greater stability, and less stress about making ends meet,” he wrote.

The new report includes detailed data about various positions in archdioceses and dioceses, as well as the benefits afforded to lay and ordained employees. The data is self-reported by a relatively small number of dioceses that responded to a survey from CARA. Regina Haney, executive director of the National Association of Church Personnel Administrators, told **America** that the report, entitled “National Diocesan Survey: Salary and Benefits for Priests and Lay Personnel, 2017,” was commissioned to help “diocesan leaders provide a more just and equitable work environment for both priests and lay personnel.”

Kerry Robinson, the founding executive director of the Leadership Roundtable, which promotes best business practices in the church, told **America** that to attract and keep talent, the church must enhance its efforts in “identification of talent, recruitment, job descriptions, compensation, performance development and promotion.”

“The church cannot survive without lay personnel,” she said. “Compensation is not the only barometer, of course, but it is one reflection of how we value laity and the particular roles laity fill in the church.”

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Michael O’Loughlin, *national correspondent*.

Twitter: @MikeOLoughlin.

Colleen Dulle, an O’Hare fellow at America Media, contributed to this report.

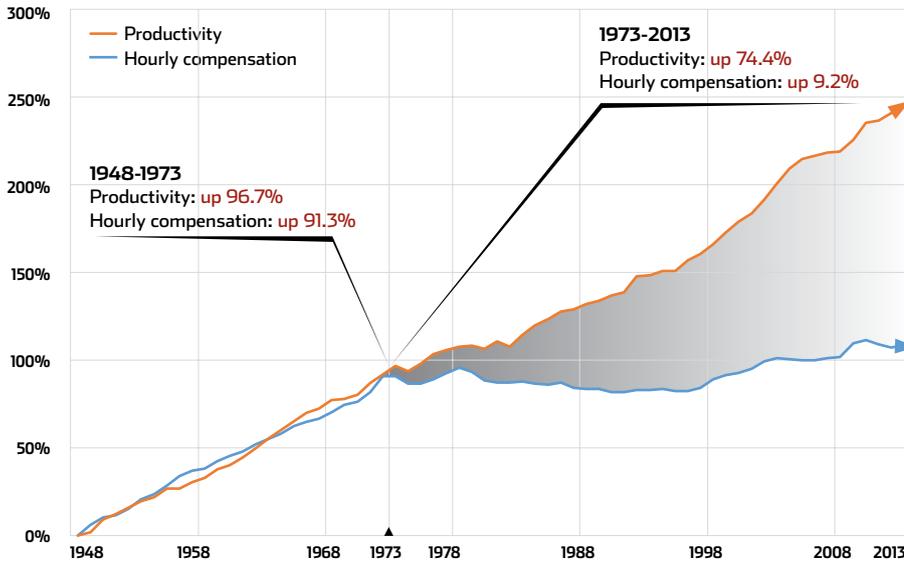
# Labor pains

As union membership has declined and the manufacturing sector has shriveled since the early 1970s, workers have seen meager improvement in their paychecks. (See Short Take, Page 10.) The first chart below compares increases in productivity with the much slower rise in hourly wages. The second chart shows that union membership and the share

of aggregate income going to the middle class (defined as the middle 60 percent of all U.S. households) have tumbled. In 1973, 26.6 percent of all U.S. workers belonged to unions and 51.9 percent of all income went to the middle class; by 2015, those numbers were down to 11.1 percent and 45.7 percent.

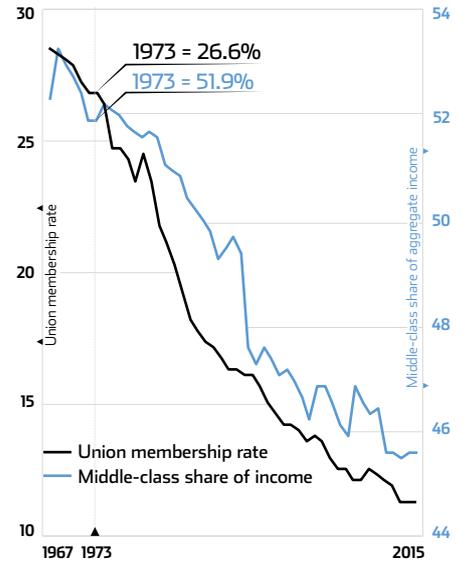
## PAY VS. PRODUCTIVITY

Since 1973, worker productivity in the United States has steadily increased, but wages have been almost flat.



## UNION MEMBERSHIP / MIDDLE CLASS INCOME

As union membership rates have decreased, middle-class incomes have shrunk.



## COMPENSATION INEQUALITY



## RIGHT-TO-WORK LAWS



ALLOW WORKERS TO RECEIVE UNION-NEGOTIATED WAGE AND BENEFITS WITHOUT PAYING DUES TO A UNION



## MEDIAN WEEKLY EARNINGS (2016)

UNION MEMBERS	\$1,004
NON-UNION	\$802

## UNION MEMBERSHIP (2016)

Percent of workers who belong to a union

PUBLIC SECTOR	34.4% = 7.1 MILLION WORKERS
PRIVATE SECTOR	6.4% = 7.4 MILLION WORKERS

**ONE IN 20 PRIVATE-SECTOR WORKERS BELONG TO A UNION, DOWN FROM 1 IN 3 IN THE 1950s**

## JOB GROWTH (1990-2015)

ALL JOBS	30%	TRANSPORTATION/WAREHOUSING	39%	WHOLESALE TRADE	12%
EDUCATION SERVICES	105%	FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES	23%	MINING AND LOGGING	7%
HEALTH CARE ASSISTANCE	99%	CONSTRUCTION	22%	UTILITIES	-25%
PROFESSIONAL SERVICES	81%	GOVERNMENT	20%	MANUFACTURING	-30%
LEISURE AND HOSPITALITY	63%	RETAIL TRADE	19%		

Sources: first chart from "The Productivity-Pay Gap," Economic Policy Institute, using data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS); second chart from Center for American Progress Action Fund, using U.S. Census Bureau data; compensation ratios from Economic Policy Institute; right-to-work data from National Conference of State Legislatures; union membership and pay from Economic Policy Institute; job growth from Pew Research Center.



A portrait of Blessed Óscar Romero is seen as Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chávez of San Salvador, El Salvador, center, celebrates a Mass on July 2 in Rome.

## New cardinal wants to revive legacy of Óscar Romero in El Salvador

Photo: CNS photo/Cathal McNaughton, Reuters

On Aug. 15, El Salvador celebrated the 100th birthday of Blessed Óscar Romero, the archbishop of San Salvador assassinated at the altar in 1980. For the newly appointed Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chávez, the time is right to revive Romero's legacy in a country still battered by violence and poverty.

Cardinal Rosa Chávez was surprised by his appointment this spring, the result of Pope Francis' looking through the ranks and choosing an auxiliary bishop who happened to be a close friend of Romero. On May 21, he announced that he accepted the new title in Romero's name, and the words hit the headlines of El Salvador's local newspapers.

"The press outlined the relation I have with Msgr. Romero, and [my nomination] is seen as a gift to the country and to the church," El Salvador's first cardinal said in a phone interview with **America**. Among the Salvadoran people, parallels between the new cardinal and the martyr were quickly drawn. "The atmosphere [in El Salvador] is full of joy and hope," he said.

Óscar Romero is venerated in El Salvador and throughout Latin America because of his courage, faith and focus on the poor. As political tensions rose between left-wing rebels and the regime, Romero's support for the social gospel kept the pressure on the Salvadoran government. In 1980 he was fatally shot at the altar during Mass, marking the beginning of a civil war that left 80,000 dead and 8,000 disappeared. Archbishop Romero was elevated to the status of a martyr in 2015, and Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, the official promoter of sainthood for Romero, has said that he hopes a canonization will take place within the next year.

Cardinal Rosa Chávez was a loyal friend to Romero in life and in death. He plans to prod Salvadorans to follow Romero's example of faith and resilience to heal the coun-

try's wounds. Because of persisting gang violence, El Salvador ranks second in homicides worldwide, and it remains politically divided.

"[Thanks to my nomination and friendship with Romero], the country has regained the eagerness and strength to fight in our very difficult situation," the cardinal said, "the barbaric violence that keeps robbing lives every day in the midst of poverty, intolerance and lack of dialogue."

Cardinal Rosa Chávez's commitment to improving El Salvador's sociopolitical conditions is not new; he had been engaged in political debates long before he became cardinal, albeit less publicly than his mentor had. Early in his career he helped end El Salvador's civil war, and 25 years later, he is expected to be a healing presence in a violence-ridden society that has not fully recovered from the war's turmoil.

In an interview with the online newspaper *El Faro*, the historian Roberto Turcios said Cardinal Rosa Chávez is the priest with the most political authority in El Salvador—he has participated in almost all political mediation initiatives, whether they be high- or low-profile cases. Cardinal Rosa Chávez offers carefully balanced opinions on controversial topics such as gang warfare, abortion and poverty. He said that his first priority is tackling violence, "which is what worries people the most." The cardinal wants to be, like his mentor, a pastor delving into the country's social fabric, working for a church of the poor and engaging in sociopolitical issues.

For the cardinal, Óscar Romero's legacy is the remedy to heal El Salvador and "to reach the country we long for, a country that is peaceful, just, supportive and fraternal."

"That is what we all yearn for, and I wish that [Óscar Romero] would help us get there," he said.

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Melissa Vida, *America* contributor.



## Europe's far right attempts to harass refugees on Mediterranean

News broke at the beginning of summer that far-right groups had begun a campaign to thwart the aid agencies that rescue refugees on the Mediterranean Sea in makeshift or foundering vessels. Their plan was to physically disrupt these humanitarian missions. History has no shortage of risible, if not hare-brained, enterprises that flow from xenophobia and bigotry.

And this summer's far-right activism on the Mediterranean would be laughable were it not so appalling.

Earlier this year, a shadowy French-based group managed to divert a search-and-rescue ship off Sicily, using, as far as can be ascertained, a hired high-speed vessel. Since then, the group has become more prominent, calling themselves Identitarians, apparently after a French far-right faction. According to the U.K.-based anti-fascist activist group Hope Not Hate, the group is also launching its operations under the name Defend Europe.

Its language is emotive and xenophobic; milder examples include references to "swarms" and "invasions" of refugees amid talk of threats to European culture and a looming catastrophe for white identity. It accuses aid agencies of collusion with the human traffickers who are putting helpless and defenseless refugees on the water. The Guardian reported that the French faction's website, which has apparently been taken down or removed to the "dark web," had claimed: "We are losing our safety, our way

of life, and there is a danger we Europeans will become a minority in our own European homelands."

This emerging movement has attracted praise from the Breitbart news agency in the United States, where it has been likened to "alt-right" groups. German media sources trace its rise in part to a right-wing young adult group that emerged in 2015. Its first public action was to unveil a banner across Berlin's landmark Brandenburg Gate with the slogan: "Sichere Grenzen, sichere Zukunft" ("Secure borders, secure future"). Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, soon up for re-election, has attracted much hostility from her country's right-wing forces after promoting hospitality to refugees over the last two years.

Through online crowdfunding, the Identitarians have succeeded in raising the equivalent of at least \$66,000 toward the purchase of a vessel. They have attracted criticism from more mainstream anti-immigration groups, who are concerned that their Greenpeace-mimicking fellow travelers will undermine what they believe is a cogent political case for reducing migration into Europe. But so far their maritime efforts have proved to be inept, if irritating to the aid agencies, and publicity about their antics has been largely negative.

The U.K. columnist Katie Hopkins did Identitarians no favors by joining them on their ship in July off Sicily. Ms. Hopkins, who has advocated the use of gunships to stop ref-

Protestors off the coast of Sicily have a message for an anti-immigrant group trying to stop refugees from reaching Europe via the Mediterranean.



Photo: Orietta Scardino/ANSA via AP

ugees, was recently fired from London's LBC talk radio station for a series of offensive statements, including her call for a "final solution" to be visited upon Muslims after the bombing in Manchester earlier this summer.

Falling into the background is the continuing tragedy of refugees trying to enter the European Union by way of the Mediterranean. Pope Francis has continued his advocacy for refugees, trying to keep this human disaster in the public eye. In the weeks to come, he will no doubt have more to say. But advocates for refugees increasingly find that news fatigue is among the chief obstacles they face.

Once again in 2017, the summer migration season has seen many calamities and great loss of life. The refugee tragedy has not come to an end even if reporting about it has. All too often, what little reporting there is fails to confront ideology-driven xenophobic propaganda about refugees as a menace. It is a reflection of a massive failure by European media: When innocent people die horrible deaths by drowning and now face harassment on the high seas by efforts like Defend Europe, someone has to step up to confront those spreading misinformation.

David Stewart, *London correspondent.*

## Refugees risk lives to flee the U.S. for Canada

Refugees fearing President Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric are crossing the Canadian border illegally from the United States in record numbers. The influx began in winter, when many refugees were treated for frostbite after crossing the border on foot, and has continued throughout the summer.

Refugee advocates say the illegal crossings are a result of the Safe Third Country Agreement, a pact between the United States and Canada made in 2004 that requires asylum seekers to make their claims in their first safe country of arrival. Refugees who first come to the United States are not permitted to then seek asylum in Canada.

Martin Mark, director of the Office for Refugees of the Archdiocese of Toronto, says, "Both countries should implement what the Geneva Convention says about refugees" and Canada should not be able to turn them away.

Together with Amnesty International and the Canadian Council for Refugees, the Canadian Council of Churches has launched a legal challenge against the Safe Third Country Agreement. "By resisting this agreement, we are speaking out on behalf of the widow, the orphan, the sojourner," says the Rev. Karen Hamilton, general secretary of the C.C.C. Ms. Hamilton says refugees who feel unsafe in the United States now feel compelled to cross illegally to avoid being turned away at the Canadian border.

There is another problem: Because of a backlog in processing, many Catholic parishes in Canada are waiting in frustration for families they are prepared to sponsor. "Not only refugees are suffering," says Mr. Mark, "but a lot of Canadians complain to their members of Parliament, saying, 'Speed up, we need our refugees!'"

Dean Dettloff, *Toronto correspondent.* Twitter: @DeanDettloff.



AP Photo/Charles Krupa

A family from Haiti approaches a Canadian Mounted Police checkpoint at the border between New York State and Quebec.

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WHEN  
A JEW  
A CATHOLIC  
MARRY



# The unexpected joys and profound tensions at the heart of interfaith unions

By Mark Oppenheimer

All marriages are mixed marriages. Catholics know this. It does not matter if both partners are committed Roman Catholics, were even raised in the same church, attended the same catechism classes in the same dank basement, were confirmed on the same day by the same bishop and matriculated at the same Catholic college. Among Catholic couples you may still find that one prefers this kind of Mass and one that kind, one adores the current pope and the other loathes him. One is committed to raising the children within the faith, while the other will give the children latitude to come to their own conclusions about God and the universe.

And I always imagine, as a Jew, that Roman Catholics have it easy. At least they have a fixed star, in the pope and the Vatican, to ground their arguments and measure the depths of their dissent. Think of what it is like for us Jews.

Let's say you are committed to marrying within the faith, and at some point, against what feel like impossible odds, given our tiny numbers, you find a fellow Jew whom you wish to marry. That is when the negotiations begin! One of you never wants to go to synagogue, while the other would never miss it on Rosh Hashana. One of you eats only kosher food, while the other one loves a good bacon cheeseburger. Or you both keep kosher—but *how* kosher? One believes it is enough to refrain from work on the Sabbath, while the other refuses to drive or use electricity. One is committed to raising the children within the faith, while the other will give the children latitude to come to their own conclusions about God and the universe.

This is all to say that, for two people with any religious identity at all, there is no marriage without negotiation. So actual interfaith marriages, the kind we think about when we think about intermarriage, are important because they throw into relief the problems inherent to all romantic unions. When, say, a Roman Catholic marries a Jew and together they embark on the journey of "How do we make *this* last for 50 years?" they are italicizing the questions that all of us who believe in long-term romantic unions ask, every day of our conjoined lives: When is a sacrifice worth making, and when is it too much? What do I really care about, and what is just my stubborn ego? Where do I end, and where does my marriage begin? And what do I owe to my religious community, which may need me as much as I need it?

Jewish-Catholic intermarriages are particularly interesting because of all that our two communities have in common. In the United States, most Jews and Catholics trace

their ancestry to working-class Europeans who arrived in the late 19th or early 20th centuries, seeking economic opportunity above all. Jews and many Catholics, like the Irish and Italians, were not considered truly white, until one day we all were, more or less; we can have testy, passive-aggressive relationships with clerical authority; and we are both petrified that the whole shop is about to go out of business.



While we, as a nation, continue to profess belief in God at rates that are distinctly non-European, our specific denominational attachments continue to wane. According to a recent Pew survey, from 2007 to 2014, Catholic self-identification fell steeply, to 20.8 percent from 23.9 percent. Jews held steady at just under 2 percent. The survey showed an increase to 1.9 percent from 1.7 percent, which was within the margin of error and which, given the high birth rate of Orthodox Jews, probably masked a notable drop in identification among Reform, Conservative and secular Jews.

But underneath those statistics are plenty of people who care deeply about their particular traditions. Extrapolating from the Pew statistics on Jewish intermarriage (over 70 percent among the non-Orthodox) and overall Jewish population in the United States (about 5.3 million, if one includes nonreligious, ethnic Jews), there are tens of thousands of Jewish-Catholic intermarriages in the United States. And a good number of them surely involve partners with strong commitments to their separate traditions.

Partners like Michal Woll and Jon Sweeney. Woll and Sweeney married in 2010, a second marriage for each. He has two grown children from his first marriage, and they have a young daughter together, who is being raised as a Jew. Woll and Sweeney are not a typical intermarriage (as if there were such a thing). Woll, who grew up a Reform Jew in the Chicago suburbs, was a bioengineer, then a physical therapist, before becoming a rabbi in the progressive Reconstructionist tradition. She recently assumed a new pulpit at Congregation Shir Hadash in Milwaukee. Sweeney, the son of an evangelical Protestant pastor, attended Wheaton College, the conservative Christian school that counts Billy Graham among its alumni. After college he rejected evangelicalism and became an Episcopalian, then 20 years later a Roman Catholic. Woll and Sweeney, who in 2013 co-authored *Mixed-up Love: Relationships, Family, and Religious Identity in the 21st Century*, are thus seekers, finely attuned to the evolution of religious commitments.



From the beginning, Sweeney found his parents' evangelicalism confining. Still, he had the goal of being a preacher, like his dad. After his freshman year at the fundamentalist Moody Bible Institute, Sweeney spent the summer doing missionary work in the Philippines. Sitting in these Filipino-Catholic houses, trying to de-Catholicize the inhabitants, Sweeney was intrigued by iconography all around him. "I would look at all their Catholic stuff, and I was very interested, like in their home altars and their pictures of saints," he said, when I met him and Woll in the comfy, New England-y Vermont house they were about to vacate for Milwaukee. But in terms of becoming a Catholic, it was not in the cards, not just yet.

After returning from the Philippines, Sweeney began occasional visits to Gethsemane, Thomas Merton's famous Trappist monastery in Kentucky. Briefly, he thought about becoming a Catholic monk, then dropped the idea. He transferred from Moody to the slightly more liberal Wheaton and afterward attended North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago. But he left before ordination to get married, at age 21. He said he knew right away he had made the wrong decision. Sweeney and his first wife separated in 2007 and divorced two years later. Meanwhile, he had developed a career in religious publishing, including a stint,

from 1997 to 2004, at Jewish Lights Publishing, which brought him to Vermont. And in 2009, as a single father of two, working for a Jewish company, he became a Roman Catholic—"mostly because it felt like that's where I had been directed for a long time."

It was a strange time for him to become a Catholic, he is the first to note, because he was received into the church four days after becoming engaged to Woll, a local rabbi in Vermont whom he had met through mutual friends. She was away in Chicago when he became a Catholic. "I was actually glad that she wasn't there," Sweeney said, "because it was all so fresh, and we were trying to figure out how we were going to work together. It was uncomfortable anyway."

Like her husband, Woll has a long history crossing denominational lines, albeit within Judaism. She grew up attending a Reform temple, but did not attend Hebrew school. Then at 12, she requested a bat mitzvah ceremony. Her parents said yes, and she had a lot of catching up to do. "So I went to Jewish overnight camp," she said, "and did a crash course in Hebrew and caught up with my friends and started going to [Hebrew] school three days a week." Still, Judaism remained primarily cultural and artistic.

Years later, after Northwestern and then graduate school at M.I.T., she was living in Delaware, working for

Rusty, left, and Juliana Reno both wanted a religious ►  
wedding ceremony. They settled on a Christian ceremony  
with the traditional Jewish Seven Blessings at the end.

the company that makes Gore-Tex products. At the local congregation she attended, Woll encountered Jewish Renewal, a left-leaning, hippie-ish strand of Judaism that emphasizes personal piety and mystical experience. In the summer of 1995, she attended a conference where she heard Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, Renewal's founding rabbi. "And he said, 'The world is an economic mess because money doesn't rest on Shabbos'" (the Sabbath), Woll recalled. That insight changed Woll's relationship to Judaism, giving a beloved cultural practice a sense of calling. When she left Delaware for a physical therapy career in Flagstaff, Ariz., she became a lay leader of the synagogue there. "I slowly spent all of my spare time doing Jewish stuff," Woll said. In 2001 her spare-time hobbies became her full-time vocation, and she started at Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, outside Philadelphia. In 2007 she moved to Vermont to work at her first congregation, where she met Jon Sweeney.

As a Reconstructionist, Woll belongs to the stream of Judaism most comfortable with intermarriage; as a rabbi, she has never had a problem performing marriages between Jews and non-Jews. But it is still unusual for a rabbi to share her life, and the responsibilities of parenting, with a Catholic husband.

When I asked if there have been any religious tensions, Woll mentioned the day she realized she could no longer attend church with Sweeney, which she had done on occasion.

"I think when I finally realized that I simply couldn't go to church at all, there was some sadness in that," Woll said. She had hoped, early in their marriage, that she could share an experience that was so meaningful to him, if not as a worshiper then as a kind of fellow traveler. "I remember the first time I went to church with him, and I really got it, like, I got him in church, I understood the power of the ritual, I knew something happened to him in the process of going and taking Communion." But eventually she realized that his tradition excluded her, in a way that hers, preceding his and being incorporated by his, did not exclude him. One day she just walked out.

Sweeney listened, and nodded at this shared memory. "There was sadness for me around that," he said. "I think I pretty quickly realized, though, and I still feel this way, that it's really to her credit—this sounds bizarre—but it's to her credit that she's uncomfortable at Mass. And I think it makes us better people in our traditions that we—what I mean is that it's to your credit"—here he turned to Woll—

"that you're uncomfortable in Mass, that you're not just there sort of cheering along with me."

"I'm actually paying attention," she said.

"Yeah, you're fully who you are, and I fully love who you are, and I would rather you not be the one who's just comfortable sort of cheering along with whatever."

Sweeney admires that Woll takes religion seriously enough to have been uncomfortable. But one also gets the sense that he admires her for the ways in which she is like him. That is, they get each other. Both are seekers, who have found their way, circuitously, to a tradition that gives them meaning. Neither of them is a scriptural literalist—when asked if he believed Catholicism was true, Sweeney said, "It's not a category that I really use." They are both ritual junkies, who think of all rituals, their own and each other's, in instrumental, rather than metaphysical, terms: "There's a way in which I don't feel like his going to Mass is very different than me going to yoga class," Woll said.

She may be slightly underestimating what Mass means to her husband, who told me that "she knows that there are times when Mass brings [him] to tears." But overall, he said, "her comparison makes a good deal of sense: Mass as a sort of exercising and stretching of the soul." They tend to see eye to eye on the big things, so when they quarrel, it's more that they quibble: he doesn't like the Friday-night Kiddush prayer, and when they were first courting, she wasn't comfortable with the crosses that hung on his apartment wall.

He took down the crosses. They have agreed to raise their daughter, Sima, now 6, as a Jew, which he said felt natural to him, both because he had deep experience with Judaism and because his theology had predisposed him to a sympathy with the Jewish story. "I'm sure I had this in the back of my mind: the Jews are our elder brothers. I mean not that I'm looking for prooftexts for Judaism in the home, but I totally believe that and feel comfortable with it. You guys came first, you know."

And finally, as it happens, there are Jewish things he knows that she doesn't. After all, she moved to Arizona, whereas he always aspired to a kind of Jewish urbanity. "I grew up watching Woody Allen movies," Sweeney said. "I know Seinfeld and she doesn't."



Woll is the rabbi, Sweeney is the religious-books editor, who now works for Ave Maria Press, a Catholic publisher. But their religion is, in each case, more experiential, and mys-



tical, than theological. This presents its own problems, but saves them others. Rusty and Juliana Reno are a different kind of interfaith couple: believers in a conventional God, they are both intensely theological, in love with abstruse argumentation, less mystics than big old nerds. But like the Woll/Sweeneys, the Renos have both been transformed, religiously as well as personally, by their interfaith romance.

R. R. Reno, known as Rusty, is now editor of *First Things*, the conservative Christian political journal; for many years he taught Christian ethics at Creighton University in Nebraska. He met Juliana when he was a graduate student at Yale, teaching a discussion section of a lecture class in Christian ethics. The two Renos have never agreed on religious or political truth, but they agree on certain fundamentals, like what sorts of things matter. For example, they both wanted a religious wedding, one that obeyed the precepts of one tradition or the other. When they could not find a rabbi to marry them, they went to his Episcopal church and used the service in the Book of Common Prayer—although they added the traditional Jewish Seven Blessings at the end, which his priest agreed did not invalidate the Christian ceremony.

And they agreed that one could not coherently raise a child “in both traditions.” She insisted that their chil-

dren—they have a daughter and a son, now grown—would be raised as Jews. He agreed in principle, but with a caveat. “He said, ‘Look, I go to services every Sunday; you never go’ to synagogue,” Juliana Reno told me when we met recently at her law office in Midtown Manhattan. “Not that I am blaming you, but if that doesn’t change by the time we have kids, I am not going to be that supportive. But I have no inherent objection.” He would have Jewish children, but they had to be raised with a Judaism that was more than occasional, and full-hearted, not half.

“So I said, ‘That’s fair,’” Juliana Reno continued. “So the Saturday after we got married, I started going to Yale Hillel, and I have gone to services almost every Saturday since then. Which surprised him. The last four years I have gone to daily minyan, too.”

I had questions. So many questions. How did they make it work? Politically, religiously, as parents?

Politically: “I’m a liberal Democrat Jew,” Juliana Reno told me, “and he’s a conservative Republican Catholic. Although we’re both more moderate than anything else.... When we talk about politics, we do it carefully—we say, ‘Okay, I want to talk about a political issue now.’”

Religiously: “I had a boyfriend in college who was Jewish but an atheist. I find it much easier to be with

someone who believes to the same depths I believe, even if he believes different things.”

And the children: “He did think his witness would have more of a potent impact on both me and the children.... When he started teaching at Creighton, and the kids got past a certain age, I said, ‘This isn’t good—you think about Christianity all day every day, and I am only doing Judaism once a week, so I need to do Judaism every day so it doesn’t go away just by attrition.’ So they started keeping kosher, mostly—no pork, no shellfish. Two sets of dishes.

In 2003, when Rusty Reno was considering converting to Catholicism, his wife’s first response was to joke about it. “I said, ‘Honey, all those times we talked about converting, I meant Judaism!’” But her second response was to give him spiritual counsel. “I made my crack, then said, ‘Okay, honey, you need to find a spiritual advisor, and pray on this for a year.’” He did, and in 2004 he was received into the Catholic Church.

When I asked him, in an email, to talk about what it was like to be in a Catholic-Jewish intermarriage, he suggested that instead I go read his 2007 essay “Faith in the Flesh,” written on the occasion of his daughter’s becoming a bat mitzvah. Early in the essay, he recalls the occasion of his son’s ritual circumcision, how it made him question the quality of his own faith: “Circumcision is a ruthlessly physical act.... My mind was utterly disordered by the visceral reality of the event. But one thought came, and it has so lodged itself in my memory that I am very nearly consumed by it to this day. It was a thought of self-doubt, a worry about the invisibility of my own faith.” Jews were marked by their faith, but was he? “Where had God’s commandment set *me* apart and marked me as Christ’s own? Did we—no, did I—make the commandments of God into empty ephemera, ‘spiritual’ and pious commitments that the currents of culture eroded and obliterated the moment I left the church?”

Reno’s essay is an argument, although he never quite says so, for intermarriage. In his reading, marrying a Christian made Juliana more Jewish, in a way to which no true Christian could really object, and also made him more Christian, more attuned to the carnal nature of sacrifice. He never quite says that his bleeding son reminded him of Christ on the cross, but he does not need to. At his daughter’s bat mitzvah, she too becomes something of a sacrifice to God the Father, inasmuch as she has been sobbing because her father, as a Gentile, cannot stand with her as she reads Torah.

“She was angry,” Reno writes, but “neither the rabbi, nor her mother, nor I could give her what she wanted. In fact, I did not want to give her what she wanted, for her desire was that obedience to God would not require the pain of renunciation, would not require the visible marks on our bodies....” And so as her brother was marked by his cut penis, she is marked by the bitter tears of separation from her father. And so, in the pews, “I feel the tears on my cheek, and the liquid fire of her voice [chanting Torah and] touching the lips of my unclean heart. O, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God!”

The Sweeney/Wolls and the Renos have in common that each pair is simultaneously alike and different; within each couple, the content of their religiosity differs, but the quality of it, the way they believe, is quite similar. They disagree, but they know what they are disagreeing about.



But there are at least two other categories of interfaith couples, roughly speaking. There are those who are both equally indifferent to the religions they grew up in, who may have faint pangs of nostalgia or appreciation but are pretty comfortable existing as secular Americans, perhaps with a Christmas tree here, a relative’s Passover seder there. And then there are those far rarer families in which one member is, or becomes, quite serious about religion while the other remains indifferent, or perhaps scornful, or just bemused, or even supportive.

Take, for example, Anna Gold’s parents. Her mother was a Frenchwoman, an exchange student at Wellesley, who met her father—“typical Jewish New Jersey, upper-middle-class, Conservative Jew”—over dinner at a professor’s house. “They fell in love pretty much immediately,” said Gold, who works for a nonprofit organization in Brooklyn. When they wed in 1964, her father’s parents were “devastated,” Gold said. “He was disinherited by an uncle. They begged my mom to convert, but she didn’t want to.”

The couple were childless for many years. Anna, their only child, was born in 1981, when her mother was 41 years old and her father was 46. “A few years before I was born,” Gold said, “my mom was having some issues with depression. She joined St. Paul’s Church, in Cambridge, started attending Mass, becoming involved. When I was born, I was baptized.”

Her father was not disturbed by his wife’s newfound religiosity. And while he never became a Christian, he



helped his wife along in her observance. On Sundays, Marie-Hélène Gold began offering intercessory prayers—written by her husband, Arthur, with his more fluent English. “My mom would do the Prayers of the Faithful, and my agnostic Jewish dad was writing these prayers that my mom was reading,” Anna Gold recalled. “People would say, ‘They are so beautiful, you should publish them!’”

Gold still has some of the prayers, typed up by her dad. Sometimes the prayers were inspired by New Testament passages, sometimes by the Hebrew Bible: “May the three angels who appeared to Abraham as homeless strangers, and whom he received so hospitably, open our hearts to the homeless, for every homeless person is or ought to be an angel to us. May we and our leaders remember what Blake once said, that to turn a homeless person away is to turn an angel from our door.”

In this short, simple prayer, we can see how a Jewish intellectual joins forces with his Catholic wife, newly religious, not quite the woman he married but no less his wife for it. In Gold’s case, Catholicism was at least a partial cure for his wife’s depression, so he owed the church as much as she did. So when taking part in their new, shared project of writing literature together—prayer as literature, but literature nonetheless—he composes a text that (as it happens)

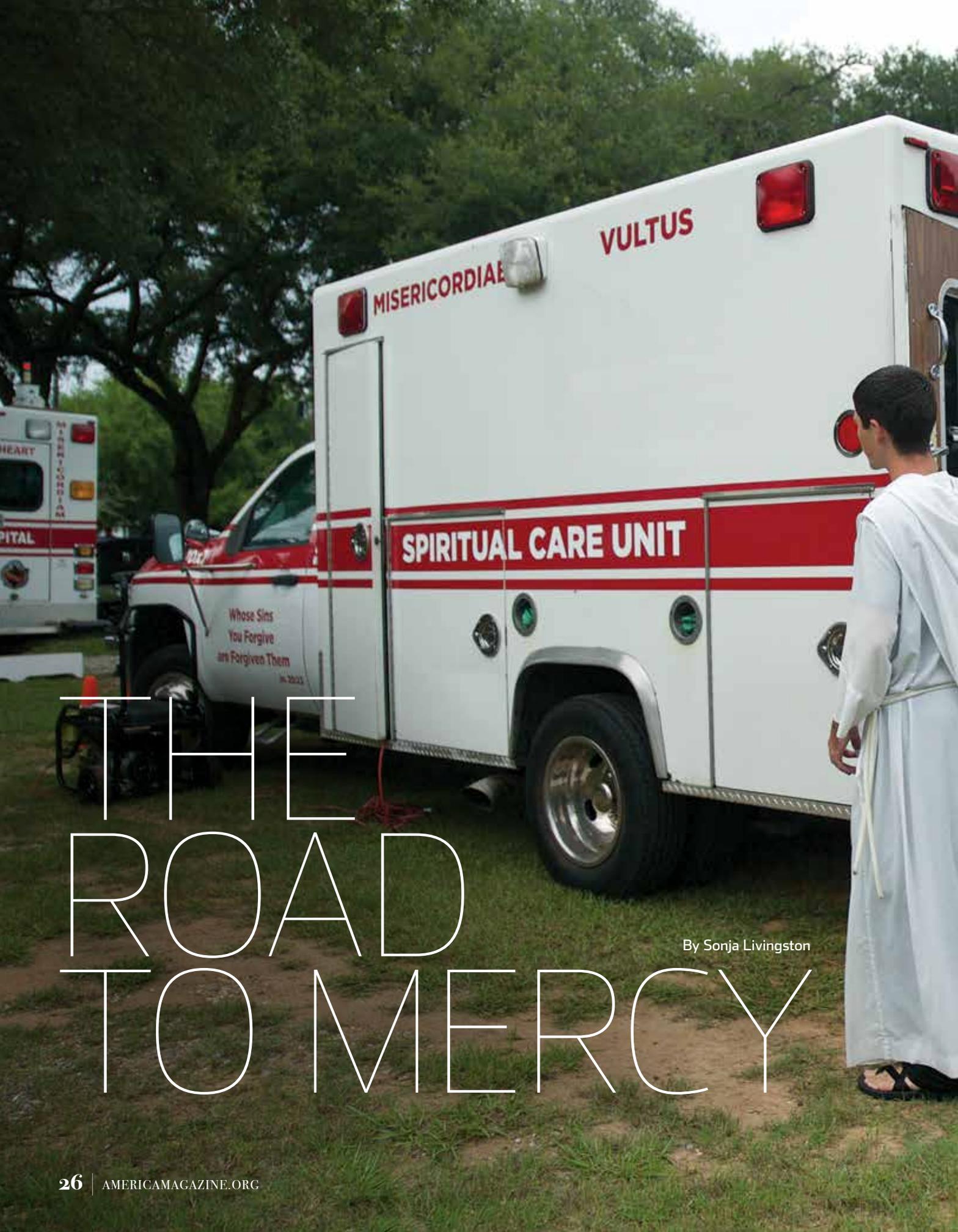
honors his own religious tradition, and his vocation as an English professor, and the church that she now calls home. He marries a patriarch to a Romantic poet, then offers the syncretism to the Catholic faithful. “I grew up with that duality,” Gold said, “knowing it was the same god but there were two ways of seeing Him.”

A more orthodox believer would say that while there may be two ways of seeing God, ultimately only one way can be correct. The Renos, for example, know that they will have to reckon further with their theological differences, if not in this life then in the next.

“Do you know C. S. Lewis’s *The Great Divorce*?” Juliana Reno asked, when I inquired if her husband was worried about her soul. “The gist is that there’s a bus ride from Hell to Heaven. And you get to Heaven, and you find out the answer, and you have to either accept it or not, and if you don’t, you get back on the bus. I said to Rusty, ‘We get to the other side, find out the real thing, and have to accept it. If I’m right, you have to pony up.’”

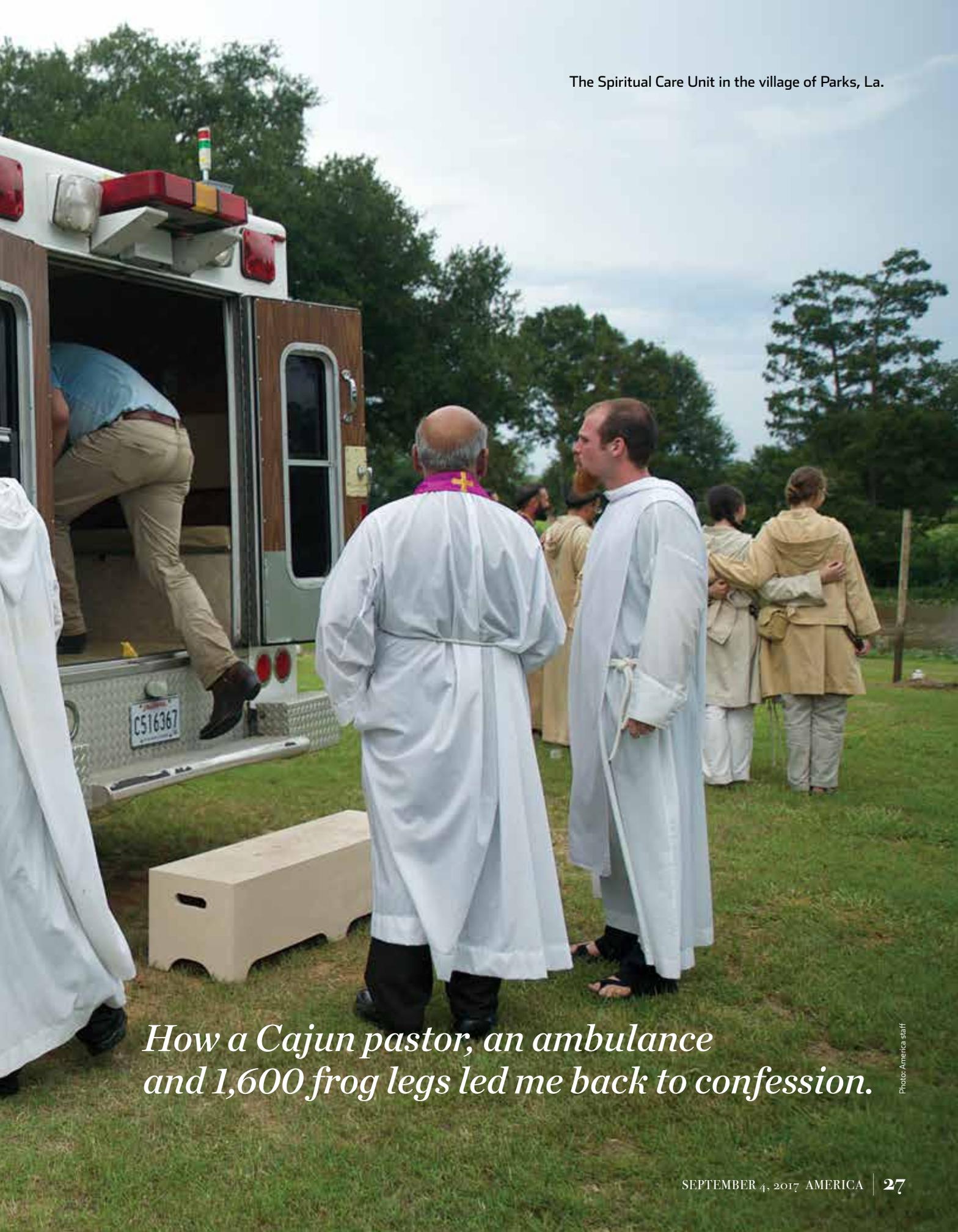
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Mark Oppenheimer hosts the podcast “Unorthodox,” a weekly, irreverent look at Jewish news and culture. He holds a Ph.D. from Yale and contributes regularly to *The Los Angeles Times* and the *The New York Times Magazine*.



# THE ROAD TO MERCY

By Sonja Livingston



*How a Cajun pastor, an ambulance and 1,600 frog legs led me back to confession.*

Photo: America staff

I had sin on my mind weeks before heading to Cajun country. Months before, in fact.

I had returned to my childhood church the year before, recalibrating to the rhythms of the Mass after two decades away. The homecoming was not without bumps, but I set aside doubt and allowed myself to rediscover the beauty of the Catholic tradition, taking in the stained glass and the singing of psalms, until the church once again became a place of solace—except for confession, which seemed to me the black sheep in the family of sacraments. Even in my churchiest days, I had never fully appreciated the sacrament of penance. This admission makes me somewhat ashamed, but it is also fairly typical. According to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, only 2 percent of Catholics go to confession monthly or more, 12 percent go once a year—and 75 percent go less than once a year or never. Which is to say I was in good company. Despite educational programs at the diocesan level, citywide billboard campaigns and apps meant to serve as confession guides, like iConfess, the sacrament seems in danger of going the way of the dinosaurs.

What is it about confession, I wondered, that seems so woefully out of date? And what do we lose as we back away? Even as I did not go, I thought about the sacrament, tentatively at first—even defensively—but then with greater frequency and curiosity. I reread my favorite scene in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, describing the protagonist's trip to a confessional. The young Stephen Dedalus had been knee-deep in sin, but once forgiven by the priest, he practically floats from the booth in a state of grace, overwhelmed by a sudden pulsing connection to the world around him. "How simple and beautiful was life after all!" Stephen thinks, experiencing one of those luminous moments we occasionally fall into when the circumstances rightly align—a heightened awareness, a certain angle of light, the heart flung momentarily open. It was my longing for such moments that had sent me back to church. But while I recognized confession as a technical precondition for Communion, I was not plagued, as Stephen Dedalus was, by excessive guilt, nor was I suffering agony over the flames of hell.

## TRUE CONFESSIONS

I grew up in the post-Vatican II era, in a progressive inner-city church in Rochester, N.Y. The folk Masses and opportunity to serve at the altar alongside boys are part of what snared me. I am sure I celebrated first penance,

though I struggle to recall it, and *celebrate* is not the verb I would have used to describe my participation. During group services or youth retreats, I would stand in line, bow my head and repeat the few canned sins I expected a priest might like to hear (*I lied, I swore, I fought with my sisters*). These confessions were true, but, even as a child, they were not major stumbling blocks on my spiritual path. I certainly do not regret the preaching of love in place of fear, but I am not sure sin was ever a meaningful part of my vocabulary. I heard the word, of course, but like *hallowed* and *apostolic*, it seemed too old-fashioned and laden a concept to carry around outside of church, like trying to spin cartwheels with cast-iron skilletts stuffed in your pockets.

Fast-forward 30 years. I was back in my childhood church, now clustered with other city parishes and renamed Our Lady of the Americas. I sat listening as, each season, our priests encouraged confession during Lent or Advent or one of the summer programs. *Maybe*, I would think. But when the time came I always had an excuse: I would be out of town, or the events were in Spanish and I worried there would be no English-speaking priest. *I'll go eventually*, I told myself, but the time never came. It went that way for months, the liturgical calendar moving from Christmas to Easter and back again to Ordinary Time. I did not go to confession, but neither did it leave me be.

All of this is how I found myself in Southern Louisiana. I wanted to meet the priest who had converted an old ambulance into a mobile confessional—the Spiritual Care Unit, he calls it—complete with kneeler and curtain, holy water and rosaries, Bibles and prayer cards. Father Michael Champagne drives the confessional throughout Cajun Country, parking outside restaurants and health clubs, visiting nursing homes and community festivals. He started the project in November 2015, heeding Pope Francis' call to be more active in bringing people back to church. Since that time, the unit has traveled 8,000 miles, made nearly 200 stops and heard 4,000 confessions.

I reached out to Father Champagne, who said he would happily meet. Aside from my interest in his commitment to the sacrament, I suppose I hoped my visit to the Spiritual Care Unit would be so out of the ordinary, I would have no choice but to fall without hesitation onto the kneeler.

## CAJUN COUNTRY CARE

My compact rental car is dwarfed by pickups as I cross the Mississippi at Baton Rouge and enter the Atchafala-



ya Basin, a landscape of tupelo and cypress swamps. The water tower in Breaux Bridge proclaims the small city the “Crawfish Capital of the World.” South of Lafayette, magnolias flaunt flowers the size of dinner plates, and Dollar General stores and tackle shops punctuate roads also featuring take-out shacks advertising *boudin* and *cracklins*.

In St. Martinville, Father Champagne shows me around the Community of Jesus Christ Crucified, pointing out the retreat center, the housing for the women religious who are part of the community, the chapel and a newly acquired building used as a food pantry and tu-

toring center. Drawing on Father Champagne’s creative leadership, the small community of contemplative missionaries hosted an 88-hour marathon reading of the Bible in the town square last fall, and it organizes the annual Fête-Dieu du Teche, a 50-boat eucharistic procession down Bayou Teche on the feast of the Assumption every August. After Vespers, the black-cassocked Father Champagne invites me to stay for a planning meeting for Fête-Dieu du Teche, and as I follow through the courtyard, I am struck by the fragrance of flowers.

“Confederate jasmine,” Father Champagne says, and



I bend into the blooming vine, its perfume startling me as much as the sight of evening primrose clustered along swampy roadsides had the day before. I had stopped to take photos of the delicate pink bells at a pull-off where others stood looking for gators. A wonder, I thought, how such tenderness survives.

Father Champagne invites me to ride along in the Spiritual Care Unit the next day. The first stop is about 10 miles south, in New Iberia. We pass over railroad tracks and under live oaks, driving by fading cottages, grand old houses and a bevy of businesses named for the Acadian folk hero Evangeline (Evangeline Funeral Home, Evangeline Optical, Evangeline Coca-Cola Bottling). Cajuns are proud of their Acadian heritage, which is rooted in Catholicism and part of the reason for their ancestors' expulsion from Canada by the British 250 years ago.

We pull into Lagniappe Village and park outside the Subway shop. The community has the routine down. The sisters from the community pull out portable steps, then unfold a table and load it with brochures—including an “Examination of Conscience” listing the works of mercy and the seven deadly sins. A portable loudspeaker plays French hymns, but the recordings vary, I am told, and they sometimes broadcast the Chaplet of Divine Mercy.

We park for two hours, as people drive in and out of the strip mall to buy pet food, get their nails done or pick up a footlong for lunch. A few shoppers ignore the confessional, which—with the music and life-sized image of Jesus fixed to its side—is tough to do. Most smile and wave. Many come over, hug the sisters and thank them for their work.

They ask for prayers, offer to buy lunch or stand waiting their turn for confession. Most I spoke with were practicing Catholics who appreciated the opportunity to go to confession. A few knew the unit's schedule, and wanted to meet with Father Champagne. Others looked so nervous I did not want to bother them with questions. All came out looking lighter than when they went in.

I had heard about Evangeline before she arrived, a devout Catholic and supporter of the community's work. I'll call her Evangeline in deference to the region, but also because of her unswerving tendency toward evangelization. “If Miss Evangeline was here, she'd get them to come to confession,” the sisters said when a trio of workers emerge from a car and fail to look our way.

They had not exaggerated. She'd arranged to allow the unit to park in front of the shop, but her commitment did not stop there. Upon arrival at the unit, Evangeline uses her boundless enthusiasm to coax people into the confessional, calling out *Hello*s and *Hey y'all*s. Her eyes flit around the parking lot, and during a slow spell, just as the sun breaks loose from the clouds, Evangeline's gaze settles on me.

“You going in?”

“I'm not sure.” I try to make my voice sound nonchalant, as if Miss Evangeline were offering sweet tea.

“You're Catholic, aren't you?”

I wipe the sweat from my brow and nod, wondering if she can sense just how recently I have returned and how tenuous it all seems as I stand beside the ambulance with the light atop, green to show the confessional is available, red to show Father Champagne is sitting with someone.

Photo: America staff

◀ According to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, only 2 percent of Catholics go to confession monthly or more, 12 percent go once a year—and 75 percent go less than once a year or never.

The light is green now and Evangeline sees that I see.

“Have you gone to confession?”

“Yes,” I say, adding the lie to my snowballing list of things to eventually confess. “But I’m just observing today.”

“What better way to observe than from inside,” Evangeline says, and I have to admit that she is right, even as my heart comes unglued and starts flailing around my chest.

## **GUILT, SIN AND SELF**

Southern Louisiana is not for the faint of heart. Alligators make a home of the bayous. Catfish grow larger than dogs. Schools close on the first Friday in October to prepare for squirrel-hunting day. There is no vegetarian patty at the New Iberia Subway and to ask for one is like driving a Toyota Prius with a Hillary bumper sticker into a land of Ford F-150s with antler decals and hunting racks. When Miss Evangeline reports that she has 1,200 frog legs in her freezer, I do not for second doubt her and try my best to wipe my sympathy for all 600 frogs from my face.

Which is to say that I am faint of heart. I am afraid of house centipedes, of baiting a hook, of the suspect textures in ill-cooked okra and squid salad, of the proliferation of germs, of navigating bendy roadways and of staring down from great heights. And despite the fact that I have traveled 1,000 miles to learn about his project, in this moment, baking under the sun in rural Louisiana I am afraid to step inside the Spiritual Care Unit, sit across from Father Champagne and confess my sins.

Before heading to St. Martinville, I had met a friend in New Orleans for breakfast. I told him where I was going, explaining the mobile confessional, my interest in the sacrament and the fact that it seems in danger of falling away.

“Really?” He was surprised. “I always thought confession would be the best part of being Catholic.”

“How so?” I bit into the deep-fried potato salad I had ordered with my scrambled eggs. Seasoned with a touch of mustard, it was perfect and terrible, and quite possibly the definition of sin itself.

“You know, just sitting there and getting to talk,” he said. “Like therapy.”

“But it’s not therapy,” I said. “It’s not an airing of grievances or a listing of various hurts. It’s the admission of guilt. The owning of faults and bad choices. It’s saying to another human being: *Here I am. Here’s what I did wrong, and exactly how many times.*”

“Oh,” he said. “Never mind.” But even as we laughed, I

tried to visualize coming clean before a priest and considered ordering up another serving of fried potato salad.

If it were simply a matter of revelation, I would have been in the Spiritual Care Unit before Miss Evangeline ever arrived on the scene. It is not confession I struggle with so much as contrition. I do not think I am alone in this. Perhaps as a reaction to once being so bound, the culture has largely thrown off shame and made personal disclosure a pastime. Round-the-clock access to the electronic signaling of others on social media facilitates our revelation. Our news feeds brim with details of celebrity private lives and over-the-top sharing. Perhaps we have not abandoned confession so much as traded in one screen for another.

## **DEFYING THE POST-CONTRITION ERA**

“Guilt is a useless emotion,” an old boyfriend once said. It was about the craziest thing I had ever heard; but, like everyone else I knew in the 1990s, I was busy learning to love myself, and letting go of guilt and shame seemed a good way to get there. We were the Free-to-Be generation, ecumenical attenders of Buddhist weekends, readers of Hermann Hesse and *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. From Joseph Campbell we learned to follow our bliss. What earlier generations called sin, we reframed as personality quirks or—if especially chronic or troublesome—as challenges resulting from the particular constellations of our childhood. This was liberating in many ways and preferable to the binds we saw in the older generation, who seemed as committed to their chronic sense of obligation as we were to its eradication.

But like most extremes, we were, in fact, flipsides of the same coin—as driven by our commitment to bliss as our parents had been to denying theirs. By which I mean that my ex-boyfriend had it wrong. Guilt comes in several varieties. Sometimes it is misplaced and debilitating, yes, but at other times appropriate and useful for making change. Perhaps it is too overwhelming to try and untangle the varieties—much easier to throw the whole mess aside, so that, despite the rise of the public confessional, our sense of responsibility and wrongdoing have dramatically withered. We have, for better or worse, entered a post-contrition era.

This is compounded by shifting notions of sin. Repentance is difficult enough when the offense is obvious, but nearly impossible when it involves something you do not see as wrong. Many sins—especially those concerning matters



◀ Inside the Spiritual Care Unit, individuals have the chance to speak with priests like the Rev. William Seifert about their struggles and sins.

of sexuality—are no longer accepted as immoral by many Catholics: birth control, divorce, same-sex relationships. The divide between institutionally sanctioned morality and how people actually live their lives has grown exponentially over the past few decades. And somewhere along the line, many of us became less inclined to allow for such a chasm and stayed home—if not from church, then certainly from the confessional.

Even as I rehearsed what to say when I finally persuad-

ed myself into going to confession, most of my energy was spent on resisting, attempting to accommodate or otherwise reacting to the traditional list of sins versus a contemplation of the sacrament itself. The more I spun my wheels on the particular or expected content of my confession versus the process of reconciliation, the more I avoided mustering the exquisite courage it takes to come before another and say, *I've done wrong*. And if you believe that we all are, in fact, one body—despite the way we so often sequester ourselves in the whirr of our own activity—then this opening of the self to another is nothing less than sacred, offering to us as individuals and as a culture the much needed balm and chance to begin anew.

Which brings me back to Louisiana, where the only booth I slipped into was inside Subway as the community ate lunch after finishing confessions. I slumped and avoided Evangeline's eye as I nibbled a spinach and cucumber sandwich.

They had been so generous. Why had I failed to partake? When I had asked Father Champagne earlier in the

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day why he thought confession was falling away, he said Catholics have adopted a doggedly individualistic and American approach to everything, including God. “Our temptation is toward isolation,” he said. “We think we can do it all ourselves.”

“We don’t want to be vulnerable before another human being,” I said, and if I had used an “I” in place of “we,” it might have been the beginning of my own confession.

I update my Facebook status a few times a week and have written about myself in books and essays and even poems—but it turns out that it is easier to bare your soul to unseen thousands than to one living, breathing human being sitting quietly before you. As I once again make myself at home in the pew, I am discovering that the sacraments confer grace in direct proportion to our willingness to open ourselves to them.

Mary, a friend at church, claims that confession is like getting a car wash for your soul. “You feel so good after,” she says. “All clean and bright.” At 96 years of age, Mary would have hopped into the Spiritual Care Unit and outdone even Evangeline at getting others to follow suit. I love Mary like nobody’s business, but I am a gifted excuse-maker; and even if she had been whisked to New Iberia, I would have found a way to stay safely planted in the parking lot.

No, I did not confess in the Spiritual Care Unit that day. But I sat two feet from the kneeler on the drive back to St. Martinville and read an Act of Contrition on the back of a prayer card. And it was this, perhaps, and Father Champagne’s example, the startling scent of jasmine—and even the proselytizing Miss Evangeline, with all those frog legs in her freezer—that propelled me home to Our Lady of the Americas Church and into a seat across from my parish priest. And no matter how often I stumble or how make-shift my Act of Contrition, he sits listening, anointing with his attention, absolving on behalf of a power larger than either of us, blessing with hands and words and goodness itself before sending me back out into the broken, beautiful world to begin again.

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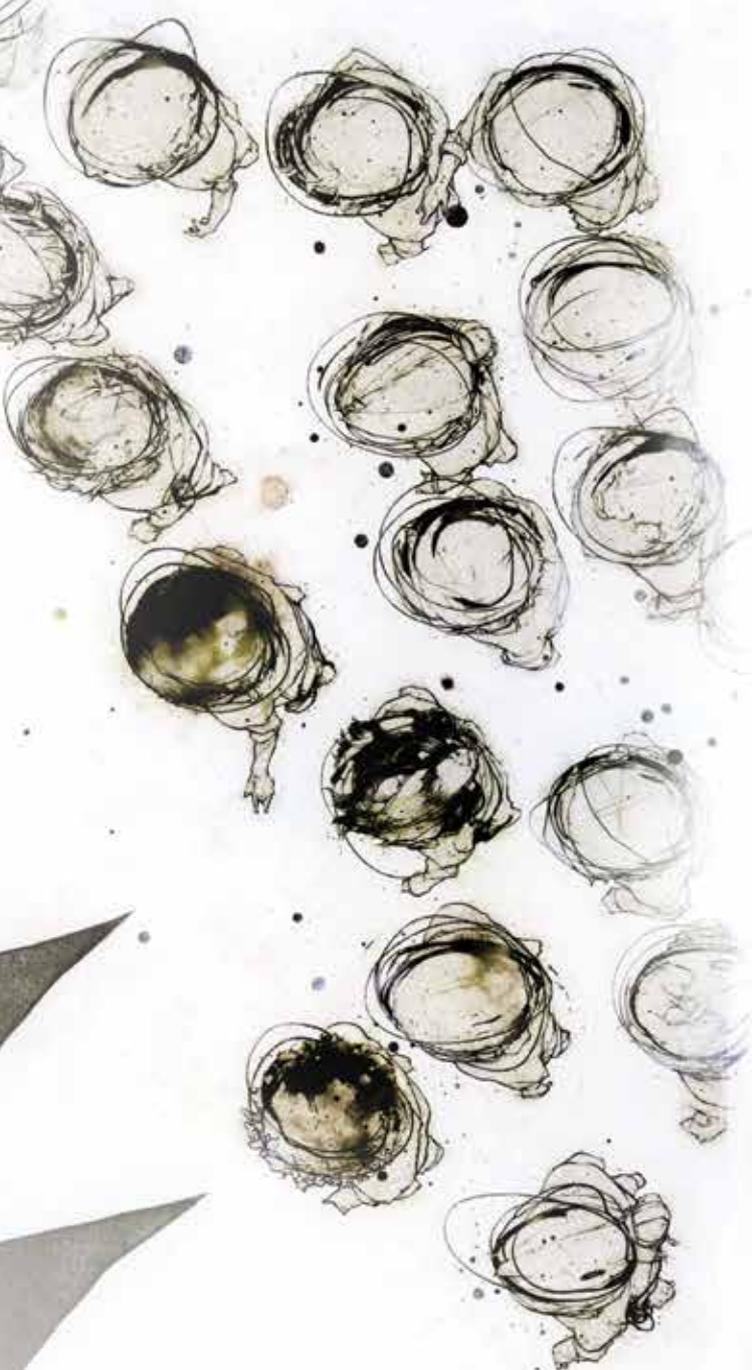
# WHEN THE K.K.K. CAME TO CHARLOTTESVILLE HOW SHOULD CATHOLICS RESPOND TO THE SIN OF RACISM?

By Nichole M. Flores

This summer, the Ku Klux Klan converged upon Charlottesville, Va. I am not naïve about the existence of racism in the United States. As a Mexican-American woman with brown skin, I have often experienced instances of racism. Until recently, however, I had imagined the K.K.K. as a fossil calcified in our national history, not as a living, active organism that still instills fear, marshaling intimidation and potentially inciting violence.

The K.K.K.'s visit to my city was but one event in a series of reactions to the efforts by Charlottesville to examine critically its history of racism and slavery and the legacy of memorials in its public spaces. In April, the City Council voted (3 to 2) to remove a statue of the Confederate general Robert E. Lee and unanimously agreed to change the name of Lee Park to Emancipation Park. Jackson Park in Charlottesville (named after Stonewall Jackson, another Confederate general) was renamed Justice Park. Though greeted with applause among many sectors of the community, retaliation against the city's efforts has also been swift and fierce. Since then, Charlottesville has become a flashpoint for a variety of contentious national debates about how cities will deal with their tormented racial legacies; the appropriateness of Confederate symbols in public; and questions of identity, the safety of minority communities, free speech and public protest.

In April the Virginia Flagggers, a group dedicated to defending Confederate monuments and memorials, hosted a rally called Save Lee Park. They waved Confederate flags and carried signs reading "Confederate heroes matter" and "Hands off our monument." In May Richard Spencer, a white nationalist and University of Virginia alumnus, led a so-called alt-right rally in Emancipation Park at the foot of Lee's



But before the tragic events of Aug. 12, the Ku Klux Klan had already come to town. On July 8 about 50 members of the Loyal White Knights, a newer chapter of the Ku Klux Klan based in Pelham, N.C., held a rally in Justice Park. Their rally was met by an estimated 1,000-person counterprotest with representation from Black Lives Matter, Showing Up for Racial Justice, Solidarity Cville and the Charlottesville Clergy Collective. The Klan members carried Confederate flags and signs with anti-Semitic messages and engaged in a collective Nazi-style salute during the 45-minute rally. The chilling ritual concluded when they were escorted away by heavily armed police officers. A member of their group said that they planned to retreat to private land for a cookout and a cross burning.

As we discern the signs of the times, the question of racial injustice confronts the Catholic Church in a forceful way. Our church teaches that racism is a sin against the dignity of human life. But fighting racism is seldom placed at the heart of our robust social justice advocacy. Christians of various denominations I spoke with suggested that the best response to the K.K.K. rally was to ignore it. The city and the University of Virginia urged people to attend alternative events, like a unity concert. A community picnic was held at the local art park and an interfaith concert and prayer service took place several blocks from the rally.

•••

On July 6 I received an email invitation from a local parish to a “Holy hour for peace and the end of hatred and racism.” We would pray the rosary in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in anticipation of the K.K.K. rally. Frankly, I was surprised to receive an invitation of this nature from this particular parish. Like many Catholic parishes in the United States, this one almost never discusses race or racism in explicit terms, even as the body count of unarmed black men and women killed at the hands of police officers continues to climb. I quickly rearranged my schedule to be present with others for this prayer.

Entering the silent sanctuary, I count one other non-white person in the gathering. I begin to worry about whether I came to the church at the wrong time or if I had misunderstood the evening’s intentions. I am reassured by the sound of rosaries jangling as they emerge from purses and pockets; we have all come to pray for peace with the Mother of God.

The presider places the Blessed Sacrament into a gleaming monstrance. He offers a brief reflection on racial justice and theology, recounting the role of St. Thom-

statue. Participants wielded torches and chanted, “You will not replace us.”

On Aug. 12 the white nationalist blogger Jason Kessler led another alt-right rally, Unite the Right, in Charlottesville. The night before the scheduled rally, white supremacist protesters marched on the grounds of the University of Virginia carrying tiki torches and committing acts of violence and intimidation against counterprotesters, university law enforcement and reporters. The next morning violence broke out before the rally was scheduled to begin. Graphic images made international news, including devastating videos of a Nazi sympathizer plowing a car into a crowd of counterprotesters, killed the 32-year-old Charlottesville resident Heather Heyer.



as Aquinas's theology in Martin Luther King Jr.'s thinking about law and justice. An unjust law is no law at all and is not to be obeyed. Justice, according to Aquinas, is to render unto everyone what is due. The presider then calls on those gathered to repent for the sin of racism, the times that we have been guilty of this sin. This is not a merely rhetorical invitation; another priest sits in a corner of the sanctuary ready to hear our confessions. The presider asks us to pray for those who do harm to others through the sin of racism. The implication of the admonition is clear: I am being asked to pray for those who will persecute me at Justice Park.

It is Thursday, so we pray the luminous mysteries of the rosary. We remember the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, the wedding feast at Cana, the proclamation of the kingdom of God, the Transfiguration, the institution of the Eucharist. In so doing, we invoke images of a flourishing human life: water, wine, food, light and community.

At first it seems odd to pray the mysteries of light; would not the sorrowful mysteries be more appropriate tonight? But as we move deeper into the mystery, the light of the Gospel pierces the despair that has haunted me since white supremacist groups descended upon our town. It

pierces the layer of despair that settles over me when I realize the extent of racial hatred that remains in our world. It illuminates the most injured part of my soul, the place where I carry wounds from hatred and marginalization based on the color of my skin.

I focus my gaze on my rosary. It is adorned with images of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Juan Diego. Guadalupe's image is the anti-Klan. Her presence is announced not with threats of violence or false notions of racial purity but with *flor y canto*—flowers and song. The brown-skinned Virgin, adorned with colorful symbols of both Aztec and Spanish splendor, testifies to the beauty that we can find in our differences. She appears to Juan Diego, the despised and denigrated person of colonial society, and empowers him to communicate her message to the church's powerful bishops and clergy. She invites communion by making the powerless equal to the powerful. As patroness of the Americas, she rejects all forms of hatred and racism as an affront to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who affirms the dignity of every human being, the beauty of justice and equality.

I leave the sanctuary in silence. When I reach the parking lot, I begin to weep. Like a healing salve applied to an open wound, to hear the church name the sin of racism at once soothes and stings. The joy of Jesus' presence meets me in my dread, calming the visceral fear that has overwhelmed me since learning about the rally. On this night, admitting the presence of racial hatred is an act of mercy, one that binds the wounds of being unseen and feeling unloved in the church as a nonwhite person. On this night, the church proclaims to me: Your life matters.

Still, I wonder why I have never heard racism denounced in such clarion terms from a parish before. Will I hear it denounced so clearly again? Does the Catholic Church in the United States have the courage to stand up to racism before the K.K.K. comes to town? Or after the K.K.K. leaves town? Will our parishes stand in solidarity with those involved in nonviolent direct action in response to racial hatred?

A holy hour against racial hatred is a profound way to begin this urgent mission of the church, rejecting racism in the clearest possible terms at all times and in all places. These prayers send us out to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with all people of good will against racial terror that assaults human life, inhibits human flourishing and demolishes the common good.

---

Nichole M. Flores is an assistant professor of religious studies at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.

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Rev. Dr. Richard Johnson, Editor, Forum Letter  
Dr. J. Patrick Hornbeck, Fordham University  
Dr. Catherine Clifford, St. Paul's University, Ottawa

MODERATOR:

Rev. Dr. John Nunes, president, Concordia College

WHEN: September 25, 2017 | 6 p.m.

WHERE: Concordia College, Sommer Center,  
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SPEAKERS:

Prof. Susan Wood, SCL, Marquette University & Rep. of  
the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity  
Fr. Brian McWeeney, Archdiocese of NY  
Rev. Dr. Leopoldo Sanchez, Concordia Seminary, MO  
Rev. Dr. Dien Ashley Taylor, Redeemer Lutheran Church,  
Bronx, NY

MODERATOR:

Matt Malone, S.J., editor in chief, *America* magazine

WHEN: September 26, 2017 | 6 p.m.

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*That man Robert Mitchum:  
remembering an enigmatic  
American original*

By Christopher Sandford

For sheer old-fashioned cool it would be hard to beat Robert Mitchum. Pictured: Mitchum preparing to appear on "The Jimmy Durante Show" in 1956.

There was a time when the American male movie star who could (supposedly) hold his liquor and get through press interviews without whining or emoting was in vogue—from, say, the mid-1940s to the late '60s. John Wayne was such a figure. Kirk Douglas, Burt Lancaster and Humphrey Bogart were, too. Or take the likes of Jimmy Cagney, Robert Ryan and Lee Marvin—all a combination of menace, resolve and caustic observation. Steve McQueen was more of a transitional figure: sometimes the squinty-eyed man's man, at others one of those postmodern ironists (think Dustin Hoffman or Warren Beatty) who hijacked pop culture in the 1970s.

But for sheer old-fashioned cool—a sort of brooding languor, with the ever-present whiff of violence—it would be hard to beat Robert Charles Durman Mitchum, who was born in Bridgeport, Conn., on Aug. 6, 1917. As the concept of masculinity underwent its modern crisis of confidence, Mitchum and one or two other distinguished peers became the face of its remembered spirit: plainspoken, defiant, inherently nostalgic.

How did he do this? In part, by honing his craft to near invisibility. I am reminded of what Robert Wise told me about directing Mitchum in 1948's "psychological" western "Blood on the Moon." Wise remembered his young star as having "mastered the art of reacting":

Mitchum could be standing completely still listening to another guy who would

be gesticulating away like Mussolini on a rant, and it would be Bob the audience was looking at. That was really his forte, the still thing, the menace. I picked up Mitchum's script once and at various points I saw that he'd marked up the phrase "NAR." I asked him about it, and he told me it stood for *No action required*. "I don't need a line," he'd say. "I'll give you a look."

In celebrating the centennial of Mitchum's birth, we are really paying homage to a peculiarly American male archetype. While some might caricature him as a sort of priapic swinger, loosely connecting the laissez-faire morals associated with the 1950s Beats with those of the Swinging Sixties—a sort of Hugh Hefner with added screen presence—Mitchum transcends the cliché.

An aspiring poet and songwriter, he never lost the classic immigrant's desire for self-improvement—nor, perhaps, his trademark mixture of ego and insecurity. It is this same tough-and-tender paradox that remains at the core of Mitchum's character and makes him so compelling to watch on screen.

It seems fair to say that Mitchum shunned—or at least tactically avoided—anything that might resemble traditional Christian piety, with its twin challenges of self-denial and service. So far as we know, he never attended church, nor ever admitted

to any sort of need for an intellectual, institutional or sacramental structure that might enable him to keep the dark side of his personality at bay. And there were dark moments: in addition to arrests for drug use, Mitchum was rightfully pummeled in the press for an interview he gave in 1983 that appeared to deny the Holocaust. (He later apologized, saying he was attempting to play a part.)

But Mitchum was open to the works of Christian writers like Thomas à Kempis, who seemed to him to answer both his spiritual and intellectual yearning. He is said to have slept with both a Bible and a bottle of whiskey on his nightstand. These were perhaps the twin totems of his whole life. Mitchum was by both instinct and self-education an acutely sensitive man, whose lifelong affinity was for those he saw as fellow underdogs, yet who resisted the lure of institutional religion.

•••

Mitchum's mother was a Norwegian immigrant and sea captain's daughter; his father, of Scottish-Irish and Blackfoot Indian descent, was a shipyard and railroad worker. It seems fair to say that a certain degree of volatility ran in the family. His father died in a railyard accident in South Carolina when Bob was a boy, and he was in and out of school, often involved in fistfights and mischief. He left home at 14 and took to riding around the country on a boxcar.

In time, Mitchum rode the rails to California and found work as a secretary and ghostwriter. He went



on to a job working the night shift as a machine operator at Lockheed until a nervous breakdown put him in the hospital. Someone suggested he might look for less demanding employment as an actor, and an agent took him on in the faint hope that he might make it as a cowboy type who “looks kinda mean in the eyes.”

Around the same time, Mitchum married his childhood sweetheart,

Dorothy Spence. The bride’s parents did not entirely approve of the match. “They thought Bob was a hobo,” Dorothy later acknowledged. “My father talked of warning him off with a shotgun.” Despite this unpromising start, the Mitchums would be together for the remaining 57 years of Robert’s life.

Meanwhile, Mitchum’s mean eyes got him an audition for the Hopalong Cassidy feature “Hoppy Serves a

Writ.” He got the part, along with the two-word motivational advice about finding his inner character: “Don’t shave.”

After notching up seven films in as many months, R.K.O. signed Mitchum to a seven-year deal. The studio memo on the new recruit assessed Mitchum as a “rugged, underplayed type” who “on and off camera is proving himself a team player.” They were right about



Mitchum represented a peculiarly American male archetype. Pictured, at right, in a scene from "Midway" (1976).

put his hands in the air. Mitchum hit the first man in the face, breaking his nose. It turned out his visitors were members of the Los Angeles Police Department investigating a nearby disturbance. The judge gave Mitchum 180 days, at which point the young actor made a counteroffer to join the army instead. He did seven months in uniform, never leaving the United States, got out on a hardship case and went back to Hollywood.

The arrest did not exactly hurt his career. Time magazine eulogized "G.I. Joe" as "a movie without a single false note" and Mitchum himself as possessed of a "profound sense of individuality and danger." Little did they know. In September 1948, Mitchum was arrested for possession of marijuana "while in the company of a lewd female person not his wife" as the police report put it. He did 43 days on a prison farm and emerged more popular than ever. A bobbysoxers' fan club—the Mitchum Droolettes—was quickly organized.

Around the middle part of his career, Mitchum gave a variety of outstanding performances that demonstrated a distinct intelligence behind the seemingly blasé facade. In 1955's "The Night of the Hunter," he famously plays a charismatic, black-clad itinerant preacher wandering the blue highways in order to do "God's works." That Mitchum's idea of the role might stray from the strictly conventional comes early on in his voice-over rumination: "Sometimes he wondered if God really understood. Not that the Lord minded about their [sinners'] killings. Why, his Book was full of killings. But there were things God did hate.... Preacher would think of these

things, and his hands at night would go crawling down under the blankets till the fingers named Love closed around the bone hasp of the knife and his soul rose up in flaming glorious fury."

This is surely one of the most creepy moments in cinema history, and taken together with certain of Mitchum's other deeds in the film, many of them still unsuitable for a family publication, it is remarkable that his young co-stars did not simply break character and run screaming from the set.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Mitchum found a niche in film noir, a genre he would adorn right up to the time of 1975's "Farewell, My Lovely." There would be 26 starring features for him in the years 1945-55. Other scripts during this period proved less elevated. "I punch in, I punch out," Mitchum once remarked. Even so, he was always professional on set. Deborah Kerr remarked of her co-star in 1957's "Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison": "He was a poetic, interesting man...a perceptive, amusing person with a great gift for telling a story.... Bob was at all times patient, loyal and sensitive, always in a good humor and always ready to make a joke when things became trying."

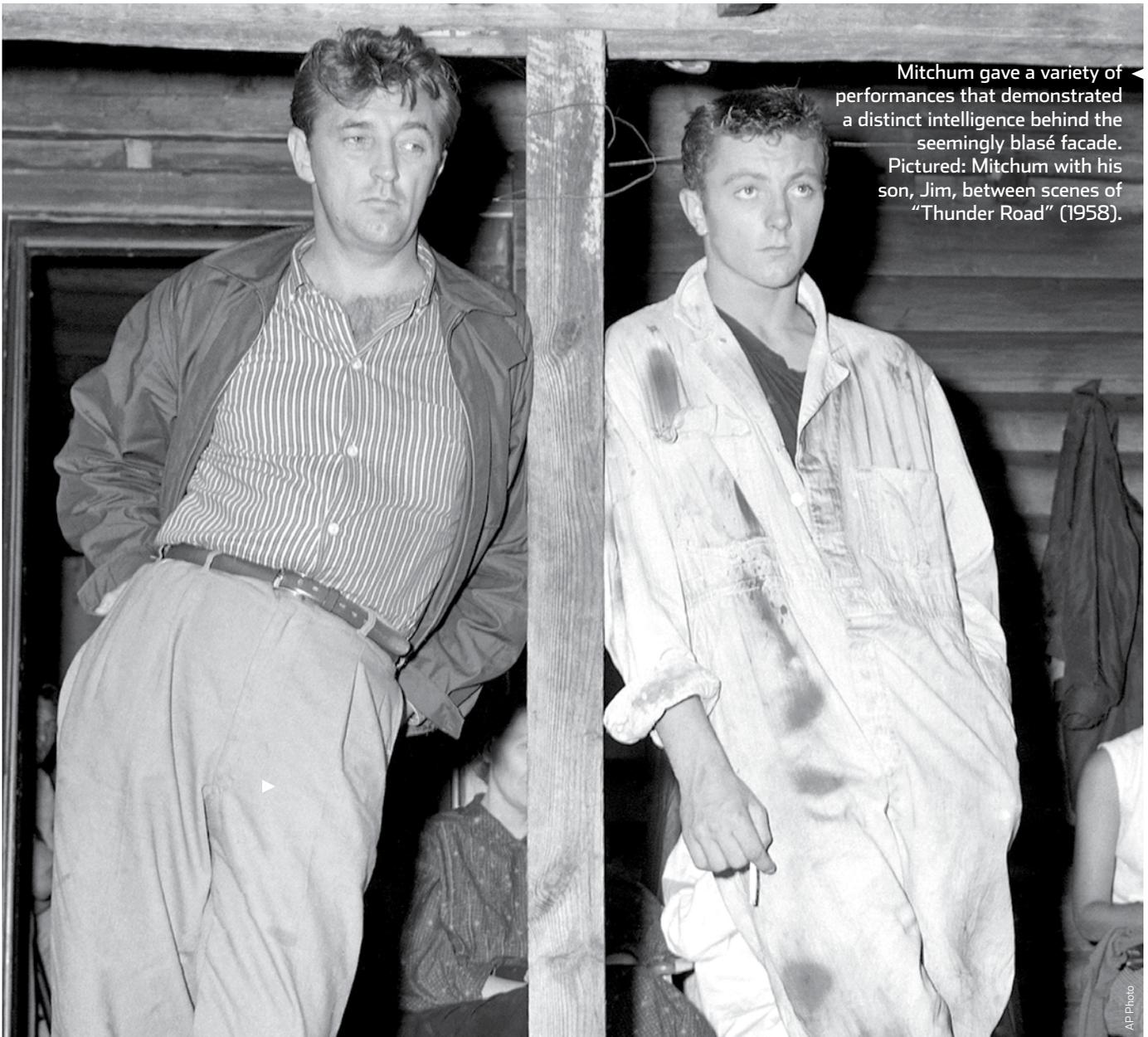
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The man of real talent who longs to be acclaimed for something else is a recurring figure in the arts. Mitchum clearly harbored the conceit that he could have earned his keep as a musician or a writer. His chief contribution to 1967's summer of love, during which he hit 50, was an album of easygoing pop tunes called "That Man Robert Mitchum...Sings." Shown on the cover wearing a pink shirt and someone's idea of a friendly smile, the

the first part, if not the second.

Not long after starring in the Oscar-nominated "The Story of G.I. Joe" (like John Wayne before him, he somehow avoided actual combat duty), Mitchum was sitting on his front porch one night when a man pulled up in a car, jumped out and ran towards him shining a flashlight in his face. Then someone else started screaming at him to hold still and

AP Photo



In the 1950s the author Barnaby Conrad kept a small hotel in San Francisco, where most of his overnight visitors signed the guest book with com-

ments along the lines of “Thanks!” or “Great place!” When Mitchum checked out, he wrote: “Compadre.... When all the broken crockery of desperate communion is swept from under our understanding heels may we find on that clear expanse of floor the true and irrevocable target of infinite thrust.” It might be unreasonable to assume he hadn’t been drinking. A bit later in his career, he wrote in a young Australian fan’s autograph book, “In a country

which with casual aplomb regards the anachronism of the kangaroo and the platypus—the being homo sapiens is a disquieting oddity—Merry Christmas, Bob Mitchum.” Again, it may be that he had overdone the Bacchic rites. But it may also be that Mitchum genuinely felt he had something he wanted to say about the human condition and that as a result, the phrase “intelligent actor” should not be considered an oxymoron in his case.

There were those who believed, in his last years as an upmarket TV soap-opera ham in overblown sagas like “The Winds of War” and “North and South,” that Mitchum had become a parody of himself. Others found his final act oddly poignant, his great face shrunken down until it resembled a sort of acorn surmounted by a pair of comic George Burns glasses. In 1994, when he was diagnosed with emphysema, someone asked him whether he might not consider downsizing the booze and cigarettes, Mitchum replied emphatically: “Hell, no. I’m not going to change my life just to live another couple of months.”

Robert Mitchum died on July 1, 1997. He was 79, and he went out on his own terms, a half-smoked butt and an empty shot glass on his bedside table. James Stewart followed him just 24 hours later, and some of the critics were thus able to talk about the end of an era. Mitchum himself would likely have scorned those seeking a higher cultural meaning to his life and times. His own preferred epitaph was the old Mexican phrase, *Feo, fuerte y formal*, which roughly translates as “He was ugly, strong and had dignity.”

Mitchum’s slow, languid smile and air of basic honesty continue to endear him to audiences around the world. He is the embodiment of the guileless American male, fundamentally decent, self-aware and as gritty as a half-finished road.

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Christopher Sandford is the author of many books, most recently *Union Jack: John F. Kennedy’s Special Relationship with Great Britain* (University Press of New England).

## The Transgression

By Sheryl Luna

We all unfold as music.  
 Our desire appears each morning.  
 It is white lit, bare branched hunger for the entire sky.  
 Dogs bark at a man with a leaf blower.  
 Doors open, close. My mind and yours lit by sun.  
 Ravens caw, an unkindness tumults in the blue.  
 We feel we learn our traumas too late, but we are as children.  
 Our heart some days an orchestra suddenly aflame.  
 Closing our eyes, we see our salmon-lit dawn,  
 and it is no transgression to look towards ourselves with awe.

Sheryl Luna’s collection *Pity the Drowned Horses* (University of Notre Dame Press) received the *Andres Montoya Poetry Prize*. Recent poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Taos International Journal of Poetry and Art* and *Pilgrimage*.

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Health care is market-driven, yet competition does not bring lower prices or improve services.

## Is affordable health care possible?

By Karen Sue Smith

In her rousing, well-researched and fast-paced book, **An American Sickness: How Healthcare Became Big Business and How You Can Take It Back** Elisabeth Rosenthal posits that our nation's current dysfunction in health care began a quarter of a century ago. The “final nail in the coffin of old-fashioned noble-minded health insurance,” she writes, took place in the 1990s. That is when the board of Blue Cross/Blue Shield, a mission-minded nonprofit, allowed members to become for-profit insurers. Deeply in debt, the Blues could no longer compete with for-profit insurers that cherry-picked young, healthy customers. Since then, the U.S. health care industry has become less patient centered and more market driven.

How did health care become so expensive? What can we do to change it? Can we provide universal coverage to all Americans? These are critical questions that Elisabeth Rosenthal and John Geyman, both physicians, address head-on.

Rosenthal graduated from Harvard Medical School, practiced medicine, then spent 22 years as a reporter for The New York Times. Currently she is editor in chief of Kaiser Health News.

In this timely book full of information and crystal-clear prose, Rosenthal names the problem, affordability, then gives readers a brief history of the commercialization of health care followed by diagnosis and treatment. She proposes actions regular citizens can take—how to make demands and complain effectively in writing and to the right people. She gives tools for price shopping, billing, negotiating, vetting hospitals and more.

Health care is market-driven, Rosenthal explains, yet neither competition nor economies of scale bring lower prices or improve services. Rosenthal spotlights a Catholic hospital that has grown into a huge health system called Providence Health & Services. It is the third largest nonprofit hospital system in the United States, with billions of dollars in revenues and

assets and a chief executive officer who is paid \$3.5 million a year. Yet when it merged with a smaller secular hospital, a patient Rosenthal reports on saw her bills rise.

Rosenthal cites other market aberrations. Government regulators cannot stop the flood of mergers or flagrant conflicts of interest. As the nation's largest lobby, the health care industry wields enormous power. Prices for the same service can vary markedly within a single hospital or doctor's office, depending on a patient's insurance. Consumers do not know what they will be charged. Why? Before buying a house, a car or even a meal, consumers routinely search for comparables. Prices are public. But people in need of critical health care find few comparables and receive bills after the fact. Hospital bills routinely lack transparency; few are itemized; most are long and indecipherable. Prices bear little relation to the cost of an item or service.

Given the great size of the health-care industry (roughly one-fifth of

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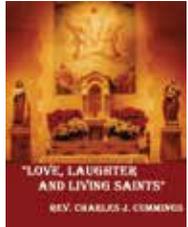
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**LOVE, LAUGHTER & LIVING SAINTS: Childhood Memories & Parish Happenings,** by the Rev. Charles J. Cummings (P.O. Box 3271, Williamsport, Pa. 17701), retired priest, Diocese of Scranton, Pa. Book and preview available: Amazon paperback, \$12.95; Nook or Kindle e-book device, \$4.99.



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Electronic submission of the following are requested: letter of application, CV, and a proposal for the research and writing to be done while holding the Chair, including an indication of how these fit into the guidelines above. Two letters of recommendation should be submitted directly. Applications are due by November 10, 2017. Decisions will be made by February 16, 2018. Communications should be addressed to Prof. James Bernauer, SJ ([cjlearning@bc.edu](mailto:cjlearning@bc.edu)), Director, Center for Christian-Jewish Learning, Stokes Hall N405, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467 USA.

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the U.S. gross domestic product), its decisions have an outsized impact on consumers. A giant insurer pulls out of a state or regional market on short notice. Overnight a pharmaceutical company decides to stop producing a drug or to multiply its price by 10. A drug maker may discontinue an old drug, forcing consumers to buy its new expensive version or do without.

With maximizing profits as the goal, a hospital or medical business may discontinue any service or product it deems not profitable enough. Finding a cure for diabetes or multiple sclerosis could be deemed less profitable than treating the illness over a patient's lifetime. Suffering people never enter the calculation.

Market-driven care has influenced doctors' practices. Small practices run by self-employed doctors are rare today. Doctors are commonly employed by hospital systems. In affluent areas, some doctors operate solely “out of network” at higher cost to patients. Concierge medicine indulging the wealthy is especially profitable. As medical students prefer high-paying specializations, the nation suffers a shortage of primary care physicians.

Health care has spawned whole new layers of employees and consultants, from business managers to billing experts who maximize profits through strategic billing of Medicare and Medicaid.

Americans now pay \$3 trillion annually for health care, not including insurance. Studies show that we spend much more for worse health outcomes than do citizens of many other highly developed countries, including Canada, Scotland, Britain, France and Japan.

I cannot do justice in this review to the nuance and breadth of Rosenthal's book. She reports on real people's experiences and masterfully blends these with academic data, historical

research, analysis and solid argument. As a reader, I felt concerned, enraged, educated and inspired to do something. This book is invaluable for anyone concerned about U.S. health care. I highly recommend it.

That said, neither Rosenthal nor John Geyman is a Catholic. They are not fans of Catholic hospital guidelines on end-of-life issues or women's reproductive issues. Rosenthal questions the tax-exempt status of any nonprofit that spends profits on things other than care.

**Crisis in U.S. Health Care: Corporate Power vs. the Common Good** is the latest in a long list of books by John Geyman. He surveys health care history from 1956 to 2016, analyzes what is amiss and reaches conclusions similar to Rosenthal's. Geyman's writing style is largely formulaic, chapter goals followed by bullet-points and a concluding comment. This makes the book less engaging. But alongside Rosenthal's book, his experience as a doctor, educator in family medicine and writer/editor/publisher is additive.

Geyman spends a chapter each on mental health and public health, not covered by Rosenthal. When he tells his own story in Part II, we can picture his two stints as a rural physician: his wife with her horse, he piloting a plane to reach patients and teach. His voice sounds folksy; he loves what he does.

In Chapter 22, Geyman argues strongly for national health insurance, a single-payer system sometimes described as “Medicare for all” that he considers the solution to our current dysfunction. National health insurance was much discussed during the planning stages of the Affordable Care Act, but was hijacked, in Geyman's view. Bernie Sanders advocates it. If proponents could interest the public, national health insurance might gain traction

as Americans respond to Republican efforts to replace Obamacare.

How would national health insurance provide affordable coverage for all? Progressive taxes would pay for it, costing most taxpayers less than the \$25,000 a year a typical family of four now pays for health insurance. A single-payer system would negotiate drug prices and would simplify the process of providing health insurance in all 50 states.

Under the plan, writes Geyman, Americans “will have universal access to affordable, comprehensive health care wherever they live and regardless of their income or health status. They will have free choice of physician and hospital.... Benefits will include physician and hospital care, outpatient care, dental services, vision services, rehabilitation, long-term care, home care, mental health care, and prescription drugs.” No copayments or other out-of-pocket costs at the point of service would be required. It all sounds dream-like, except that Canada and Scotland already have national health insurance from which we could learn.

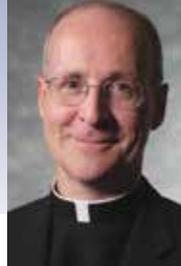
Especially important to Geyman (and consonant with Catholic social teaching that health care is a human right), national health insurance would replace health care’s profit-driven core with a focus on the common good. Medicine might then earn back public trust and its reputation as a noble occupation.

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Karen Sue Smith is the former editorial director of *America*.

## New Scripture Study

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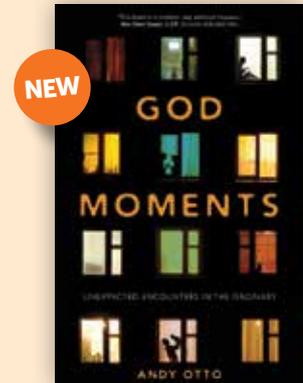


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## Movements of history

Reading a book by Massimo Faggioli is like touring an adventure park. Each chapter is another aerial thrill ride. He writes intellectual history at an especially high level. The topics that interest him are the broad movements of church history, the oscillation of ideas over time and the transient resolutions of the inherent tensions in the human/ecclesial condition.

The focus of *Catholicism and Citizenship* is the evolution of the public role of the church from the time of the Second Vatican Council to the papacy of Pope Francis. He believes that the reciprocity of church and world brought about by the council's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" allows the church to

play a unique role in today's world as a bearer of moral vision and ultimate meaning in the face of the dual crises of the secular, democratic state and global capitalism.

Pope Francis has reinterpreted the constitution to fit our changed times. Faggioli believes the pope understands that we are no longer a Eurocentric church but a global one, not an institution but a church in mission, and that we no longer dwell in Catholic ghettos but in an inclusive church. Finally, Francis is determined to move the church out of the sacristy to serve and accompany the poor.

The ecclesial and political cultures that most concern Faggioli are Europe and the United States, especially the popular church in Italy and the hierarchical church in the United States. He

regards the new ecclesial movements, like Focolare and Sant'Egidio, as the future of the church and possibly a way out of the culture wars that afflict U.S. Catholicism.

But he overlooks the contribution of the Latin American Church to the postconciliar era and its imprint on Pope Francis, and he underestimates the relative strength of the American parish and volunteerism in American Catholic life.

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Drew Christiansen, S.J., a former editor in chief of *America*, is a distinguished professor at Georgetown University.



Full book reviews at [americamagazine.org/books](http://americamagazine.org/books)

## A patchwork quilt

Years ago I was asked to help dig the grave of a stranger. He was an old man, who was loved by an old woman, who was loved by a young man, whom I loved. We set out in the Arizona desert of the Navajo Reservation and stabbed at the dry earth with spades that sang as we dug deeper. It was hard and beautiful and painful and grace-filled. Through the process, I felt oddly and inextricably connected both to the deceased and to those who loved him. It is an experience I am unlikely to repeat. But reading Sherman Alexie's new memoir, *You Don't Have to Say You Love Me*, comes close.

Readers looking for a straightforward narrative of the author's childhood on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Eastern Washington, or of the

rural, white farm town where he went to school, or of the cities of the Pacific Northwest where his writing career took off, will not find it in these pages; but the 160 short chapters of poetry and prose reveal plenty of truth. At its core, the book is a reckoning with, a love letter to, a rebuke of and a memorial for Alexie's mother, Lillian. It is as much about her as about himself, if in fact their lives can be separately considered at all.

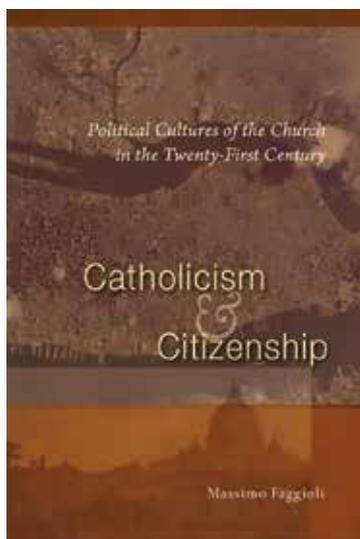
Influenced by Flannery O'Connor and Bruce Springsteen as much as salmon and circle dances, the book also explores Alexie's struggle with the seemingly incongruous juxtapositions that have made up his experience as a native writer not quite at home in the city or on the reservation. (In the chapter "Your Theology or Mine?" he describes himself as an atheist who is "equally a child

of Jesuit and Salish cultures.")

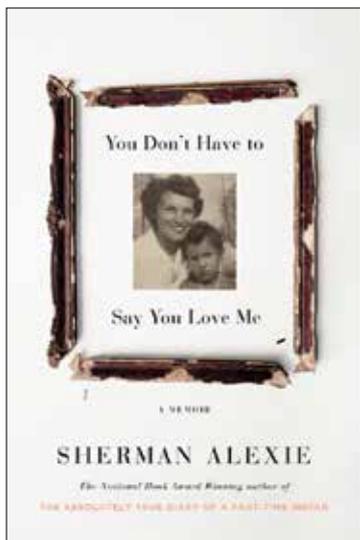
Channeling his mother's renowned quilting skills, Alexie carefully pieces together colorful scraps of his story—chapters on brain tumors, gratitude, rape, alcohol, art, politics, God, laughter, fire, basketball, bipolar disorder, anger, family, love—resulting in gorgeous patterns of raw emotion and stubborn hope. He writes: "We continue lovingly despite the crimes committed against any and all of us. How miraculous is that?" If Seamus Heaney "digs" with his pen, Alexie sews with his. It is worth wrapping oneself in the results.

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Kerry Weber is an executive editor of *America*.



**Catholicism and Citizenship**  
Political Cultures of the Church in the Twenty-first Century  
By Massimo Faggioli  
Liturgical Press, 165p \$19.95



**You Don't Have to Say You Love Me**  
A Memoir  
By Sherman Alexie  
Little, Brown and Company,  
464p \$28

## A journey of healing

It takes a courageous Catholic author like James Martin, S.J., to try to bridge the chasm between the official church's response to its L.G.B.T. members and the hurt and rejection that response has caused.

Taking as his keystone the language of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Martin spends the first part of his book puzzling out how the institutional church could build a bridge by treating the L.G.B.T. community with respect, compassion and sensitivity.

Respect calls people what they want to be called—hence Martin's consistent use of the term L.G.B.T. in his book. Respect also honors the talents that the L.G.B.T. community brings to the church. Compassion begins by hearing the stories that L.G.B.T. Catholics have of rejection and humiliation by society and the church. Compassion ends by rejecting this discrimination.

Sensitivity requires accompaniment. The church must stop seeing the L.G.B.T. community as “other,” and must accompany L.G.B.T. persons where they are, as they are. But you can cross bridges from either side. In the second part of his book, Martin describes how the L.G.B.T. community might treat the institutional church with respect, compassion and sensitivity.

Respect asks that the L.G.B.T. community try to understand what motivates some bishops when they take anti-L.G.B.T. positions, what the magisterium says and how to deal with them within the church. Compassion asks the L.G.B.T. community to see

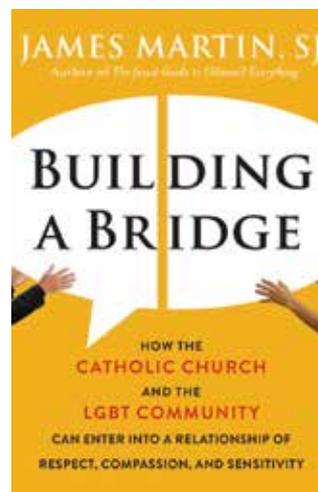
the institutional church as finite men grappling with difficult problems. This needs the gift of time.

When some criticize Pope Francis' words condemning discrimination against L.G.B.T. persons for not going far enough, Martin says: Be sensitive that the pope is dealing with a worldwide audience, that what might seem meek in America can sound revolutionary in Africa or Asia.

Martin ends his book with meditations on Gospel and psalm passages that give his bridge its deep spiritual and theological underpinnings.

This is a bold book. It talks clearly and openly about an issue that daunts our church, and it takes the hysterics out of the discussion.

Nicholas P. Cafardi is the editor of *Voting and Holiness* (Paulist Press).



**Building a Bridge**  
How the Catholic Church and the LGBT Community Can Enter Into a Relationship of Respect, Compassion and Sensitivity  
By James Martin, S.J.  
HarperOne, 160p \$19.99



## Arcade Fire looks for God in a material world

In his 1982 hit “The Coffee Cola Song,” the late Cameroonian artist Francis Bebey takes a dire view of wealth and those who possess it: “There are people in town, weird people in town, eating bread and butter and honey, and drinking black coffee cola. Money is what they like most.... But if you could go and see how they live.... Then, you discover how savage they are.”

A sample of that song’s kooky panpipe-and-vocal riff features prominently in the title track from the Québécois band Arcade Fire’s latest album, “Everything Now.” Bebey’s words aren’t heard, nor is the band’s message quite as direct, but there is a similar viciousness in its critique of consumer culture. “Every room in my house is filled with shit I couldn’t live without,” frontman Win Butler sings. Meanwhile, “Every inch of space in my heart is filled with something I’ll never start.”

This theme, of a tension between materialism and a yearning for greater meaning or purpose, runs throughout

the album. It is both self-aware and satirical. The lyric book is laid out as a retro store catalogue, the words stylized as ads for cereal, clothes and gadgets. The album begins and ends with variations on the title track (each titled “Everything Now (Continued)”); listen on repeat and it loops back seamlessly, an endless repetition. This too is a product after all, a part of the consumer culture it is lampooning.

Arcade Fire has always come across as a serious band. On “Everything Now,” the seriousness is tempered by a lighter touch. As producers, Thomas Bangalter of Daft Punk and Pulp bassist Steve Mackey guide the band through a range of retro pop and dance styles. “Chemistry,” a menacing tale of unrequited attraction, is delivered with a horns-driven swagger. “Peter Pan” is busy with bitsy synth as it explores the near-thwarting of human connection in the modern world.

But the album’s strongest tracks stick closer to the Arcade Fire blueprint—expansive, epic, elegiac. Aside

from the title track, there is also “Creature Comfort,” an anthem for young people struggling for survival in an image-obsessed world; they “starve themselves...and wait for the feedback,” or lie in bathtubs contemplating suicide. “God, make me famous,” cry Butler and his co-vocalist Régine Chassagne. “If you can’t, just make it painless.”

In the lives and worlds painted here, God is present, but the relationship with God is vexed. In the chunky ‘80s pop-inspired “Signs of Life,” Butler declares: “Love is hard, sex is easy. God in heaven, could you please me”—a sardonic evocation of a life lived for self-gratification, where God is viewed as a vendor doling out small pleasures. Conversely, the protagonist in the slow-funk “Good God Damn” is on the verge of suicide before being arrested by the graceful notion, perhaps for the first time, that “Maybe there’s a good God—damn.”

These ruminations lead eventually to the epic, slow-burning ballad



A tension between materialism and a yearning for greater meaning runs throughout Arcade Fire's new album.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons/Jean Gagnon

“We Don’t Deserve Love.” Adorned by atonal synths and sparse piano plinks, the lyric describes a pair of estranged lovers trying and failing to reconnect. The imagery suggests this is about more than human romance, evoking a God longing for reunion with those who have turned away: “Keep you waiting hour after hour, every night in your lonely tower, looking down at all the wreckage....”

Amid the excesses enunciated throughout the album, the possibility of finding solace in being loved by God persists. Tellingly, “We Don’t Deserve Love” suggests authentic human connection is one of the places in which God’s love can be located (“If you don’t deserve love, and if I don’t deserve love, could we deserve?”). Accumulated wealth or possessions can’t replace that. Singing Butler: “Stop pretending you’ve got everything now.”

Tim Kroenert is the editor of the Australian politics and culture journal *Eureka Street*.

## Sam Shepard: America’s cowboy Jeremiah

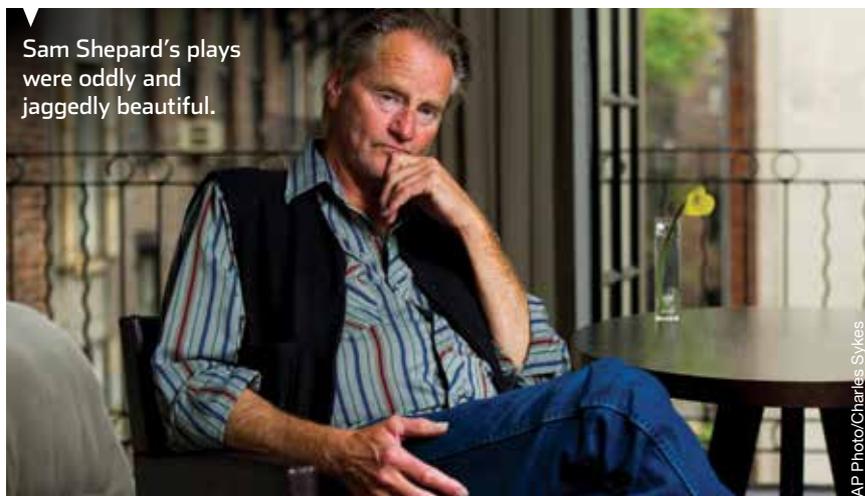
As American playwrights go, Sam Shepard, who died on July 30 at age 73, was in a class by himself. He was unique not only for his signature masterworks—“True West” and “Fool for Love” among them—and not only because he cut a lean, memorable figure as an actor in such films as “The Right Stuff.” He was distinctive in that the image he cultivated, of a cowboy Beat poet with a face chiseled as if for Mt. Rushmore, matched his playwriting voice so well. He seldom appeared in his own work, but he did not need to; he and his plays resembled each other so much. Both were oddly and jaggedly beautiful, and both embodied and interrogated the individualist mythos of the American West.

His plays relentlessly honed in on competitive jockeying among men to define themselves, but this emphasis should not be mistaken for mere machismo. To think of Shepard as a men’s movement bard would be a category error along the lines of mistaking Samuel Beckett for a Christian apologist or Edward Albee for a marriage counselor. The subject matter that obsesses a writer is usu-

ally the thing they know best, hate most or understand the least—or a tangled mix of all of the above. Shepard was raised on a California farm by an alcoholic Air Force veteran and a Midwestern teacher. So he had both the high-lonesome landscape of the American West and the middle-class domestic spaces in which we try to contain it etched into his soul.

His greatest play, “Buried Child,” set on a dilapidated Midwestern farm, evokes both Beckett and the Greeks, but represents something altogether new and indelible: an American tragedy for the broken-down, de-mythologized country we actually live in, not the one we idealize. In my book, that puts Shepard in the company of prophets—not the see-the-future kind but the show-us-who-we-really-are kind. “You’ll probably wind up on the same desert sooner or later,” says a character in “True West.” Would a cowboy Jeremiah put it any differently?

Rob Weinert-Kendt, an arts journalist and editor of *American Theatre* magazine, has written for *The New York Times* and *Time Out*.



Sam Shepard’s plays were oddly and jaggedly beautiful.

AP Photo/Charles Sykes

# The Power of the Church at Work

Readings: Ez 33:7-9, Ps 95, Rom 13:8-10, Mt 18:15-20

Michael Simone, S.J., teaches Scripture at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

Jesus saw in his disciples a community with the power to change lives, the power to release sins and the power to transform the world through prayer.

Although the Greek word *ekklesia* (church) is common in the New Testament, it is rare in the Gospels, appearing only here and in Mt 16:18. Many scholars wonder if it is an anachronism. Matthew was perhaps projecting a later reality of “house-churches” back onto the time of Jesus. This is not necessarily the case, as the word is common in the Septuagint, where it translates the Hebrew word *qahal*, meaning “assembly” (Luke uses it in exactly this way in Acts 7:38). In this older context, *ekklesia* stands for all forms of the Israelite community. In the Pentateuch, for example, the word signifies a gathering of the entire nation, while in post-exilic literature, it connotes a small assembly that represents an absent whole. Matthew is likely playing on both this latter meaning of *ekklesia* as well as its later Christian significance. In either case, *ekklesia* describes a group of God’s people who share a common purpose, history, set of values and sense of family.

In teaching his disciples to bring their disputes to such a community, Jesus drew on well-developed traditions of Second Temple Judaism. Examples of these traditions also appear in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Throughout Israel’s war-torn history, internal strife threatened national cohesion. Techniques of conflict resolution formed a significant part of Israel’s religious inheritance. Those who bound their life to Israel’s law knew that ties of affection in the local assembly could sort out nearly any dispute. Among their fellow people of God, aggrieved parties had their best chance of sympathy; among people they trusted, they could be vulnerable and open to correction.

Jesus adds his own wisdom to these traditions. If correction in the *ekklesia* does not change someone, “treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.” It is easy to imagine the evangelist, himself an advocate for Gentiles and tax collectors, smiling as he wrote this line. Jesus never gave up, and neither, therefore, could the *ekklesia* that

*‘Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.’ (Mt 18:20)*

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Who are the members of your *ekklesia*? How do you resolve conflict?

With whom do you pray? With whom do you work for the fulfillment of God’s dreams?

continues his mission. As our second reading implies, Israel’s laws about dispute resolution find their fulfillment in Jesus’ teachings on love.

The next lines of the Gospel are directed toward the life of the community. Unlike the two other discussions of the church’s power to bind and release, this instance makes no mention of sins. Instead, it reads like an exhortation to the *ekklesia* to bind the repentant back to the community and release them from the sin that led them astray.

Trust in God’s love grounds Jesus’ assurance that God grants the request of any two Christians who agree. In the wrong context, this sounds like magic. In the context of divine love, any Christian who joins with another to continue Christ’s mission will find a rich supply of grace. In this grace, God is at work, enabling the church to reconcile the estranged, to restore ties of affection among people and to pray for the realization of God’s dreams.

# Forgive and Be Forgiven

Readings: Sir 27:30-28:7, Ps 103, Rom 14:7-9, Mt 18:21-35

God's mercy is infinite, but we can limit how much we receive. This lesson in this week's Gospel comes from an old insight of Israelite wisdom, which Jesus makes a centerpiece of his teaching.

Israelite wisdom literature had long encouraged acts of forgiveness and mercy. Consider Ps 37:8, which warns of the danger of rage: "Refrain from anger; abandon wrath; do not be provoked; it brings only harm." This week's responsorial psalm takes this insight even further, affirming that forgiveness makes us like God, who "will not always chide, nor does he keep his wrath forever" (Ps 103:9). In our first reading, Sirach affirms the benefits of mercy: "Could anyone nourish anger against another and expect healing from the Lord?" Sirach even identifies such forgiveness with faithfulness to the covenant, probably thinking of Lev 19:18, "Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your own people. You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This line from Leviticus inspired Jesus as well. It comes up often in his teachings, especially those recorded by Matthew, who inherited the same Israelite wisdom (Mt 5:43, 19:19, 22:39).

Echoes of this lengthy tradition appear throughout Matthew's Gospel, in his version of the Lord's Prayer, for

*'Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?' (Mt 18:33)*

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How have you experienced mercy from God? From another person?

How can a deeper trust in grace help you release the debt of another?

example, and in teachings like Mt 7:2: "For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you." In today's Gospel, Jesus reveals that our capacity to receive God's mercy is proportionate to the generosity we show with our own.

A careful study of today's parable yields lessons for discipleship. One is that forgiveness requires transformation. The king expected his mercy to change the future behavior of his servant. Specifically, the king expected his servant to do in the future as he himself had done.

Second, forgiveness does not mean the restoration of some past state, even were that possible. The world is constantly changing. The king did not forgive his servant in an effort to get his money back. He simply accepted his loss and moved on (though one suspects that he did not continue to entrust this particular servant with any more of his money).

A third lesson comes from the size of the king's write-off. In the Greek, the phrase "huge amount" reads "10,000 talents," roughly 60 million days' wages. This was close to a third of the yearly expenditure on the Roman army. And yet the king felt he could be compassionate. He trusted that his other resources could help him rebuild his treasury. Just so, we must have similar confidence that divine grace will heal whatever damage we have suffered.

Such confidence will help us avoid the servant's fate. Unlike the king, who trusted that he could recover from his loss, the servant feared his own poverty. This fear drove him to violence against another over a trivial amount. The difference between the servant and the king, then, is one of trust. God's mercy is infinite. We who trust in God's grace will discover no limits to our own mercy. The converse is true as well: We who cultivate mercy will find an infinite store waiting for us when we meet God.

Michael Simone, S.J., teaches Scripture at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

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# *The Magnanimity of the Gospel*

## *During these political times, we are called to radical hospitality*

By Kerry Alys Robinson



Charlie and Jo's cardinal virtue was radical hospitality. They had 14 children, seven of whom were adopted, three with disabilities. In addition, each time one of their children turned 17 years of age, another 17-year-old from overseas was invited to live with them for a year on their farm in Avondale, Pa. Students came from Germany, the Philippines, Bolivia, Italy, the Middle East and Chile. More urgently, refugees from Hungary, Morocco and Vietnam, as well as a U.S. orphan, found a safe harbor over many years in their home.

As the first grandchild born to this family, I grew up recognizing foreign as familiar, global as local and diverse as approximating perfection.

Faith informed our familial culture and was at the heart of my grandparents' generosity and inclusivity. In 1975 they became national advocates of the Ulster Project, which brought Protestant and Catholic teenagers from Northern Ireland and Ireland to the United States to develop friendships, talk about their common experience and hope, and help break the generational cycle of animosity and violence. Unconditionally generous and welcoming, Jo and Charlie were champions of racial, environmental and social justice, and stalwart proponents of peace, ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue. The Gospel was at the center of their lives.

Their home became a haven for women religious and priests from all over the world. My first Communion took place during one of many celebrations of the Eucharist held in their dining room. Guests were replenished and fed, spiritually, intellectually and physically. Debate, discussion and dialogue were revered, as was music, art, poetry and conviviality. In their home Catholicism was identified with joyful hospitality and the magnanimity of the Gospel.

Today, in the midst of acrimonious national disagreement, in the face of heightened anxiety especially for vulnerable members of our communities, in this exigent season of unrelentingly stymied politics, what is especially heartbreaking is the growing chasm within our own church. Catholics are not immune to divisive politics, of course, even when our faith should unify us and transcend purely partisan identification. Too often we are deleteriously polarized, politically and theologically, quick to judge and categorize, eager to condemn and eschew dialogue. At times we are no better as Catholics in our church than we are as citizens in our country.

This has to end, especially if we are to take seriously the demands of the Gospel to be agents of reconciliation and peace, to alleviate suffering, to extend hope and to provide for the comfort of others. Most of us find

ourselves on one side of this divide. All of us need to do better at encountering and accompanying those on the other side.

If there is anything sacrosanct and urgent about what it means to be Catholic in the world today, it is that we are all made in the image and likeness of God. To heed this and aspire to be Christ-like would seem at a minimum to demand decency, humility, openness, attentiveness, forgiveness and mercy.

We may disagree about which policies—nationally and internationally—can best provide people with access to food, clean water, housing, health care, employment, justice, safety and peace. But if we profess to be Christian, we cannot abdicate our responsibility to ensure that people do have such access. To do nothing is to be complicit.

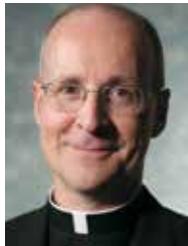
As a Catholic, as an American and as a global citizen, I am aware of the invitation at hand: to seek reconciliation, to foster civil dialogue, to mitigate fear and to be more loving, more welcoming, more radically hospitable, just as the Gospel enjoins.

**Kerry Alys Robinson is global ambassador of the Leadership Roundtable and author of *Imagining Abundance: Fundraising, Philanthropy and a Spiritual Call to Service*.**

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# BUILDING A BRIDGE: THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE LGBT COMMUNITY

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JAMES MARTIN, S.J.



NATALIA IMPERATORI-LEE

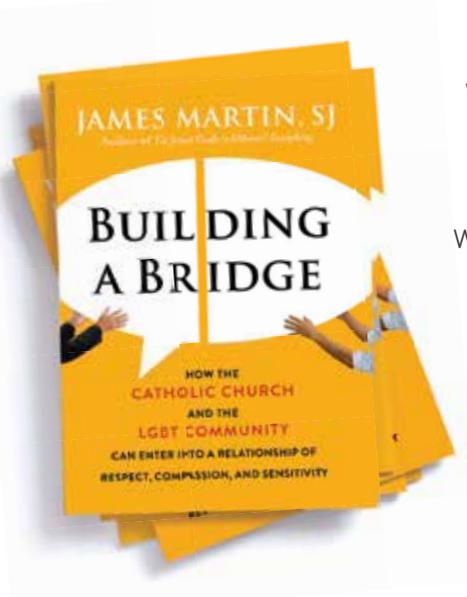


PATRICK HORNBECK

A conversation between **James Martin, S.J.**, editor at large of *America*, and **Dr. Patrick Hornbeck**, of Fordham University's theology department on Father Martin's new book, *Building a Bridge*.

MODERATOR:

**Natalia Imperatori-Lee, Ph.D., Manhattan College**



WHEN: **Tuesday**  
**September 5, 2017**  
**6:30 p.m.**

WHERE: **McNally Amphitheatre**  
**Lincoln Center Campus**  
**140 West 62nd Street**  
**New York, NY 10023**

RSVP: [americamag.org/events/lgbt](http://americamag.org/events/lgbt)

**Live-stream available at**  
[americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org)



*Cardinal Cajetan examines Martin Luther and his writings in Augsburg, Germany (1518).  
Ferdinand Wilhelm Pauwels (1830-1904) / Lutherhaus, Eisenach, Germany / Bridgeman Images*

# 1517-2017

## LUTHERANS AND CATHOLICS: THEN AND NOW

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**Susan Wood** (Marquette University)

**Peter Neuner** (Ludwig-Maximilian University, Munich)

**Amy Leonard** (Georgetown University)

**Kathryn Johnson** (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)

**Alfred Acres** (Georgetown University)

**Kenneth G. Appold** (Princeton Theological Seminary)

**Philip Key** (Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia)

**Christine Helmer** (Northwestern University)

**David Collins, S.J.** (Georgetown University)

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*Pope Francis and Bishop Munib Younan, President of the Lutheran World Federation, sign a Joint Statement commemorating the  
500th anniversary of the Reformation in Lund, Sweden, October 31, 2016. (Church of Sweden/Mikael Ringlander)*

