

America

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'Who Is My Neighbor?'

ANSWERS FROM THE AMERICAS

KEVIN CLARKE • DAVID GOLEMBOSKI • THE EDITORS

Also: On the road
With Jack Kerouac
JAMES T. KEANE

OF MANY THINGS

If Jefferson Davis had visited Lowell, he might have had second thoughts about secession. After all, there is a reason why Lowell is known as the cradle of the industrial revolution: In 1860, the Massachusetts mill town had more cotton spindles than all 11 states of the future Confederacy combined. The South grew a lot of cotton, but it lacked the facilities to process and ship it to consumers. As a result, most of the Confederacy's railroad lines ran from south to north, a situation that inhibited the movement of the Confederate armies from east to west, a not insignificant factor in the South's eventual defeat in the Civil War.

Those thousands of spindles that lured King Cotton to Lowell also attracted hundreds of thousands of immigrants over the course of a century—Germans, French-Canadians and Irish—all in search of work and what a later generation would call the American Dream. The family of Jack Kerouac was among those “huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” Indeed, Saint Jean Baptiste, the parish church of Lowell's Franco-American community, featured prominently in Kerouac's mystical visions, writes James T. Keane in this week's issue. It seems that Kerouac was much more than a whiskey-sodden ne'er-do-well; in fact, he thought of himself as a “strange solitary crazy Catholic mystic” in search of holiness.

Only God knows whether Kerouac found what he was looking for. Still, there is something we can learn from his idiosyncratic, wayward search. One question—a thread woven throughout the fabric of Kerouac's narrative—is the one put to Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: “Who is my neighbor?” In the parable Jesus tells in response, the central character is a Samaritan, an outsider, the product of mixed races, mixed marriages and mixed customs. He might as well be from Lowell, one of America's first great melting pots. What Jesus

points out is that the Samaritan, the unlikely, seemingly dissimilar stranger, is also our neighbor, as much as, if not more than, any one of our kith and kin. In other words, there are no foreigners on the road to holiness. That is a radical notion of neighborliness.

In the context of globalization, the question “who is my neighbor” is even more urgent, if not more complex. As they did 150 years ago, goods and people still move from south to north, only now the migration is a hemispheric phenomenon. The huddled masses still come in search of a better life; only now they are more likely to come from the new world than the old. Kerouac believed that if you want to know where someone is headed, then you need to know where he or she is coming from.

So in this issue of *America*, we look to our south, to our neighbors in Latin America and Haiti. We also look to the “strangers” who are already in our midst: Sister Helen Prejean tells us how the radical Christian notion of neighborliness has transformed the Catholic view of the most “foreign” of foreigners among us: those awaiting state-sanctioned execution.

In a sign of post-industrial times, Keane tells us, Saint Jean Baptiste Parish closed its doors in the early 1990s. Yet throughout the states of the former Confederacy, Catholics can't build parishes fast enough. Since 1962, the church has created more than 20 new dioceses in the South and Southwest, some in the very cities mentioned by Kerouac in *On the Road*. The U.S. church is itself on a kind of journey across America, not in pursuit of the American Dream, of course, but in search of God's dream: “that all may be one.” Indeed, Jack Kerouac's description of his most famous work could just as well describe the journey of the American church: “a story about Catholic buddies roaming the country in search of God.”

MATT MALONE, S.J.

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Cover: Solino neighborhood of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Photo by Kevin Clarke.

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Kevin Clarke talks about his visit to **Haiti**, right; also a slideshow tour of **Jack Kerouac's hometown** of Lowell, Mass. Plus, selections from **America's** reporting on **Latin America**. All at americamagazine.org.



Looking South

As President Obama begins his second term, he is likely to fix his attention on two key parts of the globe, the Middle East and Asia. The White House is eager to bring the war in Afghanistan to a close and restart the stalled Middle East peace process. The Obama team is also understandably concerned about the emergence of China as a global power and about the balance of power in the Pacific. The White House clearly has a busy foreign policy agenda, but that should not preclude it from focusing renewed attention on another crucial area of the world: Latin America.

The United States has a checkered relationship with its neighbors to the south. Too often the U.S. government improperly intervened in the affairs of these sovereign nations in pursuit of self-interest. Yet the United States has also sought to play a positive role in the development of Latin America, notably through the Alliance for Progress, an economic aid program launched by President John F. Kennedy in 1961. That program had limited success, but it serves as an important reminder of the positive relationship that the United States should try to cultivate with Latin America. Much has changed in 50 years, of course. The United States is no longer the only economic superpower in the Western hemisphere. Brazil, in particular, has emerged as a key trading partner with China and is seeking a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council. The relationship with Latin America needs to be rethought in light of the emergence of several important regional players.

President Obama is poised to tackle immigration reform, an issue that will have important ramifications for U.S. relations with Mexico and other Latin American countries. Failure on the part of the United States to address the plight of undocumented immigrants has led to frustration and uncertainty in Latin America. Yet immigration reform is just one piece of the policy puzzle. Other initiatives are needed as well, and not just additional U.S. funding for the government drug wars in Mexico, Central America and Colombia, for example. If the United States wants to exert a positive influence in the Western hemisphere, then courage and creativity will be required. These countries deserve special attention from President Obama in his second term.

Mexico. More than two-thirds of the population of Latin America reside in two countries, Mexico and Brazil. Given its size and proximity to the United States, Mexico is

a crucial ally. Much of the news coming from Mexico focuses on the drug wars near the U.S. border that have claimed tens of thousands of lives. This is a very important story, one to which the church in Mexico has recently drawn attention through the ministry of Bishop Raúl Vera, O.P., of Saltillo, who has faulted both the government and the drug cartels for their complicity in the ongoing violence. Yet the drug wars should not be the only focus of U.S. attention.

Mexico recently elected a new president. Enrique Peña Nieto is a member of the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, which has governed Mexico for most of its modern history. U.S. observers are optimistic about a Nieto presidency, but the young leader faces significant challenges. A stunning 51.3 percent of the Mexican population remains in poverty, up from 42.7 percent in 2006. It is still unclear whether Mr. Nieto is an independent leader or a functionary of the PRI machine. Mr. Nieto deserves U.S. support, but he should not be the only center of interest. Mexico has a strong opposition movement, led by Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who came close to winning the presidency in 2006. Youth and student movements are also showing their political muscle, as evidenced by the large demonstrations following the election of Mr. Nieto last July. Mexico's Congress has also played a key role in instituting government reforms. U.S. policy toward Mexico must take into account these subtle political dynamics.

Brazil. A growing economic force, Brazil is asserting power in the region and on the global stage. Under President Dilma Rousseff, Brazil refused to support U.N. intervention in Libya and Syria. Brazil will continue to exert influence on other powers in the region, including Venezuela, where anti-American sentiment is strong. Yet Brazil should not be seen as a rival to the United States, but instead a major player worthy of engagement and collaboration. "We're all focused on China. Latin America is a huge opportunity for us," Governor Mitt Romney said during a presidential debate. He was right, and that opportunity is nowhere greater than in Brazil.

Brazil will host three major world events in the next four years: World Youth Day in 2013, the World Cup in 2014 and the Summer Olympics in 2016. The government is using this opportunity to improve living conditions in the infamous slums of Rio, an important step but one that should not emphasize gentrification over the needs of Brazil's poor. The Obama administration seems to understand that Brazil must be cultivated; in 2011 Mr. Obama visited the country even as the Arab Spring raged. Brazil's combination of state-owned industry and free-market policies may seem an odd mix to American observers, but it is a historic trend in Latin America, and one that is working in Brazil despite a recent slowdown in growth.

Brazil has the most Catholics of any country in the world. The church in Brazil will play a prominent role in worldwide church affairs in years to come. On the issue of climate change, the church can help shape opinion in the world and in the church. Bishop Dom Erwin Kräutler, C.P.P.S., of Xingu, Brazil, has written about how droughts and severe storms caused by climate change have had adverse effects on the region's farmers. The United States must pay attention to the experience of countries like Brazil and partner with them to take concrete steps to address the causes of climate change.

Cuba. For a small island country, Cuba has played an outsized role in U.S. policy toward Latin America. Resistance to the Castro regime remains strong in the United States, but there are signs that the U.S. government's hardline position may be softening. President Obama's decision in 2010 to ease the travel ban to Cuba was generally met with support. Since Mr. Obama's re-election in November, there has been growing pressure on the administration to lift the embargo. Even some Cuban-Americans favor ending the 50-year-old policy in hopes of hastening economic reforms in Havana.

Still, regime change in Cuba remains official U.S. policy. Now that Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Republican of Florida, a Cuban American, is no longer chairwoman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, there might be an opening for Congress to change course. The White House should, at the very least, abandon its commitment to regime change—a course repudiated by the Cuban Catholic Church, among others—in favor of letting the Cuban people determine their political future. Doing so would send a strong signal to all of Latin America that the United States is not interested in interfering in their internal political affairs. Though Cuba may be small, it offers a unique opportunity for the United States to set a new tone in its dealings with Latin America.

Venezuela and Colombia. For years these two countries represented the two poles of U.S. engagement with Latin America. In Venezuela, President Hugo Chávez has made a career of demonizing the United States. In Colombia the former president, Álvaro Uribe, distinguished himself from his neighbors by his fealty to Washington. Yet the dynamics in both countries are quickly changing.

The election of President Obama in 2008 robbed Mr. Chávez of his bogeyman, President George W. Bush. Meanwhile, Mr. Chávez's health is in decline, which could lead to a change in leadership and, possibly, an improvement of relations with the United States. Reports indicate that the two sides have discussed the prospect of restoring full

diplomatic relations. In Colombia the new president, Juan Manuel Santos, has instituted a number of surprising policy initiatives since his election in 2010. Mr. Santos served as the defense minister under President Uribe, which led many to expect that he would, like the former president, make the battle against the rebel Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, a top priority. Yet Mr. Santos is currently engaged in peace talks with FARC, and his most notable achievement is a law that compensates victims who have been displaced by ongoing violence between the government and rebel groups.

Venezuela and Colombia serve as a reminder that internal politics in Latin America is fluid and complex. The United States cannot assume that any one country is an absolute enemy or an unquestioning friend. Channels of communication should remain open to allow for change to occur.

Central America. When President Kennedy launched the Alliance for Progress in 1961, the poverty of Latin America was a top concern. Poverty may no longer be a systemic problem in countries like Chile, but it remains a pressing issue in Central America. Nicaragua is the second poorest country in Latin America after Haiti. Nearly half of Guatemala's children are malnourished. Both countries are over-reliant on a single export crop, like coffee. Meanwhile, the seven countries on the Central American isthmus are uniquely vulnerable to hurricanes, mudslides, volcanic eruptions and other natural disasters. Add to this the violence fueled by the drug trade, and the future of Central America seems dim.

U.S. aid to these countries is minimal. That should change. Increased financial assistance to Central America will have long-term effects and will help repair the damage left by U.S. support for Central American dictators during the cold war era. The U.S. church, too, should continue to cultivate ties with the church in Central America [see "Still 'Presenté'?" page 17]. Finally, given the violence and instability engendered by the drug trade in Central America and Mexico, the United States should consider how its severe and increasingly myopic approach to drug abuse at home contributes to a rise in bloodshed abroad.

For nearly a century the relationship between the United States and Latin America alternated between intrusion and neglect. If President Obama continues that trend by looking east and failing to look south, the United States will become increasingly irrelevant to its neighbors to the south. The U.S. government can no longer look upon Latin America as a vehicle for its own interests. It must come to see Latin America for what it is, a diverse and complex society deserving of our full diplomatic scrutiny and support.



SIGNS OF THE TIMES

CONGRESS

Last-Minute Budget Compromise Dodges Fiscal Cliff Dive

The American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012—and 2013, considering when the House of Representatives passed it—may be remembered as much for what it did not accomplish as for what it did. The legislation includes permanently lower income tax rates for an estimated 98 percent of Americans—that means no more sliding deadline for cuts originally enacted when George W. Bush was president. But no agreement was reached on how to deal with tax breaks and loopholes. There is a “doc fix” that avoids slashing the reimbursement rates doctors are paid for treating Medicare patients, but no “Sandy fix,” i.e., disaster relief aid for East Coast cities and states hit by Hurricane Sandy in late October.

The bill increases taxes on individuals making \$400,000 a year and couples making \$450,000 a year that will garner, by White House estimates, an extra \$737 billion in revenue over the next 10 years. But the stopgap legislation did not include an increase of the nation’s \$16 trillion debt ceiling, suggesting a new round of congressional brinkmanship over the national debt and federal deficits is not far off. The plan did manage to postpone sequestration, automatic budget cuts that go into effect if no long-term agreement is reached, for another two months.

The act “isn’t perfect,” said the Rev. David Beckmann, a Lutheran minister who is president of Bread for the World, an anti-hunger lobby. But, Beckmann added, the compromise legislation remains “a good deal that will prevent major economic damage that would have affected hungry and poor people the most.

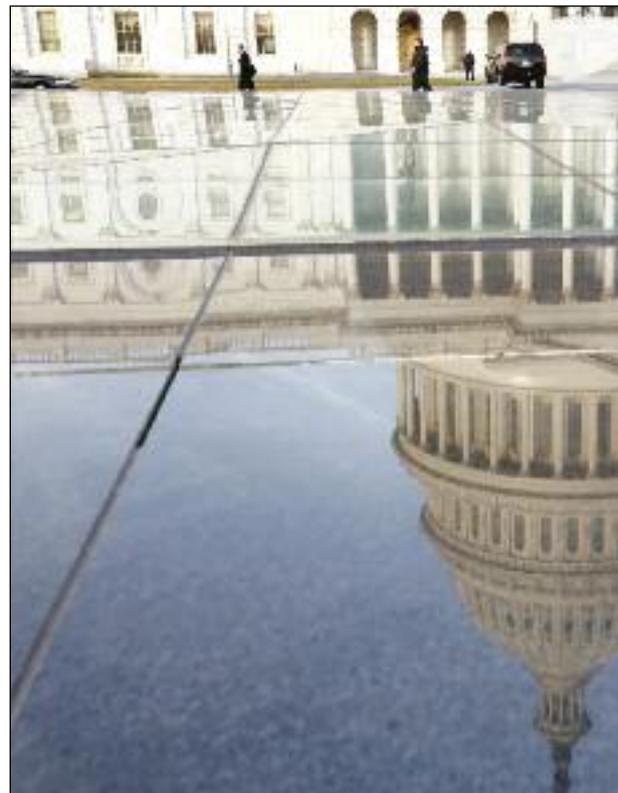
“Budgets are moral documents. Their impact on those whom the Bible refers to as ‘the least of these’ tells the world what kind of country we are,” Beckmann said in a statement on Jan. 2. He said positive elements in the bill include a five-year extension on improvements made to the earned-income tax credit and child tax credit over the last decade and a one-year extension of emergency unemployment benefits, a measure that will affect an estimated two million out-of-work Americans.

Negotiated in the waning moments of 2012, the last-minute legislation

also included a nine-month extension of the 2008 farm bill. That legislative maneuver was primarily aimed at preventing milk prices from doubling.

But that meant maintaining provisions of the old farm bill that agriculture advocates say are wasteful. Bob Gronski, a policy analyst for the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, said he was “disappointed with the lack of [subsidy] reform and the lack of money for conservation programs” in the extension.

All the same, Gronski allowed, “we were 36 hours away from going over the cliff. So Mitch McConnell and Joe Biden got together and did what had to be done.” Biden, who as U.S. vice president serves as president of the Senate, and McConnell, the Kentucky Republican and Senate minority leader, brokered the bill that passed 89 to 8 in the Senate and 257 to 167 in the House.



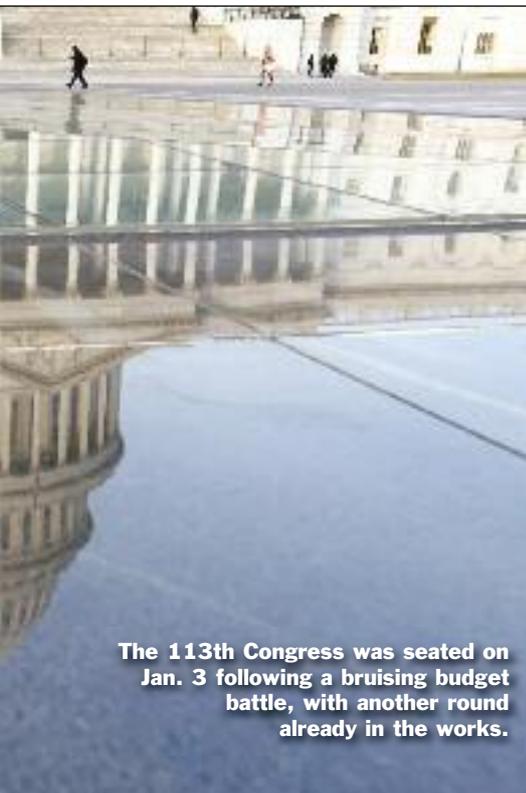
Anticipating the debt-ceiling battle to come, President Obama said late on Jan. 1, 35 minutes after the House’s 10:45 p.m. vote to pass the bill: “We can’t not pay bills that we’ve already incurred.

“If Congress refuses to give the United States government the ability to pay these bills on time, the consequences for the entire global economy would be catastrophic—far worse than the impact of a fiscal cliff.”

MENTAL ILLNESS

Can Parishes Do More to Help?

When Deacon Tom Lambert’s wife was hospitalized for open heart surgery, friends brought meals to the family’s door. “For three or four weeks, every day at 6 o’clock the bell would



The 113th Congress was seated on Jan. 3 following a bruising budget battle, with another round already in the works.

ring and a different family would bring us dinner," he said.

Those neighbors and fellow parishioners were responding to a need. But a different illness in his family some years later garnered no response.

"When our daughter was diagnosed with mental illness, no one came to the door," he said.

That was 25 years ago, and Lambert, who co-chairs the National Catholic Partnership on Disability's Council on Mental Illness, said awareness is essential to overcome the stigma associated with a disease of the mind. In the United States, severe or persistent mental illness affects one in 17 Americans. The mental illness disability rate has more than doubled since the 1980s and increased six-fold since the 1950s.

Nancy Kehoe, a Sacred Heart sister and clinical psychologist, is the author of *Wrestling With our Inner Angels*:

Faith, Mental Illness, and the Journey to Wholeness. When she began working with people with mental illness 30 years ago, faith issues were ignored because mental health professionals were not trained to respond adequately when a patient spoke about spirituality, she said.

"It was really unheard of in 1981 to have anyone suggest that it would be worthwhile to have a conversation with people with serious mental illness about religion because up until then, it was really just seen as part of their symptoms or a defense," she said. "Either people pathologized [faith] or they ignored it."

Contrary to the prevailing belief that faith was a part of a patient's mental illness, Sister Nancy soon discovered that it was often part of an individual's inner strength. She organized a group for people who wanted to talk about mental illness and religion. The group meets monthly at St. Paul Parish in Cambridge, Mass. When people struggle with a severe mental illness, they often feel isolated. Their behaviors may put others at a distance, and they may have difficulty holding a job, keeping relationships and living on their own.

Deacon Lambert said that many people at Sunday Mass privately struggle with mental illness and that the vast majority are managing their illness well.

"Nobody's going to come up and say, 'Well, I have schizophrenia, but I go to work every day, I hold a job, I have a marriage.' But I guarantee there's a lot of people who are in that situation," he said.

As "people of compassion and justice," Deacon Lambert said, Catholics can help by creating safe havens for people to talk about their mental illness and allow their faith to be part of



Mental Health Crusader: Deacon Tom Lambert of Chicago

their healing. Even a prayer intention at Mass may spark hope, he added. (Information about various ways that parishes can reach out to its members struggling with mental illness can be found on the Web site of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability at ncpd.org).

His faith was crucial in helping respond to his daughter's diagnosis, Lambert said. "Through prayer and turning things over to the Lord," he remembered, "saying we're going to deal with this situation with the strength and hope that comes from God and our faith. That's really what got us through, quite honestly. It's as simple as that."

Immigrants Seek Church Help in France

Illegal immigrants who occupied the Vatican's embassy in Paris have called on the church to support their struggle for better treatment. "We've asked moral and spiritual authorities, firstly the Vatican, to call the French government to greater humanity," said the Collective Sans-Papiers, or "Undocu-

mented Collective,” in a statement released on Jan. 2. Between 40 and 70 mostly African undocumented migrants took over the embassy on Dec. 31, unfurling a banner with the slogan “Jesus defended the stranger,” in support of a hunger-strike by other undocumented people outside the Catholic cathedral in Lille. The statement said the nuncio, Archbishop Luigi Ventura, had agreed to pass along the protesters’ demand for a meeting with France’s interior minister, Manuel Valls. On Nov. 28, a new Interior Ministry directive said immigrants must submit pay stubs as a condition for regularizing their status. In its statement, Collective Sans-Papiers said the November directive had imposed an “impossible condition” for most undocumented people and “condemned them to a desperate situation.”

Decree Against Religion in Vietnam?

Christian Solidarity Worldwide has expressed concerns about a new decree that came into force in Vietnam on Jan. 1, which sets out conditions for registration of religious activities and practitioners and includes a wide range of limitations on religious practice. Catholic priests and parishioners in Vietnam are reported to believe this “backward” decree is a sign that the government is following a Chinese model and “looking for a way to control and restrict the freedom of religion.” Thich Quang Do, 84, the head of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam who is currently under house arrest, warned that the new decree will “seriously curtail religious freedom” in Vietnam. C.S.W.’s advocacy director, Andrew Johnston, said, “Vietnam has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; however, this decree appears to restrict religious

NEWS BRIEFS

More than 2.3 million pilgrims attended audiences or **celebrations with Pope Benedict XVI** at the Vatican during 2012. • “Bold steps” are necessary to counter the “rising tide of aggressive posturing” between the **United States and Iran**, wrote Bishop Richard E. Pates of Des Moines, Iowa, chairman of the U.S. bishops’ Committee on International Justice and Peace, on Dec. 18 in a letter to National Security Advisor Thomas E. Donilon. • **Lee Young-chan**, a Jesuit priest jailed because of his support for campaigners against the construction of a military base on Jeju Island off the coast of Korea, was released on bail on Dec. 26. • Pope Benedict visited his former **butler, Paolo Gabriele**, in his cell in the Vatican police barracks, personally telling the butler he was forgiven and was being pardoned after his conviction for leaking Vatican documents. • Members of the Religion Newswriters Association picked the U.S. Catholic bishops’ opposition to a federal mandate for contraception coverage in health plans as the **No. 1 religion story** of 2012 and chose Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York as the year’s top newsmaker in their annual poll. • In his New Year’s message, Caracas Cardinal Jorge Urosa Savino asked Venezuelans to **pray for President Hugo Chavez** in his continuing battle with cancer.



2.3 million pilgrims

activities in a manner not consistent with its obligations under [the covenant].... C.S.W. urges the government of Vietnam to ensure that the right to freedom of religion or belief is fully guaranteed by law.”

Big Faith on Campus

Catholic students at two secular universities soon will have a dormitory all their own. In a historic collaboration, Bishop John G. Noonan of Orlando, Fla., Anthony J. Catanese, president of Florida Institute of Technology, and Matt Zerrusen, president of the Newman Student Housing Fund, were among attendees at a groundbreaking for the Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Student Residence at the institute in Melbourne, Fla., on Dec. 7.

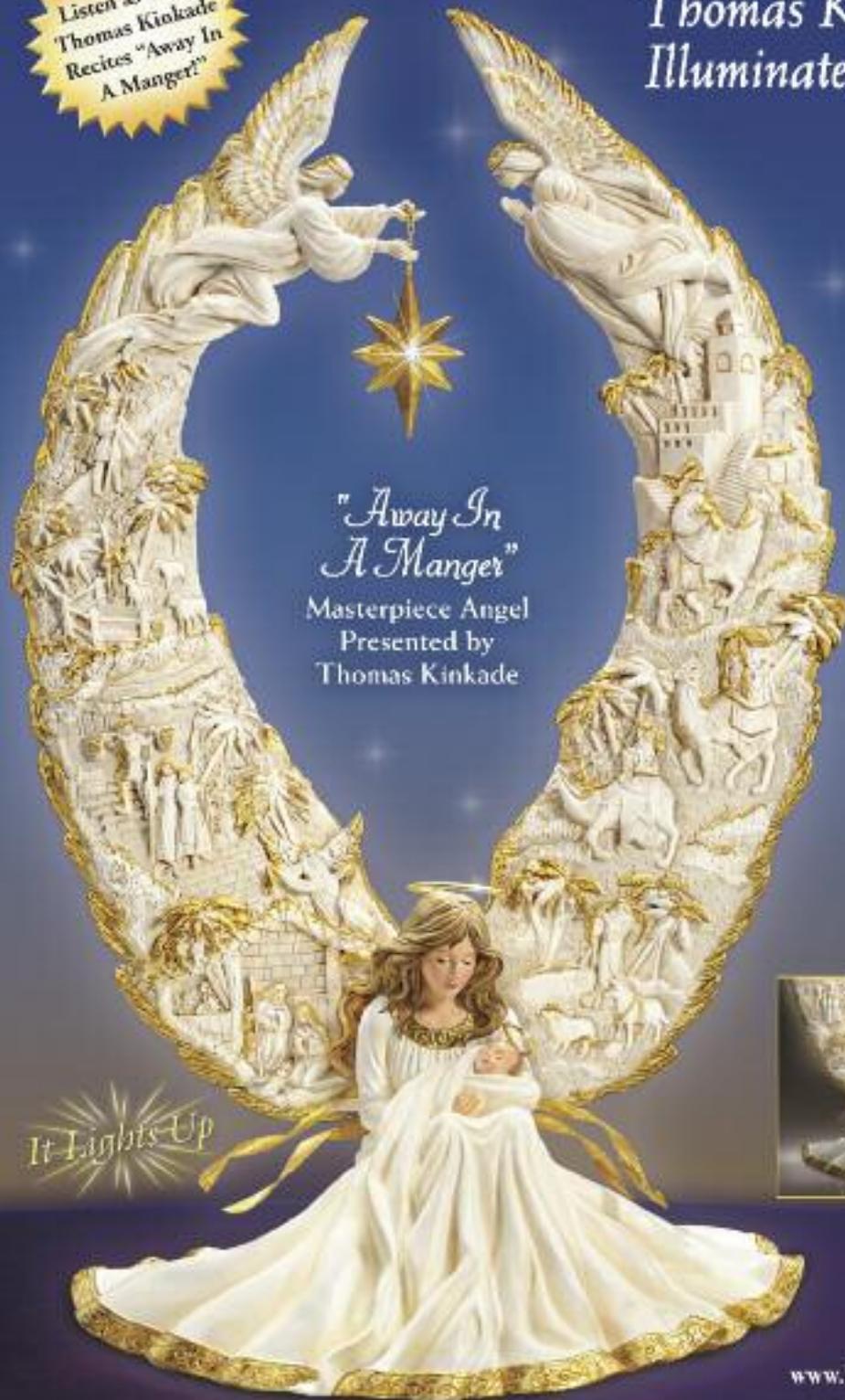
The ceremony was the second in as many months at a secular university in which housing specifically designated for Catholic students was being constructed. Another groundbreaking took place on Oct. 3 at Texas A&M University-Kingsville for the St. Thomas Aquinas Newman Center. The Newman Student Housing Fund is financing the new residence hall at F.I.T. “Fifty percent of students on college campuses lose their faith by the time they graduate,” Zerrusen said. “This is unacceptable.” He called the new facilities “pioneers” for what could become “authentic Catholic campuses inside secular ones” nationwide.

From CNS and other sources.

First-Ever!

Thomas Kinkadee Narrative Illuminated Nativity Angel

Listen as Artist Thomas Kinkadee Recites "Away In A Manger!"



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The Freezing Point

Beneath two miles of Antarctic ice lies Lake Ellsworth, resting in perpetual solitude, having been isolated from the earth's atmosphere for half a million years—until a team of British scientists recently undertook a sophisticated experiment to probe its depths for any microorganisms that might help our understanding of the limits at which life can exist on earth and to observe the patterns of polar ice melt.

Life at that depth would face major challenges. It would exist in total darkness; it would be hard-pressed to find any nourishment; it would endure colossal pressure from the two miles of ice weighing down on it; and it would subsist in complete isolation from the very atmosphere that we regard as essential. But it would have its own water at least, for at such intense pressure, the freezing point of water decreases sufficiently to allow the lake to remain in a liquid state. So who knows what life might be waiting down there, quite cut off, until now, from our searching gaze?

When I read about this experiment, I was powerfully reminded of the state of the human heart in our world today.

We too live in the dark—a darkness of bewilderment and sometimes of despair, groping our way through life with the tiny candle of what we think we know or can predict, yet acutely aware of the surrounding dark of unknowing and unpredictability. We may have an abundance of trash food, not just for our bodies but for our

minds and souls, but where is there any real and lasting nourishment—what Jesus called the bread of life and the water that never runs dry? As for high pressure, no need to remind ourselves of that, in a society where even our children are prey to depression, self-harming and suicide. And in spite of, or perhaps even because of, our worldwide social networking skills, we can easily remain isolated in worlds that are rapidly becoming reduced to a tiny screen.

We have a lot in common with that lake deep below the Antarctic ice. Could we be living in fragile bubbles of pleasure and distraction while our hearts are frozen over with thick layers of fear, bewilderment and loneliness that effectively isolate us from the source of true life that is waiting to coax the greening of springtime from our emptiness and darkness?

I was saddened recently to watch small children being entertained by superficial and very expensive sideshows at a seaside holiday fair. Had they only looked behind them they would have seen a whole vista of rocky shoreline, running waves and the distant views over the Mull of Kintyre—a world beckoning them in vain to the possibility of real adventure. The seduction of the superficial was isolating them from the joy that was surging all around them, calling fruitlessly for their attention. Are our little ones becoming trapped, like the lake, beneath an impenetrable layer of trivial matters?

And yet, as we are reminded every

year, “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Is 9:2). If Advent-Christmas-Epiphany is merely “the holiday season,” it may well be all frosting and no cake. But if it is truly the celebration of the birth of a revolution, then it heralds the dawning of a light that will far outshine all human tinsel and melt the thickest layers of ice that encase us. But how? Does the Incarnation offer us a

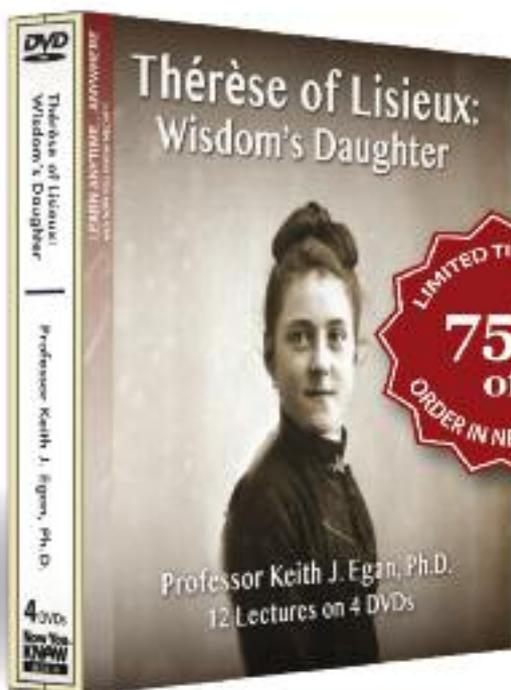
“probe” to penetrate the heart of the matter? I think not. Our ways are not God's ways.

An old fable tells the story of a man who went for a walk wearing his overcoat. The wind and the sun had a game with each other. Each claimed it could persuade the man to take off his coat. The wind

tried first. It blew and blew and tried its hardest to blow the man's coat away, but he just pulled his coat more tightly around himself. Then the sun came out, and, simply by shining down, warmed up the man so much that he quite naturally took off his coat.

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THE VIEW FROM CARRADEAUX: A transitional community has been home to thousands for three years.

RECONSTRUCTING HAITI THREE YEARS
AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

Road to Recovery

BY KEVIN CLARKE

At St. Pierre Parish in Port-au-Prince, one of the few Catholic churches that did not collapse in the earthquake in January 2010, everyone is dressed smartly for Sunday evening Mass. People are attired comfortably in the tropical heat—93 degrees outside today—but none, not even folks who are clearly quite poor, appear careless about what they are wearing. Little girls in their Sunday best are carried into church wrapped in their fathers' arms. The Kreyòl choir reverberates angelically throughout the church. In short, it is a Sunday evening Mass as lovely and natural as it can be in Port-au-Prince, a city of more than three million, where things indeed are edging closer to what passed for normal before the disaster that claimed somewhere in the vicinity of 250,000 lives three years ago. The street life here is as vibrant as it ever was, perhaps even more vibrant, since so many are living doubled up with friends and family, waiting for the opportunity to return to a home of their own.

Just outside the church a large park is a green and airy break from the crush of small homes in the surrounding neighborhood. Just a few months ago, this park had been packed with more than 5,000 people living in a tent city, said David Alexis, the housing community infrastructure coordinator for Catholic Relief Services in Port-au-Prince. But its temporary residents have finally been relocated, and the park is, well, a park again—a place where young people stroll and children shout and play. Almost 360,000 people still live in tent cities in nearly 500 camps and informal sites scattered around Port-au-Prince. Thousands more live in transitional housing, a vast improvement over the tents but still far from a permanent solution. The figures are down considerably from the more than 1.5 million who were displaced by the earthquake, but they suggest the people of Haiti still have a long way to go to recover.

KEVIN CLARKE, *an associate editor of America, visited Haiti in December.*



CNS PHOTO/BOB ROLLER

Struggle to Normalcy

The multimillion-dollar renovation and modernization of Port-au-Prince's Toussaint Louverture International Airport is a source of great municipal, even national, pride. But inside, at the drab duty-free lounge where passengers are killing time until their boarding call, in a section of the old airport that survived the quake, a large mirror over the snack bar is cracked into three large pieces. It has been that way, yet to be repaired, since the earthquake, a waitress explains. A handwritten sign advertising beverage options is taped across one of the cracks. While they wait for something better, the staff here are making do with what they have.

The same appeared true throughout Port-au-Prince as Jan. 12 and the third anniversary of the earthquake approached—residents make do with what they have in makeshift homes and temporary classrooms and cobbled together community services. Big plans are being realized all around them that offer the hope of substantial and lasting improvements. But for the average resident of Port-au-Prince, daily life remains a struggle, whether one lives in a home that survived the earthquake undamaged or is trapped in a “temporary” tent shelter three years after the deadly tremor.

There is virtually no neighborhood in Port-au-Prince that was not damaged by the 7.0 quake. In some neighborhoods whole blocks were leveled. On other streets and within the city's incomprehensible, winding, residential alleys, scattered piles of rubble or crumbling cinderblock frames are testimony to the quake's hopscotch of destruction. Throughout the city, many large buildings remain standing but uninhabited, fenced off from squatters or the merely curious. They are too unstable to be repaired, but they have not yet been demolished, reminders in cracked and crumbling concrete of the mayhem of Jan. 12, 2010.

The pattern of reconstruction in Port-au-Prince is likewise difficult to perceive. Many homeowners appear to have made a start at rebuilding, only to run out of steam, or perhaps money, halfway through the job. Some of the partially restored homes are inhabited anyway. The impact of foreign assistance is hard to discern.

Aside from a small grant from Caritas Sweden, “No one has helped us,” says the Rev. Francky Désir, pastor of Notre Dame D'Altagrace in Port-au-Prince, standing before what has become the agonizingly slow reconstruction of his parish school. Like 80 percent of school buildings in Port-au-Prince, the old school collapsed during the quake. The earthquake killed over 40,000 students and more than 1,000 teachers, caving in the National Ministry of

Education and Professional Formation, which lost, in addition to key professionals, all its records.

Father Désir estimates total rebuilding costs for the school at about \$1 million. The parish has raised nearly \$200,000 on its own. The pace of reconstruction, Father Désir says, depends entirely on the flow of donations. After leading a tour of the skeleton of what he hopes one day will be a school for over 1,000 students, he makes a frank appeal for support to Rachel Hermes, education coordinator for Catholic Relief Services. For now she can only nod her head sympathetically.

It is hard to know the best place to invest C.R.S. resources in Haiti, she explains later: “The need here is so great.” C.R.S. maintains a dizzying array of programs in Haiti, from efforts at job and business creation, basic sanitation and long-term housing development to substantial investments in the nation's education and health care systems. C.R.S. was first invited into Haiti in 1954. Since then its Haiti program has grown into the agency's largest, with 693 staff and 344 local partner affiliates. “I can assure you,” Ms. Hermes says, “that however compelling this parish's need seems, there are 100 other equally compelling” situations.

The thread by which many Haitians hang is thin, and the abyss is deep.

The View From the Top

On the plateau overlooking Port-au-Prince, a visitor has a breathtaking view of the busy and dusty city below. A sand-colored monolith of high walls and straining telecommunications equipment dominates the perspective. “We are a 10-minute drive from the American Embassy,” says Mr. Alexis, gesturing toward the giant facility.

The distance separating the high-security embassy from this transitional living camp in the Carradeux neighborhood of Port-Au-Prince is significantly greater, of course, than can be measured in time or space. This sprawling community of well-maintained wood and cinderblock shelters over asphalt slabs is surprisingly neat. The community has its own management committee that runs the show in the absence of any government assistance. C.R.S. helped build many of the “transitional” shelters here, replacing the tents and panel shacks from the U.S. Agency for International Development that had been erected in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake.

Three years later the committee members are delighted to show a visitor around their “village.” Unlike many of the shantytowns that rise along the eroded, crowded hillsides overlooking Port-au-Prince, there are no pits of smoking refuse here, no stinking, open gullies draining sewage through the streets. Trash is carried by residents to pick-up spots throughout the community before being brought to a

central location for proper disposal. Latrines have been established around the community to contain run-off of human waste. All in all, the village is remarkably orderly, but it remains far from home for many who live here. They are still waiting in hope for a more permanent resolution to their personal, and the nation's, crises.

Mr. Alexis believes he has one answer. He has a model community in mind that will set a new standard for housing in Port-au-Prince. "This is my dream to build for 7,000 people in this village," Mr. Alexis says: 250 buildings; 2,000 two-bedroom apartments, each with a bathroom, running water and electricity; a school with 18 classrooms capable of educating thousands of students. They will be homes, he says, not unlike homes in the United States. Establishing who actually owns the land where this Caradeux community has risen up is one major hurdle. It is not the only one. To build this dream community, Mr. Alexis says, "I need money. Where that money is coming from I don't know."

The Money Trail

Certainly in the years since the earthquake, plenty of money has flowed from donors in the North to this poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere; and flush with cash, a confusing alphabet soup of overseas nongovernmental organizations has set up shop. Haiti, in fact, is often referred to as the Republic of NGO's. Its government structures are weak. Less than 10 percent of all relief money has been directed through the government; donors are frankly skeptical of how it will be spent. Transparency International ranks Haiti ninth from the bottom on its 2012 corruption scale. Asking average Haitians how the government has assisted them since the quake elicits either wry smiles or absolute befuddlement at the foolishness of such a question. But the lack of trust in government and the continued reliance on NGO's has created something of a catch-22. By some estimates two-thirds of the services that should be provided by government are now delivered by NGO's. Government institutions remain bereft of the opportunity to develop the professionalism that might help Haiti emerge from such dependence. (A United Nations policy "roadmap" promises to respond to this problem.)

Each NGO maintains the machinery of fund-raising and program-launching that has led to the raising and disbursement of more than \$3 billion since the earthquake—and about \$3 billion more has been pledged to Haiti's recovery. (To put these grand figures in a little perspective, consider that in 2010, the year of the great earthquake, Americans spent almost \$50 billion on their pets.)

Western donors, and even Haitians themselves, wonder where all that money has gone. Delille Antoine is the execu-

utive director of Haiti's Episcopal Commission for Catholic Education. He says many Haitians have grown weary of the legions of NGO's that have descended on Haiti since the earthquake.

"Where is it?" Mr. Antoine says many Haitians ask about the vast relief effort. "Can they come to a place and take a picture and show us what they have done with the money?"

"That's probably the question I get the most," says Darren Hercyk, C.R.S.'s newly arrived country representative for Haiti. "Has the money disappeared? Has it been wasted? Why don't we see more [progress]?"

These are questions that have come to frustrate aid workers in Haiti. Amélie Gauthier works for Oxfam, an international relief and development agency. "Saving lives is very expensive," she says, a note of exasperation creeping into her voice. And Oxfam, like other NGO's, has been engaged in daily life-saving almost constantly since the quake. Before Hurricane Sandy moved on to leave a better publicized trail of destruction on the U.S. eastern seaboard, for instance, it devastated Haiti's croplands. Ms. Gauthier is already anticipating a national food crisis in a few months.

The thread by which many Haitians hang is thin, and the abyss is deep, she explains. "I know one mother who was depending on one fruit plant to [provide enough income to] pay for her child's school tuition. Others use one or two trees to pay for seed." Those meager investments have now been destroyed by Sandy, she says. It will be difficult and expensive to help the farmers she works with to recover from their losses.

Eighty percent of Haiti's nearly 10 million people get by on less than \$2 a day. "That was the case before the earthquake," says Mr. Hercyk, "and of course the earthquake was an enormous setback." Since the quake, Haiti has endured a deadly cholera epidemic—an outbreak that apparently originated with U.N. peacekeepers—and a series of major storms. "In my three months here, we've had two tropical storms," says Mr. Hercyk, marveling.

Only a fortunate minority in Port-au-Prince possess even the basics: running water, sanitation, dependable electricity.

For many girls as young as 7 or 8, the first chore of the day is to fetch five gallons of clean water that will be carried back to their shelters, balanced atop tiny heads, for use for drinking, cleaning and cooking throughout the day.

"A lot of money has come down here and you realize a lot of it [has been spent on] life-saving," says Mr. Hercyk. "It's providing shelter and emergency services, and you really cannot see the result of that work as clearly as you can see the reconstruction of a building."

Eyeballing conditions up close, some of the apparently slow pace of the recovery is easily explained. Haiti's infras-

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structure has been and is now in a sad state. Getting equipment and building materials in and out of Port-au-Prince across its many unpaved and deeply tank-trapped streets is no easy job. Once inside the city, would-be rebuilders face the daunting task of getting materials into the communities where they are needed. Most of the city's shantytowns have blossomed across steep hillsides; the homes themselves are tightly packed together and often joined only by a path barely wide enough for one person to pass through.

The Long Road

Despite such challenges, Mr. Hercyk says C.R.S. will keep moving forward. "We have gone from life-saving to reconstruction of communities and eventually to work on development," he says. C.R.S. has begun to focus again on long-term solutions to significant challenges in education and health care. One major commitment has been the \$15 million reconstruction of Port-au-Prince's St. François de Sales Hospital, financed jointly by the U.S. Catholic Health Association, C.R.S. and the Sur Futuro Foundation, a charity from the bordering Dominican Republic. Mr. Hercyk expects to see the 200-bed, state-of-the-art teaching facility completed by June 2014. It will be a major symbol of restoration for the nation. Still, "the road is going to be long," says Mr. Hercyk.

In Carradeux the community committee proudly leads a visitor to a five-room schoolhouse, built by C.R.S., that has made all the difference to the village's children. Prior to its construction, the children had been enduring class within the superheated steel confines of a fleet of decommissioned buses from the Dominican Republic. School work was frequently interrupted by the scorching Haitian sun. Many parents refused to send their children because of the classroom conditions. Now with the new, well-ventilated classrooms, enrollment is way up and more students were expected to join come January.

As the tour continues, Mireille Martino stands before her cheerful and colorful cottage and invites a visitor over with a smile to talk about conditions in the village. "We are surviving, but we hope it will be better someday, God help us," she says. After her apartment building was destroyed in the quake, she came to the camp when it was a tent city and has "moved up" to one of the 803 C.R.S. transitional shelters here (in all, the agency built more than 10,000 T-shelters during the crisis), which she shares with her adult children. Conditions in the village, by far better than many of the other temporary communities that have emerged in Port-au-Prince, are still quite difficult, she says. "Most people are not working...but when you are a servant of the Lord," she says, "there is always hope.

"Eventually we will find delivery," says Ms. Martino. Her smile is broad and patient. **A**

Still 'Presente'?

U.S. Catholics should reconnect with Latin America.

BY DAVID GOLEMBOSKI

Since August, several workers formerly employed by General Motors in Colombia have been protesting unsafe working conditions and demanding compensation after being fired following injuries sustained on the job. Some of the protestors have launched hunger strikes, sewing their mouths shut and declaring that they are prepared to die if G.M. does not agree to a fair resolution of the conflict. The protest has received coverage in major newspapers and has expanded to include demonstrations at G.M. locations around the United States, including the corporate headquarters in Detroit and the home of G.M.'s chief executive officer outside Washington, D.C.

A number of human rights organizations and faith groups in the United States have spoken in support of the workers and organized to pressure G.M., but none of the

most vocal advocates have been representatives of the U.S. Catholic community. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has not made any official statement concerning the protests. This conspicuous absence is no one-time phenomenon. Rather, it highlights a shift that has occurred in the U.S. Catholic community over the past two decades.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, great portions of the U.S. Catholic community were heavily engaged in various forms of outreach and expressions of solidarity with the people of Latin America—the land of Archbishop Oscar Romero, liberation theology and death squads. This included delegations of Americans who traveled to Nicaragua, El Salvador or other places and the establishment of sister-parish relationships between U.S. and Central American congregations. According to Christian Smith, a sociologist at Notre Dame, more than 100,000 U.S. citizens traveled to Nicaragua during this time “to observe its revolution firsthand.” At home, the sanctuary movement saw faith communities sheltering political refugees from Latin America, often illegally. Countless Catholics joined in advocacy efforts to

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CRIME SCENE: After a gang murder in Tegucigalpa, Honduras

reshape U.S. policies in Central America, the movement to close what was then the School of the Americas in Georgia being a prominent example. The growing use of Spanish songs and prayers in U.S. liturgies originated largely in the spirit of solidarity that flourished in this era.

But since the 1980s and early 1990s, this widespread and intense commitment to Latin America has waned. The annual School of the Americas protest continues (the S.O.A. is now called the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation), but the event is now as much an annual convocation of progressive Catholics as a targeted advocacy effort. Whereas Latin America was once a central preoccupation for the U.S. Catholic Church, it now appears to be a dwindling niche concern for a handful of aging diehards.

Should we expect that Latin America will remain a relative non-issue in the American church? Do U.S. Catholics still care about Latin America?

Shifting Priorities

The gradual eclipse of Latin America on the agenda of many U.S. Catholics has much to do with changes in geopolitical dynamics and the U.S. government's foreign policy agenda. In particular, the end of the cold war and the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, have had enormous consequences in shaping U.S. objectives abroad. Soviet Communism has been replaced by Islamist terrorism as the nation's primary perceived enemy, and the corresponding "battlegrounds" have shifted as well. No longer do U.S. covert interventions and overt wars aim to stop the spread of communism, but rather to disrupt the operations of Al Qaeda and other terrorist threats. Central America figured prominently in the old struggle, but the Middle East has taken center stage in the new one. During this fall's presidential debate on foreign policy, neither Barack Obama nor Mitt Romney mentioned a single Latin American country by name. As the currents of global politics have changed, the projects of global activists have evolved as well. Catholics who once protested wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador now find themselves focused on countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran and Syria.

This shift has coincided with a growing perception that the economic and political crises that once called for urgent attention in Latin America have abated. The civil wars that ravaged El Salvador and Nicaragua ended more than 20 years ago. Jess Hunter-Bowman, associate director of the Latin America solidarity organization Witness for Peace,

believes that this has contributed to diminished interest in Latin America. "When there isn't that front-page issue," he says, "people turn their focus to whatever new crisis needs to be addressed." Also, globalization is steadily, if unevenly, delivering many benefits of economic growth to Latin America. According to the Center for Economic and Policy Research, between 2000 and 2010, gross domestic product per capita in Latin American countries grew at nearly six times the rate that it had over the previous two decades. Only a naïf could believe that Latin America is entirely liberated from its struggles, but one is no longer besieged by

the horrific reports of the kind that used to emanate regularly from Latin American countries in decades past.

But despite some positive developments in Latin America, poverty, inequality, corruption and social instability remain wide-

spread. Mexico has been terrorized over the last several years by the brutality of the international drug trade and scandalized by the government's ineffectual response. In Colombia, similarly, a U.S.-led "war on drugs" bears a share of responsibility for violence, displacement and devastation of agricultural communities. In Honduras violence and impunity have spiraled out of control since the 2009 coup that overthrew that country's democratically elected president. According to the Committee of Families of the Detained and Disappeared of Honduras, a leading Honduran human rights organization, more than 10,000 complaints of human rights abuses by state security forces have been filed in the last three years. In early 2012 the United Nations called Honduras the world's most dangerous nation. Responsibility for this crisis falls partly on the United States, given the Obama administration's decision to more or less accept the outcome of the coup.

Moving North

But if violence in Latin America has by no means disappeared, something has changed since the days when dictators and death squads were on everyone's radar. Central America—the entire globe, in fact—has witnessed a transformation that can be described as the economization of violence. The brute-force politics of the 1980s have yielded to the economic warfare of neoliberal economic policies.

Free trade agreements and "structural adjustment" policies have undermined local economies, weakened governments at the national, state and municipal level and left millions of people struggling to survive in the new world econ-

Since the 1980s and early 1990s, this widespread and intense commitment to Latin America has waned.

omy. Poverty, exploitation and displacement are no longer considered human rights abuses; they are now part of the “creative destruction” effected by a globalizing capitalism. Economic violence is all the more difficult to resist because its perpetrators are harder to identify. During the years of the contra war in Nicaragua, one could easily “follow the dollars” in military aid flowing from the U.S. government to the militias responsible for murders, rapes and other human rights violations. Now, the policies that wreak havoc on poor families and communities are entangled with sincere, if problematic, efforts to promote development. Even though many countries have enjoyed significant economic growth, a report released this year by the Latin American Center for Rural Development identified the region as the most inequitable in the world.

Economics have also contributed to a more visible change that has affected the relationships of U.S. Catholics to Central America—namely, migration. Over the past two decades, many of the vulnerable people who captured the attention of the Catholic community in the United States are no longer in Central America—they have moved North. Solidarity with Latinos requires us to look no farther than our own parish neighborhoods.

As trade liberalization has lowered barriers to the mobility of capital, goods and services, many workers have been forced to become mobile as well. Countless mothers, fathers and even children have left their homes, families and communities in search of work and economic security. Daniel Groody, C.S.C., an associate professor of theology and director of the Center for Latino Spirituality and Culture at the University of Notre Dame, notes that migration has much to do with the economic struggles that plague Latin American countries. “People have an economic gun to their backs,” he says. “That’s why they leave.”

Immigration from Latin America has also changed the U.S. church. According to the Pew Research Center, more than one-third of U.S. Catholics are now Latinos, and that number will likely increase to at least 40 percent by 2030. Churches and faith-based organizations are working more than ever to accompany arriving migrants and support immigrant communities in the United States. This work is especially important, given the frequent demonization and scapegoating of immigrants.

Re-committing ‘From Below’

Despite these shifts in political dynamics and activist attention, there remain important reasons for the U.S. church to retain its focus on Latin America and for U.S. Catholics to remain engaged with the region. The poverty, violence and oppression that stirred Americans’ consciences in past decades have not disappeared. Many people living in Latin America continue to face extraordinarily dire circum-



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stances, and people of faith in the United States need to be aware of these realities and committed to addressing this great human need.

The United States looms large over Latin America and continues to exert an outsized influence over the region. Since the declaration of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, the United States has never shied from its self-appointed role as protector of the Western hemisphere. Neoliberal economics and the ill-conceived war on drugs are two examples of present-day U.S. policies that play important roles in shaping the political, economic and social landscapes of Latin America. Jean Stokan, director of the Sisters of Mercy Institute Justice Team, says that U.S. involvement in the region raises questions. "Our sisters in Latin America have asked us, 'Why does your country spend so much money militarizing our region? Why not put it into economic development?'" Particularly in a climate of budget-cutting at home, Catholics in the United States should be asking these questions too.

Because of the ever-increasing significance of immigration in U.S. politics and society, Americans must be attentive to the root causes of migration. To understand and address immigration in the United States, one must look at the "push factors" that compel people to leave their homes and communities in search of work. This new focus would enrich public discourse about immigration. The U.S. bishops have consistently raised the issue of root causes; and in 2003 they issued with the Catholic bishops of Mexico a joint pastoral letter that called for long-term solutions to address economic inequality in migrant "sending countries." The U.S. church is already, and must remain, in the forefront of fostering a more comprehensive conversation about immigration and just how deeply the United States is inter-

connected with the nations of Latin America.

The relative proximity of Latin America to the United States, along with the high number of Catholics living in that region, means that there are rich and varied possibilities for making connections and building solidarity, a unique potential for engagement on a personal level. Many churches and schools are already able to make delegation trips to Latin America, and many host delegations from Latin America as well. The Rev. Juan Molina, director of the Church in Latin America for the U.S.C.C.B., notes that parish-level relationships with communities in Latin America are flourishing, but they have changed over the years. "Those connections are no longer focused on policy issues alone, such as human rights or conflict in a particular country," he says. "Instead, they are focused on the relationships among the participants themselves. Faith is being shared and lived in community—the global community." These person-to-person encounters are critical for enhancing understanding and transforming U.S. communities. Whereas a visit to Iran may be impractical for many reasons, a pilgrimage to Mexico or Guatemala is within the reach of many U.S. Catholics.

In an interview in 1987, the Rev. J. Bryan Hehir, a social ethicist now at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, named Latin America as one of the four top issues that the U.S. bishops had been active on. (The others were nuclear arms control, economic justice and abortion.) Much has changed in the intervening 25 years, but there is a lesson in the experience of the 1980s that applies to the present day. Father Hehir, in his interview, said that whereas it was the bishops' own initiative that accounted for the other prominent issues on the church's agenda, it was an impetus "from below" that brought Latin America to the forefront. The U.S. Catholic Church became a leading voice for justice in Latin America in large part because of connections and commitments on the grassroots level among the faithful.

At a moment when Latin America no longer receives the attention from American Catholics that it once did, but when there remains as much need for justice in that region as ever, people of faith in the United States need not wait for a pastoral letter from the U.S. bishops to take action. Latin America has changed since the 1980s, as has the U.S. church, but as in those days, it can be people in the pews who lead the church to engage in this vital work of liberation. **A**

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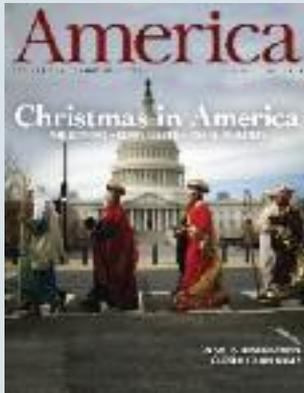
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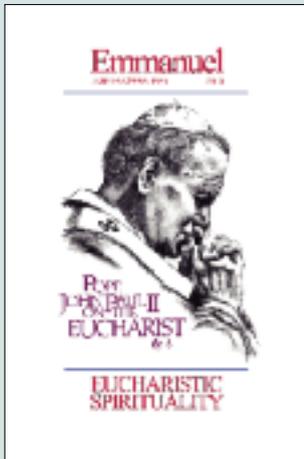
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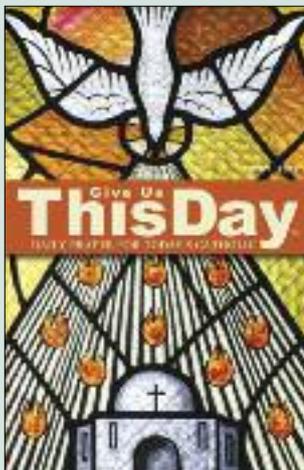


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Signs of Life

The Catholic voice against the death penalty is growing stronger.

BY HELEN PREJEAN

Can it possibly be happening? After years of relentless dialogue on the death penalty among Catholics in the United States, are we at last beginning to see signs that Catholics are becoming a significant moral force in efforts to abolish state-sanctioned death? Yes! I see it and rejoice.

For the last 34 years I have been engaged in this dialogue—ever since I walked out of Louisiana’s killing chamber in the early morning hours of April 5, 1984, after seeing a man strapped down and killed in front of my eyes.

Now, at last, there are signs of hope. As support for the death penalty has steadily declined in the United States in recent years, Catholic support has dropped even more significantly. According to the Pew Research Center, 78 percent of Americans—and a higher proportion of Catholics, 80 percent—supported the death penalty in 1996. By 2011, however, those numbers had fallen to 62 percent and 59 percent, respectively. Now Catholics support the death penalty at a lower rate than the general population.

In 2005 the pollster John Zogby reported a comparable shift in Catholic opinion toward the death penalty, but over a shorter period of time. But this poll also revealed another bright and shining fact: Catholics who regularly attend Mass support the death penalty less than those who seldom attend.

For a long time it was the other way around; going to church seemed to reaffirm Catholics in their support for the death penalty. In the late 1980s, it was anguishing to learn from polls at that time, people who attended Christian churches, including Catholics, were more likely than other Americans to support the death penalty. As I crisscrossed the nation giving talks, all I heard in audience after audience was, “An eye for an eye.” I wondered: What had happened to Jesus’ Gospel challenge to love our enemies and to forgive those who hurt us? Had we Catholics become so acculturated that we were virtually indistinguishable from other Americans? Had the salt lost its flavor?

Catholic Action

Last October, however, I saw clear evidence of the Catholic transformation on this issue. As Californians considered

HELEN PREJEAN, C.S.J., is the author of *Dead Man Walking* and *The Death of Innocents*.

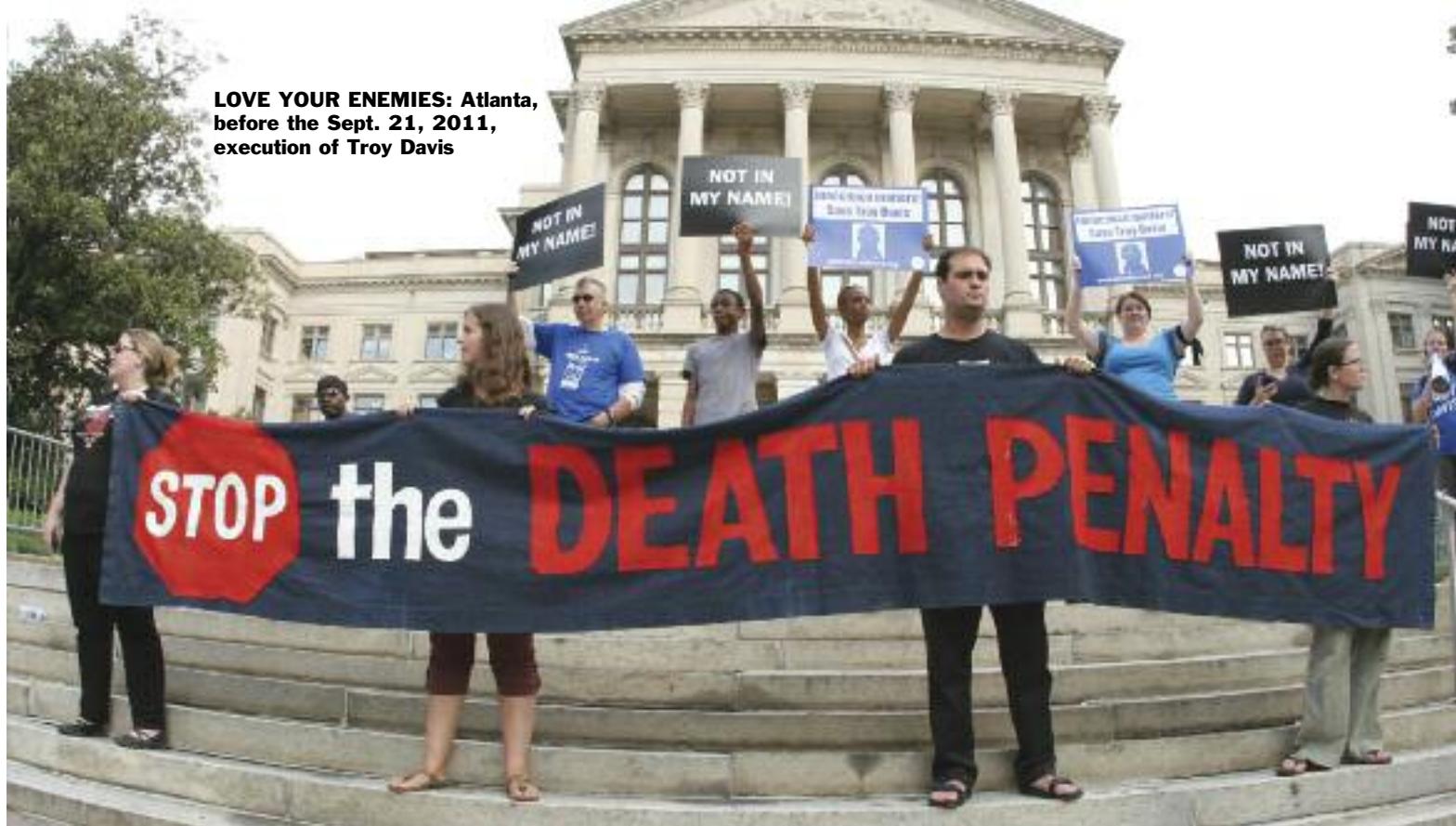
Proposition 34, which sought to repeal the state’s death penalty and convert the sentences of 727 death row inmates to life imprisonment without parole, I barnstormed Catholic churches across Southern California in favor of the ballot initiative. Even though it ended up being narrowly defeated (48 to 52 percent) in the November election, it was downright refreshing to witness broad Catholic action in support of the proposition. Catholics collected signatures on petitions, staffed tables at shopping centers and helped with phone banks. I cannot help remembering the lonely marches in the 1980s of a straggly few of us out on the road trying our meager best to awaken the public to the need to abolish the death penalty.

Pope Benedict XVI gave a real boost to the hands-on participation of Catholics on this issue in November 2011, when he expressed his hope that a meeting of the Community of Sant’Egidio and their collaborators would “encourage the political and legislative initiatives being promoted in a growing number of countries to eliminate the death penalty...” While Pope Benedict has publicly congratulated the leaders of Mexico and the Philippines for ending the death penalty in their countries, his message for Sant’Egidio was, to my knowledge, his most forthright public statement in opposition to capital punishment.

Pope John Paul II on numerous occasions called for an end to the death penalty. But the statement I cherish most came during his January 1999 visit to St. Louis, Mo., in which he positioned the death penalty side-by-side with the other pro-life issues—so dear to the hearts of Catholics. Having described abortion, euthanasia and assisted suicide as “terrible rejection[s] of God’s gift of life and love,” John Paul II continued: “The new evangelization calls for followers of Christ who are unconditionally pro-life: who will proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of life in every situation. A sign of hope is the increasing recognition that the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil.” Rooted in this conviction, the pope renewed his appeal “for a consensus to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary.”

Two years earlier I had traveled to Rome for a personal dialogue with Pope John Paul II about the death penalty. I asked: “Your Holiness, does the Catholic Church uphold the dignity only of innocent life? What about the guilty?” I shared with him that when I am walking to execution with

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES: Atlanta, before the Sept. 21, 2011, execution of Troy Davis



a man—rendered completely defenseless—who says to me, “Please pray God holds up my legs,” I cannot help but ask, Where is the dignity in this death? (I recount this dialogue with John Paul II in my book *The Death of Innocents*.)

On Holy Thursday 2005, the U.S. Catholic bishops inaugurated the Catholic Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty, and we began to see many more bishops at press conferences and legislative hearings in active support of bills to repeal the death penalty.

When Cardinal Roger Mahony gathered more than 1,000 priests of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles to announce that the California bishops strongly supported Proposition 34 and that the death penalty issue would be an integral part of Respect Life Month in October 2012, the priests responded with warm applause.

Rooted in Dialogue

The Second Vatican Council guided us rightly. Sustained, respectful dialogue—listening to all voices in the church, laity and hierarchy together—is the Gospel way to win over minds and hearts. The gentle art of education and persuasion is always slower and more labor-intensive than juridical edicts handed down from on high. I say thank God for Vatican II, which has schooled us in the art of patient, steady dialogue.

Nothing beats grassroots education and incessant invitations to action. As one example I hold up the Catholic Mobilizing Network, launched in 2008, developed and led

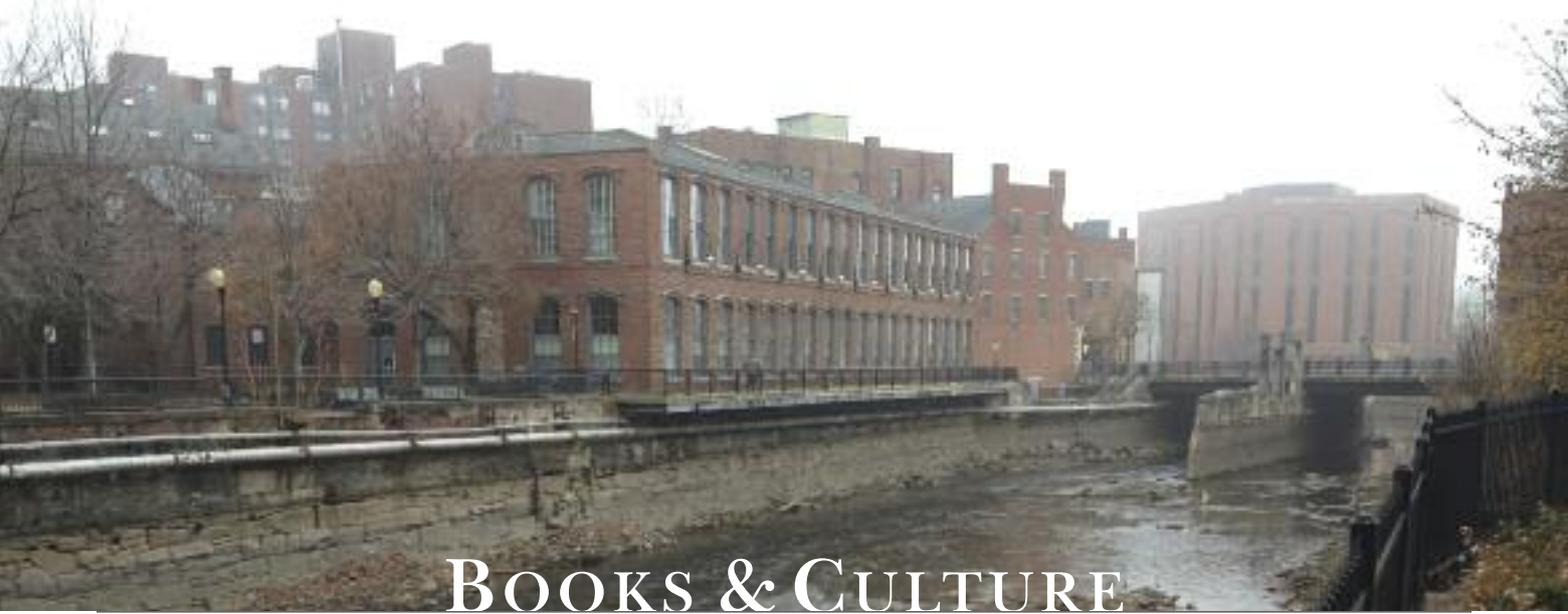
by dynamic Catholic laypeople and sponsored by my religious community, the Congregation of St. Joseph. The network’s mission is to collaborate with the U.S. bishops’ Catholic Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty. Its Web site (catholicismobilizing.org) offers ideas for homilies as well as teaching tools for adults and young people to understand the church’s newly developed vigorous opposition to state killing.

What better focus for the Year of Faith than continued dialogue about the dignity of all life, even of those found guilty of committing terrible crimes? We are called to restorative justice and compassion, not retributive, eye-for-an-eye vengeance. On a controversial issue like the death penalty, we hope and strive for understanding and enlightenment. But even more, we pray for the grace St. Bonaventure calls us to desire. He wrote, “Ask for...not light, but the fire that totally inflames and carries us into God.”

I have experienced such a call, and I describe it in the prelude to the spiritual memoir I am now writing, *River of Fire*:

*They killed a man with fire one night, strapped him in a
wooden chair
And pumped electricity into his body until he was dead.
His killing was a legal act (because he had killed).
No religious leaders protested his killing that night,
But I was there. I saw it with my own eyes.
And what I saw set my soul on fire, a fire that burns in
me still.*





BOOKS & CULTURE

IDEAS | JAMES T. KEANE

BEAT ATTITUDE

Jack Kerouac's unexpected life

The thread of Jack Kerouac's literary and personal life in the American imagination might be unwound succinctly in the following terms: ambitious and fun-loving young man leaves behind his small-town upbringing to chase heroes and dreams in the American West, finding along the way new paths to enlightenment while blazing a trail for generations of

seekers to follow.

It is a theme familiar to most of us, because more than a few of our favorite novels embrace it. It is also, in the case of Kerouac, almost entirely a fiction. The man most associated with the peripatetic Beat Generation spent more than half his life in his hometown of Lowell, Mass., living with his mother. This master of the postwar American idiom grew up speaking the French dialect of his Canadian immigrant parents and actually attempted an early draft of *On The Road* (the book was eventually published in 1957) in the dialect of his Franco-American community. Despite the image of a modern spiritual seeker who eventually found a home in Buddhism, Kerouac was born and died a self-identified Catholic; and despite his iconic status as a chronicler of the road, the most prominent theme in Kerouac's novels is a mysticism of place.

Because his fiction (13 autobiographical novels) closely follows the events and themes of Kerouac's own life, a visit to Lowell is not just a pilgrimage to see a grave or a museum; it is instead a step back, to the degree

possible, into the world Kerouac inhabited, chronicled and occasionally loathed during a productive literary life cut short by alcoholism at the age of 47. During a three-day visit in November 2012, I had the chance to walk the streets Kerouac walked and visit the important sites of his life in Lowell: the apartment in which he was born, an event he claimed to remember as occurring "at five o'clock in the afternoon of a red-all-over supertime"; the Catholic school where he began his education, where the inscription over the door reads not "school" but *école*; the public library where he spent much of his teenage (and later) years; the churches and religious shrines of a Franco-American culture that had its own devotions, its own stubborn Jansenist streak, its own interpretations of the American Dream.

From Lowell and Back Again

At one point before the Civil War, the textile mills powered by Lowell's numerous canals off the Merrimack River made the city one of the Western world's greatest industrial centers. Workers flocked to Lowell, including a large population of French-speaking immigrants from Canada. Today, the city has the second-largest population of Cambodian-Americans in the

WHERE THE ROAD BEGAN: Above, a canal in Lowell, Mass; left, the crucifix atop the Lourdes Grotto; opposite, Kerouac's childhood home.



United States, so that the city is one-fifth Buddhist (somewhat ironically, given the way Kerouac helped to popularize the study of Buddhism) and is also home to large populations of Latin American immigrants. The mother church of the Franco-American Catholic community for generations, St. Jean Baptiste, enjoyed a brief second life as Nuestra Señora del Carmen before being finally closed in recent years. Economic hard times came even before the Great Depression and lasted for decades, with upticks during World War II and during the 1980s, when Wang Laboratories employed thousands of local employees. Today, Lowell has the feel of a city diminished, but not without a thriving arts scene and

ing Neal Cassady across the Plains. Kerouac not only writes in detail of his own numerous mystical visions, but attributes even more to his brother Gerard, whose early and painful death haunted Kerouac even as the local nuns revered Gerard as a child saint.

The physical environment of his early apartments, churches and schoolyards also gives one a sense of the bifurcations to come in Kerouac's later life. He was raised in a Franco-American culture that valorized resistance against American Protestant values, and yet he became a somewhat bewildered American icon. He approached the sacraments with nothing short of terror, and yet drifted in and out of Buddhism in his 30s, perhaps (as some biographers have claimed) in a desperate attempt to save himself from the alcoholism that had overtaken his life, as it had his father's. He dreamed of an aristocratic pedigree for his family, going so far as to create fanciful genealogies of his ancestry, and yet moved from year to year in his youth depending on his father's economic fortunes. In later life he would return to

some economic prospects. It is, in short, not just the place where "Ti Jean" was born.

The Mysticism of Home

Kerouac's "Lowell novels," including *The Town and the City*, *Visions of Gerard*, *Maggie Cassidy*, *Vanity of Dulooz* and *Doctor Sax*, show the interplay of a mystical faith and quotidian existence in a working-class town, including intensely personal reflections on death, destiny and the self-discoveries of a young man attempting to find himself along the axes of spirituality, sexuality and cultural identity. This is far removed from the legends of chas-

Lowell again and again, occasionally with his mother, drawn always back to the blue-collar homes and bars of his youth. And he was drawn even more back into the mystical faith his mother and his culture had given him—even *On The Road*, Kerouac insisted, was "really a story about two Catholic buddies roaming the country in search of God." A self-description in *Lonesome Traveler* repeats the claim that he was "not a 'beat' at all, but a strange solitary Catholic mystic" who "always considered writing my duty on earth, and the preachment of universal kindness, which hysterical critics have failed to notice."



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Christ Crucified

Kerouac's mystical visions had another specific theme—the crucifixion. In *Maggie Cassidy*, Christ speaks to him from a crucifix after confession:

“My child, you find yourself in the world of mystery and pain not understandable—I know, angel—it is for your good, we shall save you, because we find your soul as important as the soul of the others in the world—but you must suffer for that, in effect my child, you must die, you must die in pain, with cries, frights, despairs—the ambiguities! the terrors!”

Gerard had similar visions. While both brothers were convinced of universal salvation (a sticking point for those who would call Kerouac a Jansenist), glowing crucifixes and visions of Christ suffering loomed large. In *Big Sur*, Kerouac's haunting chronicle of an

attempt to escape his demons by isolating himself on the California shoreline, he suffers a terrifying nightmare about Satan coming to capture him in the form of a growing stain across the sky. He is surprised to hear angels laughing with joy, and “suddenly as clear as anything I ever saw in my life I see the Cross.” Biographers note that in his dissolute final years, Kerouac spent much of his time sketching scenes of the crucifixion. One senses that Kerouac felt not only gratitude for the sacrifice of the crucifixion, but also a certain kinship with a suffering Jesus—a vanity, perhaps, but not an unknown one in the history of Christian mysticism.

Another local site that appears in the Lowell novels is a huge replica of the grotto at Lourdes, where generations of Franco-Americans offered prayers and climbed on their knees up steps behind the grotto to a looming

crucifix atop the hill. The sky was slate-gray the day I walked up those steps myself (no knees, thanks), and the dark image of Christ hanging from the wood against that backdrop was indeed something to inspire a kind of terrible awe—at the enormity of the sacrifice, of the messy bloodiness of incarnated divinity, of the mysteries of life and death, salvation and suffering.

I imagine Kerouac as a child at that shrine, which he visited scores of times, and suspect it was that memory, not one of hipsters seeking kicks in some far-off locale, that explains Jack Kerouac's life, death and work more than anything else.

ON THE WEB

A photo tour of Jack Kerouac's hometown.
americamagazine.org/slide-show

JAMES T. KEANE is an editor at Orbis Books in Ossining, N.Y., and a former associate editor of *America*. This essay owes much to the assistance of Paul Marion, executive director for community and cultural affairs at UMass Lowell.

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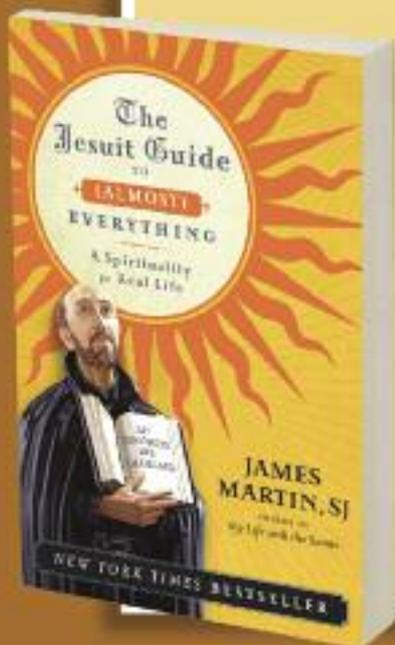
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FINDING A THIRD WAY

LAW'S VIRTUES

Fostering Autonomy and Solidarity in American Society

By Cathleen Kaveny

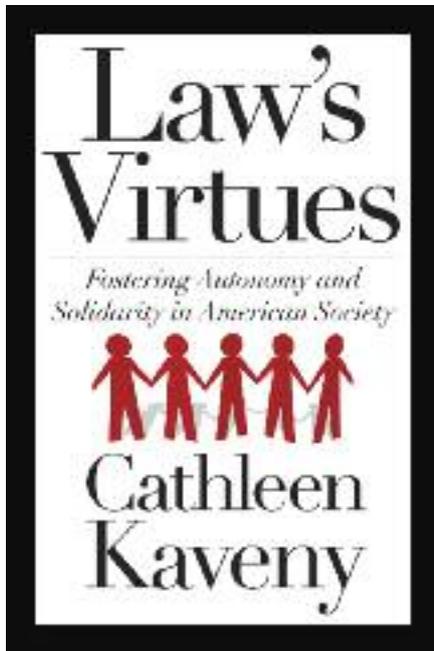
Georgetown University Press. 304p
\$29.95

This is an important book on religion, morality and law. In *Law's Virtues*, Cathleen Kaveny, a legal scholar and moral theologian, argues that law "can, should and does" function as a moral teacher even in the United States, a pluralistic representative democracy committed to individual liberty and legal laissez-faire. What she offers here is "a constructive appropriation and application of Thomistic legal thought to the contemporary context," consistent with her standing in the legal academy as a leading proponent of Roman Catholic jurisprudence.

St. Thomas Aquinas taught that law, rightly understood, teaches virtue. This is Kaveny's theoretical starting point, making her an outlier on the contemporary jurisprudential scene. For that alone, she should be complimented. To insist that law is an effective moral teacher, Kaveny must counter the liberal approach now in

vogue that claims law operates as a negative constraint and is not concerned with teaching moral lessons.

She argues intelligently and very



specifically that this approach is far too narrow to account for many federal laws, including the Civil Rights Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. For Kaveny, these laws do teach by pointing beyond their technical requirements in order to begin realiz-

ing their ultimate normative visions. But she also endorses Aquinas' caveat: the role of law in promoting virtue has its limits. So her moral idealism and optimism are properly tempered by moral realism and the limits of ordinary virtue.

Claiming, much less understanding, any relationship between law and morality in our pluralistic society is never easy, yet Kaveny's provocative and nuanced approach sets a new standard.

With her framework in place, Kaveny then asks what virtues the law should teach. Her answer is: autonomy, as understood by the "perfectionistic" liberal Joseph Raz and solidarity, as framed by Pope John Paul II. Both virtues are related to human flourishing in a social context. For Raz, autonomy is the "capacity to be the 'part-owner' of one's own life." John Paul II defines solidarity as "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good." With the good of individuals and the common good intertwined, Kaveny can now insist that "individual autonomy is ultimately a social achievement." This move is nothing but an appropriately contemporary spin on a traditional Catholic position.

Championing her view that law is best understood as a moral teacher, Kaveny applies this framework to contemporary questions about abortion, genetics and euthanasia. She also examines the morality of voting, in critical conversation with the 2007 U.S. bishops' voting guide, *Faithful Citizenship*. To begin, Kaveny establishes her Catholic bona fides: "I think that the practices commonly described as abortion and euthanasia generally involve the wrongful killing of human beings." She then proposes a "third way" for wise lawmaking, valuing the socially important moral message of law while rejecting the view of those who would move directly from moral condemnation to legal prohibition. Her analysis of these hot-button legal

WITHOUT GUILT



CARTOON BY HARLEY SCHWADRON



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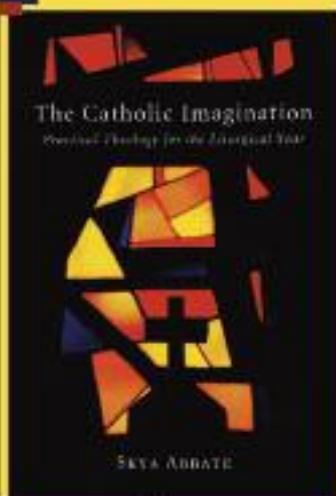
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and moral issues is balanced and exhaustive (with extensive citations).

On the morality of voting, Kaveny argues that "intrinsic evil," a highly technical term from Catholic moral theology, is often misused by American Catholics as the catchword in many discussions about voting for pro-choice candidates. Her presentation on this topic is a tour de force. This is reason enough to look forward

to Kaveny's promised book on complicity. Moving beyond the "culture wars" model of political engagement, Cathleen Kaveny digs deep in *Law's Virtues* to deliver a must read for anyone who cares about the relationship of law and morality in our pluralistic society.

KEVIN P. QUINN, S.J., is president of the University of Scranton in Scranton, Pa.

KYLE T. KRAMER

HOT AIR

THE CARBON CRUNCH How We're Getting Climate Change Wrong— And How to Fix It

By Dieter Helm

Yale University Press. 304p \$35

Superstorm Sandy brought climate change back into public consciousness with a vengeance. Although no single weather event can be directly linked to climate change, Sandy's devastation offered an undeniable preview of the kinds of extreme weather events we will face regularly in a warming world.

At such a critical moment in the climate change conversation, Dieter Helm's new book, *The Carbon Crunch*, could not be more timely. A professor of energy policy at the University of Oxford and a fellow in economics at New College, Oxford, Helm also sits on various British and European governmental committees related to energy, economics and climate change. His is a voice to be reckoned with, not only because of his knowledge and authority regarding these issues, but also because Helm levels a blunt critique of

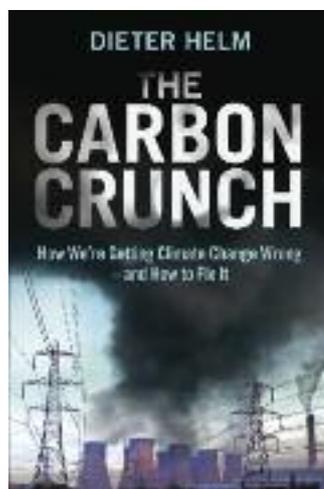
current efforts—by governments and "green" organizations alike—to deal with the serious threat of anthropogenic climate change.

Helm unfolds his argument in three sections. He first explores why carbon emissions continue to rise and who is to blame. Burning fossil fuels is the general cause, but Helm narrows in on coal as the "prime villain," since in terms of carbon emissions per unit of energy produced, "coal is worse than oil, and much worse than gas."

Unfortunately, coal is the primary energy source fueling the economic boom in the developing world, especially in the populous nations of India and China, who between them build three new coal plants every week.

Developed Western nations are responsible for the lion's share of historical emissions, given current standards

of living and the long arc of an Industrial Revolution built on coal. And even if Britain, for example, boasts of cutting its direct domestic production of carbon "by 15 percent between 1990 and 2005," its total "carbon consumption went up by over 19



percent.” This is largely because Brits, like the rest of Europeans and North Americans, increasingly consume goods made in coal-fired China—indirect emissions for which they are still ultimately responsible but that they fail to acknowledge.

In the second section of *The Carbon Crunch*, Helm explores why reining in carbon emissions is so challenging. Current renewables, like wind and solar, he argues, cannot feasibly scale up to meet the world’s growing energy needs, and focusing on them diverts capital from more effective alternatives. Improvements in energy efficiency, while essential, paradoxically tend to increase energy use (the Jevons paradox). Nuclear energy is no likely savior; it is too capital-intensive, red-tape-ridden, risk-laden and politically unpalatable.

Some argue that since fossil fuel is a finite resource, eventually the supply will wane, the price will rise and the market will curb our carbon addiction for us. Helm, however, makes a convincing case that new production technologies, like hydraulic fracturing, will keep the supply stable for the foreseeable future. Unfortunately, there is more than enough accessible fossil fuel to fry the climate.

Helm sharply criticizes international agreements for reducing carbon emissions, like the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and the more recent conferences at Copenhagen and Durban. The past two decades have demonstrated that these frameworks are incapable of reversing or even slowing the global emissions juggernaut; they simply shift emissions to industrializing nations, like China and India, whose carbon production is unregulated.

What, then, can be done? In his final section, Helm proposes solutions. First, carbon pollution must have a price tag that reflects its environmental consequences. Helm recommends that developed Western nations (independently, if necessary)

institute a carbon tax on domestic emissions as well as a border tax on carbon-intensive imported goods.

Helm’s second recommendation is a rapid transition from coal to gas as a primary (though transitional) energy source. Gas also has environmental consequences, but it produces only half the emissions of coal per unit of energy. As the recent U.S. shale gas boom demonstrates, new (though controversial) drilling technology has already made gas a game-changing alternative to coal.

A move to gas buys time to pour capital into researching and developing new low-carbon energy technologies that can meet the huge energy demands of an increasingly large and affluent global population. Helm hesitates to pick winners, but he sees promise in several possibilities. He advocates developing a computerized “smart” utility grid that can provide flexible ways of matching energy supply and demand.

New energy storage technologies are necessary to smooth out the intermittency issues associated with renewables (the sun doesn’t always shine and the wind doesn’t always blow). Electrifying the transport sector will help with this, as vehicles become grid-integrated means to store electricity. Helm is bullish on new solar technologies (including biomass production) and geothermal heat—both potentially unlimited sources of energy if we can harness and store them more effectively.

But for some occasionally bogged-down sections on ethical responsibility and economics, Helm’s level-headed prose is very

accessible to the general reader, even as his book serves as a velvet sledgehammer in the global conversation about climate change. I wish he had addressed forest management and agriculture more meaningfully, which offer large-scale and cost-effective means to reduce and sequester carbon emissions. While Helm may place a bit too much faith in the power of tax policy, the market economy and as-yet unproven energy technologies, he is realistic enough to acknowledge that reducing carbon emissions, while possible, is neither easy nor painless; there is a price to pay in first-world economies and lifestyles. His ideas deserve a hearing from government decision-makers and the general public.

KYLE T. KRAMER, a columnist for *America*, is the author of *A Time to Plant: Lessons in Work, Prayer, and Dirt* (Sorkin Books).

Saint Sunday

In certain folktales, she appears with Mary,
pierced through with the scissors and needles
of girls who worked, forbidden, on Sundays.
She is marred with knives, and scarred
with scythes wielded disobediently.
I imagine Christ’s gentle hands, healing
his battered Saint, pulling nails from her flesh,
gauzing over the wounded, bleeding breast.
As when I lay on a gurney before surgery,
my eyes fixed on the nurse’s crucifix.
As long as I could watch Christ’s hanging body,
I was calm; and in that brief and conditional
courage, God came and erased fear’s bruises
from my neck and stayed with me, who wept.

ANYA SILVER

ANYA SILVER teaches English literature at Mercer College in Macon, Ga.

RAYMOND A. SCHROTH
WHY WE FIGHT

INTO THE FIRE

A Firsthand Account of the Most Extraordinary Battle in the Afghan War

Dakota Meyer and Bing West
Random House. 256p \$27

NO WORSE ENEMY

The Inside Story of the Chaotic Struggle for Afghanistan

Ben Anderson
NewWorld Publications. 288p \$24.95

On Nov. 2, by coincidence the liturgical day on which Catholics remember the dead, *The Washington Post*, following a practice begun in 2003, printed full-page the “Faces of the Fallen,” 45 portraits of the American soldiers and Marines who died in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan between February and April. Their ages range from 19 to 48; more than half were in their 20s. Eleven were killed by makeshift bombs and three by suicide bombers.

The journalistic tradition begun by *Life* magazine during the Vietnam War and now shared by *The New York Times* and public television, of asking the public to look the combat dead in the face, is a fleeting wake-up call. Not just nameless foreigners but our next-door neighbors are dying for a cause few understand and fewer feel one way or another. Now come two books full of frontline blood, battles and the human costs of combat.

Ben Anderson, a British documentary maker and war correspondent, spent 13 months in Afghanistan over the course of five years, six with the British army, the rest in two-month stints with three battalions of U.S. marines. His thirst for combat seems unquenchable, perhaps because he knows that the best war journalism comes from those who experience the

shock of battle and live to tell about it. The best are also moralists. They seldom preach, but they know moral ambiguity—or sin—when they see it and tell the world.

On the day Anderson arrived in Helmand Province, the British dropped a 500-pound bomb on a building from which Taliban were firing. The bomb killed 30 fighters and 25 civilians, including nine women and three children who had been hiding in a small room. A few days later he attended a meeting of the local elders who raged against the bombings. One man, almost in tears, had lost four brothers; another lost 20 family members. An officer delivered a box of cash, \$2,000 in compensation for each family member lost. One Afghan told Anderson that a jet bombed his house and killed eight “martyrs.” When the children helping him dig in the debris got frightened and tried to run away, the plane shot them one by one.

The deaths of civilians is a steady theme in Anderson’s book, along with the fearsome improvised explosive devices; the incompetence of the Afghan soldiers, who often resemble a heavily armed, badly dressed version of the Keystone Kops—on drugs. Many were exceptionally brave, but the desertion rate was 20 percent, sometimes rising to 60 percent for those deployed in Helmand.

Anderson records the voices of the

U.S. troops: “I love this stuff, this is what I re-enlisted for. Four deployments now. You can’t keep me down.” Another: “Our families don’t know what’s going on.... America’s not at war, America’s at the mall. No one cares. It’s ‘what’s up with Paris Hilton now?’”

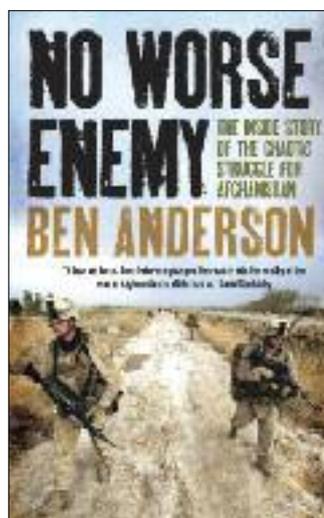
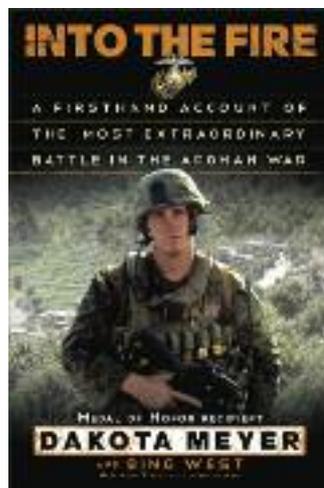
Anderson focuses on kindly, idealistic First Lt. Aaron MacLean. His men have just fired rockets into a house sheltering three families, killing four and wounding seven. Shaken, the lieutenant has read widely about the war and feels obliged to save the Afghans from “these theocratic fascists.” “War is a curse,” he says, but “it’s not the worse

thing out there.”

Yes, says Anderson, his experience has provided evidence for pacifism; but he remains convinced that some things are black and white, and that the Taliban “are just evil.” The final chapters recount the battle for Sangin, once occupied by the British, now by the Taliban, a battle won at great human cost with the destruction of homes and a mosque. Anderson asks the commander, Capt. Matthew Peterson, what he would say to those who refer to Afghanistan as America’s longest war. Peterson replies, “So

what?” If it takes another 10, if that’s the cost of success, then “Who cares how long it takes?”

If *No Worse Enemy* reads like a reporter’s notebook, Dakota Meyer’s *Into the Fire* is structured as a memoir, as told to Bing West, assistant secretary of defense in the Reagan administration and author of military best sellers.



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LITURGICAL PRESS

Meyer, a 21-year-old farm boy—whose mother had handed him over to a former husband, who became his foster parent—joined the Marines because he liked to shoot and fight and also, at 17, did not know what to do with his life. Playing high school football he had picked up three concussions and was “bored with academics.”

Meyer bought quickly into the Marine Corps concept of four-man teamship. In sniper school he learned that another human being is like a math problem, a life or death contest where your target is scheming to kill you. His motto, tattooed on his chest read, *Vestri nex est meus vita*, or “Your death is my life.” A staph infection from a spider bite crippled his fingers and resulted in six months of therapy and a daily reliance on a bottle-and-a-half of Kentucky bourbon.

His sergeant helped him shape up, knock off the bourbon and volunteer for Afghanistan as an advisor. He learned the official counterinsurgency

strategy: give Afghans security and project money and build relationships with local officials. But both American and Afghan soldiers warned them: Never assume the villagers are on your side. They have a saying: You can rent an Afghan but you can never buy one. Meyer was friendly with the Afghan children, hoping that maybe someday kids would remember that some Americans were kind to them—though “you don’t help out because you expect something in return.” He hung out with the “Askars” (Afghan soldiers) and, with the help of Hafez, his team’s interpreter, they talked for hours about his Kentucky farm.

The book’s momentum builds toward the battle for Ganjal, a terraced mountain village above a river bed a few miles away that was an infiltration corridor from next-door Pakistan. Meyer, who desperately wanted to qualify for a Combat Action Ribbon, was furious because the other three members of his team—Lt.

Johnson, Gunnery Sgt. Kenefick and Hospitalman James “Doc” Layton—and the combined expedition of Americans ostensibly led by Afghans were going in without him. Meyer was an assigned “advisor” and considered too headstrong to be trusted in combat. Nevertheless Meyer and a colleague determined that if the planned attack went awry, they would rush to the rescue.

In fact the enemy is waiting, the mission surrounded on three sides. By 5:30 a.m. machine gun fire is pouring in. They call for artillery and air support, which is denied lest civilians be hurt. The villagers support the Taliban. At 6:00 a.m. Meyer, though denied permission, loads a truck with a machine gun and other weapons and drives into the fight. He collects the dead, rescues many wounded, one with his legs blown off, and drives them to safety. He kills as many Taliban as he can, then returns several times in a fruitless search for his team buddies, who are trapped in a house. In the end he finds his beloved friends, their corpses piled one upon the other. “I never believed it would end like this,” he writes. He personally puts them into their bags. It is what they would have done for him.

Months later, discharged, Meyer undergoes therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder and returns to the bourbon and a construction job. In despair because he “screwed up big time” by failing to rescue his brothers, he takes his Glock out of his car’s glove compartment and presses it to his head. But someone has removed the bullets.

In August the phone rings. It is President Barack Obama inviting him to the White House to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. In an epilogue, Bing West concludes that this is a story about “grit,” the “invincibility of the American warrior.” He is wrong. It is about much more than that.

RAYMOND A. SCHROTH, S.J., is literary editor of *America*.



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LETTERS

Coastal Planning

In a letter to the editor ("Stupid Human Tricks," 12/24), William F. Klosterman passionately addresses the difficulties caused by building on the sea coast. But he utterly fails to propose any reasonable solutions. Is he suggesting that New Orleans—with all its history, culture and economic impact—be abandoned? Does he propose that the lower third of Manhattan (with the financial district) and the bank of the East River (with the United Nations) be emptied out? Would he like to see Florence, that cradle of the Renaissance, disappear before the Arno floods again?

My parishioners, who live on a barrier island, are mostly firefighters, police officers, medical workers, teachers and other public employees. They are not in a financial position to abandon their homes and move beyond the flood zone. Also, the barrier islands

are not simply "moving oceanside sand bars" but necessary protections for millions of homes and businesses on the mainland that would face the ocean's power without them.

I wholeheartedly agree that we on the seashore cannot continue business as usual. Responding to climate change necessitates serious planning among ourselves and with the wider community. Simplistic diatribes against living on the ocean are neither realistic nor helpful to that dialogue.

(MSGR.) DONALD McE. BECKMANN
Long Beach, N.Y.

Southern Christmas

I moved to Florida in 1969, so I can relate to "A Light in the Cold," by Mary Sweeney, S.C. (12/17), about the connection between cold, northern winters and Christmas. So many of our feelings about Christmas are based on past experiences; we are so sentimental about Christmas. It is as if what is done in the North is the way Christmas should be. The Catholic

Church is still too Euro-centered.

But today most Catholics live in the southern hemisphere, where there is no snow. Still these southern regions have much to offer. In Mexico, we experienced Las Posadas, searching for a room with Mary and Joseph on Christmas Eve. At the midnight Mass, the people bring the baby Jesus from their cribs to church where they rock him to sleep. When you see Mexican cowboys, big gruff men in their distinctive hats, rocking a plastic baby, you will never forget it.

I also wonder how much snow and ice there was in Bethlehem when Jesus was born.

LUCY FUCHS
Brandon, Fla.

Thank You?

Re "Of Many Things," by Matt Malone, S.J. (12/10): Oh my! An essay written by a living Jesuit that actually makes sense to me? An essay that has a beginning, a middle and an end? One that does not resort to some pop-cul-

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ture version of feel-good spirituality to explain life's complexities? An essay that actually runs counter to the conventional wisdom that all educated Americans must worship at the altar of "enlightened Europe"? A tacit admission by Father Malone that progress is often, at best, a double-edged sword? An appeal to look to Genesis, not psychology or history, as the basis of man's inhumanity to man?

I was about to cancel my subscription to *America*, but now you've robbed

me of the fleeting joy that doing so would have provided. What happened?

ALVARO MARTINEZ-FONTS
Miami Beach, Fla.

Reimagining Creation

In "Facebook Apologetics" (12/10), Brad Rothrock makes a good case for the importance of philosophical theology as part of a new apologetics, but I think something more exciting is needed. How about a creation story that inspires us?

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., provided this when he explained how God creates through evolution. If you accept the overwhelming evidence that he was right and add a little zoology, especially primatology, you have to conclude that the human tendencies attributed to original sin are actually the result of millions of years of evolution. Our instincts tell us to dominate others, by any means available, so that our genes are the ones that shape the future. God saw this as good because it drove physical evolution. But now we must repent, in the sense of turning away from following our natural impulses, or we will destroy ourselves. We hold the fate of creation in our hands.

That is a challenge that can motivate people of our day, if opinion polls accurately reflect the current zeitgeist. The traditional story that Jesus died to pay for our sins, so that we can be happy after death if we follow the rules, seems unlikely to motivate people in the 21st century. Rather than a sacrificial victim, we need Jesus as a teacher and role model to show us how to do the important work entrusted to us.

DONALD ROHMER
Muenster, Tex.

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Start from Scratch

In "New Plan to Reverse Decline?" (Signs of the Times, 12/10), Thomas Groome says that closing more parishes in the Boston Archdiocese would be like "rearranging chairs on the deck of the Titanic." I agree with Mr. Groome that the priesthood needs to expand to married men—and, in my opinion, to women. But that would still be rearranging deck chairs. The most telling figure: "Currently about 16 percent of Boston Catholics regularly attend Mass...."

This would not significantly change with the introduction of married or women priests—as evidenced by the steep declines in church attendance among mainstream Protestants. Catholics who don't understand the

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importance of regularly celebrating the Eucharist with their fellow believers will not be moved by married or women priests.

Catholic leaders need to start from scratch in evangelization, reassessing what is really of the essence in following Jesus and coming up with a new language and ways of reaching people where they are. Anything less will result in continued listing of the bark of Peter. We have assurance from Jesus that the ship won't sink, but he expects the crew, led by its officers, to do what it takes to keep it afloat.

TOM CARNEY
Johnston, Iowa

Catholic Inequality

I read with interest, "School Daze" (Editorial, 10/15), because of my involvement with Catholic education over 40 years as a teacher, parent of 10 sons who attended Catholic schools and board member on the parish and diocesan levels.

I agree with this statement from the editorial: "It is inimical to a just and democratic society to maintain two separate, unequal systems, whether that dualism is based on race or property tax bases." The editorial exhorts lay Catholics and church officials to insist on an equitable and effective education for all of America's children, implying this inequality exists only in the public schools.

Unfortunately, I have experienced and still witness the same inequality in our Catholic school systems. More affluent parishes are able to pay higher salaries and provide educational amenities in their parish schools that less affluent parishes, often in the inner city, are unable to provide in their schools. While I agree on insisting on change in our public schools, lay Catholics and church officials must address the same and difficult issue of inequality and dualism in our Catholic schools.

CATHERINE GARCIA-PRATS
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Body Building

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), JAN. 27, 2013

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

The joy of the Lord is your strength (Neh 8:10)

The church is a body of believers, and each part is essential for the overall health of the body. According to St. Paul, each individual person is vital for the body to thrive. All three of the readings for the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time place us in the context of the body of believers. Two of these three passages situate us among the Jewish covenant people. In the first, Ezra reads from the book of the law to the people assembled outside Jerusalem; in the Gospel, Jesus reads from the prophets to the people of the synagogue.

Though questions swirl around the historical figure of Ezra, we know that he returned under Persian rule to the land of Judah after the Babylonian destruction and exile to find a people without the word of God. Before the gathered people enter Jerusalem, they ask Ezra to read them the law (Neh 7:1–5). When Ezra proclaims the Torah to the people, he not only reads it; he also interprets it. His special task is to bring the word of God to the people, but their task is to hear and accept. They accept the Torah with tears and mourning, but again Ezra acts as their interpreter, telling them to eat, drink and celebrate “for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

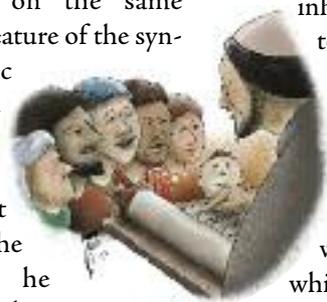
This same communal joy permeates Jesus’ reading in Luke 4. Jesus is in his hometown synagogue, an institution whose origin as “village assembly” was

in the Persian period. Indeed, Anders Runesson, a specialist on the New Testament and early Judaism, links Luke 4 with Nehemiah 8 because the reforms implemented by Ezra and Nehemiah focused on the same unique and defining feature of the synagogue: the “public reading” of the Torah. Luke, unlike Mark and Matthew, has placed Jesus’ reading at the synagogue as the moment in which he begins his ministry, with a spirit-filled public proclamation to his people. But when Jesus reads the Isaian prophecy, a prophecy drenched with good news for the poor and the oppressed, he not only speaks of the promises of God but of his own fulfillment of them. Luke says that “the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him,” a description that evokes the people’s initial response of wonder: How will Jesus’ fulfillment of the word be enacted?

The word was enacted in the church, the body of believers in the Messiah Jesus, who themselves are a part of the mystical body of Christ. In practice, it emerged as a type of synagogue structure, a voluntary association based upon the word and person of Jesus. St. Paul speaks of the “one Spirit” by which “we were all baptized into one body.” And yet division seems to suffuse the church in Corinth. Paul insists, amid a world that valued superiority and hierarchy, that every part had its crucial role in the body of

Christ. Paul’s desire is that there be “no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.” Paul does not deny spiritual gifts or differences among gifts but insists that all are necessary for the body.

All of these passages speak to the need of the people of God to hear and accept the word of God and then to respond to that word with the joy inherent in it, just as Ezra spoke to the people of Jerusalem and Jesus spoke to his neighbors in Nazareth. This is not a passive task, for God’s people must go beyond reception of the word to enact the word through the gifts by which each member of the body



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Do I respond to the word of God with joy?
- How am I hearing and acting on the word of God in my life?
- Do I acknowledge the unique gifts assigned to each person in the body of Christ?

is graced. “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.” Whatever the role of an individual person within the church, the body of Christ, each person participates in the priestly, prophetic and kingly offices of Jesus Christ. In these readings we see the participation of the people of Christ in the prophetic office particularly, called to hear the word as witnesses but also to recognize joyfully our gifts for the evangelization of the world.

ART: TAD DUNNE

JOHN W. MARTENS is an associate professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn.

Love Never Fails

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), FEB. 3, 2013

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

And I will show you a still more excellent way (1 Cor 12:31)

Love never fails because God, who is love, never fails. Human loves can be disordered and disintegrate because they can be built upon our own misguided hopes and desires. We mistake what we want or how we perceive something for how things must be or truly are. When Jesus spoke in the synagogue in Nazareth, his initial proclamation was greeted warmly: “All spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.” Yet when Jesus speaks of God’s healing love among the gentiles, drawing on examples from the prophets Elijah and Elisha, Luke presents a group of people suddenly enraged. How could things change so fast? Luke does not offer us many details, but it seems people’s expectations regarding God’s salvation were not met. Jesus had just spoken of his prophetic fulfillment in the synagogue, so why would he place God’s fulfillment of Israel’s hopes among the gentiles? In addition, something else is bubbling under the surface with respect to Jesus, as to whether he is truly “the one.” After all, “Isn’t this the son of Joseph?”

The scene Luke sketches, though short and dramatic, encapsulates the human desire to manage and control events. We think we know how things ought to go, and we are often certain we know who people are. We are quick to order the world according to our own wishes and desires. Because of this, the proclamation of the word of God does not always fall on fertile soil. It is not what we wanted, hoped for or

expected. It is too challenging, too generous or too different. The person God has chosen for a task is not someone who we feel has the proper qualifications.

The prophet Jeremiah had the same doubts about himself. Though the word of God came to Jeremiah saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you,” he initially rejects his own worthiness for the call. God declares, though, that he will deliver Jeremiah. The Psalmist too understands that it is God who is his strength: “For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth. Upon you I have leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother’s womb.” Even before we are born we are known to God, called by God and depend upon God even when his plans are unclear to us.

As creations of God there is something else that binds all of us together, the essence of God himself, which is love. This is why Paul speaks of love as the greatest of spiritual gifts—it is the gift that, unlike prophecy or knowledge, is eternal. More than that, it is the gift that is available to all of us, regardless of our call or understanding. From the aged to the athlete, from those disabled to those just born, love is our heritage. We are worthy of love by the very fact of our creation and being. Ceslas Spicq says that this love, *agape* in the New Testament, is a “demonstration of love,” “a divine love,

coming from heaven” and a love that “links persons of different conditions: with rulers, benefactors and fathers; it is a disinterested and generous love, full of thoughtfulness and concern. It is in this sense that God is *agape* and loves the world” (*Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*).

It is this outpouring of *agape* that points to the inherent and true value of all human life: We are made to receive God’s love and to share God’s love. Our blind spots, personal or societal, can blind us to the true meaning and purpose of life. The anger at the Nazareth synagogue emerged from mistaken notions of how God should or must act and led to the rejection of Jesus’ proclamation that God’s love incarnate in him was for all peoples. God’s love is not dependent upon our human calculation of gifts and capabil-

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Am I open to God doing something new?
- Do I recognize love as the greatest spiritual gift?
- Can I accept the working of God’s gifts in others?

ities. The rejection of the little ones in our society—whether the unborn, the aged, the disabled or the poor—emerges from our assessment of people as products we can evaluate. But the performance that God desires from us, to which he has called every one of us, is simply this: that we love one another. And this love never fails.

JOHN W. MARTENS

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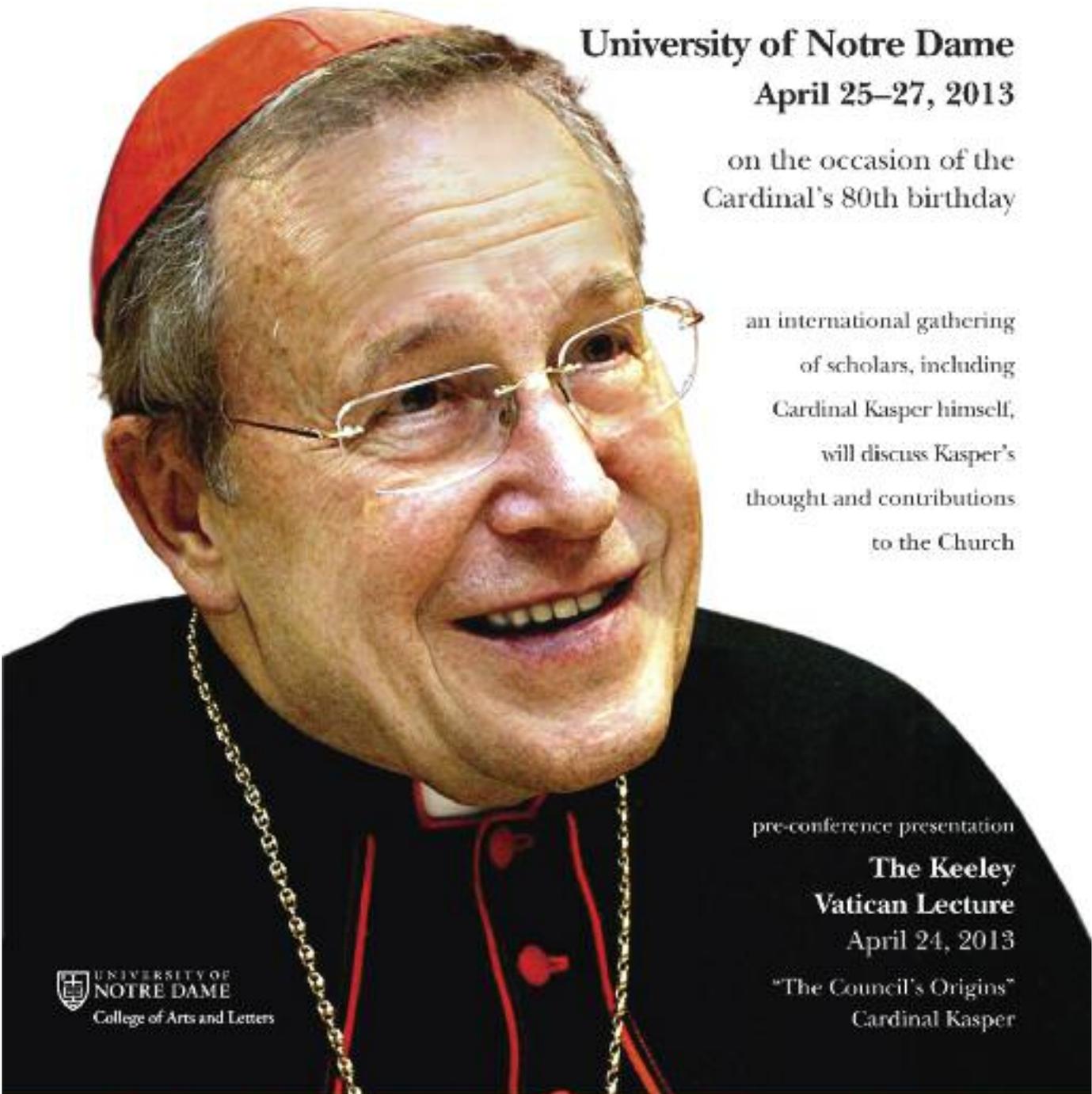
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