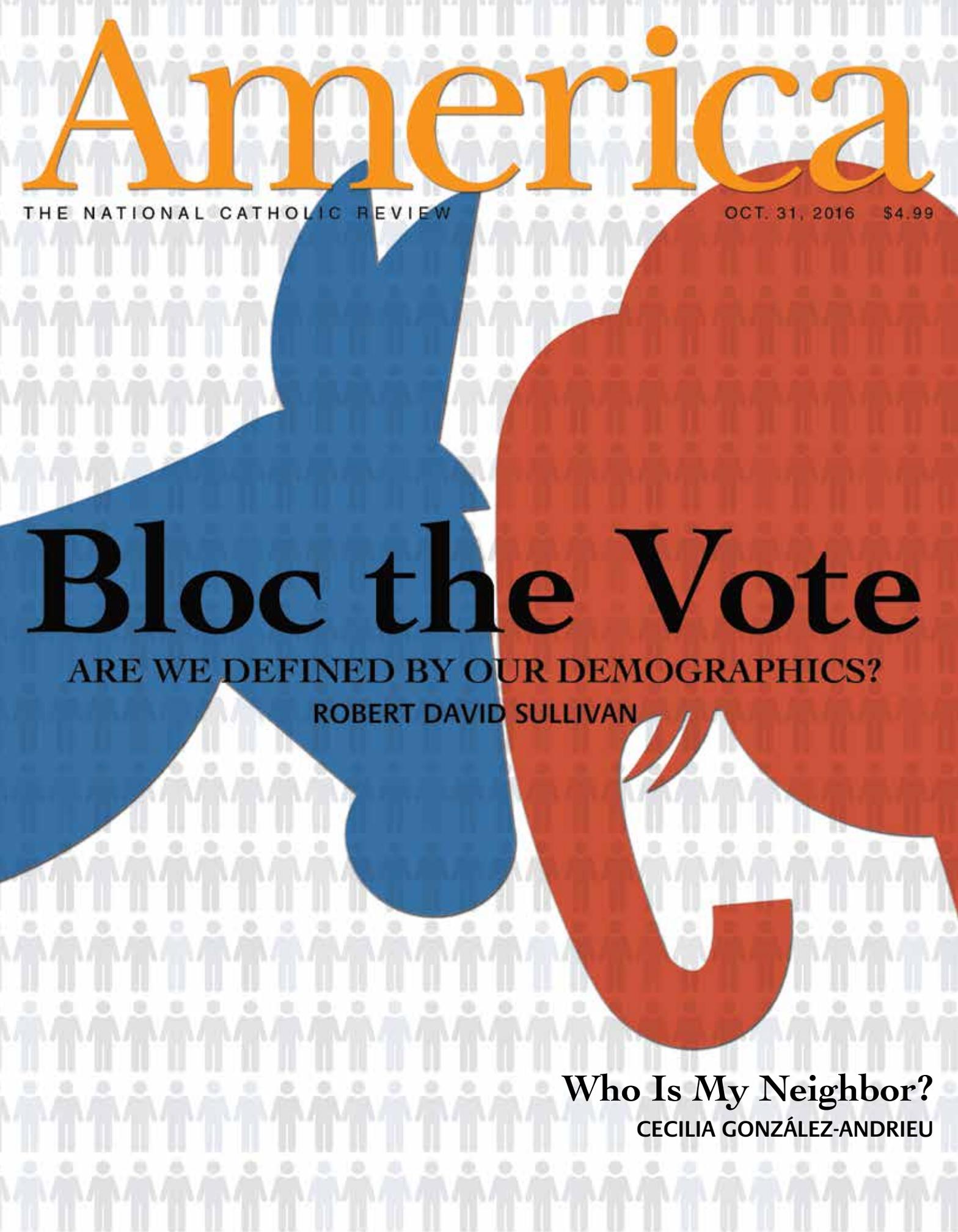


America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC REVIEW

OCT. 31, 2016 \$4.99



Bloc the Vote

ARE WE DEFINED BY OUR DEMOGRAPHICS?

ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN

Who Is My Neighbor?

CECILIA GONZÁLEZ-ANDRIEU

OF MANY THINGS

I got down to my office early last Friday, Oct. 14—really early, just a bit past 5. It wasn't a tight deadline that brought me there. Rather, I was looking for the big news we were expecting, news from Rome where that day our Jesuit general congregation was electing a new superior general. Rome is six hours ahead of us, so the morning's work there should be moving along. If the delegates did not reach a decision on the first ballot, there would be another, and then another until one Jesuit received the needed majority.

I recall the excitement at the previous congregation, the 35th, in January 2008, as the leaders up front in the *aula*, the meeting hall, opened the paper ballots and read out the names. The first round of balloting failed to reach the required majority, but as the second round results were tallied, it became clear that Adolfo Nicolás would be chosen. We had heard his name mentioned among those who emerged as possible choices—all without politics or campaigning. We had seen him walking the halls, praying in the *aula*, attending Mass with the rest of us. And the numbers by his name were adding up.

I had met Father Nicolás in Tokyo in the early '90s on the night before he was announced as the Jesuit superior of Japan. I met him again when he stayed briefly in our community in Chicago a couple of years later, and then a decade after that at a meeting in Spain. I was sure that with his talent for administration, his spirituality and commitment to mission and his ready smile he would be a great leader. But I also felt concern for him as his life was about to make a dramatic turn.

At 5:33 a.m. last Friday we had word that applause was coming from the *aula*. Only delegates were in the hall during the voting; curial staff and other congregation staff were waiting nearby to catch any news. The applause was the first sign that the voting might be over. Once the new general was

officially chosen, I expected that Father Federico Lombardi would phone this news to Pope Francis, as he had called Pope Benedict in 2008 with the election result. As the outside world waited, the electors filed up one by one to greet their new general. The mood was very upbeat, consolation at having done an important job well.

At 6:13 a.m., we got word that General Congregation 36 had chosen Father Arturo Sosa of Venezuela as the 31st superior general of the Society of Jesus.

In the week before the election, the congregation had discussed the needs of the Society of Jesus today. No specifics of that are made public, but as we look at Jesuit ministry in various areas of the world, we know that different issues arise. In India and parts of Africa, one issue would be managing growth. In the United States, one issue would certainly be how to manage the Jesuit identity of well-established institutions with declining numbers of Jesuits. The superior general does not manage the details of these issues, but he is certainly aware of them. Part of his job is to read the many reports that come in from the provinces around the world. And he does detail work in that he appoints provincial superiors and some local superiors. And he makes major decisions with wide impact.

A great part of his mission is to lead us all, to inspire us in our specific ministries. We hear that we are called to be at the margins, to go to the frontiers, to get in the mix with the issues that affect people today. We need to aid the contact between the church and contemporary culture: How to we preach Jesus and his Gospel today?

The congregation has spoken, and we are happy with their choice of Father Arturo Sosa as our new superior general. We have every confidence in him and thank him for taking on his new mission.

EDMUND W. SCHMIDT, S.J.

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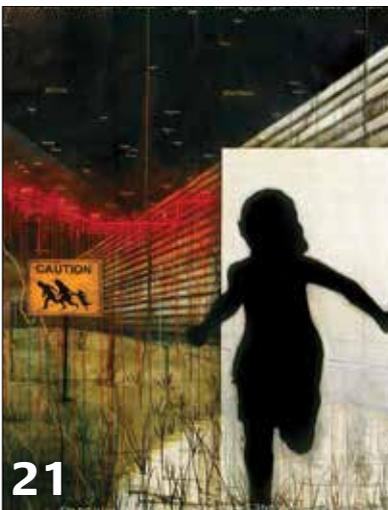
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ON THE WEB

America Films reports from Rome on the **election of a new Jesuit leader**, and **Robert Ellsberg** talks about his new book, *Blessed Among Us: Day by Day With Sainly Witnesses*. Full digital highlights on page 30 and at americamagazine.org/webfeatures.



Death on the Ballot

Support for the death penalty has slipped to just below 50 percent, its lowest level in 40 years, according to a recent poll by the Pew Research Center. Further evidence of public attitudes can be expected on Election Day. Archbishop José Gomez of Los Angeles is urging California voters to abolish capital punishment, writing that it deprives the condemned of “the chance to change his heart and make amends.” In Nebraska, voters will decide whether to reinstate the death penalty after it was repealed earlier this year by the legislature; in Oklahoma the question is whether to enshrine its capital punishment law in the state constitution.

Eight states have repealed the death penalty since 2000, but none by popular vote. The last time the death penalty lost at the ballot box was in Arizona in 1916, and it was reinstated two years later. This may be one reason why few national political leaders have joined the movement for repeal. Donald J. Trump notoriously took out newspaper ads in 1989 saying “Bring Back the Death Penalty” to New York after the arrest of five teenagers for the rape of a jogger in Central Park. (They were later exonerated.) Meanwhile, Hillary Clinton continues to support the death penalty, and her running mate, Tim Kaine, answered a question about “balancing” his Catholic faith with public policy by saying he had allowed executions to continue when he was governor of Virginia. Sadly, Mr. Kaine gave no indication that he would work to abolish the death penalty at any level of government.

It is heartening that younger voters in particular are increasingly skeptical that the state has the right to execute human beings. But abolishing the death penalty at the federal level and in the 31 states where it remains is a daunting process that will require continued passion and commitment. The courts and the leaders of the two major political parties cannot be relied upon to advance this cause.

Labor Scandal at Wells Fargo?

It has surely been a couple of difficult months for Wells Fargo & Co. and its chief executive officer, John Stumpf. The bank had to pony up \$185 million in September to settle state and federal investigations after the discovery of as many as two million fraudulent accounts opened for customers without their permission. Worse, Mr. Stumpf had to endure a humiliating congressional grilling by Senator Elizabeth Warren, Democrat of Massachusetts, before resigning in disgrace on Oct. 12.

In mid-October the company’s top brass joined around 500 senior executives in an hourlong crisis-management call.

One issue that did not come up? The well-being of Wells Fargo employees. It was the bank’s intense pressure to “cross sell” accounts that convinced many low-level employees that it was preferable to break the law than to miss quotas.

Wells Fargo may not be alone in this regard. A June 2016 report on the retail banking sector by the National Employment Law Project found that “workers suffer harassment and threats in order to make ever-changing over-aggressive quotas.” The report suggests how easy it can be to move from abusing corporate employees to abusing customers and clients.

The real scandal at Wells Fargo may be not just the fraudulent accounts but also the years of wage-hour violations and gut-wrenching pressure on low-paid employees. In the absence of union representation and with unreliable enforcement by the understaffed Department of Labor, who is protecting the workers who could then be in a better position to protect customers?

Wells Fargo reports that over the last five years it has terminated 5,300 employees for “inappropriate sales conduct.” Not one of the bank’s top managers received a pink slip.

Hacking at Home

In late September a record-breaking “denial of service” attack was launched against the security news site KrebsOnSecurity. For about 24 hours legitimate users could not reach the site. A week later a similar attack on another site shattered the record at 1.1 terabytes per second. These increasingly large attacks were made possible by the so-called internet of things, devices like security cameras, digital video recorders and other small home appliances that are connected to the internet.

Because of poor security design, these devices are easily compromised and added to a botnet, a network of devices that can be controlled and coordinated by hackers. The hackers use these devices to target a specific website or internet service with floods of phony traffic. This can be a lucrative business; one group collected over \$600,000 over the course of two years. The poor security of these devices deserves immediate attention. When they install these devices in their homes, consumers may unwittingly be giving hackers the tools to block access to information around the world. It is a classic tragedy of the commons.

Internet service providers should create ways to inform customers when it appears that malicious traffic is originating from their home connections. Armed with more knowledge, users could update their devices to the latest standards and press hardware makers to release safer, more robust firmware.

End the Epidemic

Police in East Liverpool, Ohio, recently shared on social media a photo of two adults slumped over in the front seats of a car, while a 4-year-old boy sat in the back seat. The adults had overdosed on heroin, almost leading to their deaths, and the police hoped the image might shock people into recognizing the damage that opioid abuse can cause. To some degree, it worked. The photo, which received national attention, prompted local government action.

Unfortunately, stories like this are all too common these days. Recent weeks brought more examples: the 2-year-old in pink pajamas trying desperately to wake her unconscious, overdosed mother in the aisle of a Family Dollar store in Lawrence, Mass.; the 7-year-old girl in McKeesport, Pa., who told her bus driver she had been unable to wake her parents, both of whom were dead from overdoses, leaving the girl's three siblings, ages 5, 3 and 9 months, alone in the home.

In the last 10 years, the United States has seen the number of heroin-related overdoses nearly quadruple. According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine, in 2014 more than 10,000 people died from heroin overdoses and more than 18,000 from prescription opioids, together accounting for nearly two-thirds of the accidental drug overdoses in the country. The greatest increases in the death rates have occurred in the Midwest and the Northeast, and in young adults ages 25 to 34. Four out of five heroin users first became addicted to prescription opioids before moving on to heroin, often because it is cheaper and easier to obtain.

Around the country, local and state governments, health care workers, law enforcement, families and faith communities are struggling with how to end this epidemic of addiction. Some strategies have proved effective in countering addiction. Physicians have begun issuing short-term prescriptions for opioids following medical procedures so that the drugs will last only until a recovering patient can visit a physician. Needle drop-off programs, more comprehensive prescription monitoring programs to discourage individuals from requesting prescriptions from multiple doctors and increased numbers of and access to treatment centers have also helped. Additional evidence-based strategies also can benefit the wider community, including the expansion of good Samaritan laws, so that drug users are not prosecuted when reporting an overdose, and increased access to drugs such as naloxone that counteract overdoses. These strategies recognize that drug abuse is a community issue with community solutions.

Perhaps the most important change communities can

make is to treat opioid abuse as a health issue, not a criminal problem. Increasingly, it is understood that individuals struggling with addiction need medical help, not jail time. This welcome shift has gained support on both sides of the aisle. Despite some arguments about funding, a bill supporting drug treatment, monitoring and prevention programs passed the Senate with a vote of 94 to 1 and the House with a vote of 400 to 5; it was signed into law by President Obama in July.

The law is one more reminder of the importance of a comprehensive approach to combatting addiction. Although legal and medical issues must be addressed, the emotional needs of those suffering from addiction also must be cared for—as well as the family members who often get pulled into a terrible spiral. In this effort, faith communities can play a unique role. For many people, drugs seem like a solution to the isolation that can come from a lack of hope, self-esteem, resources or community support. Faith communities can help to provide this support while working actively with clinics, medical professionals and city officials to meet health and legal needs as well.

Hunterdon County in New Jersey offers one positive example. Through its One Voice initiative, the county prosecutor's office has teamed up with the Safe Communities Coalition of Hunterdon/Somerset and with area faith leaders to address issues of importance to the community. During the weekend of Oct. 7-9, more than 100 faith leaders in the county spoke to their congregations about opioid addiction.

The Hunterdon County initiative encourages dialogue among churches, law enforcement and the city, but it also encourages faith communities to think more deliberately about their own role in the crisis and what each one might do to support those suffering from addiction.

These initiatives also serve as reminders that faith communities have real opportunities to become sources of education and comfort. They can offer prayers and help with one's faith life. They also can connect people to stress management resources, job resources, counseling, education in the warning signs of addiction and can help to discourage the stigma of addiction.

As the number of individuals affected by this epidemic grows, it is important to ensure that there are even more who are willing to help find a solution.



REPLY ALL

Civil and Religious

Re “Freedom to Serve” (Editorial, 10/10): The editors have failed to note the difference between civil and religious spheres. While Americans are entitled to their religious beliefs and practices and moral codes, in the public sphere they are not entitled to impose them on others. Belief that all marriage must be heterosexual does not entitle one to enforce that belief on others when significant legal rights are attached to marital status, nor to deny children homes that are otherwise beneficial to them because one objects to the adult relationships in that home. Unless the biological parents have placed a condition upon the agency that the child be raised as a Catholic, the agency has no basis for demanding Catholic conditions.

In the civil sphere, all people have a right to equal treatment under the law, even if others think their behavior is immoral. Civil governments cannot successfully impose legislation of the morality of a minority upon the rest of society without generating massive disrespect and evasion of the law. Permitting others to make their own moral choices is fundamental to the Catholic concept of conscience. So long as Catholic institutions hire and sell services to non-Catholics, they are fully participating in civil society and must not interfere with the consciences of others. Catholics are free to argue for and to promote their moral positions but not to restrict the freedom of others to act from their own moral conclusions.

TOM POELKER
Online Comment

Illinois in Trouble

Re “Budget Fight Bruises the Needy,” by Judith Valente (10/10): As an

Illinois resident and human service provider, I understand that Gov. Bruce Rauner spent decades in business and then decided to run for governor. His election surprised me because Illinois is, by tradition, a “blue” state. As we know, the goal of business is to make money, while the goal of government is the protection of all of its citizens. The only thing keeping Illinois from serving even fewer people and descending lower educationally is Michael Madigan, the Democratic leader, and those who work with him. Student enrollment in Illinois universities and colleges is down this year, since students have no assurance about which institutions will be gutted further or even closed down. The author of this report is directly on point.

RICHARD BOOTH
Online Comment

A Long Road of Recovery

Re “The New Know-Nothings” (Editorial, 10/3): The editors are right to speak out about anti-immigrant nativism and bigotry. It has been wonderful to see unity on this point across a wide spectrum of Christian thinkers, including those who, from a secular perspective, could be labeled either left or right (e.g., perspectives included in *America*, and those of various bishops, Shane Claiborne and Russell Moore). Turning this into a broader Clinton vs. Trump debate is a distraction. Only one major party candidate has intentionally let the genie of bigotry out of the bottle here. He is rightly condemned for doing so; but if you can still vote for him, hopefully it is despite this behavior and not because of it. Regardless of the result on Nov. 8, we as a people face a long road of recovery, in part because of the nastiness promoted this cycle by Mr. Trump.

STEVEN REYNOLDS
Online Comment

Being There for the Elderly

Re “Lonely Planet” (Current Comment, 9/26): I never realized how fortunate I was that both my parents, in their mid-80s, were able to live in their two-story Cape Cod house for over 60 years, up until six months before our Lord called them home. Once a week in the last five years before they passed away, I would take them both to their parish Over 50 Club social on Monday mornings. It was so enjoyable being with them and their friends, I wound up being president of the club for a couple of years.

When I lost my parents, I wanted to find a way to be there for the elderly. In my own parish, I heard about the Legion of Mary, and the fact that a large part of their ministry was with seniors in nursing homes and assisted-living residences. Going to local nursing homes to say the rosary and pray novenas with the residents opened my eyes to the number of other families who are not as lucky as mine. Talk about an epidemic of loneliness!

I hope and pray that your readers will become part of the Legion. Legion groups all over the country, called “praesidia,” really need compassionate, loving and faithful people to respond to this epidemic, and let the love of our Lord and our Lady shine through them.

STEPHANIE GRECO
*Director of Shrine Services
Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish Shrine
Lindenwold, N.J.*

Educational Needs

Re “Fully Formed,” by T. Howland Sanks, S.J. (9/26): This article on seminary formation speaks to the educational needs of Jesuit students. On that matter Father Sanks has more experience than I, certainly. But at the end of his article, he states that his recommendations might be considered

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for non-Jesuit ministerial candidates.

I am a diocesan priest who has been a pastor. I have held several diocesan positions, including vicar general. I taught parish administration and homiletics in the local seminary as well as in the permanent deacon program. I say all of this because I have a perspective on the work of diocesan seminaries and diaconal education in the United States from “both sides of the desk.”

While what Father Sanks states is true—that all priests are in service to the church—more fundamentally, diocesan clergy are called to serve in a particular church: their diocese. This is also the case for lay ministers, many of whom hold positions that are appointments directly from the bishop. To Father Sanks's concerns about education, I would say that in my experience people don't care what you know until they know that you care.

When it comes to foreign students, there are significant matters that need to be addressed. Language is of course equally important, if not more important than that the priest has the capacity to relate with maturity and be at ease with people. This is a requirement for deacons, lay ministers, pastors and bishops. Unfortunately, cultural differences too often seem to govern, and this is an issue that has not been fully addressed at almost any level.

(REV.) PAUL F. PERI
St. Benedict, Ore.

Doctrine Lacks Credibility

Re “Free to Serve,” by Helen M. Alvaré (9/26): Jesus expressed admiration for those called to celibacy for the sake of the kingdom, and I share in his admiration. But I cannot praise the patriarchal system that governs male-female relations in the family and in the church.

As long as the church hierarchy remains exclusively male, Catholic doctrine on sex and gender increasingly

lacks credibility, for good reasons that transcend sociological trends. Deep down, the *sensus fidelium* no longer takes the patriarchal family model as “natural law.” If you want to link social, sexual and family justice, transform the church hierarchy into an icon of Trinitarian communion instead of presenting the church as an icon of patriarchal ideology. When was the last time you heard Eph 5:22-33 read at a Catholic wedding? If women are ordained to the priesthood and the episcopate, “*Humanae Vitae*” makes sense. Otherwise people will continue to turn around and walk away with fingers in their ears.

LUIS GUTIÉRREZ
Online Comment

Both Baby Boomers

Re Of Many Things (9/19): One small correction. Both Hillary Clinton and Donald J. Trump were born at the very beginning of the baby boom: Trump in 1946, and Clinton in 1947. The baby boom generation is more or less officially designated as people born from 1946 to 1964.

Those born in 1964 would be 52 years old this year. It is not likely that these two candidates will be the last members of the baby boom generation

to run for president.

But this election may indeed be one of the most important in U.S. history. The fact that both candidates are baby boomers is largely irrelevant. I would add that it is likely that their level of participation in organized religion is also irrelevant.

What is relevant and very important about this election is: Will the United States continue to support the American values represented by the U.S. Constitution, and by the symbolism of the Statue of Liberty?

Will the United States continue to welcome immigrants as it has throughout its history? Will our country and its people continue to work toward eliminating bigotry of all kinds, including bigotry towards those of different religions and races, which include most of the more recent immigrants? The choice of candidates really comes down to this.

So the decisive potential turning point is whether or not the United States will turn its back on everything it has always represented. Will the people, in electing a president, choose to support the values on which this nation was built or to renounce them?

ANNE CHAPMAN
Online Comment



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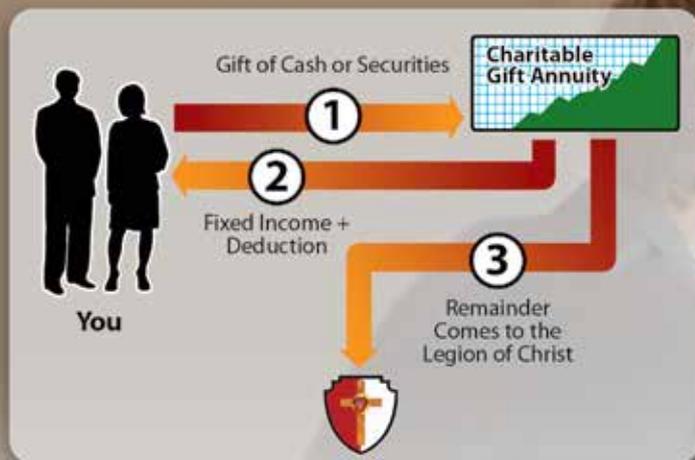
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SIGNS OF THE TIMES

GENERAL CONGREGATION 36

New Leader of Jesuits Worldwide Is Latin American ‘Historic Choice’

EMBRAZO. Arturo Sosa, S.J., right, the newly elected superior general of the Society of Jesus, greets his predecessor, Father Adolfo Nicolás, in Rome on Oct. 14.



Jesuits from 62 countries have chosen “a man of deep prayer” in electing Venezuelan-born Arturo Sosa Abascal as the new superior general of their order, said Timothy P. Kesicki, S.J., president of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, a few hours after the decision was announced on Oct. 14.

That is one of two qualities that are essential for the head of the order, Father Kesicki told *America*. The superior general has to be a man of prayer because he makes his decisions in prayerful discernment, he said. He must also have “a holy boldness, an apostolic aggressivity,” Father Kesicki said, “because we are a missionary order that is called to go to the farthest corners of the earth and do so without fear.”

Father Sosa is the 31st successor of St. Ignatius Loyola, who founded the Society of Jesus in 1540. He is the first non-European and the first Latin American to head what is today the largest religious order of priests and brothers in the Catholic Church.

“As someone from the New World, he brings the riches of the Latin American church and knows also the challenges,” Father Kesicki said. “He is also a man with cross-cultural experience, having studied at the Gregorian University in Rome as well as universities in his homeland.” The new superior general, he said, “has direct experience of some of the challenges we face in the United States and is especially

aware of the difficulties migrants from Latin America face.”

Asked whether the decision to choose a Latin American was influenced by the fact that the church already has a Latin American pope, Father Kesicki was doubtful. “There’s never an overt political calculus” like that, he said. On the other hand, he acknowledged that “it’s not a big surprise that the new superior general is from the global South, given that 59 percent of the delegates at G.C. 36 come from there.”

He recognized that it is “a historic choice” and that the new leader’s perspective will be “different from that of Father Nicolás, who came with an Asian experience.” Before his appointment to the Jesuit central administration in Rome, Father Sosa served as superior of the Jesuit province in Venezuela between 1996 and 2004 and had to contend with the mercurial former president, the late Hugo Chávez. Before that, he was coordinator of the social apostolate in that country and director of Centro Gumilla, the Jesuits’ center for research and social action in Venezuela.

Father Sosa was a professor and a member of the Foundation Council of the Andrés Bello Catholic University and was for 10 years the rector of the Catholic University in Táchira. He did most of his research and teaching in political science and published several works about the history and politics of Venezuela.

Before the election on Oct. 14, the 212 electors who chose Father Sosa concelebrated Mass in the nearby

Church of the Holy Spirit and then at 9 a.m. entered the hall where the 36th General Congregation was being held. Before voting, they listened to an exhortation and prayed in silence for almost an hour. Father Sosa's election

was greeted with warm and sustained applause from the delegates.

The new Jesuit leader will become 68 years old on Nov. 12; he is elected for life.

GERARD O'CONNELL

HAITI

Recovery Will Take Long-term Effort

The people of southern Haiti are traumatized and the landscape has suffered "complete devastation." Hurricane Matthew survivors "have never seen anything like this," Christopher Bessey, the country representative for Haiti for Catholic Relief Services, reports. The Category 4 hurricane was the fiercest storm to make landfall here in 52 years. "They've basically lost everything."

Most of the houses are gone, and those that are not are seriously damaged. Schools the region's children should now be attending have also been damaged or destroyed, as has other critical civil infrastructure.

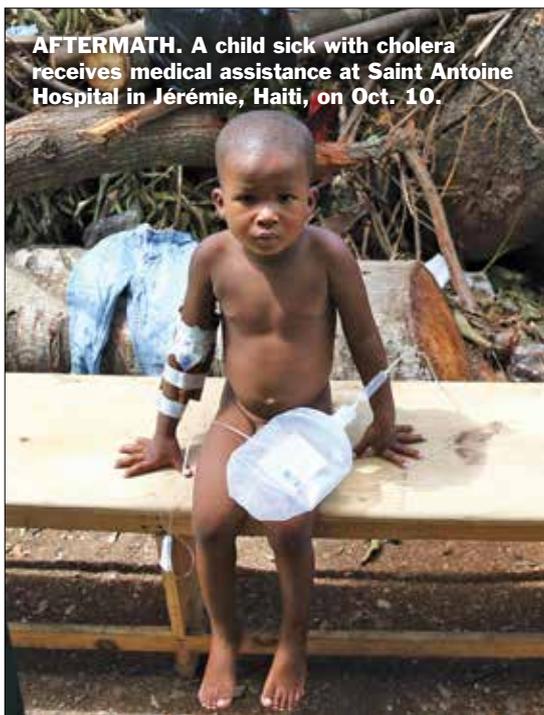
For the region's farmers, Hurricane Matthew has been a crop-killer; worse, Matthew arrived just as they were preparing for rainy season planting. But this year there will be no planting and no harvesting; Matthew has overrun their fields with mud and debris and taken the seed from their homes.

The Associated Press reports on one father of six who survived the storm with his family in Las Cayes examining the wreckage of fields he had cultivated for 25 years. His rice was swamped with river water; the family's mango and breadfruit trees were split like matchsticks; his corn flattened or torn from the ground.

"It is going to take us a long, long time to get back on our feet," the farmer told AP.

Mr. Bessey reports such scenes are common all over the two southern departments of Haiti that had been hardest hit by Matthew.

Crop loss in the south is virtually absolute and many crop trees—mango, cocoa and coconut—have been uprooted and thrown flat by the storm.



AFTERMATH. A child sick with cholera receives medical assistance at Saint Antoine Hospital in Jérémie, Haiti, on Oct. 10.

"It's as though someone went in and clear cut the entire area," Mr. Bessey said.

"A tree crop like cocoa can take three years before it will start producing," he added, one small indication of how long the restoration to normalcy

in Haiti will take and how much patience it will require.

In the meantime, the Haitian government reports that 1.4 million people will need immediate humanitarian assistance—food, clean water, temporary shelters. Mr. Bessey said C.R.S. teams are moving those commodities into the affected areas. Emergency medical assistance is also urgently required. Reports of cholera are already coming in because water supplies have been swamped and contaminated.

In a situation report filed on Oct. 11 by the the Catholic Medical Mission Board, Brittany Jonap, a C.M.M.B. volunteer, reports receiving a request for 50,000 food kits for survivors in Jérémie. "I don't know how we will do this," she writes. "Right now that area isn't even accessible by car. It will take a helicopter or boat. It took our entire staff a whole day to prepare 1/50th of that. Yet the need for food and clean water is urgent."

The official death toll on Oct. 14 was 473, though local officials have reported figures suggesting it will eventually climb much higher, and the homes of more than 120,000 families were damaged or destroyed.

It will take months, if not years for recovery in the region, according to Mr. Bessey. "That's assuming there is the right level of assistance." He likens the completeness of the destructive force of the hurricane to the devastation of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. The effort to rebuild after Matthew will demand a similar humanitarian response, he says.

He is already worried that global media will move on to a new crisis, "if it hasn't already," before the resources necessary for such an effort can be mustered.

“We’ve gotten great support from the Catholic bishops of the United States,” he said. “They’re making sure that the call goes out through the diocese and parishes, and we do hope that the story isn’t forgotten now.”

KEVIN CLARKE

Cardinal Surprises

A 5 a.m. wake-up call from a friend in Rome alerted Cardinal-designate Blase J. Cupich of Chicago to the news that Pope Francis had added his name to the list of church leaders soon to be made cardinals. The previous six archbishops of Chicago received a red hat, but Pope Francis has recently skipped over several archdioceses traditionally led by cardinals. “This pope is a pope of surprises. So I think it wasn’t something I had my heart set on,” he said. But that was not the pope’s only surprise. He named two other U.S. prelates, Joseph W. Tobin of Indianapolis and Kevin J. Farrell, former bishop of Dallas who is now prefect of the newly created Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. Choosing these three shows Pope Francis “values the experience of the church in our country,” the Chicago archbishop said. “Especially the way that we have worked to integrate immigrants into our country.” Cardinal-designate Cupich will receive his red hat along with 16 other new cardinals at a consistory in Rome on Nov. 19.

Doctors Against Assisted Suicide

Two Catholic organizations are calling on physicians to urge the American Medical Association to maintain its current stance against physician-assisted suicide. The call from the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

NEWS BRIEFS

In his message for **World Food Day** on Oct. 14, Pope Francis urged consumers to take responsibility for their use and waste of food and actions that harm the environment. • The Diocese of Baton Rouge has been **helping flood victims** deal with the stress of “letting go” and adjusting to a “new normal” in October through a new program, “From Flooding to Flourishing: Turning Trauma into Growth.” • Too much of the political discourse during this election year “has **de-meant women** and marginalized people of faith,” said Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Ky., president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, on Oct. 14. • On Oct. 13 Catholic leaders in Nigeria welcomed **the release of 21 of the more than 200 girls** who were kidnaped in 2014 from a school in Chibok and urged the Nigerian government to prioritize the release of the remaining girls. • A letter released on Oct. 12 from U.S. religious leaders, including two Catholic bishops, to President Obama and congressional leaders asks them to **publicly renounce** a contentious sentence in a recent report from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights that equates religious freedom with discrimination.



21 Chibok girls released

and the National Catholic Bioethics Center comes as the A.M.A.’s Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs gathers information to “outline the current landscape” on physician-assisted suicide. Representatives of the Catholic organizations are concerned that this effort by the association is a first step toward taking a neutral stance on assisted suicide, which could open the door to wider acceptance of such a practice. Greg Schleppenbach, associate director of the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, also urged nonphysicians to contact the A.M.A. and share their concerns. “We all have a stake in the medical professions not adopting assisted suicide,” he said.

Check Your Hypocrisy

Meeting a pilgrimage of Catholics and Lutherans from Germany, Pope Francis said he does not like “the con-

tradition of those who want to defend Christianity in the West and, on the other hand, are against refugees and other religions.” Answering questions from young people in the group on Oct. 13, the pope said, “The sickness, or you can say the sin, that Jesus condemns most is hypocrisy.” He added, “You cannot be a Christian without living like a Christian,” he said. “You cannot be a Christian without practicing the Beatitudes. You cannot be a Christian without doing what Jesus teaches us in Matthew 25,” which is to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and welcome the stranger. “It’s hypocrisy to call yourself a Christian and chase away a refugee or someone seeking help, someone who is hungry or thirsty, toss out someone who is in need of my help,” he said. “If I say I am Christian, but do these things, I’m a hypocrite.”

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

DISPATCH | BOSTON

Building on Diversity

When Msgr. Francis Kelley arrived at Sacred Heart Parish in the Roslindale neighborhood of Boston almost 30 years ago, the predominant ethnic groups represented at Masses were Irish and Italian. These groups still have a sizeable presence in the parish, but the Latino and Haitian communities, small in the late 1980s, have grown considerably. West Africans too do not go unnoticed in the mix.

There were some growing pains as the demographics shifted, but Monsignor Kelley said his parishioners have grown increasingly proud of their diversity, which is reflected in the parish school population as well as at Mass. And while many churches and Catholic schools throughout the Northeast have struggled to keep their doors open, Sacred Heart has embraced its diversity as an opportunity to flourish.

According to Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, the number of parishes in the United States peaked in 1990 at 19,620, declining from there to 17,337 in 2015. Catholic schools have had it even worse. There were half as many Catholic elementary schools in 2015 as in 1965, with about one-third as many students. Still, the Catholic population grew steadily in those years, helped along by a surge in the Latino population across the United States. Sacred Heart is among the parishes that have welcomed the new wave of Catholics. "We work to bring everyone in," Monsignor Kelley said, the operative word being *everyone*. "I don't want to turn

it into a Hispanic parish or a Haitian parish. If we're going to move ahead, we better find a way for all of us to worship together as well as learn together." Sacred Heart School was one of the first in the Archdiocese of Boston to partner with the Catholic Schools Foundation when it launched a recruitment initiative in the Latino community in 2008. It has since grown into one of the foundation's largest beneficiaries, and fully

'We better find a way
for all of us
to worship together.'

one-third of its student body is Latino. Megan Adzima, director of allocations and partnerships at the foundation, says many other parish schools could benefit from similarly concerted recruitment efforts. "One of the missing pieces is that school leaders might not know how to make that first step," Adzima said. "They say 'I know I have this community in my church, but I don't know where to start.'"

One problem is cultural competency. Parish school staffs are dominated by people who reflect a different church. The latest data show 54 percent of all school-age Catholics are Latino. Yet Latinos make up barely 3 percent of Catholic school students, an even smaller portion than non-Catholics. And they are only about 12 percent of teachers in schools that explicitly identify themselves as serving Latino communities. While Monsignor Kelley admits Sacred Heart School does not have enough

Latino or even Spanish-speaking staff members, he and the school's principal, Monica Haldiman, have pushed training around cultural competencies. Haldiman recognized immediately the value of helping everyone better understand new cultures and how they fit into the educational context. Still, she is part of a distinct minority among Catholic schools nationwide. In a Boston College survey of Catholic schools serving Latino families, fewer than one-quarter of responding principals had received training about Latino culture.

Another systemic problem is what Hoeffman Ospino, an assistant professor of Hispanic ministry and religious education at Boston College, calls a silo mentality. In a report that came out last winter based on the survey "Catholic Schools in an Increasingly Hispanic Church," Ospino and his co-author, Patricia Weitzel-O'Neill, write that important connections between Catholic education and Hispanic ministry are regularly missed. At Sacred Heart, Monsignor Kelley makes sure that the parish and the school are not in separate silos; but within the Archdiocese of Boston, he says, Catholic schools and Hispanic ministry do not communicate and Catholic school leaders rarely share best practices with each other.

"Everybody has got so much to face in their own situation, we cannot choose to spend time building up a collaborative relationship with other schools," Monsignor Kelley said. Still, there is reason to try. Catholic schools across the Northeast are at risk of closing. Better engaging Latino populations and sharing the most effective ways to do so could be key to their survival—and the only way to serve the youth majority in the Catholic church.

TARA GARCÍA MATHEWSON

TARA GARCÍA MATHEWSON is a Boston-based freelance writer.

The Reformations

By Prof. Christopher M. Bellitto, Ph.D.

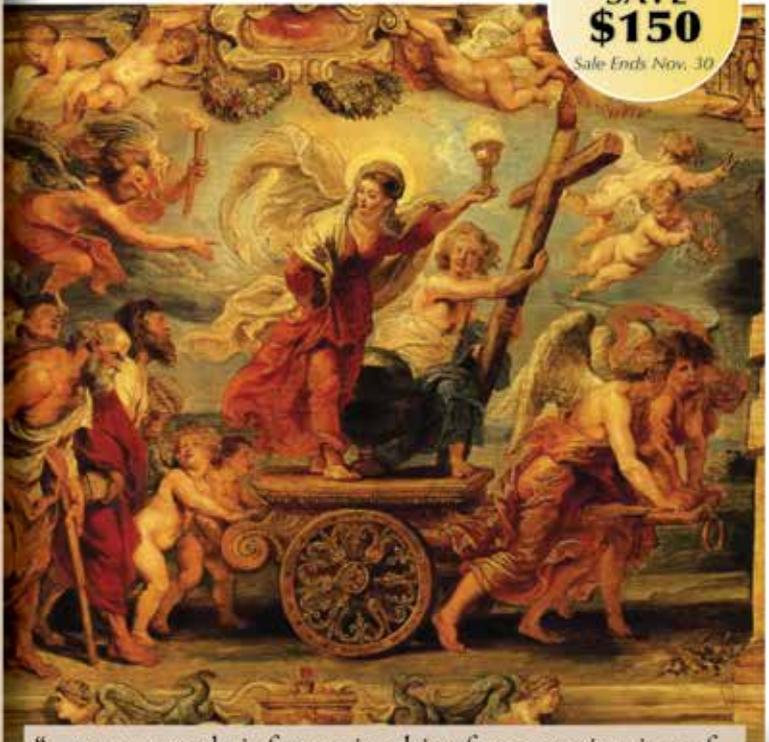
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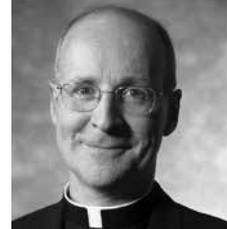
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Hate.Net

Why are some Catholics so hateful on social media? The most common reactions to this question are these: First, “I know what you’re talking about. I see that all the time on Facebook!” Second, “I’m not on social media that much. What are you talking about?” And third, “Don’t be so sensitive. Criticizing doesn’t make someone mean.”

For those who don’t frequent social media, here’s a primer. Certain Catholics consider it their bounden duty to correct, admonish and attack others when they perceive something that offends their own religious sensibilities or deviates from the faith, as they see it. The journalist David Gibson recently highlighted “liturgy shaming,” in which evidence of supposed liturgical abuses are posted online, which prompts outraged Catholics to pen furious missives to offending priests or bishops. Eavesdrop on any gathering of Catholic journalists, and you’ll hear the same lament: I’m sick of all the hatred.

Whence so much hatred from supposedly religious people?

Recently I had a Facebook Live chat with Michael O’Loughlin, *America’s* national correspondent, who suggested a few reasons. The first two relate to everyone on social media; the third to Catholics. First, he noted, there is a lack of “nonverbal cues” on social media. If I say something in your presence that offends you, you’ll recoil. I’ll notice your reaction and presumably moderate my comments. Online, however, there are no “live” repercussions for saying hurtful things. Second, the anonymous nature of the web allows

people to create social media accounts simply to spew venom. Third, Catholics have a “deep passion” for religion, so if you read or see something you disagree with, you are likely to defend your viewpoint vigorously—and may even be tempted to label someone “heretical.” That last reason disturbs me the most. Once some Catholics decide that they alone have the correct interpretation of the faith, they seem to act as if God on their side, when, in fact, the topic may admit legitimate theological disagreement or even mystery.

A few weeks ago, for example, I tweeted out a brief reflection on the daily Gospel reading, the story of Jesus and the Syrophenician woman who asks for healing for her daughter (Mk 7:25-30; Mt 15:21-18). Initially Jesus turns her down, but then when she persists, he performs the healing.

It is a mysterious story. Why does Jesus refuse? Why does he finally agree to her request? I tweeted that Jesus seemed to learn something from the persistence of a wise woman. In an instant dozens of tweets were lobbed at me, many of them calling me a heretic. Jesus couldn’t learn anything! He knew everything, always! Other tweeters egged people on, and the hate-tweeting dragged on for days.

So I sent out a few tweets reminding people that Jesus was fully human and fully divine, and that we will never fully comprehend how his divinity interacted with his humanity. There are signs in the Gospels that he did not know everything, as when he says that not even the Son knows when the end times would come (Mk 13:32). On the other hand,

he shows foreknowledge of his death and resurrection (Jn 2:19). The theological conundrum is this: Since Jesus was divine, he had a divine consciousness and knew everything. But since he’s human he had a human consciousness and needed to be taught something before he knew it. In the end, it’s a mystery. Still not good enough. “Heretic!” Eventually, I saw that explanations were largely useless. And that those who were denying his humanity were, ironically, themselves thinking like heretics—Docetists, to be precise. A few had only a tenuous grasp on theology. But I wondered if they had a problem not with my theology, but with mystery itself.

I have no problem with theological discussions; but, like most people, I have a problem with hatred, name-calling and invective. Sometimes people online seem so “Catholic” that they’re barely Christian.

So why are some Catholics so mean on social media? For all of Michael O’Loughlin’s reasons. As well, some may be mean to begin with. Catholicism just gives them another forum in which to exercise their emotions. Over time, though, I’ve grown less bothered by the hatred. A few years ago I would have responded to every comment and tried to convince everyone that I was a faithful Catholic. But not now. Why don’t they listen? Why don’t they give people the benefit of the doubt? Why do they label someone a heretic at the drop of a hat?

In the end, I suppose, like so much of human behavior, it’s a mystery.

JAMES MARTIN, S.J., is editor at large of *America* and the author of *Jesus: A Pilgrimage*. Twitter: jamesmartinsj.

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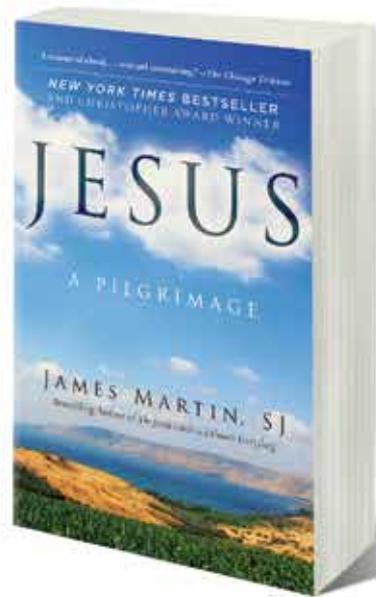
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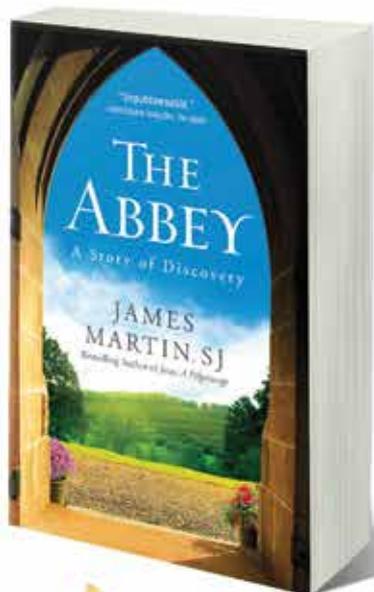
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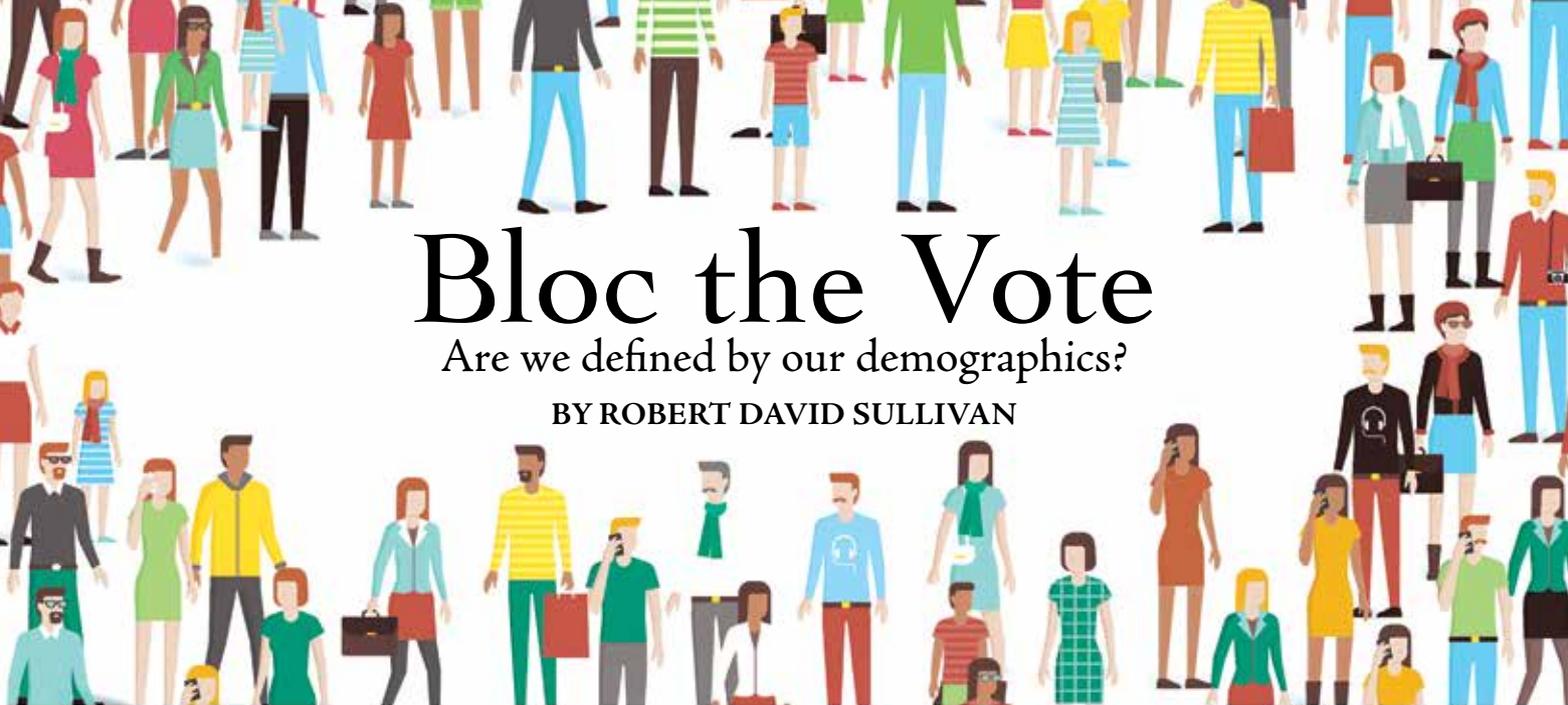
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Bloc the Vote

Are we defined by our demographics?

BY ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN

Donald Trump vows to “make America great again.” Hillary Clinton proclaims, “We’re stronger together.” They seem like compatible messages, but they are pitched to different types of people, in distant parts of the country.

While Democratic presidential nominees have become almost invincible among the highly educated urbanites—having done better and better among city dwellers and the well-educated over the past few decades—Republicans have increased their margins among white voters in more rural areas, especially in the South and among those without college degrees. There is now an almost exact correlation between population density and party strength, with Democrats at an advantage where there are more than 800 residents per square mile.

Democrats and Republicans were not always favored along these geographic, racial and educational lines. Historically, the Democratic base was the Deep South and the Republicans did best in the Northeast. Since the 20th century the parties have swapped turfs, and their major demographic groups, too. The field of battle has also narrowed as of late. When President Obama was re-elected in 2012, the two major parties were within five percentage points of each other in only 275 counties (less than one-tenth of the total), whereas in 1992 the two major parties were within five points of one another in almost 700 counties.

This year the parties have picked nominees seemingly ideally suited to continue those trends. Hillary Clinton fared best in the Democratic primaries with nonwhite voters, college graduates and residents of large cities like New York

and Washington. Donald Trump did well in Republican primaries among white voters without college degrees, though within that group he did better among higher-income voters. Throughout the summer, polls showed Mrs. Clinton outperforming Barack Obama’s 2012 campaign among white college graduates while doing the same or worse among white voters, especially men, without degrees.

Political analysts agree on these trends, but they have had sharp disagreements on why they are happening. Some argue that Mr. Trump is benefiting from fears of being left out of an increasingly global economy with few jobs for less-educated Americans. Others say the Republican nominee’s appeal is based on simple racism.

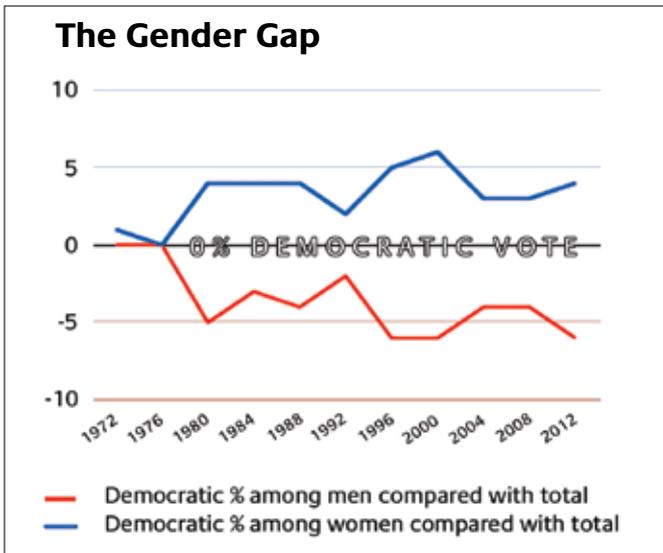
The Trump Conundrum

Compared with past Democratic nominees, Hillary Clinton is thriving among those who are doing well (white college graduates) and those who feel things are getting better. The second group includes African-American voters and other minority groups; Janelle Bouie, a writer for Slate, wrote, “If you’re black, if you’re Latino, if you’re gay—life is unquestionably better now than it was in the past.”

This combination of white college graduates and non-white voters is helping the Democrats in highly educated “battleground” states like Colorado and Virginia. For Mr. Trump to win, he must capture more states on the lower half of the educational-attainment scale, including Ohio and Pennsylvania.

Within those “left behind” states, Mr. Trump must do very well among white men, who—in contrast to women and nonwhites—have seen their incomes fall over the past 40 years. As Kevin Drum of Mother Jones writes, “It’s certainly something that helps explain why white men are an-

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



Beginning in 1980, women have consistently voted about 5 points more Democratic than the national average, and men about 5 points less Democratic.

grier than most people about their economic position.”

Others are less sympathetic. Vox’s Matthew Yglesias argues that “racial resentment,” not the economy, accounts for Mr. Trump’s popularity, and that is why the candidate has gotten away with few specifics on how he would improve his supporters’ lives: “When Trump voters say they’re upset about needing to press one for English, mad that Black Lives

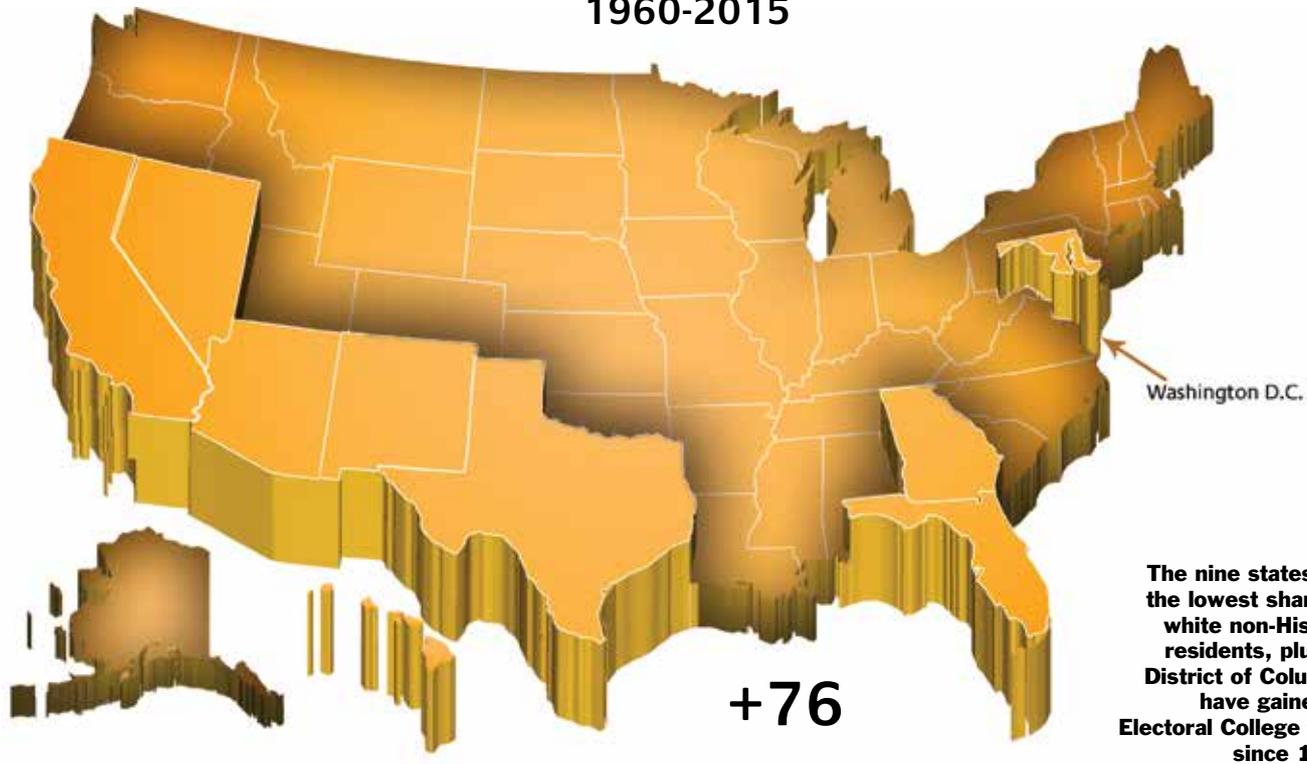
Matter protesters are slandering police officers, and worried that Muslim and/or Mexican immigrants are going to murder their children, it’s perverse to interpret them as secretly hankering for a refundable child care tax credit.”

Despite rising mortality rates, joblessness and drug addiction among low-income whites, Alec MacGillis writes in ProPublica, there is a “barely veiled implication” from both the left and right that “the people undergoing these travails deserve relatively little sympathy—that they maybe, kinda had this reckoning coming.”

But Mr. Trump is not necessarily doing the best among those with the most hardships. Using exit polls and Census Bureau data, FiveThirtyEight’s Nate Silver estimated that the median household income of a Trump supporter in the Republican primaries before he clinched the nomination was \$72,000—significantly above the national median of \$56,000. In August, an analysis by the Gallup polling company also found that Mr. Trump had more support among middle-income voters (especially the self-employed) rather than low-income voters, and that he was actually less popular in places that have seen the sharpest decline in manufacturing jobs. (The study also found that his supporters were less likely to live in neighborhoods with a significant number of immigrants or nonwhite residents.)

Over all, however, Mr. Trump did better in places that still had a manufacturing base but had low economic mobility, or where children found it difficult to earn more than

Change in Electoral College Votes 1960-2015





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their parents—and where there are higher mortality rates among middle-aged whites. Washington Post reporters Max Ehrenfreund and Jeff Guo speculate, “Trump supporters tend to live in places where the world has gotten visibly tougher for the kids on the block.... It could be that Trump supporters aren’t worried for themselves, but for their children.”

There is plenty of evidence from polling data that racism and prejudice against both immigrants and religious minorities are higher among supporters of Mr. Trump, who raised his political profile by propagating the falsehood that President Barack Obama was born outside the United States and is therefore an illegitimate president. But this does not mean that white, working-class voters are willfully ignoring a strong economy or simply refusing to give credit to a black president. The economic recovery has not made it to many parts of the country beyond the Northeast Corridor. Frustration with an uncertain future may, in turn, fuel racism and xenophobia.

The Decline of the Blue-Collar Democrat

At times in recent history, the Democratic Party has seemed to make progress toward a biracial coalition of working-class voters. Robert F. Kennedy tried to unite blacks and working-class whites during his brief presidential run in 1968, and Jimmy Carter got overwhelming support from African-Americans in 1976 while still getting about half the white vote. (Hispanic voters were not yet counted separately.) Just four years later, however, Republican Ronald Reagan opened a 20-point lead among white voters, even as he got only about 10 percent of nonwhite voters. There has been a huge racial gap in just about every election since then.

One factor in the erosion of working-class, white Democrats may be the decline in labor union membership, from about one-third of all American workers in the 1950s to barely more than one-tenth today. The AFL-CIO was one of several major unions to actively support Mr. Obama in 2008, and after the election it released exit poll data showing that white males who were union members supported the Democrat by 18 points—in contrast to President Obama’s 16-point loss among white males over all. “Unions are remarkably effective at getting people to the polls,” wrote sociologist Neil Gross in a column in the *New York Times* on the findings. “Unions can also push their members to overcome prejudices bearing on politics.”

Union support may be one explanation for why Mr. Obama, while getting only about 35 percent of the white male vote nationwide in 2012, won more than 40 percent in Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin—the “blue wall” of states that have voted Democratic in every election since 1988. These states have long been on the Republican Party’s most-wanted list. Even if Mr. Trump falls short this time, the Democrats cannot afford to give up on white, work-

ing-class voters in the Midwest, if only because it would be impossible to take back the House of Representatives when the party is limited to carrying major cities like Detroit and Milwaukee.

But it may be difficult for the Democrats to stop their slide among white, working-class men when they have the image of a “redistributionist” party—that is, a party more committed to increasing economic opportunities for women and nonwhites than to expanding the economy for everyone (and who knows how to do that?). As the political scientist Howard Rosenthal told the *New York Times*, “Redistribution is not win-win.... Identity politics is a matter of social justice that has limited economic benefits for white males.” Mr. Trump is playing on this recognition in his promise to turn back the clock and “make America great again.” A similar phenomenon is happening in Great Britain, France, Germany and other European countries, where culturally conservative, anti-immigration parties are faring well with working-class voters.

The Republican Party was making inroads with white, working-class voters long before Mr. Trump came along, and if he loses that bloc in November, the Democrats may get a little too giddy about their long-term prospects. “Reform conservatives,” also known as “reformocons,” have been working for years on a Republican agenda to appeal to working-class voters—one based on tax relief for lower-income families and on mitigating the effects of globalization in ways more subtle than building a giant wall—and will surely survive Mr. Trump. (Admittedly, their ranks as of now include more writers, like David Frum and the *National Review*’s Reihan Salam, than elected officials.) Making 2016 nothing more than a referendum on “white male privilege,” or a celebration of its death, may win the presidency for Democrats but leave the party worse off in Congress and in state legislatures.

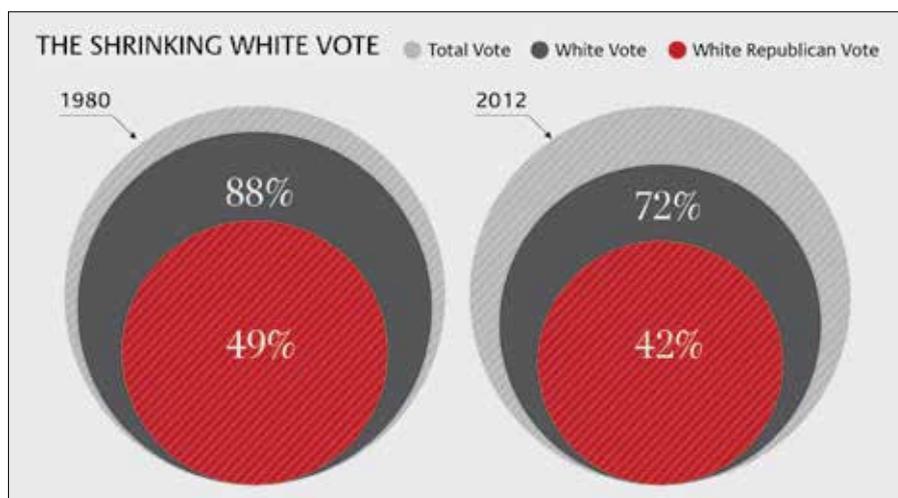
The Present Versus the Future

On the surface the future looks bright for the Democrats, who have advantages among growing demographic groups like nonwhites, college graduates and urbanites. In 1980, the national electorate was about 88 percent non-Hispanic white. Republican Ronald Reagan won 56 percent of the white vote, which translated to 49 percent of all votes. (Reagan won 51 percent of the total vote.) By 2012, the electorate was only 72 percent white; among this group Mitt Romney did better than Reagan had, getting 59 percent, but this translated to only 42 percent of all votes. (He won 47 percent over all.) At

least at the presidential level, the long-term trend is not good for a party struggling with nonwhite voters.

Not coincidentally, the Republicans have a particular problem with younger voters—Mr. Trump has a 74 percent unfavorability rating among voters under 30, according to one poll—and *FiveThirtyEight*’s Clare Malone warns, “bad reputations can stick around for years; like sports teams and baldness, our political beliefs are passed down through generations and familial connections.”

Still, the Republican Party can adapt to demographic reality in a short time. Just as Mr. Trump unexpectedly dominated the G.O.P. primaries in 2016, a newcomer with greater appeal among younger and college-educated voters could put together a new coalition to win the party’s nomination in 2020—similar to the one that was not yet large enough to carry Florida Sen. Marco Rubio through this year’s primary season. This is assuming that Republican primary voters will



not double down on white nationalism, embracing a candidate of what has been called the “alternative right,” or a reactionary movement against multiculturalism. That would guarantee that the party will continue to fall behind among young and college-educated voters, who are more comfortable with diversity.

Another possibility: the inability of the two major parties to hold onto their bases, let alone attract new voters, finally makes it possible for a third party to take root. A Pew Research Center poll from August showed Gary Johnson, the Libertarian nominee, and Jill Stein, the Green Party nominee, getting a combined 27 percent of the vote among voters under 30.

History tells us that support for minor parties fades as the election gets nearer, and that even if a third party does well, it cannot replicate its success in the next election. Then again, history told us that someone like Donald Trump could never be nominated by a major party for president. **A**



Blowing the Whistle

Corporate greed, evidenced by the Wells Fargo scandals, and government wrongdoing, like that disclosed by Chelsea Manning (formerly known as Bradley Manning) and Eric Snowden, illustrate the need for increased understanding and improvement of our nation's whistleblower and false claims laws.

Whistleblower laws. The first federal whistleblower law was passed in 1778 to protect sailors who were arrested after reporting incidents of torture committed by their superior officer. Current federal statutes protect government employees, and private employees who work in certain regulated industries, from employer retaliation for reporting improper acts. Employees must follow procedures carefully or risk losing protection. Employees have a short timeframe in which to report alleged retaliation. Misconduct may be reported internally to an inspector general or compliance officer, or externally to a law enforcement officer, regulatory agent or member of Congress.

Depending on the applicable statute, employees who skip those approved avenues and go directly to the press or publicize disclosures themselves may not be protected. Specific laws also determine the remedies available to whistleblowers. Most federal whistleblower laws grant back wages and compensatory damages. A few, including the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, include bounty awards that can range from 10 percent to 30 percent of fines imposed against noncomplying

companies. In 2015, \$37 million was paid to whistleblowers under the act.

The specificity of whistleblower laws works against the employer as well as the employee. In *Department of Homeland Security v. McLean* (2015), the Supreme Court ruled in favor of a federal air marshal who was fired after releasing sensitive information to a newspaper because the Homeland Security Act did not explicitly prohibit such disclosures. Chief Justice Roberts wrote: "Although Congress and the President each has the power to address the Government's concerns, neither has done so. It is not our role to do so for them."

Separate laws apply to members of the military and intelligence community employees. People in military service are protected from retaliation when they report misconduct either through the chain of command, to the inspector general or to a member of Congress. Since 2012, government whistleblowers employed by intelligence agencies also are granted protection from retaliation. Employees of private intelligence contractors are not protected from employment retaliation for disclosing wrongdoing. Procedures are in place, however, for those employees, as well as military and government agents, to report wrongdoing even when it involves classified information. The misconduct must be of "urgent concern," may be disclosed only to the appropriate inspector general or a member of Congress and must be transmitted through approved couriers or a secu-

rity officer. Violation of these procedures could result in prosecution under the Espionage Act.

False Claims. The False Claims Act applies to all federal government spending and permits anyone, not just an employee, who has evidence of fraud to bring a *qui tam* action (legal Latin shorthand for "he who brings a case on behalf of our lord the King, as well as for himself"). The person who brings the action is called a relator and can be granted up to 30 percent of any judgment against the wrongdoer. Procedural aspects of the law "present many interpretive challenges," which is why the Supreme Court has taken three False Claims Act cases since 2015. Many more may be on the way, as *qui tam* claims are on the rise.

The inclination to bring wrongdoing to light needs an effective legal outlet.

In 2015 they brought in \$2.8 billion to the federal coffers and earned relators almost \$6 million. The Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit has held that federal employees may bring *qui tam* actions, but proceedings that risk exposure of classified information will be dismissed.

Whistleblower laws and the False Claims Act encourage reporting of fraud and misconduct, but awareness of their procedures and additional protection for those who deal with sensitive government information can be improved. The inclination to bring wrongdoing to light needs an effective legal outlet; without one, we discourage disclosure, endanger society and risk persecuting the just.

ELLEN K. BOEGEL

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Who Is My Neighbor?

A new answer to an ancient question

BY CECILIA GONZÁLEZ-ANDRIEU

Whether it is a Syrian refugee desperately trying to reach Europe, hundreds of Haitians making their way through Central America to the U.S. border or women carrying children on their backs fleeing wars and famines, the stateless are the neighborless—unclaimed, unwanted and unnamed. I was a refugee child who in the minutes it took to cross from Havana to Miami went from having neighbors to being a complete stranger. We were processed, given Red Cross rations and told that we were now “aliens.” For years I remember the strangeness of filling out paperwork for my mother to renew our alien status. Eventually I would learn to make light of it, claiming it meant I was from Mars.

I had not changed, but everything around me had. I had been part of a community, a web of relationships that helped ease suffering by allowing us to search for hope together. With them I had known joy. But suddenly, the vacuum of uncertainty and the constant feeling of displacement were all I knew. I wish I could tell you that the feeling of isolation and alienation vanished when I stepped into my parish church in Florida, but it did not. The Christian ideal of love dissipated in the challenge of making space for us and sharing resources with us, the “new” people, who were uninvited and inconvenient. Did I no longer have neighbors? Would I ever feel at home again? It is an ancient question.

Whether crouching in small cave dwellings or rushing

among the skyscrapers of our modern cities, and in farms, fishing villages and everywhere in between, human groups have asked themselves: Who belongs with us? Who does not? Who is my enemy? Who is my friend? Who must I care about? Who can I ignore? Who must I protect? Who may I harm? It is a daunting challenge that the New Testament



“The Bleeding Border,” by Sergio Gomez, 2008.

summarizes in four words: “Who is my neighbor?” In the face of the mounting political crises over immigration, the desperation of refugees and the unleashing of violence against particular communities at home and abroad, is it possible to bring a renewed perspective to this question?

The question of identifying our “neighbor” may strike most Christians in the same way as a question that seems more straightforward, like “What is the color of the sky?” Yet works of art help us see that not even this apparently simple question about our natural world has only one obvious answer. In asking, “Who is my neighbor?” it is good to remember the context of the question in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 10. The entire chapter is about discipleship and is clearly addressed to those who would call themselves

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PHOTO FROM THE ARTIST

Jesus' friends. If the answer to "Who is my neighbor?" was not obvious to those who were the closest to Jesus, by what right do we claim it is obvious to us? As Luke's story implies, maybe there is not just one answer but many. Our question is unexpectedly complex, and one way to begin is to be both humbled and intrigued by this complexity.

What Is the Question?

My university students know that when I say "problematize," we are about to engage in turning, digging and questioning what we thought we already knew. They relish those times. In the world they inhabit, which is often hopelessly polarized between myopic rigidity and equally paralyzing relativism, they welcome this invitation. They feel freed by an attitude that does not say there is no such thing as truth, but rather says truth must be wrestled with so we can discover its variegated multiple dimensions. Even before we can ask the question "Who is my neighbor?" posed by an ancient scholar as he spoke with Jesus 2,000 years ago, there are some things we need to know about the question itself. If, as Luke tells us, the scholar's question is an effort to expand his own understanding of the religious law of his community expressed in Leviticus 19:18, that "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," it needs a prior question. That question, put simply, is: "Why are we asking this question?"

There was a context for the question about the neighbor in Luke's text, and there is a context for us now. Questions arise, and in Spanish we would call them *inquietudes*, a difficult word to translate into English, which means disquiet, restlessness, the feeling that something we need to know is just out of reach and wanting to be known. We are restless because intuitively we surmise that answering the questions posed by our *inquietudes* will help us make our way more truthfully through life.

Where does the question about the neighbor come from? Let me start with the ancient and move to our own time. In Luke's text, the conversation begins with the desire to know more about what today we might call "the ethics of the kingdom." The scholar of the law, described in commentaries as a scribe or lawyer but better called a theologian, asks Jesus, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Lk 10:25). The motivation for the question is given by the Evangelist as this particular scribe's desire to "test" Jesus, a desire we normally interpret negatively, as with other instances in the New Testament where someone tests Jesus in order to trap him into saying something incriminating. But we do not have any hint of this in Luke 10; rather, the "testing" of Jesus could be akin to our own yearning to understand more deeply something vital to our community's life.

Additionally, there is the striking form of the question. The scholar does not speak abstractly or theoretically. Instead he refers to himself, to what he must do. This ques-

tion is not rhetorical, it is personal. Addressed as teacher, Jesus responds like a good teacher with an even more penetrating question: "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" (Lk 10:26). This second question from Jesus establishes a dialogue between their common Jewish tradition and their present context. The young rabbi asks for the scholar's interpretation; he does not want him to uncritically repeat the ancient text. Jesus wants a personal and historically located interpretation. He wants originality and creativity and so encourages the scribe to do the work of theology to engage tradition and current questions together and in this way generate insights.

Something was in the air in that moment of dialogue between the scribe and Jesus that required an answer to this question about what we must do, what the law commands. What should surprise us is that the insight comes from the scribe—from "us," you could say—not from Jesus. What was in the air at that moment? Was the Jewish community caught in a terrible cycle of picking between apparently impossible choices? Were they wrestling with the practice of accommodating the priorities of the powerful few, which perpetuated the poverty and marginality of the many? Were they considering rebelling against those dominant structures, with the attendant violence and the sure, swift and brutal retaliation of the Romans? Was this the why behind the question? Did the requirements of the law have anything to do with their fractured society and their incoherent lives?

In Mark's and Matthew's versions (Mk 10:17, Mt 19:16) of this initial question about how life must be lived in order to attain eternal life, the texts move to revisiting the requirements of the Mosaic commandments, finishing with an emphasis on the care of the poor. Not so in Luke. Here the scholar of the law puts together two concepts that are not explicitly joined in the law he spent his life studying. He cites the all-pervading and obligating love of God as the first commandment in any human being's life, knowing that this is clear from the Scriptures he holds so closely. But the second part, the part about the neighbor, is not so clear. In fact the injunction is only mentioned once in the Old Testament, in Leviticus. So during this singular conversation, the work of theology as it generates insights happens. The scholar (with Jesus' encouragement) brings the two concepts together in



what we Christians will later call the Great Commandment: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself” (Lk 10:27).

The context of a community struggling to live the requirements of its sacred covenant with the God of its ancestors reveals Jesus’ intention to bring renewal to his community’s relationship with God, not only as an ancient tradition but as a present reality. He achieves this by encouraging the scholar to move away from disembodied precepts and toward an embodiment of love.

Luckily for us, the curious scholar is not content with his very correct interpretation (as Jesus affirms) of the ethics of the kingdom as expressed in the new unity he notices between love of God and love of neighbor. It is his continuing *inquietud* that prompts the defining question, the question now posed

ing passage from the Second Vatican Council’s “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” (Nos. 4, 23-25) points to an answer:

Never has the human race enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic power, and yet a huge proportion of the world’s citizens are still tormented by hunger and poverty, while countless numbers suffer from total illiteracy.

Never before has [the human person] had so keen an understanding of freedom, yet at the same time new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance. Although the world of today has a very vivid awareness of its unity and of how one [person] depends on another in needful solidarity, it is most grievously torn into opposing camps by conflicting forces. For political, social, economic, racial and ideological disputes still continue bitterly, and with them the peril of a war which would reduce everything to ashes. (No. 4, 23-25)

My undergraduate students respond to this text with assent and recognition that, sadly, it describes the world they know. Their eyes turn from interested and affirmed to visible shock when I disclose that this text is from the Vatican Council and was signed in 1965. It dawns on them that something really is terribly wrong, and our conversation becomes filled with urgency. They ask, “Why have the generations since 1965 been unable to seriously address and transform the pain described in this document?” This is their question; it must be *our* question.



“The Good Samaritan,” by John August Swanson, 2002.

by us. “Sure,” we can hear the scribe thinking to himself: “I know I’m supposed to love my neighbor, but just who is this neighbor? Who in this constellation of people—oppressors and oppressed, rich and poor, observant and unclean, meek and revolutionary is this neighbor our law refers to?” Does he want to know because it will affect his ethical living? I think Jesus’ reason for problematizing his interpretation is exactly because he wants the scribe to go there. Jesus is encouraging those he teaches to embrace a radical concreteness and not be content with observing the minimum required by the law. The scribe sets the stage for Jesus to respond creatively in one of the most enduring and beautiful stories in human history, the parable of the good Samaritan.

In a work by the artist John August Swanson, the neighbor in Jesus’ telling is an integral part of the creation. And the one who cares for him, bent over his body as over the fertile earth to bring it to bloom, is also the neighbor.

Now let us bring this question to our time, just as the scribe did in his time. Why are we asking this question and trying to figure out “who is our neighbor”? The follow-

Wrestling for Answers

The most common Spanish word for neighbor is *vecino*, which can also be used as an adjective to say something is close to something else, that it occupies the space precisely next to it. We could say that to be *vecino* or *vecina* to something else means you cannot take a picture of “this” without “that” also being in the picture—there is an unavoidable closeness. In this sense, *vecino*/neighbor refers to the proximity of space.

Following this understanding of neighbor, which is also the general understanding in English and in the text of the Hebrew Scriptures the scribe has studied, the neighbor is the one who shares my space and who is physically near to me. Focused this way, we see the problem. What about when people are not close by, when the space between us is vast? What do we do when the area separating us from our neighbor is made up not just of the distance of city blocks or farmlands, but by the vastness of oceans made up of different languages or the chasms—much wider than the Grand Canyon—of cultural practices? What about the light years of distance when we take into account our religious beliefs,

our moral imperatives or our political commitments?

The concept of neighbor, defined in the sense of sharing our understandings because we share the intimate space that has formed those understandings, becomes a constraint in a globalized reality. This idea of the neighbor works to limit our sphere of care to those most like us. As we well know, and as Sergio Gómez reminds us in his large canvas “The Bleeding Border,” sometimes walls are erected precisely so that those who do share physical proximity will be kept at all costs from knowing each other and possibly becoming *vecinos*, or neighbors. This is why Pope Francis said, “A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not Christian. This is not the Gospel.”

So back to the wrestling. In English there is only one word for neighbor; in Spanish there are three. *Vecino* is the closest to the English meaning, but there is a second word: *prójimo*. This is the word most often used in translating Scripture when it speaks about the neighbor. *Prójimo* comes from the Latin *proximus*, which also refers to nearness, proximity and what is close. However, over time *prójimo* took on additional meanings, and the Spanish Royal Academy gives the single definition of the word thus: “one human being in relation to another, understood through the concept of human solidarity.” We notice here an expansion of the idea of proximity, not only as referring to physical space, as in *vecino*, but also as predicated on our shared human condition and as necessitating our solidarity in that condition. I wonder if the growth of the meaning of *prójimo* from *proximus* to its present form happened because the word became the predominant way of saying neighbor in the Bible. The usage in the Scriptures, always linking *prójimo* to the injunction to love, may have given birth to a new word for the Spanish-speaking world to always connote our shared humanity.

What about the third word in Spanish for neighbor? This one is used sparsely in Scripture translations, but when it is, it hits us with the full force of its uncompromising meaning—the word is *semejante*. The root of this word is *semej*, to resemble. When used as an adjective, instead of referring to proximity this word refers to essential sameness. To say something is *semejante* to something else means the two are so closely aligned that the qualities of one can be accurately deduced from the qualities of the other. *Semejante* is just a dash away from “same” and stands between it and the concept of “other.” *Semejante*, in Scripture, is often a way to simply refer to human beings, to us as human creatures. It often stands in for the word “human” and helps us see the neighbors as just “us” with slight variations.

These three words help set the stage for the question “Who is our neighbor?” In an earlier time, *vecino* was a rich concept because it denoted the identity of those who lived in *las vecindades*, housing areas or tenements, where the central patio served as a playground, washing facilities, a

communication center—the heart of a community for the poor. These *vecindades* helped to develop ways for residents to rely on each other, to have neighborliness incarnated in virtues of shared responsibility and care. Without romanticizing poverty, the simplicity of neighborhoods where life was shared—perhaps one lone television set brought everyone together, or meals were communal enterprises with eggs from one *vecino* and flour from another—is unknown to many of us. Today, such simplicity is rare, and the poor as well as the not-so-poor are encouraged to live apart and to always crave more, because such discontent fuels consumerist economies.

Today, it is problematic if we define the neighbor as the one who shares my space, since physical neighborhoods are strictly defined by socioeconomic status, ethnicity and other variables. More and more, we tend to live near people who are like us, and research shows that in the last few decades, people in the United States have clustered more and more into carefully defined affinity groups in ways unprecedented in recent American history. One look at our electoral maps, with their deeply red and deeply blue counties, as well as the reputations and pedigrees of particular regions, tells us that if we answer the question, “Who is our neighbor?” in this way, we will likely just look on our block, our political party, our ethnicity and our faith (or lack of it). We will not venture any further than that.

What about *prójimo*? How does this word answer our question about the identity of my neighbor? *Prójimo* focuses on our shared human condition and refers to solidarity. For Spanish speakers (even in the most common vernacular usage) it always carries with it the biblical injunction to love. So the neighbor here is understood as that other human being whose dignity I am called to protect, and whose well-being I am called to guard vigilantly. *Prójimo* answers “Who is my neighbor?” very simply: the one who needs you, *this* is your neighbor.

Finally, what about *semejante*? This beautifully poetic word makes an even more potent point and challenging claim on us. It answers the question of who our neighbor might be by first turning our gaze to ourselves and to the contours of our own humanity. Then it turns us around and outward to recognize the resemblance, the radical closeness of attributes and qualities that all human beings share. *Semejante* answers the question with poetry—see the beauty in you, see the beauty in everything that resembles you. Your neighbor is close and also far, needy and also comfortable, known and also unknown. Because your neighbor is precisely every single human person. We could say, using theological language, that the neighbor here is the one who, as made by God, shares our *imago Dei*. We are variations on a theme, the theme of finite yet strikingly beautiful and varied images of God who need each other. 

Filling Empty Seats

Chinese students and Catholic high schools

BY ANTHONY J. ZAVAGNIN

Wait, I don't get it. How could Jesus be 100 percent human and 100 percent God? How is that even possible?" It was surely not the first time such a question arose in a high school religion class. I was sitting in on this junior theology class to evaluate the performance of the teacher, a member of Providence College's PACT program, a master's degree program that places recent college graduates as full-time teachers in Catholic schools.

As I looked around the classroom, I saw a distinct look of bewilderment, even cluelessness, on the faces of students. Some of the confusion stemmed from the theological concept at hand, but much of it I attributed to their limited grasp of English. This particular theology class of 20 was composed entirely of international students, mostly from China. Many enrolled in this urban Catholic school in order to receive a diploma and enter the pipeline to the coveted American university system. In its yearly battle to fill seats, this Catholic high school was eager to welcome them. Chinese students pay 50 percent more than local children to attend.

According to *Foreign Policy* magazine, the number of Chinese high school students in the United States increased from fewer than 1,000 in 2005 to more than 23,000 by 2013.

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Of these, just under 28 percent attend Catholic schools. This influx of students from China is a lifeline to many Catholic schools around the country, as schools can charge a premium for their education. An article in *The New York Times* in 2014 described one Catholic school where Chinese students pay more than five times what local children pay.

Additionally, local families who host a Chinese student for the year receive a stipend for opening their homes. For the parents at one school, this amounts to a monthly payment of around \$1,000. For families who struggle to pay tuition, such stipends are an added benefit for a school community. As a consequence, students from China, whose government limits both religious and academic freedoms, are in the position to help keep the doors open for many struggling Catholic schools in the United States.

While the business side of such arrangements adds up, the actual instruction of international students can be a major challenge for faculty members at Catholic schools, who often lack professional development opportunities specific to teaching foreign students. One obvious hurdle is language. While the companies that arrange student exchanges claim that Chinese students are "proficient" in English, their definition of proficiency varies widely. The result is a mixed group, with some who are completely lost during a lesson.

Beyond language, there are some striking cultural differences. Another teacher I supervise teaches American litera-

PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/JULIUS FEKETE

ture to a class of Chinese students. Teaching a revised curriculum mostly of her own making, she had her class read Lois Lowry's dystopian novel *The Giver* in an effort to raise some universal themes of human potential with the class. The resulting conversations could have made for an interesting sociological study. Students took little issue with topics like conformity, and, much to her surprise, they were largely unmoved by the novel's major twist: an institutional program of infanticide, known as a "release." The teacher was left unsure if knowledge of English hampered the class discussion or if these students, who grew up in the era of China's one-child policy, were truly ambivalent about euthanasia.

It is also unclear how Catholic schools can welcome Chinese students in a way that is most in keeping with their mission. A fundamental tenet of Catholic K-12 education is the establishment of a true partnership between the school and parents. This principle stems from the belief that the parents are the primary educators of their child. It is fair to question the nature of this partnership when students and parents are separated by thousands of miles and when

Catholic schools use third-party companies, some of which are for-profit, to recruit and place Chinese students.

At the end of the day, while schools and placement agencies tout the benefits of bringing international diversity and richness to Catholic schools, the presence of large numbers of Chinese students is primarily a financial decision, a year-long transaction with clear terms. Catholic schools are to provide a high-quality, rigorous education, and Chinese parents are to pay a market-value price for that. It is a mutually beneficial relationship that leads to stability at the school and financial aid possibilities for local children.

How can Catholic schools welcome Chinese students in a way that is most in keeping with their mission?

Educating for Evangelization

Yet any school that claims to inherit the tradition of Catholic education cannot view international students just as a revenue stream. Schools that I have encountered realize this and try their best to lead all students, international or not, toward an encounter with God. In this spirit, some questions need to be addressed. Even if schools can charge Chinese students three, four or five times the normal tuition, should they do so? What is fair to the child, to the family and to the school community? What message might we be sending about unfettered capitalism, if Catholic schools keep pushing up the tuition because the market allows for it?

Further, what is fair to the teachers? For educators who might already be stretched thin, what additional expectations are placed on them? How much assistance and professional development can schools offer teachers? Are international students supposed to sit in the back and follow along, or is the expectation for a truly inclusive curriculum? Does the education promised to parents in China meet the realities of day-to-day instruction?

Lastly and most important, schools need to consider Chinese students in our shared call to focus on the new evangelization. Whatever their religious background was in China, here these students are taking part in theology classes, encountering issues of social justice and attending liturgies—all during a pivotal time in a young person's life, a time away from home when their beliefs are taking shape. There is a lesson for all Catholic schools to heed: Financial necessity may have brought them into the school, but children from China are just that, children, whose awkward teenage years are compounded by being in a foreign culture; children who might be searching for more than fluency in English and the right grades for college admission; children who, given the right pastoral care, may be drawn into a relationship with God.



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Springtime in Asia?

Pope Francis has his eyes fixed on Asia, where he sees the possibility of a new springtime for the church. He is seeking to normalize relations with China and has already made two journeys to this continent, where two-thirds of humanity lives, visiting South Korea (2014), Sri Lanka and the Philippines (2015). He is planning to return a third time in 2017 to visit India and Bangladesh.

He broke this news on the flight from Azerbaijan to Rome on Oct. 2, saying it was “almost certain.” His surprising announcement, however, was eclipsed by the media’s focus on what he had to say about accompanying gay and transgender persons. The news is nevertheless highly significant. India, the world’s largest democracy and second most populous country, is predominantly Hindu, while Bangladesh is the third most populous Muslim country in the world. Christians, a tiny minority in both states, welcomed the likelihood of Francis’ visit with immense joy.

It is not without significance perhaps, at least from the Indian perspective, that Francis broke the news on the anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi. India has 1.32 billion people and is second only to China (1.38 billion) in total population, but with its median age of 27 it is much younger than China.

A widely accepted tradition claims that St. Thomas the Apostle introduced Christianity to India in 52 A.D. and died there a martyr 20 years later. There is solid historical evidence for the existence of Christianity in

India from around 300 A.D.

The Jesuits have a long history there too. Francis Xavier reached Goa in 1542 and started his very successful missionary work among the fishermen in the Coromandel Coast. In 1559, Jesuits founded the Madurai mission that developed the “accommodation method” of missionary activity much favored by Roberto de Nobili, an Italian Jesuit missionary there. Today Indians constitute almost 25 percent of the membership of the Society of Jesus.

Over the years, the Catholic Church has made a major contribution to the Indian people, particularly through education but also by charitable work, including that of Mother Teresa of Calcutta and her Missionaries of Charity. Notwithstanding all this, there are only 27 million Christians in India today, including 18 million Catholics; many come from tribal and Dalit communities. Hinduism has deep roots in this land; 80 percent of the people are Hindu. Dialogue with the other religions is therefore a must for Christians in India.

This is also true for Christians in Bangladesh, where 90 percent of the country’s 160 million people are Muslim and 9 percent are Hindu. Christianity first came to this land in the mid-16th century with the arrival of Jesuit, Augustinian and Dominican missionaries. Today there are 600,000 Christians in the country, including 350,000 Catholics. Many are descendants of Portuguese colonialists and Indian merchants from Goa, but most are members of the lower castes and tribals.

Commenting on the proposed visit, the Indian Jesuit Cedric Prakash, who now works with Jesuit Refugee Service in the Middle East, told **America**: “Francis has brought a new vitality to the church—particularly to the Catholic laity. Whenever he travels he is able to energize the local community, helping to deepen their faith by his incisive words and very meaningful deeds. Men and women of other faith traditions are also easily

drawn to what he says and does. His ‘rockstar’ appeal certainly goes a long way in strengthening interreligious and ecumenical harmony. I have no doubt that this will all happen during his proposed visits to Bangladesh and India too.”

At the same time, Father Prakash expressed concern that “both India and Bangladesh, in the recent past, have seen the rise of right-wing elements: ‘Hindutva’ in India and ‘Islamists’ in Bangladesh,” and he predicted they would not welcome the pope’s visit.

Francis will be the third pope to visit India and the second to go to Bangladesh. Blessed Paul VI went to India in 1964 for the International Eucharistic Congress in Mumbai. St. John Paul II visited in November 1986 and went to New Delhi in 1999 to release the apostolic exhortation “The Church in Asia” after China blocked him from doing so in Hong Kong. St. John Paul II also made a 24-hour visit to Bangladesh in November 1986. The Vatican has yet to give the dates for Francis’ visit, which now appears certain.

Dialogue with the other religions is a must for Christians in India.

GERARD O’CONNELL

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Direction Finder

One Jesuit's lifetime of discernment

BY PATRICK J. RYAN

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola center on the nitty-gritty process of making decisions—"elections" in Ignatian-speak—actions carried out under the influence of a gracious God. St. Ignatius suggests three possible intellectual and emotional "times" of one's life "in any of which a sound and good election can be made." I have, over my 59 years as a Jesuit, made elections in all three of these times. But St. Ignatius' guidance is not a preserve just for Jesuits. All human beings who put their faith in God have to make elections from time to time.

St. Ignatius describes the first time for making an election thus: "When God our Lord so moves and attracts the will that without doubting or being able to doubt, such a dedicated soul follows what is shown, just as St. Paul and St. Matthew did when they followed Christ our Lord" (*Sp. Ex.*, No. 175). Many people claim the sud-

den clarity that characterizes this first manner of making an election is rare, but I can testify to having made such elections more than once, starting with my decision, two months after entering the Jesuit novitiate, to become a missionary.

A novice a year ahead of me remarked one afternoon that he thought the greatest Jesuits he had met thus far were visiting missionaries from the western Pacific and the Philippines. A deep-dyed New Yorker, the only islands that held my heart were, in the words of an old song, Manhattan, Staten and Long. Later that afternoon, during a prescribed period of prayer, it occurred to me that I was a less than generous knight, to use Ignatian imagery, and that I should give some thought to a missionary future. By the end of that half hour I resolved the issue by deciding to volunteer for the missions. Looking back on it, I realize it was a reckless choice—but I never got around to reversing it, for which I thank God.

My master of novices tried to keep my obsession with the missions on the

back burner, but without success. For years I told almost no one else about this missionary ambition, so it came as a surprise to some of my Jesuit contemporaries when I was assigned to work in Nigeria in 1964. I did not exactly fit the "missionary type" of the day—athletic, outdoorsy. I was definitely not athletic, decidedly indoorsy.

Inspired by that first year in Nigeria, a country almost equally divided between Christians and Muslims, I started theological studies in the United States and subsequently pursued a doctorate in the history of religion, specializing in Islamic studies. I taught in that academic area at a state university in Ghana for nine years. By the time I had completed a total of 11 years in West Africa, I thought I had done my bit for the missions and accepted an offer to teach at Fordham University in 1983. The following year, the new superior of the New York Province invited me to see him in his office. He asked why I was not back in Africa. I explained that I felt that my long-widowed mother needed my presence in New York. Despite

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my mild protests, he knew how much I truly loved Africa. "I'll get you back to Africa some way or another," he said by way of conclusion.

Discerning Spirits

This brings me to the "second time" in which "a good election can be made." St. Ignatius characterizes it as one "when sufficient light and knowledge is received through experience of consolations and desolations, and through experience of the discernment of different spirits" (*Sp. Ex.*, No. 176).

If in the first time an election comes as a flash of insight, in the second time it gradually evolves through a sometimes exhausting process of evaluating conflicting feelings, varying emotions that arise in an interior struggle not unlike that of Jacob wrestling with God by night (Gen 32:24–30). When the provincial finally got around to asking me to return to Nigeria, he asked me to take up a job I could only describe as totally boring: factotum (general assistant) to the regional superior in Nigeria and Ghana. The provincial had left the acceptance of that job up to me—and Jesuit friends urged me not to take it. But God felt differently.

In the fall of 1985 the Jesuits of my province were invited to engage in what is called a 19th Annotation Retreat. That annotation to the text of the Spiritual Exercises allows one "taken up with public affairs or necessary business"—I was teaching three courses a semester at Fordham University and helping in a parish on weekends—to make the Exercises for an hour and a half each day. One month into this extended retreat I went to visit my mother, wintering that year in West Palm Beach. She wondered why I was so taciturn and preoccupied. One day, on the boardwalk at Lake Worth, I broke my silence: "The provincial wants me to go back to Africa." She seemed strange-

ly unperturbed. "Do whatever he tells you."

At my mother's wake five years later, a friend of hers asked me if I remembered that conversation. "She told me about it," the friend continued. "She said that you had been so silent, so unlike yourself, that she was beginning to wonder if you were about to tell her that you wanted to leave the Jesuits and get married." I burst out laughing. Much later I realized that my mother, perhaps better able to discern "different

I knew that January afternoon that my election had been confirmed and that I was going home to Africa.

spirits" in me than I, said to me what the mother of Jesus had said to the stewards at the marriage feast in Cana: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5).

A few weeks later I was struggling with my daily retreat meditation in the chapel of the Jesuit community at Fordham, still not drawn to that dreadful job in Lagos. While I was praying there and, in some sense, reproaching God for putting me into this dilemma, an older Jesuit entered the chapel. Joseph McKenna, S.J., was a brilliant man who had spent over 20 years in Nigeria, a place he personally found very difficult. He had a doctorate from Yale and was the head of Fordham's political science department before the provincial sent him to Nigeria. He felt the loss of his academic field, but he never complained. Father McKenna did great things in Nigeria, always behind the scenes, among them funneling international food aid to refugees suffering from the results of the Nigerian civil war (1967–70).

God had sent me a sign that afternoon, a personal symbol of self-sacri-

fice. A feeling of tremendous consolation came over me, a sense of relief. I knew that January afternoon that my election had been confirmed and that I was going home to Africa.

The job in Lagos turned out to be less dreadful than I had feared. In fact, when it came time to leave Nigeria three years later, I burst into tears as I drove past the teaching hospital where I had ministered part time, thinking of the many sick and dying people I had the privilege to serve.

The logic of this second-time election would kick in two more times when events beyond my control pulled me back to Africa. On Nov. 12, 1989, Ray Adams, the Jesuit superior in Ghana and a close friend of mine, was murdered. Four days later the New York provincial

asked if I would be willing to replace Ray in Ghana. I sat down, thought for a few seconds and said yes. When the provincial asked if I wanted some time to think and pray over it, I replied no.

Then in 1996, while I was teaching at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, the regional superior in Nigeria and Ghana asked if I would consider returning to become the president of a recently opened Jesuit secondary school in Nigeria's federal capital, Abuja. I told the New York provincial that I knew nothing about running secondary schools but I would think and pray over the request. Somehow the provincial took that response as a yes.

Calmer Seas

I have not yet described the "third time" for making an election, a time that St. Ignatius suggests is only a backup in case you have not experienced the work of the Spirit in the first two times. But St. Ignatius recognizes that there are more phlegmatic people in the world, and that maybe all of us have more phlegmatic days—what he calls "a tran-

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quill time.” He goes on to specify “a tranquil time” as a time when “the soul is not disturbed by different spirits and can use her natural powers freely and calmly” (*Sp. Ex.*, No. 177). Maybe I am just a turbulent soul, but I do not have those days very often. Others do, and St. Ignatius elaborates two sets of rules for making a graced decision in “a tranquil time.”

Both sets of rules for tranquil-time decisions involve counting pros and cons for a particular course of action and putting them in a larger perspective than might be afforded by simply following your own instincts. In the second way of making an election in a tranquil time, St. Ignatius suggests that you look back at a potential election the way you might do from your deathbed or from the Day of Judgment. Maybe it’s because I am Irish, but looking back from the perspective of my deathbed has always had a salutary effect on the choices I have made over the years.

But even after an election is made in one way or another in a tranquil time, the person making the election still has to go back to seek God’s confirmation, and that involves examining one’s consolations and desolations in prayer, the spiritual ups and downs, the inner twists and turns that always accompany the process of wrestling with God.

I turned 77 this year, and I realize that I have fewer years ahead of me, fewer elections to make. I must say, however, that those 26 years in Africa remain much more vivid in my imagination than the half century I have spent elsewhere. Lord Tennyson’s “Ulysses” speaks to me as I grow older: “I am a part of all that I have met;/ Yet all experience is an arch where-thro’/ Gleams that untravell’d world whose margin fades/ Forever and forever when I move.” I thank God for St. Ignatius and for the ways he has helped me to chart the seas of many elections, throwing open the windows of my heart and mind on new worlds over the past six decades. 

TELEVISION | ELOISE BLONDIAU

CHARACTER STUDIES

Can watching television make you a better person?

At first glance “Easy” and “High Maintenance” might look boring. Neither television show has an overarching plotline, and both have a taste for the ordinary. “Easy,” available on Netflix, holds patient focus on quotidian drama: a couple buys Halloween costumes to buoy up their marriage, two brothers bicker about their fledgling business, a washed-up author gratefully accepts attention from a graduate student.

HBO’s “High Maintenance,” which began as a low-key (and free) web series on Vimeo, is likewise mundane. Each episode follows a new character’s day-to-day turmoils and excitements. All of these characters have one thing in common: they share a “weed guy.” In one episode a man attempts to sever ties with his abusive best friend by joining Alcoholics Anonymous. In another a Muslim teen parties while her aunt and uncle sleep. In a later episode, a husband learns he has contracted chlamydia and then hosts a birthday party with his wife. “The weed guy”—an affable, balding presence—is the most reliably recurring character, but he is more of a plot pivot than a protagonist. His perspective is only sometimes inhabited, and he mostly appears in a supporting role.

“High Maintenance” and “Easy” both highlight the growing popularity of “latticework”

television. This trend, coined by Richard Brody, a writer for *The New Yorker*, denies the viewer a primary protagonist and instead overlays the stories of multiple, tangentially connected characters throughout the course of a season. In shows like “Easy” and “High Maintenance,” Brody writes, a season unfurls “not from the pursuit of a single story but from the impulsive addition of a new facet, a new connection, a new idea.”

The latticework format is related to—though distinct from—vi-

gnette-driven television shows, which allow different perspectives to take center stage but remain focused on a tight-knit cast of characters. “Transparent,” for example, concentrates primarily on the Pfefferman family; “Orange Is the New Black” trains its eye on the inmates of the Litchfield prison; and “The Affair” spends most of its time with the two eponymous cheaters. In contrast, the wide-angle approach of latticework television draws seemingly random people together within the confines of a larger geographic area—Chicago, in the case of “Easy,” and New York in “High Maintenance.”

These shows require work on the part of the viewer, who is constantly asked to put herself in another person’s shoes—and then another’s. You cannot get too comfortable, or too sympathet-

QUICK TAKES. Marc Maron as Jacob Malco and Emily Ratajkowski as Allison Lizowska in “Easy.”



JUST ONE COOK. Ben Sinclair as The Guy, Amy Ryan as Gigi. Below, Shazi Raja as Easha in "High Maintenance."



ic, with any one person or place. It is also the viewer's job, rewarding though it may be, to notice how the characters are connected to one another. In "Easy," for example, the dowdy husband attempting to connect with his wife in episode one reappears as a boisterous colleague of a despairing, though successful, actress in episode seven. In "High Maintenance," this game of connect-the-dots is particularly intricate, as characters from the web series make thoughtful cameos in the souped-up HBO series.

The spoils of this work are comparable to the satisfaction of piecing together a puzzle. But more than satisfaction, the viewer reaps the rewards of being trained to think outside of herself and to consider what is going on inside other people. It is difficult to cling to your biases when you are required to move between at least two minds per episode and so many more over the course of a season. To use Iris Murdoch's terminology, this is a practice of "unselfing," which forces your

ego and vanity to drop away—a prerequisite for making ethical decisions.

In addition to helping us to "unself," latticework television encourages viewers to contemplate the daily lives of other people. In both "Easy" and "High Maintenance," endearing and unlikeable personalities abound, and the viewer repeatedly witnesses betrayals (both minor and more intense) as well as kindnesses. These shows remind us to question the idea that for art to be morally valuable it must present us with paradigms of virtue. Both series embrace complication, with no character presented as wholly good or wholly bad. Unlike "The Sopranos" or "Breaking Bad," both of which hone in on an anti-hero, latticework television reveals these dualities to exist in everyone. "Easy" and "High Maintenance" ask us to scatter our attention evenly among disparate and complicated people, from the people we live with to the people with whom we commute.

The value of compassion has been

long debated in ethical and psychological circles. Empathy can be used to manipulate people as well as to serve them, and it can even fool us into making overly lenient and unjust decisions. The French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas goes so far as to suggest that empathy is a doomed enterprise, because there is so much room for the "empathizer" to project his or her own feelings. Paul Bloom, a Yale psychologist, argues that empathy holds far too much sway over human decision-making, leading people to be drawn to a particular set of plights close to their own hearts (he uses the example of a child falling down a well) and ignoring other forms of suffering (poverty, war, racism). While it is true that people often convince themselves that they are experiencing empathy when they are navel-gazing, my hope is that the "unselfing" quality of latticework television can serve as an antidote to solipsism.

The push to spend our attention and compassion in an egalitarian way remains valuable, though not infallible.

Take episode two of "High Maintenance," in which we see a Muslim teenager, Easha, torn between her desires to please her aunt and uncle and to rebel against them. We watch Easha pick up her cousin from school in her hijab, try to buy cigarettes at a bodega and study at her college library while avoiding the gaze of boys. Considering the recent Georgetown study that found Catholics to have poor understandings of Islam, such an episode is a worthwhile, although very much incomplete, glimpse of what life for a young Muslim-American might look like: at times dull or joyful, and at others devastating. It is a perspective that demands our attention.

And then on to the next.

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A GREAT AND HARSH BEAUTY

Helpless Catholic that I am, I have a confession to make. I am a Bruce Springsteen devotee. Bruce's music is the soundtrack of my life. I run with him every morning—or, rather, he runs with me—"Thunder Road" at the top of my playlist, and by the time I hit my stride we're both being swept along the banks of the Bronx River by "Born to Run." An hour later when I get in my car, my CD player cues up disc one of "The River," the album featured in Springsteen's recent string of concerts—which are not really concerts at all but liturgies, ritual celebrations of the power of poetry and music to speak our desire and despair, our loves and hatreds, our plentiful sins and longings for grace.

In a legendary concert in Madison Square Garden recorded in 2000, Bruce introduces the members of the E Street Band in a televangelical tour de force testifying to the essential role his bandmates have played through the decades as they've carried out their ministry of rock and roll.

So, yes, I confess. And as a faithful devotee, when I heard that Bruce's autobiography, *Born to Run*, was finally being released after seven years in the making, I ordered it on Amazon and waited. (Sadly, I did not join the line of fellow fans in Freehold, N.J., for the Boss's book launch for I had to teach that day, and even I have limits.) When the book arrived, I pushed everything off my desk onto the floor, sat down and read all 528 pages.

Truth be told, I learned nothing new. Bruce's songs have long been telling his story. But his plain prose

makes explicit facts only implicit in his poetry.

One of the truths Bruce lays claim to is his Catholic identity and the key role faith has played in his art. Speaking of the church next door to his house, St. Rose of Lima, where his family attended Mass and where he endured school (having his knuckles *classically rapped*), he writes, *This was the world where I found the beginnings of my song. In Catholicism, there existed the poetry, danger and darkness that reflected my imagination and my inner self. I found a land of great and harsh beauty, of fantastic stories, of unimaginable punishment and infinite reward. It has walked alongside me as a waking dream my whole life.*

This admission comes as no surprise, for Bruce's music is full of Catholic poetry and *mythos*, the imagery of crosses, saviors, baptisms and trials by fire. His landscapes are haunted by "Darkness on the Edge of Town," traversed by Adam and his cursed son Cain, signs that we are all pilgrims in a fallen world making our way to *The Promised Land*.

He proclaims his credo in "Badlands": *I believe in the love/ that you gave me/ I believe in the faith/ that can save me/ I believe in the hope And I pray/ that some day it may raise me.* After years of writing lyrics inflected with faith, despite an emphatic rejection of his childhood church, Bruce describes a process of gradual epiphany and his arrival at sudden self-knowl-

edge: *I came to ruefully and bemusedly understand that once you're a Catholic, you're always a Catholic. So I stopped kidding myself. I know somewhere deep inside I'm still on the team.*

Over the years, Bruce has hinted at this recognition. In an interview with the nephew of the Catholic writer Walker Percy, he confesses (again, that

Catholic word) his discovery of Flannery O'Connor and describes what compels him in her fiction: *She got to the heart of some part of meanness that she never spelled out. It was at the core of every one of her stories—the way that she'd left that hole there, that hole that's inside of everybody. There was some dark thing—a component of spirituality—that I sensed in her stories, and that set me off exploring characters of my own. She knew original sin—she knew*

how to give it the flesh of the story.

O'Connor and Springsteen share a common vocation—bearing witness to our darkness and making it incarnate in art. They also share a devotion to redemption, our need for grace and mercy to offset that darkness. This grace comes in many forms—the promise of an engine beneath a dirty hood, wheels that spirit young lovers away, a ride to the river where they dive into its healing waters.

The not-so-big Catholic secret is that all Bruce's songs are redemption songs and tell the same story—the only story—of the saving power of love. For Springsteen fans, that's old news. For all of us, it's Good News.

The not-so-big secret is that all Bruce's songs are redemption songs.



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FROM GOWN TO TOWN

THERE IS LIFE AFTER COLLEGE

What Parents and Students Should Know About Navigating School to Prepare for the Jobs of Tomorrow

By Jeffrey J. Selingo
William Morrow. 297p \$25.99

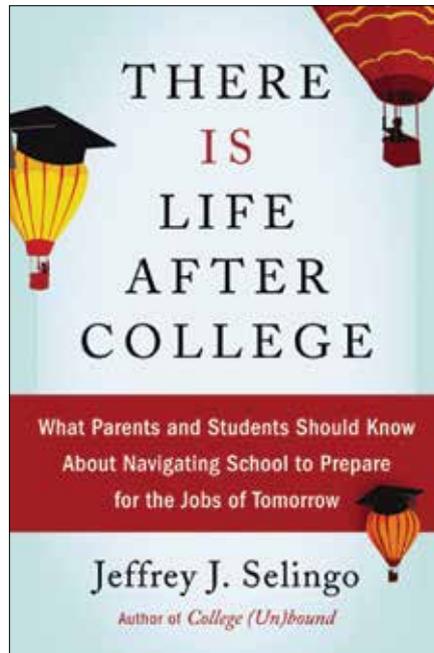
When I taught at a small, Catholic college in the Rust Belt, I faced a dilemma. I wanted my working-class students to enjoy professional success, yet I also wanted them to question the values and habits—like opportunism and overwork—that make professional success possible. How could I foster both their ambition and a commitment to the common good?

The students themselves were more concerned with getting a firmer foothold in the middle class. They justifiably fretted about repaying student loans and steered toward majors in business and health sciences, while dreaming of BMW's and cruises. They believed the prevailing wisdom that a degree—a “very expensive piece of paper”—is the sole ticket to success in the postindustrial economy. To them, and to our political elite for that matter, college is about getting a job. Period. Theology classes like mine were just in the way.

Prospective college students (and their parents) who have similar concerns are the audience for *There Is Life After College*, by Jeffrey Selingo, a former editor in chief of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. The book offers detailed guidance on managing the entire slate of decisions a potential college student must make, including whether to go to college right after high school, where one should attend and how to find internships along the way. Through it all, careerism remains

unquestioned.

Selingo begins with a three-category taxonomy of twentysomethings, based on a survey he commissioned. Sprinters charge through college and into a career with unwavering focus. Wanderers are those who “earned a college degree but run into trouble along



the way to adulthood.” And stragglers typically drop out of school and persist in low-wage work or unemployment.

The categories are tacitly moral. Throughout the book, Selingo denigrates any vision of flourishing apart from professional success. He interviews a young woman who he says “had fond memories of Davidson [College] for allowing her to pursue her dreams” but who regretted not acquiring “the explicit know-how sought by employers today.” It is a narrow moral universe, in which the opportunity to pursue dreams is a consolation prize.

Similarly, Selingo refers to Portland, Ore., as a haven for young people with fitful careers but who “were remain-

ing nonetheless, attracted by the city’s nearby mountains, mild winters, outdoorsy reputation, and streak of independence.” These “stragglers” seem to me to have their priorities straight, valuing active leisure and experiences with nature ahead of their résumés.

To understand how higher education can feed students’ economic interest (and, more to the point, company profits), Selingo interviews dozens of students, alumni, business leaders and university administrators. He interviews professors, too, but only insofar as they are experts on the job market. I found only one place in the book—a single sentence—where Selingo noted how a professor’s pedagogy aims to promote students’ development.

The gaps in Selingo’s approach mirror much in the marketing strategies of colleges themselves, which often threaten to overtake their missions. Visit a college campus or website as a prospective student, and you will find out much about student life and job placement. How you will learn, and who will do the teaching, will probably be an afterthought. But as Daniel Chambliss and Christopher Takacs show in their book *How College Works* (2014), relationships with professors as teachers and mentors are indispensable for students to learn, form virtuous habits and find their college experience meaningful.

Despite the rising tuition at Catholic colleges, many of them are in bleak financial shape. They also face a crisis of identity. They claim in mission statements to transform students and society, to orient people toward the good. But in order to attract students, and thus revenue, they feel they must present themselves as fulfilling students’ pre-existing desires for material success. Claiming to transform students’ desires seems risky. As Simon Newman, the financier who served briefly as president of Mount St. Mary’s University in Emmitsburg, Md., allegedly put it, “Catholic doesn’t

sell” and “liberal arts doesn’t sell.”

Selingo justifies aligning education with a career by noting again and again that companies are reluctant to invest in training workers. “For American education to remain relevant to students, it must abandon the antiquated idea that schools and colleges broadly educate people for life while employers train them for jobs,” he writes. Because “employers want graduates pretrained for a job,” it is up to colleges to train them, at the inevitable expense of failing to educate them for life. Selingo nods toward a broader approach in the final chapter, but here, too, he sees disciplines like philosophy as helpful mainly for narrating one’s career moves.

There is an irony in deferring, as Selingo does, to business leaders’ complaint that college graduates lack adequate business skills. With rare exceptions, those leaders graduated from American colleges, too, and if colleges

are as hidebound as Selingo says they are, then those leaders must also have graduated without business skills. And yet there they sit, at the head of the conference table.

Selingo further undermines his argument by reporting, in a chapter on hiring, that the corporate recruiters he interviewed “often didn’t know what they wanted, revealing a level of dysfunction for matching talent and opportunity that I didn’t expect in an economy as advanced as that of the United States.” In other words, Selingo is asking students to shape their lives according to arbitrary and unfair demands. Following his advice guarantees nothing.

There is indeed life after college, and there is more to life than a career.

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BRETT McLAUGHLIN

A CONCRETE FAITH

BUILDING THE HUMAN CITY **William F. Lynch’s Ignatian** **Spirituality for Public Life**

By John F. Kane
Pickwick. 292p \$35

Ignatian spirituality readily lends itself to personal faith development and works of justice, yet the framework for civic responsibilities occasionally seems difficult to codify. William F. Lynch, S.J., through his deep appreciation of philosophy and political engagement, analyzed 20th-century culture and envisioned an Ignatian stance toward our complex world. His scholarship preferred an extensive evaluation of his own society rather than typical issues within theology and philosophy. Lynch’s spiritual orientation urged finite action in the context of human relationships. John F. Kane,

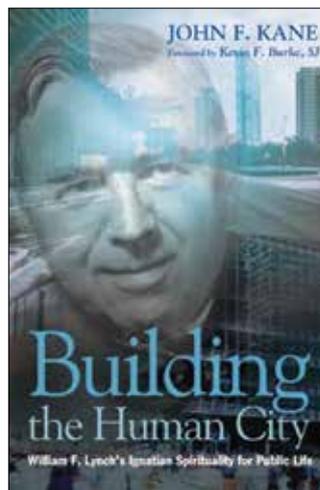
emeritus professor of religious studies at Regis University, describes in detail the unique life of Lynch as he left the Georgetown University faculty and academy to pursue writing as public engagement.

Lynch possessed a deeply incarnational spirituality and criticized religion understood as mere assent to transcendent meaning. For him, much of human understanding arises from our procession through concrete experiences. Lynch had grown up in an Irish immigrant family on Manhattan’s East Side. After matriculating through Catholic grade school, he entered the

Jesuits and completed a Ph.D. in classics at Fordham University. He would direct Greek dramas, work in classics at several universities and continually involve himself in the life of the city. Lynch credited St. Ignatius for inspiring his own image of Christ as God’s thorough engagement with the world. He pointed out that faith must have a body; spirituality involves concrete action in time.

Most of his writing was guided by his lifelong appreciation of philosophy, which included an extensive use of Plato. Though he wrote several books and edited *Thought*, Fordham’s quarterly journal, Lynch would never compose a systematic or fundamental perspective on Catholic life in the United States. As Kane notes, “Rather [Lynch] was in all he wrote concerned to understand, and to help us understand, a number of basic ideas which he saw as crucial or foundational for ability to respond to the challenges of our times.”

Following an overview of his life, each chapter is organized around one of Lynch’s key images for the examination of contemporary society. Kane observes that Lynch often began his public lectures with a particular image, which he then elaborated to explain his ideas. Kane has accommodatingly included Lynch’s complete biography of works, a glossary of terms and a list of abbreviations used. Sections include a consideration of his lifelong writing on the role of the arts, images of hope and faith, a spirituality for public life, the relationship between the secular and sacred and creative new developments in theology. Kane acknowledges that in Lynch’s writing “there is a rarely a simple linear



progression in the development of his argument," nor are there obvious deductions. He disliked absolutized thinking or simple clarities; he therefore led the reader gradually through an investigation of ideas within contexts.

Lynch deplored the divorce of art from reality. He wrote two reflections on aesthetics, *The Image Industries*, on the state of movies and popular culture, and *Christ and Apollo*, on literary forms. Instead of offering an imaginative new understanding of our times, Lynch faulted the dramatic arts for a detour "in some romantic or aesthetic haven, or in some ideologically pure 'walled city' of separation from the mainstream of the human city." Films often alternate

between disgust for the state of society and an infinite dream. Lynch would certainly not enjoy the proliferation of comic-book films in the past decade. This gnostic turn of aesthetics alienates its viewers from ordinary human experiences instead of providing valuable perspective on our times.

In *The Integrating Mind*, Lynch identified the polarization of culture as the "Totalistic Temptation." This inclination brings people "to see most issues and concerns in 'either-or' terms, and thereby to embrace simplistic and 'total' solutions which regard all opposed or alternative positions as enemies." With the typical human desire for clear ideas, Lynch describes a temptation to

see contraries found in everyday life as absolute oppositions. Strong ideological solutions then emerge for the most complex problems.

Lynch found that the "problem of freedom is not about the goal of freedom, but the far more difficult question of how, in our actual lives and in the life of the city, we move to attain real freedom—how, in other words, we understand the relation of freedom to the contrary reality of limitation." He warns that the boundless yearning for freedom can result in a loathing for the old self, relationships and country.

Over two chapters, Kane presents one of Lynch's most penetrating illustrations of culture and freedom: the Dionysian primal desire for all the world offers. Kane shows how Lynch turned to mythology and theater for more fundamental concepts. Dionysian energy seeks both the triumph of individual wishing and will "that feeds as much on fury as on love." Lynch is most alarmed that these primal desires usually end only in pure and absolute beliefs. While many identify desires of this sort with youth and adolescence, Kane highlights that this passion courses through all sorts of political causes. A proper Christian spirituality holds a hope that shares with others, an imagination that always returns to present realities.

Lynch envisaged modern secularization as a threat to both the sacred imagination and the spiritual. The secular has grown into "an overwhelming presence in which the religious imagination must learn to exist." Even though the sacred once provided the predominant inspiration, many features of the modern city result from an entirely secular vision. Kane explains Lynch's challenging solution for the religious imagination: It must allow the secular to emerge autonomously, while retaining religious truths.

Previous volumes on Lynch did not fully examine his style of pedagogy and combine the totality of his insights on

Lessons

So near holidays. For now, celebrate
their nearness. Brush the cat hair off
of coats, collect the hackberry leaves.
Winter threatens is unfair; it menaces
like sleep, like hunger. Cheer a killing
frost but mourn the lettuce, the orchid
you snap, an accident, not meaning to
be an ender. Less time now for repairs,
only so much skin left on your hands.
Ants arrive in rivulets. Psylla are born,
borne on the backs of leaves; host them
once they've left their elder. Make space
for succulents on the sill, where the sun
comes like clergy to bless and pass. See
them not as muscles, but a musculature.
Wake and put the cold of tea to your lips.
Grow old. See love as something like this.

JUSTIN RUNGE

JUSTIN RUNGE, of *Lawrence, Kan.*, is the poetry editor of *Parcel* and the author of two chapbooks, *Plainsight* (New Michigan Press, 2012) and *Hum Decode* (Greying Ghost Press, 2014).

contemporary society. Gerald Bednar has drawn attention to Lynch's use of analogical imagination for a theology of faith. Francesca Murphy referred to him repeatedly for her own development of Christian aesthetics. Several other authors made use of Lynch's discussions on secularity and literature. Kane's study of Lynch surveys his major publications, his vocation to public life and his complicated style of authorship.

Readers familiar with Ignatian spirituality or philosophy will find this book

JENNIFER LEVASSEUR

THE CRIMINAL'S MASK

THE LAST PAINTING OF SARA DE VOS

By Dominic Smith

Sarah Crichton Books. 304p \$26

For those who don't create, the act of forming something beautiful or transcendent from a rough collection of anodyne objects—pigment, paper, words—can appear alchemic. To side-step mystery (or to forgive our own inability), we often dismiss the effort artwork demands by viewing it as the product of inherent talent.

Fellow artists and scholars move closer to understanding, but the forger taps into the mystery of the creative process in a way few others can imagine. This transgression, which also becomes an intimate inhabitation, fuels the heart of Dominic Smith's exciting breakout novel, *The Last Painting of Sara de Vos*.

This story of theft, guilt and reconciliation follows three main characters: the first female painter of the Dutch Golden Age admitted to the Guild of St. Luke, the blueblood Manhattan lawyer whose family has owned a rare landscape by the painter for three hundred years and the Australian art student/restorer in Brooklyn who forges that painting. Forty years later,

a valuable supplement to current discussions about political discourse, aesthetics and secular society. Lynch frequently objects to ideological opposition, but he does not resolve the gridlock of the two-party system. As he often reminds us, keeping our imagination and faith in contact with reality is perhaps the way forward.

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the forgery resurfaces, threatening to destroy precariously constructed lives.

In the first two paragraphs of the novel, Smith proves his control and facility by deftly setting up the time frame and the theft—"The painting is stolen the same week the Russians put a dog into space"—as well as introduce a work of art endowed with a hex lasting three centuries.

Smith's greatest gifts in this riveting read are his ability to endow characters with complete inner lives in just a few well-placed phrases and the seeming effortlessness of the unfolding story and its prose. With each detail, whether it's a character's internal side remarks or a historical note about harvesting a whale carcass or boiling rabbit pelts for glue, he builds a world—actually, three intersecting worlds—layer by layer.

Told in alternating chapters, the lives of painter, collector and forger blend and echo in ways that none of them could imagine. Each one pivots at a decisive moment. Sara de Vos's

only child has died and her husband has bound them to inescapable debt that bans them from the guild, but inspiration strikes. Marty de Groot, surrounded by wealth and privilege and stalled in his career, drifts from his frail wife after her second miscarriage.

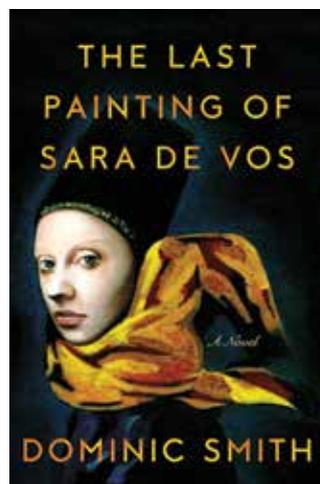
Ellie, alone in a mildewing apartment, finds her only visceral connection through the study of 17th-century painting, eschewing human relationships to convene with long-dead genius. She had fled Sydney but is met with condescension in London as "a bright spark from the colonies." Now in New York, her dissertation flounders. It strikes her that she "has traveled halfway around the world...to live in studious squalor." Loss and deceit vibrate across centuries and lives.

While the object that moves across time through the hands of disparate people is a long-trusted writer's trope—think Don DeLillo's baseball in *Underworld* and the rare volume in Geraldine Brooks's *People of the Book*—Smith keeps the device fresh by rendering it ordinary. What's more innocuous than a family heirloom landscape painting?

This one, *At the Edge of a Wood* (1636), has loomed above the de Groot marital bed for generations. When thieves replace it with a "meticulous fake" during a charity dinner benefitting orphans—

in an enthralling sequence that involves "Rent-a-Beats" and a ham radio tapping into the frequency from Sputnik Two—Marty doesn't notice the violation for six months.

Alongside missing and absent children, *The Last Painting of Sara de Vos* finds some of its most poignant motifs in the sanctity, and violation of, the bedroom, this private space



of intimacy and lost dreams. It is the site of the theft of the rare painting, as well as the source of great sadness for the de Groot. It is where Sara's daughter dies and what becomes her coffin. Above Ellie's bed, a bloom of mold spreads and discourages visitors. When art dealer Gabriel shows Ellie photographs of a little-seen, sole surviving landscape painted by Sara de Vos and asks Ellie "to work up a faithful copy of it for its rightful owner," she feels the twinge of doubt, not only because the photographs he provides include the disheveled bed beneath the canvas.

For most of her young life, Ellie has been ignored—by her father who never recovered from the loss of his first-born son, by curators who didn't appreciate her antipodean credentials.

She seems to value her ability over her identity or her vision: "Sometimes they paid her hundreds of dollars for a day's work, but she found herself unable to spend the money. Because she would have gladly done the work for free, it seemed ill-gotten." When the question of forgery arises, the test of her ability becomes more important than any ethical dilemma. It takes little effort for her to slip out of her restorer's coat and into the criminal's mask.

The rest of Ellie's life, and to a lesser degree Marty's, hinges on this single decision and how each seeks forgiveness through acts that have little to do with the original sin. Once Marty discovers the fake and those responsible, he sets in motion a payback reminiscent of the shocking revenge scene in

James Salter's *All That Is*. This malice seems beyond him, fueled more by other hurts than the theft of property and its attending humiliations.

If there's any criticism of *The Last Painting of Sara de Vos*, it's the novel's structural and thematic perfection. Each storyline comes to a satisfactory close, with all of the players doing basically the right thing, seeking and receiving forgiveness. Even though the novel is a remarkable feat, it leaves this reader with the sinking suspicion that Smith created a checklist to build a best seller—locations both exotic and familiar, illumination of arcane knowledge, artists on the edge of acknowledged greatness and over-the-top minor characters (an eel-fishing detective, a disgruntled and territorial academic) to add color without sabotaging the narrative.

The rich legacy of intentional imperfection appears throughout time. Saint Francis fasted for 39 days instead of 40 as to avoid competing with the holiness of Christ. Some Native American beadwork introduces a wrong color to disrupt the pattern, as Persian rug makers create intentional fault in their intricate designs. Each of these injects a glimmer of wrongness in order to highlight beauty and to submit to a greater power.

Dominic Smith has written a literary novel that will give comfort and enjoyment to the masses. He commands great talent and an artist's eye for nuance and for weaving stories, but if he had followed a less rigid prescription or left a single stitch unfinished, he might have allowed the reader some threads to worry about long after the fact to keep the novel alive in our imaginations.

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Witnesses to Life

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), NOV. 6, 2016

Readings: 2 Mc 7:1-14; Ps 17:1-15; 2 Thes 2:16-3:5; Lk 19:1-10

“The Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you” (2 Thes 3:3)

St. Augustine defined martyrdom in this way: “It is the reason why, not the suffering that constitutes the martyr.” The “reason why” is the martyr’s “witness” (Greek *martys*) to the truth, regardless of the consequences, strengthened and guarded by God to remain faithful. The Christian understanding of martyrdom does not require that one must die, though at various times throughout history, including our own, Christian witness has led to death.

Perhaps the most prominent example of martyrdom from the time before Christ are Hannah and her seven sons, often called the Maccabean martyrs because their story is found in the Second Book of Maccabees. In the story, set in the time of the persecution of the Jews by the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes IV (175-164 B.C.E.), seven brothers, one by one, suffer severe torture and death, as does their mother, because they refuse to eat pork. The stories are gruesome, but each of the martyrs makes a decision to remain faithful to God’s law instead of turning from the truth. It is not that these martyrs desire death; they desire life.

A full life in this world included the freedom to follow God’s law, so the Maccabean martyrs were, the text says, “ready to die rather than transgress

the laws of our ancestors.” But they also maintained that life, a good given them by God, would not end with their torturous deaths. When the second brother was being put to death, he said to his persecutor, “You dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws.” The fourth brother, too, near death, said, “One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him.” The hope of the resurrection guarded the witness of the brothers and strengthened their faith that God would never forget his people.

This same hope in the resurrection motivated the early Christians to witness to the truth, even when this might lead to persecution or death, since the truth was the resurrection from the dead. Christian faith is grounded in Jesus’ own resurrection and the hope of the resurrection to come. Paul assures the Thessalonians, who as a new church faced almost immediate persecution (1 Thes 1:6, 2:14, 3:3), that in times of distress “our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father” will “comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.” Paul repeats the same promise later, stating that as the word of the Lord is spread, “the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.”



It is clear that to be strengthened and guarded from the evil one does not mean to escape persecution or even death. Paul, Peter and numerous other early apostles and disciples died as witnesses to the truth. But it did mean that God would strengthen them and guard their witness at times of severe persecution. And at the root of this witness is not a desire to abandon this world, though later Christian martyrdom accounts will certainly flirt with a desire for death, but the ability to remain faithful to God’s word or, in Paul’s stirring words, to direct our hearts “to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.”

It is not necessary to believe in resurrection to remain faithful to the truth and steadfast in one’s

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Think of your life as a witness (*martys*) to God. Is it a challenge to witness to the truth? How has God strengthened you and guarded you in sharing the truth? How does your witness show evidence of the abundant life in God?

ART: TAD DUNNE

beliefs, as Socrates demonstrated, but it does offer most fully the understanding that the goodness of this life is based upon the goodness of God’s eternal being. It is God’s being as the one that was, is and ever will be that allows people to be witnesses, wherever that leads, because God upholds life. Jesus says in his dispute with the Sadducees, the one Jewish group in Jesus’ day that rejected belief in the resurrection, that God is “God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.” Martyrs are not witnesses to a love of death but to the hope of abundant life.

JOHN W. MARTENS

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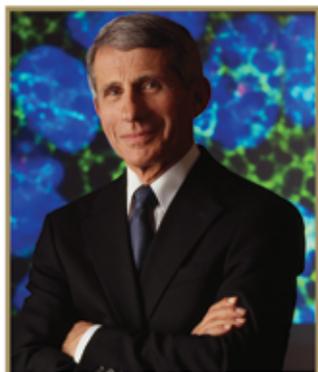


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