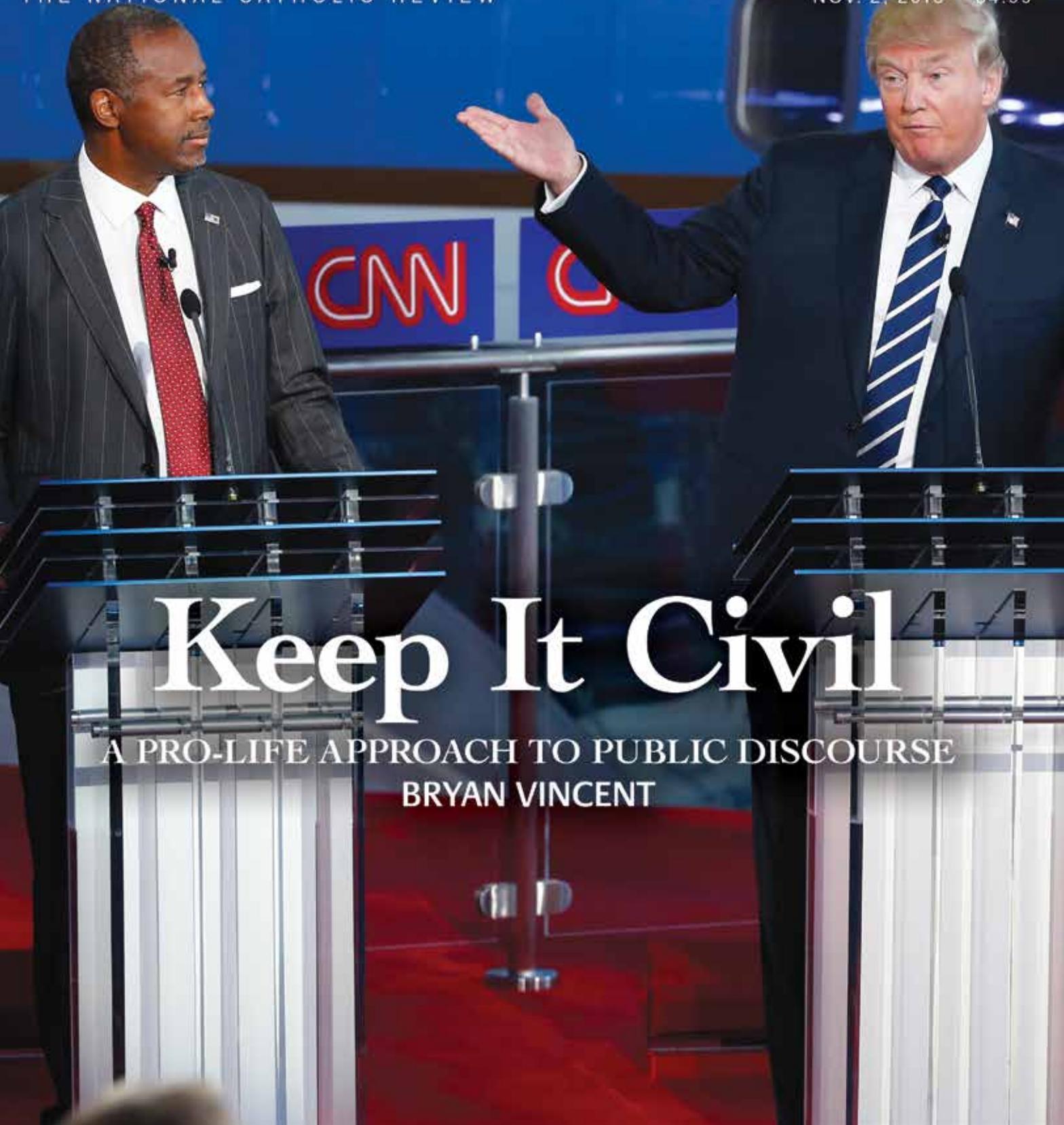


# America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC REVIEW

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## Keep It Civil

A PRO-LIFE APPROACH TO PUBLIC DISCOURSE

BRYAN VINCENT

**T**hat cry of “Lazarus, come out” we heard north of our border on the evening of Oct. 19 was the Canadian electorate reviving the fortunes of the long-thought-moribund Liberal Party. In a stunning coast-to-coast triumph, the Liberals won 184 of the country’s 338 seats in the House of Commons—the largest increase in seats in a single election in Canadian history. Led by Justin Trudeau, the idealistic son of the late premier, Pierre Trudeau, the Liberals capitalized on a widespread perception among Canadians that the federal government had become too arrogant, too centralized and too ideological. By contrast, the Liberals, writes Bob Rae of Toronto’s *Globe and Mail*, were seen as “the hardest working, most compassionate, most willing to listen, and most capable of learning.”

The new prime minister, who has spent most of his 43 years out of the public eye, was considered a lightweight and a long shot by most Canadian pundits. Former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney said as much on election night, telling CTV News, “I think that in some quarters he was underestimated and he got a real big bite tonight, and that’s what happened.” There are bigger bites to come as Mr. Trudeau turns his attention to forming a government. In a situation not entirely unlike that of the United States in 2008, the immensity of the country’s challenges is outweighed only by the expectations of the voters. Mr. Trudeau has promised successive rounds of annual deficit spending in order to rescue Canadians from the vestiges of recession. His policies will provide an interesting test case for neo-Keynesianism and a clear alternative to the austerity policies of his European counterparts.

The Liberals also promised a shift in Canadian foreign policy, to align it more closely in Mr. Trudeau’s mind with the country’s traditional peace-building role in global affairs. Look

for a less bellicose Canadian presence at the United Nations, a more critical view of Israeli policies and Canada’s support for the nuclear treaty with Iran. Above all, expect a resurgence of the sort of hopeful Canadian nationalism so identified with Mr. Trudeau’s father, the Canadian political titan who changed the course of history with his dogmatic belief that “it is in our future in which we will find our greatness.”

In many ways, however, the son is a different man. While charming and telegenic, Justin Trudeau lacks his father’s distinctive style, what Quebecers might call his *élan*, an effective mixture of celebrity and statesmanship, which he could deploy rhetorically to great effect. Yet while the elder Trudeau was warm and devout, his chronic workaholicism destroyed his marriage. There then followed a number of high-profile relationships with Barbara Streisand and Margot Kidder, among others, which put Mr. Trudeau on the cover of *People* magazine and put Canada on America’s pop cultural map. The younger Trudeau, the Liberals are keen to stress, is in every way a devoted family man, a product of Jesuit education and Quebec’s post-modern but still Catholic culture.

Nevertheless, it was Canada’s Catholics who were in all likelihood the most reluctant to pull the lever for the Liberals. Mr. Trudeau is an unapologetic pro-choice politician, even going so far as to deny pro-life Liberal members of Parliament a free vote on the question. That move is disturbing, not simply for what looks like callous disregard for human dignity, but for its undemocratic impulse. In the words of his late father, “a society which emphasizes uniformity is one which creates intolerance and hate.” On victory night, Mr. Trudeau told his jubilant supporters that “you can appeal to the better angels of our nature and you can win doing it.” Let’s hope that’s true.

**MATT MALONE, S.J.**

106 West 56th Street  
New York, NY 10019-3803  
Ph: (212) 581-4640; Fax: (212) 399-3596  
Subscriptions: (800) 627-9533  
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**EDITOR, THE JESUIT POST** Michael Rossmann, S.J.

**EDITORIAL E-MAIL**  
[america@americamedia.org](mailto:america@americamedia.org)

**PUBLISHER AND CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER**

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*Cover:* Dr. Ben Carson, left, and Donald Trump at the second official Republican candidates’ debate in the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, Calif., on Sept. 16. Reuters/Lucy Nicholson

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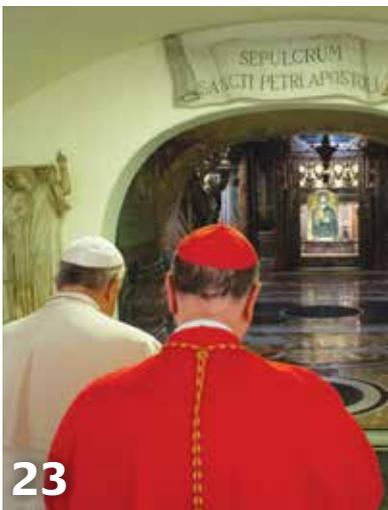
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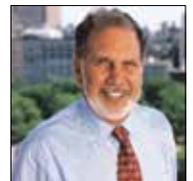
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## ON THE WEB

**John Sexton**, president of NYU, talks about his Jesuit schooling and his **career in higher education**. Plus, a video conversation with **Mary Karr and James Martin, S.J.** Full digital highlights on page 19 and at [americamagazine.org/webfeatures](http://americamagazine.org/webfeatures).



### The Great Powers in Syria

The entrance of the Russian Federation into Syria's multi-front civil war begins a new, distressing chapter in the savage conflict. As millions flee and others huddle in ruined cities, anyone who has wondered if the Syrian war could possibly get any worse now has an answer.

Despite tough talk on the Islamic State, Russian forces have concentrated on anti-Assad rebel targets. In return U.S. restraint on weapons transfers to the Free Syrian Army and allied militias has abruptly lifted. The conflict now shows all the initial makings of a new proxy war between the great powers. At least the Russian aim in Syria is clear: salvage the Assad regime and protect strategic assets. But what exactly is the goal of the continuing U.S. intervention in Syria? The Obama administration properly abandoned a \$500 million program aimed at training a perhaps more-wished-for-than-real "moderate" resistance to President Assad. Now going tit-for-tat with the Russians begins a new adventure that is hideously indifferent to the suffering of the Syrian people and the possibility of an accidental (or otherwise) encounter between U.S. and Russian forces.

The administration should be redirecting its energy and resources into promoting a U.N.-mediated cease-fire negotiation between the diminished Assad regime and whatever real moderates the Obama administration can drag into dialogue. Even a brief respite from the mayhem might give all parties a chance to remember what they have lost in this war and to consider if other means might achieve something close to their goals. Syria will never be the nation it was, but anything is better than perpetuating another moment of the combat zone it has become.

### Offering Healing and Hope

October was Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and the National Council of Catholic Women wanted to make sure that the occasion did not pass unnoticed. The organization issued a 52-page resource manual on preventing domestic violence, with the hope that it will inform people about the prevalence and impact of domestic violence, as well as the church's response, prayers and other resources. They also created a customizable safety flyer that can be posted in public locations. (Both are available at [nccw.org](http://nccw.org).)

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, "more than one in three women (35.6 percent) and more than one in four men (28.5 percent) in the United States have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime." The

2002 U.S. bishops' pastoral letter in response to the issue of domestic violence sought to remind those being abused that the church should be a help, not a hindrance to them: "As a resource, it [the church] encourages women to resist mistreatment. As a roadblock, its misinterpretation can contribute to the victim's self-blame and suffering and to the abuser's rationalizations."

The N.C.C.W. hopes to ensure that the church is never a hindrance, and its resources can prompt important conversations that can bring difficult subjects into the open and help people to heal. They also remind individuals that neither Scripture nor the church's teaching on marriage can be used to justify violence in intimate relationships. The effects of domestic violence touch not only women, but families, children, workplaces and parish communities. Though the violence may target individuals, the healing response must come from a caring community.

### Innocence Lost

Across Latin America, girls mark their 15th birthday with a *quinceañera*, a celebration of their transition to womanhood. In El Salvador teens often wear a pink dress on that day as a sign of their innocence, a tradition that belies the harsh realities young people face in one of the world's most violent countries. A new series from NPR, called "#15girls," tells their stories. Marcela was shot dead in the street in front of her younger sister. Mimi started helping victims of gangs as a volunteer ambulance worker at age 10. And one girl, unnamed for her protection, traveled 1,000 miles north after her father, a gang member in prison for murder, threatened to have her raped and killed. She was turned back a few hours short of the U.S. border.

El Salvador recently surpassed Honduras as the homicide capital of the world. Over 5,000 people have been killed this year in a country with a population smaller than that of New York City. The mayhem comes amid a crackdown by the government on two warring gangs—MS-13 and Barrio 18—after a truce reached in 2012 broke down last year. According to the World Bank, the country loses 10.8 percent of its gross domestic product each year to crime and violence.

President Salvador Sánchez Cerén has launched a five-year, \$2.1 billion plan to strengthen state institutions and help victims of crime. The United States should support these efforts to bring security and opportunity to El Salvador with generous foreign aid. But we should also remember the names and stories behind the "unaccompanied minors" who come to our border seeking refuge.

# Euthanasia in California

California is now the fifth and largest state in the country to allow doctors to prescribe life-ending medication to patients. With the signing of the End-of-Life Option Act by Gov. Jerry Brown on Oct. 5, the so-called right to die movement scored a major victory. Several other states, including New York, are considering similar bills that will surely be boosted by the momentum initiated in Sacramento.

In attempting to allow individuals to “die with dignity,” these laws end up devaluing life at all stages and elevate an idea of freedom that is fundamentally at odds with an authentically human understanding of individual dignity in relation with God and community. But there are many other persuasive arguments against assisted suicide laws that deserve a wide hearing. One need not be a Christian or a believer to see the serious problems with laws that legalize a “right to die.”

In a letter released on the day the California law was signed, Governor Brown explained his reasons for supporting it. “I do not know what I would do if I were dying in prolonged and excruciating pain,” the governor wrote. “I am certain, however, that it would be a comfort to be able to consider the options afforded by this bill. And I wouldn’t deny that right to others.”

The governor’s argument was heartfelt and, from a limited viewpoint, compelling. Many people who support “right to die” legislation are motivated by a strong sense of compassion for those who suffer. Yet the scenario presented by Governor Brown presents only part of the picture. People who suffer near the end of their lives do not make these critical decisions in a vacuum. Their suffering includes not only physical pain but sometimes also despair over the absence of people to depend on or resources they need. This law does nothing to address that lack of support; indeed it suggests that the right response is not to ask for help in bearing suffering but rather for assistance in removing the perceived burden their lives have become.

California’s new law was passed against the strong resistance of the disability rights community. These advocates have argued time and again that the introduction of assisted suicide laws into a for-profit health care system is a dangerous experiment. The plain fact is that it is less expensive to administer life-ending drugs than to pay for pain management or extended hospice care. It should give us pause that California’s End-of-Life Option Act was passed while the

legislature was considering ways to address funding shortfalls for Medi-Cal, the state’s health insurance program for the poor. In that effort, they were unsuccessful. As the state’s Catholic bishops pointed out, California’s poorest residents do not have access to palliative care, yet now they have the right to end their lives.



It is naïve to believe that people in California will not feel pressure to end their lives as a result of the new law. To pretend otherwise is a failure of empathy. We are able to respond to the suffering of Brittany Maynard, a vibrant young woman who received a wave of social media support for her decision to end her life in the face of terminal cancer. Yet we do not often think about what it will be like for an elderly woman who cannot pay her medical bills in a society that preaches the “right to die.”

The law’s advocates argue that the scope of the legislation is limited. Physicians are allowed to prescribe life-ending drugs only to individuals who are deemed mentally competent and are expected to die within six months. Two doctors must sign off on the order. But medical prognoses are sometimes wrong. And the reasons most frequently cited for seeking life-ending medication have more to do with loneliness and fear than disease. In Oregon, a state in which assisted suicide has been legal since 1997, “loss of autonomy” and “loss of dignity” are two of the most common reasons given for wanting to end life. The fact that all we are willing to offer individuals in these circumstances is an opportunity to die is an indictment of both our health care system and the community in which it is embedded.

In 2008 Barbara Wagner and Randy Stroup, both suffering from cancer, sought payment for their treatments from the Oregon State Medicaid system. Their requests were denied, but among other options listed, the state offered to pay for life-ending drugs. (The offer was later rescinded when the letter was made public.) Their cases are a reminder that introducing the “right to die” into our health care system—especially in a large state like California, with its complex bureaucracy—will have many unintended consequences. Passing such legislation does not make us more “compassionate.” Instead, it reveals our failure to adopt the perspective of those who are truly most in need of our compassion.

## REPLY ALL

### The Humble Truth

Re “Doctrinal Challenges,” by Peter Folan, S.J. (10/12): I find it interesting that Jesus was able to launch all of Christianity in just a few years, an achievement beyond comparison in the Western world, without much if any reference to sophisticated intellectual theology. His genius seemed to be his ability to share profound truths about the human condition in a way that the humblest among us could grasp.

Perhaps there comes a point when being intelligent, educated and sophisticated becomes a liability instead of an asset when considering the message of love that Jesus shared. Perhaps we make it complicated to sidestep the ruthless simplicity of love, to give ourselves many hurdles that must be overcome before we can be who we already know we should be.

Every day each of us faces a series of ordinary life situations, in which we are called upon to choose between the tiny prison cell of “me” and love/God. When we love, we are with God. When we don’t love, we are on our own. The vast majority of the time, we already know which we have chosen.

PHIL TANNY  
*Online Comment*

### The Cousins Carroll

It’s highly unusual for Matt Malone, S.J. to make a mistake in history, but he did so when he wrote in “Of Many Things” (10/12) that Charles Carroll was the brother of Archbishop John Carroll. They actually were cousins. John was born to Daniel and Eleanor Carroll at Upper Marlboro, Md., and Charles was born to Charles Carroll of Annapolis and Elizabeth Brooke, who were not married at the time of his birth. John and Charles were educated together, though, at St. Omer in France.

Archbishop Carroll did, however, have a brother, who was also one of

our country’s founders. Daniel Carroll was a member of the Continental Congress from 1780 to 1784, a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in 1789, one of the signers of the United States Constitution, a member of Congress from 1789 to 1791 and one of three commissioners appointed to lay out the site of the capital city of Washington. He himself donated the land for the capitol building.

JOHN F. FINK  
*Indianapolis, Ind.*

### The Sacred Progression

Thanks to John Paris, S.J., for his article “The Hour of Death” (10/5). Having done research on the spiritual dimension of hospice care, and having served in a parish both as a deacon and priest, the blessings I have received ministering to those in hospice care cannot be counted. So often I take note that I am the only person at a bedside who is not “family,” and yet I am invited to share that sacred, intimate time with someone on the threshold of passing from earth to heaven and with their loved ones, who feel the pain of being left behind even before death gently takes their mother, father, sister, brother, husband, wife or child.

My hope and prayer, for each person at the hour of our death, is that we embrace the sacred progression from life on earth to life in heaven promised by our baptism. Father Paris’s article is a wise reminder that the ethical questions of proportionate care, within our Catholic tradition, help each person to consider our human dignity as we develop an informed conscience to apply science and medical treatment with gentleness and pastoral concern for the person and their family.

(REV.) JIM GROGAN  
*Online Comment*

### Ministry Issues

There surely was a lack of connection for me between the cover banner “Ministry in America” and the four articles in the Sept. 28 issue. Is ministry

today about deacons? Is changing ministry landscape really about the pope’s changes in pallium protocol? Next was a pretty thin treatment of “mission work” by laypeople, and I never did figure out the connection between ministry in America and the poetry of Catholicism piece. All this says nothing about the huge lacunae for this topic—for example no mention of women who do most of the “Ministry in America”! How disappointing.

MARY GARASCIA  
*Online Comment*

### Expanding the Diaconate

Re “A Deacon’s Education,” by Jay Cormier (9/28): I was ordained to the diaconate in 1983. We were extremely fortunate in our formation to have down-to-earth, practical instruction and a strong emphasis on service to our parishes and outside world. I wish there were five to seven deacons in every parish; some of us are getting old and infirm. The ministries we get involved in all come from our liturgical presence directly serving our people. By becoming real ourselves, we make the vision and effects of our church real and present to others. The next step will be a movement to ordain to the diaconate women, who possess vast talents we do not yet understand or utilize. Their ministry will save the church.

MIKE EVANS  
*Online Comment*

### Learning From Cuba

Thank you for your recent cover story by Miguel Díaz concerning the need for U.S.-Cuban reconciliation in response to the example of Pope Francis (“A Tale of Two Countries,” 9/21). I heartily agree with the importance of direct interchange between common people of the United States and Cuba. To that end we should encourage both the administration and especially Congress to repeal travel restrictions that have been in effect for some 50 years.

Having been to Cuba over a dozen

times, on sister church, sister city, professional research and other types of trips, I do not share the view of Cuba today as being divided into two societies, with much of the population marginalized based on sexual orientation, race or religion. Cuba has many faults and weaknesses, some of which are aggravated by our continuing policy of economic blockade, but there is a sense of shared community there, based on both nationalism and internationalism, and above all based on sharing and generosity towards your neighbor. The people of each land have much to learn from each other, but this is one lesson that we can all take to heart.

ART HEITZER  
Milwaukee, Wis.

## A Rich Church

I appreciated very much the article "They Know the Suffering Christ" (9/21), by Stephen P. White. He articulates well what a church dedicated to the poor should be. He repeats what we all know about the need to care for the poor around us. And he acknowledges that the church has a pretty good record of charity but not so much of justice. And he goes on to encourage us to explore how we can learn from the poor.

But he failed to mention that Pope Francis, by his example and by statements, especially to some bishops, has deplored the way the church itself lives rich. Our churches are gorgeous and often richly endowed, and the higher one rises in something like a palace and to be served by others, the way the wealthy of this world do and are. Jesus said that his followers are to be servants of others. Until this is taken seriously, the church will not be a poor church.

LUCY FUCHS  
Brandon, Fla.

## STATUS UPDATE

On America's blog *In All Things*, Jim McDermott, S.J., responded to the decision by Gov. Jerry Brown of California to sign assisted suicide legislation into law ("Compassion and Choices," 10/6). Readers weigh in.

He did what is compassionate. There are so many safeguards in place to ensure there is no "slippery slope." People who access this law do so because they are dying. What is more compassionate: slipping away peacefully or being tethered to machines that offer no miracle cure?

JANET DIMINICH

Many people across the country know little about this law other than its title. This law also requires all records of the termination proceedings to be held in secret, even against legal discovery. The records will be sealed to any and

all relatives who want answers after the fact about how it happened and why. A lesson on how to make a truly bad law even worse.

JERRY BOWERS

My aunt had ALS. She couldn't move for years. It was awful. She used Washington's right-to-die law to end her nightmare with her family by her side. Hard to say it wasn't the compassionate thing to do. I understand the worries over misuse but I've only seen assisted suicide used with compassion.

ERIC HOFFMAN

Why should this surprise us? The next stop on this slippery slope will be the termination of lives deemed useless—the elderly, the severely handicapped. We aborted the peers of a whole generation, why should we expect them to respect our lives?

ANNETTE LAMARCHE ALLEVA

## Taking Exemptions

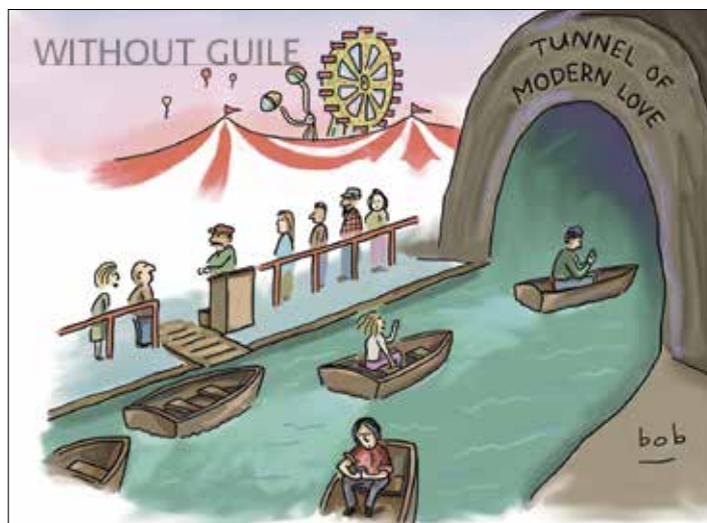
In "Of Many Things" (9/14), Matt Malone, S.J., writes of the decline of civil society in the United States, quoting William T. Cavanaugh, who said, "The rise of the state is the history of the atrophying of such [intermediate] associations." The premise that an over-reaching state inevitably shrinks charitable activity by third-party actors (like churches) poses a false dilemma.

Poverty has never been eliminated in this country. The idea that there is nothing left for the charitable impulse to expend itself on seems spiritually bankrupt.

While it may be handy for churches to complain that the government is undercutting them, the complaint is bogus, much like the assertion that a loss of government subsidy impinges on "religious freedom." It seems somewhat

duplicitous to pretend that we are restrained from doing the good we want, when in fact we are perfectly free to do so and pay for it ourselves. Jesus never asked that we fight for government tax exemptions or favored status. We are called to pick up our crosses and follow him. Is it a denial of religious freedom that we are asked to put our money where our mouths are?

DEIRDRE PIERSON  
Online Comment



# SCIENCE IN SEMINARIES

"The present situation is heavily marked ... by fresh problems and questions brought up by scientific and technological discoveries. It strongly demands a high level of intellectual formation, such as will enable priests to proclaim, in a context like this, the changeless Gospel of Christ and make it credible to the legitimate demands of human reason." - Pastores Dabo Vobis, #51

**\$10,000 AWARDS**

In response to directives from papal and other official documents of the Church, we are pleased to announce \$10,000 awards to seminaries for the development and delivery of the science courses listed below. The authors of the proposals for these courses will meet, along with their respective rectors/presidents or academic deans, in Tucson, Arizona from Jan 28 - Feb 1, 2016. The Vatican Observatory will be honored at that time.

## **Darwin and Naturalism**

*Mount St. Mary's Seminary, Emmitsburg, Maryland*  
Christopher Anadale, Ph.D.

## **The Emergence of the Image: Human Evolution from Biological, Philosophical and Theological Perspectives**

*Notre Dame Seminary and Graduate School of  
Theology, New Orleans, Louisiana*  
Christopher T. Baglow, Ph.D.

## **Only Wonder Comprehends**

*Athenaeum of Ohio/Mount St. Mary's Seminary  
of the West, Cincinnati, Ohio*  
Marco Caggioni, Ph.D., Rev. Earl K. Fernandes,  
S.T.D., & Simona Ferioli, M.D.

## **Theology of Marriage and Human Sexuality**

*St. John's Seminary, Camarillo, California*  
Rev. Luke Dysinger, O.S.B., D. Phil., M.D.

## **Catholicism in an Evolving World**

*Oblate School of Theology, San Antonio, Texas*  
Sr. Linda Gibler, O.P., Ph.D. and  
R. Scott Woodward, D. Min

## **Integral Anthropology: Evolution in Dialogue with Catholic Theology and Philosophy**

*St. Joseph Seminary College,  
St. Benedict, Louisiana*  
Cory Hayes, Ph.D.

## **Science and Theology: In Dialogue for the New Evangelization**

*Kenrick-Glennon Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri*  
Edward P. Hogan, Ph.D.

## **The Transfigured Brain: The Relationship between Brain Science, Ritual and Mysticism**

*Saint Mary Seminary and Graduate School of  
Theology, Wickliffe, Ohio*  
Edward Kaczuk, Ph.D., and Rev. Michael G. Woost, S.T.L.

## **Fundamentals of Science at the Foundations of Faith**

*University of Saint Mary of the Lake/ Mundelein  
Seminary, Mundelein, Illinois*  
Rev. John Kartje, Ph.D., S.T.D.

## **Creation and Science**

*Immaculate Conception Seminary,  
South Orange, New Jersey*  
Rev. Joseph R. Laracy, S.T.L.

## **Science: A Theology of Creation**

*Mount Angel Seminary, St. Benedict, Oregon*  
Bro. Louis de Montfort Nguyen, O.S.B., M.D.

## **What Does Science Prove? Topics at the Intersection of Science and Religion**

*Borromeo Seminary, Wickliffe, Ohio*  
Beth Rath, Ph.D.

## **Liturgical Piety: Anthropological Foundations of Catholic Worship**

*Dominican School of Philosophy & Theology,  
Berkeley, California*  
Rev. Christopher J. Renz, O.P., Ph.D.

## **Science in the Light of Faith**

*Holy Apostles College and Seminary, Cromwell, Connecticut*  
Stacy Trasancos, Ph.D.

## **Human Genetics and Biotechnologies: Challenges for Science and Religion**

*Boston College School of Theology and Ministry,  
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts*  
Rev. Andrea Vicini, S.J., M.D., Ph.D.

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SYNOD ON THE FAMILY

## Francis Calls for Decentralization And ‘Conversion’ of the Papacy

**SYNODAL BLESSING.** Pope Francis begins an event marking the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops in Paul VI Hall at the Vatican on Oct. 17. The pope outlined his vision for a “listening church.”



In a keynote talk before the Synod of Bishops on the family, Pope Francis reminded the 270 synod fathers that “the synod journey culminates in listening to the Bishop of Rome, [who is] called to speak authoritatively as ‘Pastor and Teacher of all Christians.’” In other words, as many debated what form a final statement from the synod might take, he reminded them that the buck stops with him.

In his address to the synod on Oct. 17, Pope Francis emphasized the need to give new life to structures of synodality in the local churches worldwide. He confirmed his intention to promote greater “decentralization” in the church and to bring about “a conversion of the papacy.” Pope Francis began by recalling that ever since he became Bishop of Rome, “I wanted to give value to the synod, which constitutes one of the most precious inheritances of the last council gathering.”

“The way of synodality is the way that God wants for the church of the third millennium,” Francis declared. He explained that what Jesus is asking of the church today “is all contained in the word ‘synod,’ which means “walking together—laity, pastors, the Bishop of Rome.” This is an easy concept, but it’s one that’s difficult to put into practice, he admitted.

He recalled that the Second Vatican Council had reaffirmed that “the People of God is constituted by all the baptized” and that “the entire people cannot err in believing.” Then, in a statement that has far-reaching implications, Francis declared that “the sense of faith impedes the rigid separation between the Teaching Church and the Learning Church because the flock possesses its own ‘sense’ to discern the new roads that the Lord reveals to the church.” He revealed that it was this conviction that led him to hold the

consultations in churches worldwide before the 2014 and 2015 synods because it was not possible to speak about the family without talking to families.

“A synodal church is a listening church, [one that is] aware that listening is more than hearing. It’s a mutual listening in which each one has something to learn,” he said.

The pope’s talk was offered on the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the synod of bishops even as controversy persisted about the process followed at this particular synod. In an interview with *America* on Oct. 18, Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington flatly denied allegations by some of his fellow cardinals and bishops that the fathers attending the synod were “somehow” being manipulated by the pope and the synod structure that Francis approved.

“I wonder if some of these people who are speaking, sometimes surreptitiously, sometimes half-way implying, then backing off and then twisting around, I wonder if it is really that they find they just don’t like this pope,” he said. He suggested these charges may have already “tainted” the synod process in the public eye and so cast a cloud over its outcome.

“I thought the pope’s speech...focused exactly on where we need to be,” Cardinal Wuerl said. “The church ‘with and under Peter’ moves forward. There are always people who are unhappy with something that is going on in the church, but the touchstone of authentic Catholicism is adherence to the teaching of the pope.”

Cardinal Wuerl has a long experience of synods, having attended seven as a bishop and having served as general rapporteur at one. He insisted that he hasn’t seen even the slightest hint of manipulation at this synod. On the contrary, he says, the bishops have greater freedom

than ever before to speak their minds.

“Now there are some bishops whose position is that we shouldn’t be discussing any of this anyway,” he said. “They were the ones at the last synod that were giving interviews and denouncing and claiming there were intrigues and manipulation. That, I think, falls on them. I don’t see it with a foundation in reality.”

The cardinal said, “Pope Francis is calling for a church that, to my mind, is much more in contact with the Gospel, with the living out of the Gospel. Not just the articulation of the Gospel...but the personal living of it, and that seems to be what is the most attractive part of this pope, why so many people find him inviting, why so many people follow him, why so many people are coming back to the practice of the faith. And for reasons known only to them, there are some who find this somewhat threatening.”

**GERARD O’CONNELL**

## HOLY LAND

# Violence Continues Over Sacred Sites

**I**t has been painful to watch as violence has taken over Jerusalem once again, especially along the Via Dolorosa, where Jesus suffered in order to dissuade the use of violence, said Auxiliary Bishop William Shomali, Latin Patriarchate chancellor.

This violence goes against Jerusalem’s vocation as a holy city, which should be open to all people of faith, he said. “We are shocked at what is happening,” Bishop Shomali said in mid-October, after two weeks of unrest. “Violence does not help. We do not accept violence by any side.”

The fighting began following

**TENSIONS MOUNT.** Palestinian protesters clash with Israeli soldiers in Bethlehem, West Bank, on Oct. 6.



the late-September visit of Israeli Agricultural Minister Uri Ariel to one of the smallest contested spots on earth—a 36-acre compound known by Muslims as the Haram al-Sharif and by Jews as the Temple Mount. The Israeli minister’s visit stirred controversy after he used the opportunity to say a blessing for the Jewish new year.

Today the Al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock stand on the spot, which is the third-holiest site for Muslims, who believe their prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven on a white stallion from this spot. However, this site is also revered as the holiest site in Judaism, as the place where the two Jewish biblical temples stood. Here Jews believe Abraham was called upon by God to sacrifice his son Isaac; Muslims believe it was his son with Hagar, Ishmael, whom Ibrahim—as Abraham is known by Muslims—was asked to sacrifice. Christians also believe the site to be holy as the place where Mary and Joseph took the infant Jesus for the traditional Jewish ceremonial redemption of the firstborn and where Jesus returned numerous times to teach and preach.

A tenuous status quo agreement has been in place since 1967, when Israel gained control of the site from Jordan. The Islamic Waqf Authority, under the

Jordanian king, controls the area, while Israeli security forces have control over the entrances to the compound. Neither Christian nor Jewish prayer is allowed on the site, though members of both faiths are permitted to visit during visiting hours reserved for non-Muslims.

The new wave of violence is taking place in the wake of rumors that Israel plans to change the established status quo and take over the compound—a charge the Israeli government denies. The tensions have been fueled by continuing visits of ultra-religious Jews who attempt to pray at the site.

Holy Cross Father Russ McDougall, rector of Tantur Ecumenical Institute, noted that, unlike Christian theology, both Judaism and Islam share the concept of having sovereignty over a holy place. Still, he added, though the spark that ignited this round of violence was the conflict over the holy site, it is also the result of pent-up Palestinian frustration at both Israeli policies and Palestinian corruption.

“In a perfect world it would be wonderful if Jews, Christians and Muslims were to pray alongside one another,” said Father McDougall, quoting the book of Isaiah, in which God says his house will become a house of prayer for all people. “Unfortunately, we are not quite ready for that. It is a very fraught

issue, while the vision is beautiful.”

“The Temple Mount has come to symbolize a national focal point in which the fate of the whole Jewish sovereignty of the Land of Israel is to be decided,” said Tomer Persico, a research fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute. A parallel process has occurred for Muslims over the past 20 years, he said, and the compound has become first and foremost a symbol of nationalism, with the Al-Aqsa mosque coming to define Palestinian identity as Arabs.

## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

# Reports Track Plight of World’s Christians

**T**he escalation of violence in the name of religion perpetrated by non-state actors is one of the major trends explored in the State Department’s International Religious Freedom Report for 2014.

During a press briefing after the report’s release on Oct. 14, Secretary of State John Kerry said these non-state actors “are now the principal persecutors and preventers of religious tolerance and practice.” “Most prominent, and most harmful, obviously, has been the rise of international terrorist groups such as Daesh, al-Qaida, al-Shabaab, Boko Haram,” said Kerry. “And all have been guilty of vicious acts of unprovoked violence.” Kerry used *daesh*, a term with derogatory undertones, to refer to Islamic State militants (otherwise known as ISIS or ISIL).

“Under their control,” Kerry said, “captives have been given a choice between conversion or slavery or death. Children have been among the victims, and also among those forced to witness or participate in executions—some-

times even of their own family members. Entire populations of religious minority groups have been targeted for killing. Terrified young girls have been separated out by religion and sold into slavery.

“The repugnance of these acts,” he said, “is only multiplied when the perpetrators seek to justify themselves by pointing a finger at God and claiming somehow that God licensed these acts. We are, and we will continue, to oppose these groups with far more than words of condemnation that are contained in this report.”

The report singled out non-state actors like Boko Haram and Daesh for the specific incidents of brutality they have become notorious for, but the ineffective response of state offices to respond effectively to such groups was also deplored. According to the report, “In the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and throughout Asia, a range of non-state actors including terrorist organizations, have set their sights on destroying religious diversity. ... In these regions, religious intolerance and hostility, often combined with political, economic and ethnic grievances, frequently led to violence. Governments stood by, either unwilling or unable to

act in response to the resulting death, injuries and displacement.”

As if to confirm the State Department’s grim assessment, a disheartening report on the state of Christians worldwide was released the same week in London by Catholic relief and development agency Aid to the Church in Need. A.C.N. warned that as persecution and conflict continue to threaten and dislocate Christian communities, the Christian presence throughout the Middle East may be brought to an unwilling end within 10 years—even sooner in particularly troubled states such as Iraq. The analysis, “Persecuted and Forgotten? A report on Christians oppressed for their Faith 2013-2015,” assessed the deepening plight of Christians in 22 countries.

A.C.N. reports that the contraction and displacement of Christian populations has been driven by the well-founded fear of genocide after a number of well-publicized and brutal attacks conducted by Islamic State militants and other extremists groups like Africa’s notorious Boko Haram. “Persecution has emerged as a key factor in a global upsurge of forcibly displaced people,” the report notes.



**REFUGE.** A Christian mother and child on Oct. 15 at a camp for displaced people at a Catholic school in Manduamas, Indonesia. More than 4,000 Aceh residents fled to North Sumatra following attacks by Islamic groups and the burning of two churches.

According to the report, the vast exodus of Christians from Syria, Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East “highlights the very real possibility that Christianity could soon all but disappear from much of its ancient homeland.” A.C.N. researchers found that Christians in Iraq now number as few as 275,000. They add, “Many, if not most, of those who remain want to leave Iraq.”

Iraq’s Christian diminishment is being replicated, according to the report, in Syria, parts of Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa.

A.C.N. warns, “If the situation does not improve, Christianity is on course for extinction in many of its biblical heartlands within a generation, if not before.”

The State Department’s religious freedom report also raised concerns over a surge of anti-Semitism in Europe last year and noted “continued deficiencies in the respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom” in Burma.

A backlash against Christians in China and the continued abuses of blasphemy and apostasy laws in countries like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Sudan were also critically reviewed in the report.

## Refugees in Winter

Greece is bracing for thousands more Syrians and other people to land on Lesbos and other key island crossings from Turkey, as those fleeing conflict remain undeterred by the worsening weather and colder autumn temperatures. “The waves were rolling fiercely with the salt water nearly choking us,” said Syrian Um Tariq. “We thought we were going to die.” The trip, meant to be a half-hour long, took three hours in a tightly packed dinghy. Women cried out in panic and men shouted, desperately holding onto their babies and young children, appealing for assistance from

## NEWS BRIEFS

Pope Francis joined Archbishop Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner and Adolfo Nicolas, S.J., superior general of the Society of Jesus, in a visit to a **new homeless shelter** for men in Rome on Oct. 15. + In 2014, a recent high of **1,400 cases of blasphemy** were registered in Pakistan, while its courts sentenced three people to death and six to life imprisonment for blasphemy. + Until an investigation into how the state twice received the wrong drugs for the lethal cocktail used in Oklahoma’s executions is complete, Attorney General Scott Pruitt announced on Oct. 16 that his office **would not request execution dates** for prisoners on death row. + The Constitution’s right to bear arms has been “perverted” by a **gun industry seeking profits at any cost**, Archbishop Blase Cupich of Chicago wrote in an op-ed published on Oct 9, arguing that the nation’s founding fathers could not have anticipated the widespread availability of “military-grade assault weapons that have turned our streets into battlefields.” + With 30,000 people gathered in St. Peter’s Square on Oct. 14, Pope Francis interrupted his catechesis to ask “in the name of the church...**your forgiveness for the scandals** which have occurred recently both in Rome and at the Vatican.”



the volunteers gathered on shore to help them land. Some 169 people reportedly drowned crossing the Aegean Sea in September; 44 of them were children. In one week in early October, 7,000 people a day came ashore in Greece, said the International Organization for Migration. After Syrians, Afghans are the chief nationality among the nearly half-million people who have landed on Greek shores from Turkey this year, marking a tenfold increase from 2014.

## Planned Parenthood Ends Fetal Tissue Sales

The president of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America said on Oct. 13 that the organization’s clinics will no longer accept reimbursement for fetal tissue procured in abortions and provided to researchers. Cecile Richards

said the decision was made “to completely debunk” a series of 11 videos released in recent weeks by the Center for Medical Progress showing physicians and others associated with Planned Parenthood describing the harvesting of fetal tissue and body parts during abortions at their clinics. The resulting controversy has prompted investigations by state and federal officials. Planned Parenthood receives more than \$500 million of its \$1.3 billion annual budget from federal and state programs. “While Richards extols the wonderfulness of the nation’s largest abortion provider, it begs the question raised in House committee hearings: Why shouldn’t federal family planning money go to federally qualified health centers which don’t perform abortions?” said Dave Andrusko, editor of National Right to Life News.

From CNS, RNS and other sources.

## Courting Disaster?

The decision of the ruling African National Congress to withdraw South Africa from membership of the International Criminal Court has drawn fierce criticism from many within the country—from opposition parties in Parliament, from civil society groups and from the human rights community. This is a sequel to a political standoff that occurred in June this year, when the government allowed Sudan's president, Omar Al-Bashir (wanted by the I.C.C. for human rights violations and crimes against humanity), to attend an African Union meeting in the country—and then slip out of the country even after a South African court ruled that he should be arrested.

The rationale for defenders of the Bashir action was summed up as a mixture of pan-Africanist solidarity and skepticism about the I.C.C. itself. The former is an assertion—filled with anti-colonial rhetoric—that the I.C.C. seems to inordinately target African state leaders, almost never Western war criminals. The latter raises the perhaps more subtle and arguable claim that since many powerful countries like the United States, Russia and China are not signatories to the I.C.C. agreement, the court itself is of questionable global effectiveness.

Significantly, neither of these issues seems to be considered by South African critics of the A.N.C.'s decision. Their concerns are rooted in pressing domestic issues, most notably how the ruling party sees South Africa's own

rule of law.

For these critics Bashir's unmolested departure from South Africa represents yet another case where the ruling party flouts the rule of law that it, as the governing party, is supposed to uphold. The A.N.C. has done this on a number of occasions. It has refused to comply with instructions from the Office of Public Protector regarding state funding for improvements to President Jacob

Two decades into a post-apartheid democracy the law would simply be ignored.

Zuma's private residence. More recently the government did not instruct the state-administered South African Broadcasting Corporation to suspend its director Hlaudi Motsoaneng, pending investigation into alleged corruption and deceit regarding his appointment. (Mr. Motsoaneng is a party loyalist who enjoys the favor of Mr. Zuma.)

On another level, critics observe that this latest incident is a mirror of how the A.N.C. regards human rights and the Constitution—that is, selectively, according to what suits the party's needs. They see it as a disturbing example of how sectoral political interests are undermining the long-struggled-for culture of human rights and due process that was the hallmark of the new democratic state inaugurated in 1994 and bolstered by a Constitution and bill of rights that was acclaimed as one of the best in the world, a touchstone for democracy.

When it was created, South Africa's

Constitution was intended to prevent the subversion of law and the violation of human rights that had been part of the old regime. Many who wrote it had been lawyers under apartheid who had used an imperfect legal system to carve out spaces of freedom to challenge the old state. The use of courts to challenge imprisonment without trial or faulty state declarations of martial law served as temporary "holding actions against unlimited state power." But the state would change laws to suit its interests.

Seeing that the past problem was too much power in the hands of the executive and legislature, the drafters of the South African Constitution made it the supreme authority, with laws and procedures subject to judicial review and changeable only by parliamentary majorities. No one imagined that two decades into a post-apartheid democracy the law would simply be ignored.

At this time, the A.N.C.'s decision to withdraw from the I.C.C. has no legal status. It is a resolution of a party conference, an expression of a policy that the A.N.C. hopes to make law. One possibility is that the A.N.C. leadership may be persuaded to back away from the resolution for political reasons. Any withdrawal from the I.C.C. might, considering the circumstances that gave rise to it, look like South Africa endorsing rogue regimes and dictators.

If the policy is pursued, it will have to go before a Parliament in which the A.N.C. holds a majority. Even if it passes there, it could in theory be challenged in the Constitutional Court. One may see in this an echo of the "holding action" against state power that marked human rights legal activism in the apartheid era.

Whatever the case, critics of the A.N.C. are right to be worried about this latest move.

**ANTHONY EGAN**

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



# Crossing Boundaries

Three years after Paul Ryan and Joseph R. Biden debated as vice presidential candidates, Washington is anxiously waiting for them to make anguishing choices about their futures—whether Mr. Ryan will answer his fractured party’s pleas to serve as speaker and whether Mr. Biden has the emotional strength and single-mindedness to run for president.

This political limbo comes after Pope Francis’ address to Congress and after John Boehner was brought to tears by his own success in bringing a pope to visit Congress and broke out into song as he announced his resignation as speaker. The shocks continued as Kevin McCarthy, the presumed speaker-to-be, withdrew as voting was to begin, leading to the appeals to Mr. Ryan.

This disarray is not isolated. There are endless charges and excuses around Hillary Clinton’s emails. Some Republicans seek to paralyze government and demonize immigrants. We are fighting a war against ISIS without Congressional authorization or success. We repeat political rituals after multiple slayings in public places. We see a libertarian orthodoxy of the right and left, enforced by the Koch brothers or EMILY’s List, idolizing the market or individual choice.

Ms. Clinton’s inevitability is undermined by questions about trust and the surprising strength of Bernie Sanders, who is not a Democrat but a socialist. Donald Trump and Ben Carson lead the Republican race as

they say things about immigrants and Muslims that would disqualify ordinary candidates.

In these extraordinary times, bishops and other Catholic leaders should follow the example of Pope Francis in public life. Francis demonstrates how to share Catholic moral principles and priorities in ways that invite and persuade rather than alienate and push people away. Humility helps. Civility doesn’t hurt. It is better to humanize issues than politicize them. Francis appealed to our best traditions and values instead of pointing to our failures and condemning our sins. He reaches out to the sick and vulnerable, not big contributors and ideological leaders. He seeks to reach the unconverted, not just true believers.

In “The Joy of the Gospel,” Pope Francis quotes the U.S. bishops: “Responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation.” Pope Francis shows us several ways to practice the “faithful citizenship” the church preaches. He is:

*Principled but not ideological.* Pope Francis does not like ideologies of left or right, in the church or in public life. He avoids culture-war rhetoric but offers a principled call for a new culture that protects human life and dignity, family and creation. He warned Congress against “the simplistic reductionism which sees only good or evil; the righteous and sinners.” We need to “confront every form of polarization.... Our response must instead be one of hope and healing, of peace and justice.”

*Political but not partisan.* Francis told Congress, “Politics is...an expression of our compelling need to live as one, in order to build as one the greatest common good: that of a community which sacrifices particular interests in order to share, in justice and peace, its goods, its interests....”

*Civil but not soft.* Francis’ message was strong but not strident, challenging us on human life and care for creation, on supporting family and ending the arms race. He told the U.S. bishops: “Harsh and divisive language does not befit the tongue of a pastor.... Although it may momentarily seem to win the day, only the enduring allure of goodness and love remains truly convincing.”

*Engaged but not used.* Francis stood with a smiling President Obama at the White House and with a proud and tearful Speaker Boehner at the Capitol, but he advanced the church’s principles, not their agendas. President Obama said the pope asks “everybody all across the political spectrum what more you can do to be kind, and to be helpful, and to love, and to sacrifice, and to serve.... I think he is speaking to all of our consciences.”

In the midst of partisan disarray, ecclesiastical divisions and skepticism about religion in politics, Pope Francis offers a powerful example of the “culture of encounter” and the “path of fearless dialogue” that strengthen the church, enrich public life and advance the common good.

Civility  
doesn’t hurt.  
It is better  
to humanize  
issues than  
politicize  
them.

JOHN CARR

JOHN CARR is director of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

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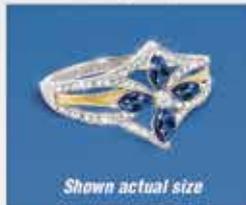
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# Keep It Civil

## A pro-life approach to public discourse

BY BRYAN VINCENT

**A**s a political notion, democracy seems to be very popular; the work of democracy, perhaps not so much. Full and morally responsible citizenship in modern American democracy demands a great deal. Active citizenship requires us, for example, to be prepared to discuss social problems with each other and participate in discerning whether or not the solutions to these problems require government action and, if so, what that action should be.

This is a tall order, as the policy questions we face today as citizens are numerous and complex. Maybe it is more of a burden than many can be expected to bear, so it should not come as a surprise that engagement in community affairs is in decline. Or perhaps it is not the work that turns so many people away from full, active and morally responsible citizenship. It could be the general unpleasantness of political discourse in U.S. culture that is the deterrent.

For Catholics who wish to be engaged, citizenship can be a somewhat lighter burden. The pro-life teaching of the church provides a moral compass that guides our analysis of many of the difficult questions U.S. society faces. It would be difficult to overstate the value of this gift. Even when Catholics disagree, we share in the great benefit of having a common Catholic vocabulary and shared goals to evaluate the issues we struggle with.

But, as we have all experienced, this moral compass does not point all Catholics to the same policy conclusions. One reason we end up in different places, even if we start from the same beliefs, is that the ideological divisions over our nation's social policy do not fall neatly into life-affirming and life-denying camps. Americans tend to embrace a belief in free and equal individuals but disagree on whether freedom or equality is more important and therefore on what role the government should play in the lives of individuals.

A Catholic pro-life perspective values both freedom and equality to the degree that each recognizes and nurtures life, but when freedom allows one person or group to enslave or oppress others, or when equality justifies denial of the development and expression of the individual's God-given special talents and gifts, these values have lost their life-affirming qualities.

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**BRYAN VINCENT** lives in Baton Rouge, La., where he is a member of St. Joseph Cathedral Parish and is in formation as an associate of the Congregation of St. Joseph.

Catholics also tend to place more emphasis on community than on individualism, which may isolate us from the American norm. Consequently, in the world of actual policy debate, the pro-life moral compass does not guide us clearly to one or the other side of the American conversation.

So there is still much for us to discuss. But it is here in the discussion, in our civic discourse, that it seems that we so often fail to follow the guidance of the pro-life moral compass, adopting the tone and rhetoric of our American political culture. Letting our Catholic values guide our civic discourse instead could have numerous benefits, not only for U.S. Catholics but for American democracy as a whole.

### Looking for a Win-Win

Generally speaking, American politics is practiced as a zero-sum game; there can be winners only if there are also losers. As a result, discourse is typically motivated by the desire to defeat those who hold a contrary position. The goal of both candidate and issue campaigns is victory, which requires building majorities in order to win elections or votes in legislative bodies. The political rhetoric that results can be hysterical; insults can be brutal; anger can be palpable. There seems to be very little concern with the damage being done to civic life. Presumably, this is not the life-affirming discourse that pro-life Catholics would like to see, but most of us have come to accept this as normal.

In our political culture, civic discourse, motivated by a desire to win, involves four closely related and mutually supportive tactics aimed at building a majority.

*Simplify.* Focusing on the complexity of an issue by presenting careful analysis of the problem and the reasons why one particular solution is preferable to others is not a path to success in American politics; it demands too much of a potential supporter's time and energy. On the other hand, reducing the presentation of the same issue to powerful, symbolic buzzwords and pithy phrases lowers the amount of time and energy that must be invested by a potential supporter of an issue or candidate. This approach is much more effective in attracting followers.

*Bifurcate.* Presenting a social policy issue as if there were only two possible predetermined sides also facilitates "followership." This tactic seems to grow out of the fact that de-



**CITIZENS UNITED.** The audience at the Reagan Presidential Library applauds during the second official Republican debate of the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign in Simi Valley, Calif., on Sept. 16.

mocracy ultimately requires us to vote, and voting usually means choosing between two available options. When a vast array of theoretically possible policy options on a difficult issue is neatly trimmed to two diametrically opposed sides before we even start discussing the issue, we tend not to ask more questions but simply pick a side.

*Exaggerate.* Hyperbole is another effective tactic to recruit followers and build a winning majority. Efforts to recruit supporters are generally aimed at persons who do not yet have an opinion on the party, candidate or issue rather than at those who hold a contrary position. It is therefore useful to present the party, candidate or issue in a way that creates an impression that not having an opinion is not an option—that too much is at stake for a citizen to ignore the question. The common approach to achieving this goal is escalating the rhetoric and overstating the threat of inaction or of supporting the wrong side. The American way of life, we are constantly told, is teetering on the edge of collapse.

*Vilify.* Political operatives often seek to portray the diabolical character of the opponent or opposing view. This is often achieved through direct and personal attack, either on

the opposition generally, “extreme liberals” or “radical conservatives,” or on a proxy for the others, a president or Supreme Court justice, for example. Following this technique, even the most mind-numbingly intricate policy question—how to provide health care for the poor, for example—can be reduced to the most primitive of narrative forms: good versus evil.

### **Zero-Sum Losses**

From these elemental pieces, American civic discourse assumes its character. Our discourse involves plenty of so-called “debate” in which no one is listening. The parties and interest groups attempt to cajole citizens to join their side rather than provide arguments about why they should do so. Instead of policy discussion, we see competing public relations campaigns focused on branding and counterbranding, advertising campaigns playing off raw emotion and catchy slogans.

But what is lost on this path to defeating the opposition? Real understanding of the issues is sacrificed by simplification. In truth, few contemporary policy questions are simple.

PHOTO: REUTERS/LUCY NICHOLSON

We abdicate the responsibilities of citizenship when we accept the reductionist rhetoric of the marketing professionals. Meaningful involvement with our democratic form of government requires, at the very least, an effort to understand the sources of a problem and the implications of various proposed responses to it. As meaningful involvement declines, we become ever more dependent on the framers of the “debate,” those who deliver it all to us in bite-sized morsels.

Bifurcation closes the door on policy options at the beginning of the debate so that numerous possibilities are never considered. If we presume that there can be only two positions on an issue, only two answers to any question, a great deal of creativity is precluded. Also lost is the possibility of seeking win-win solutions; by definition such outcomes are impossible when our civic discourse is founded on the principle there must be only winners and losers.

Hyperbole undermines a sense of context and our ability to discuss priorities. When every issue is a pressing crisis requiring immediate action, we lose the awareness that governance is primarily concerned with allocating limited resources. Actual governing requires seeing needs in the context of other needs and establishing priorities. The consequences of an inability to prioritize are an incapacitated government and a growing sense of panic about what government is failing to do. Citizens feel simply lost and angry and have the impression that governance is beyond their comprehension. This undermines even a basic desire for engaged citizenship.

Vilification destroys community. There is no broader “us” that we are concerned about if we view our communities as being populated by two types of people, the good guys and the bad guys. Furthermore, the space for compromise is closed off when any compromise is viewed as a deal with the devil. Where would our nation be if our founders had held this view? There never would have been a nation.

In summary, the zero-sum, competing-public-relations-campaigns approach to civic discourse does not serve democracy well. It diminishes citizen participation in meaningful civic discourse. Citizens are expected to pick a side and repeat what they are told. The beneficiaries of this system are the institutional entities that run the campaigns. Simplification, vilification, etc., are a perfect recipe for the fundraising and self-perpetuation of these institutions. Human citizens, on the other hand, are left with an impression of violence and chaos, of dysfunction and disarray and of the rapid decline of society. What is ultimately lost is any

sense of what full, active and morally responsible citizenship looks like.

This mode of discourse is antithetical to pro-life principles. By cultivating hatred and hopelessness, it diminishes the role of human citizens and discourages them from accepting their obligations to their communities. It is important, therefore, that American Catholics look for life-affirming ways to discuss issues with each other and with non-Catholic citizens.

## The pro-life teaching of the church provides a moral compass that guides our analysis of many of the difficult questions U.S. society faces.

### A Pro-life Discourse

Though there is not a single path to adopting the practice of a pro-life discourse or a simple list of basic tactics to facilitate it, I believe some of its themes will be:

*Moral clarity does not make an issue simple.* Though the Catholic pro-life

positions on the legality of abortion and the use of the death penalty are quite clear, these issues are not easy as social policy questions. Only by turning a cold heart to a great deal of suffering and a blind eye to some rather thorny constitutional issues is it possible to see these issues as “simple.” Awareness of human, legal and other complicating factors would have a dramatic impact on the tone of our civic discourse.

Because no issue is simple, investment of time and energy is necessary. Gathering information, listening to and understanding other perspectives, reflection and creativity are all essential to healthy civic discourse. If we wish to nurture respectful civic discourse, we cannot simply accept someone else’s hyperbolic rhetoric or succumb to other advertising gimmicks. We also must recognize that a preoccupation with private concerns that pre-empts consideration of public concerns undermines the best of pro-life intentions.

*We should not reject the humanity of any person in favor of an ideology or a short-term political end.* Pope Francis calls us to authentic human interactions rather than ideology in his apostolic exhortation “The Joy of the Gospel” (see especially Nos. 199, 213 and 243).

*Most real-world policies require us to choose between two goods rather than between good and evil.* Fundamentally sound values and reasoning are at the core of most policy positions finding voice in the American polis today: lower taxes are certainly a good thing, but so are better government services; smaller government has much to recommend it, but so does a government that meets its obligation to protect public health and safety. Freedom and equality are both valuable social objectives. The host of policy positions that grow out of these principles can never be simply dismissed

by one group as manifestations of the corruption of the other group. This is not to say that any and all policy positions are valid or valuable, but in a conversation with a fellow citizen with whom we disagree, righteous dismissal of his or her policy position should be a last resort rather than a first move.

A change in governmental policy is usually only one aspect of the process of achieving pro-life social change. Changing hearts and minds is also critical to most of the social issues that we as Catholics care about. Defending and advancing civil rights for African-Americans is an example of a policy that would be generally supported by pro-life American Catholics. But legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 does not in and of itself establish those rights.

As history shows us, that act was the result of substantial social change that made passage of the legislation possible, and we continue to strive to achieve the ultimate goal of full citizenship. The passage or repeal of one law or a decision in a single Supreme Court case does not suddenly resolve the problem at hand. Pro-life civic discourse must focus on building the social bonds that make broader societal change possible even when a change of law is a desirable piece of the broader change.

Policy compromise is a pro-life concept. In fact, compromise should come naturally to those who recognize the human dignity of their fellow citizens. Only through active engage-

ment with our fellow citizens can we achieve the incremental changes that move governmental policy and social values in a pro-life direction. And only through such active engagement do we establish a foundation on which to work for further change in the future. In a pluralistic, democratic society, a compromise on policy does not require, or even indicate, a compromise of values.

Ultimately, we will discover that pro-life and zero-sum discourse do not work well together. To bring about the social changes we would like to see in a life-affirming manner will mean educating or being educated by others rather than defeating others. We must be aware, however, that zero-sum culture is a powerful force in our nation, and American Catholics are not immune to its influence.

Adopting a pro-life approach to our conversations with fellow citizens could have many benefits. It could make American democracy stronger by increasing the role of human citizens over that of institutional citizens. It could be practically beneficial in achieving the social objectives of pro-life Catholics by establishing stronger social bonds.

Theoretically, one would expect it to be difficult to argue for a pro-life issue position while exhibiting a life-denying attitude about a neighbor and using life-denying rhetoric. A pro-life approach to discourse would also bring our practice more in line with our professed beliefs. Practicing pro-life civic discourse could be a win-win for everyone. ▲

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# Strategic Opportunities

## Six chances to strengthen the church

BY DENNIS H. HOLTSCHNEIDER

**T**his November, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops will set forth a new strategic plan. The notion of a unified national bishops' conference addressing major issues is complicated, of course, because bishops remain independent actors in their own dioceses. Still, all organizations can be strengthened if they set clear goals and aggressively implement them. If the conference were to adopt some collective, achievable and useful strategic goals, what might those include? It is a thought experiment, to be sure, but here is a first attempt.

*Develop 21st-century religious education tools.* Ask any Catholic college president: our Catholic students arrive unable to list the seven sacraments. The students are reasonably confident that their Catholicism requires them to live a good life, perform public service, be charitable when asked and attend Sunday Mass with at least some regularity. They like the pope. But basic doctrine? Church organization? Our history? Nope. Methods of prayer? Catholic social teaching? Varieties of religious expression, from monasticism to charismatic? No again.

The truth is, our present methods of providing religious education fall short, and everyone knows it. We could, if we decided, develop powerful educational tools to enrich students' knowledge and learning about their faith. Parishes could use those tools. Parents could homeschool with those tools. Catholics—from pre-school-age children to adults—would seek them out because they could be engaging and conveniently available in formats they desire and use.

Catholic publishers have made starts on this front, but every other sector of education seems to have more advanced online tools. If seed-funded by Catholic foundations and coordinated with Catholic publishers, the church in the United States could create something truly educational, sophisticated and even self-funding. If the bishops' conference pulled everyone to the table, it could be a game changer.

*Improve preaching.* A study of former Catholic parishioners in Trenton, N.J., published in *America* ("Why They Left," 4/30/12), identified poor preaching as the single most com-

mon complaint of Catholics who stopped attending church. And yet the solution is a relatively easy fix. The bishops should require eight semesters of preaching training—one each semester in the four-year seminary curriculum. That is what was required in my seminary. We were required to speak without notes from the first day and to view video recordings of ourselves with faculty feedback after every attempt. Eight semesters of feedback will raise the quality of preaching.

But then there is the matter of vacuous preaching. One does not always expect hard-earned wisdom from the newly ordained, but over time it is fair to expect real spiritual wisdom from one's priest: insightful, soul-searing knowledge that recognizes the struggles within, gives language to them and shows one the growth opportunity that may be available in a faith context. One could hope that develops with experience, but that is not always the case. Years ago, feedback came mostly from the older pastor with whom young priests lived and worked. Young priests do not live with older pastors for very long anymore, though, and the feedback loop needs a new model. The conference could help provide some basic structure for ongoing feedback on preaching.

*Strengthen ministry.* While the bishops' conference debates the future of ministry and how to provide sufficient numbers of ordained clergy, it would do well to improve the working conditions of the ministers already active.

This generation of diocesan priests loves their work, but they are feeling stretched. Salaries are low; retirements are challenging. Parish priests increasingly live alone and travel to multiple communities. They are worried that they have no recourse if an unfounded accusation is made in their direction. Non-native clergy and permanent deacons have admirably stepped forward to fill the church's ministry needs. More than a few within those groups could benefit from well-designed programs to support them once they have been placed into ministry.

Lay pastoral ministry needs equal attention. Health care chaplains are generally paid a living wage, but campus ministers and high school chaplains less reliably so, and parish lay ministers, less still. All would benefit from some sort of educational loan program, which could be underwritten in connection with their work as chaplains in the years following their training. All would benefit from heightened status

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DENNIS H. HOLTSCHNEIDER, C.M., *president of DePaul University and chair of Ascension Health, lectures on strategy at the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Management Development Program.*

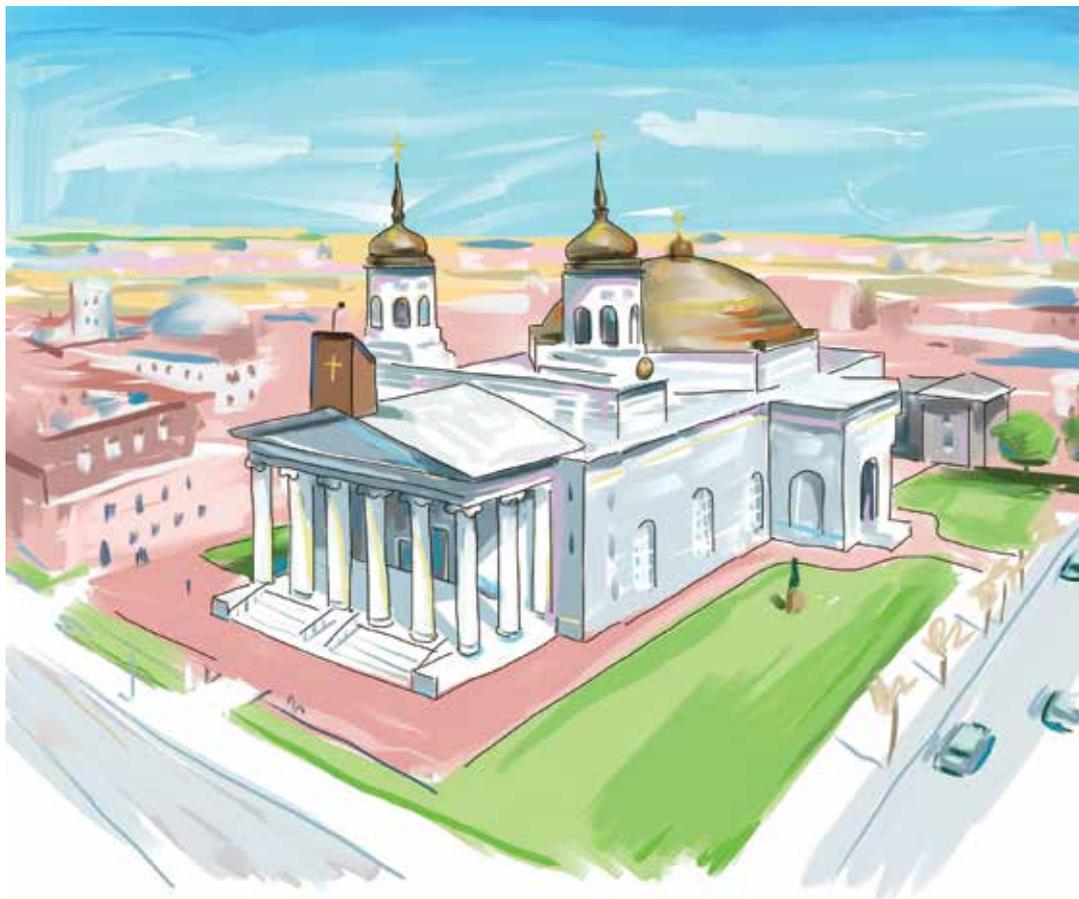
and attention, since they are now responsible for a great deal of the basic spiritual accompaniment the church provides.

**Make Catholics proud.** U.S. Catholics are proud of Pope Francis, but how about their U.S. church? Do they know that one out of six Americans get their health care from a Catholic institution, or that more than one out of five Americans living in poverty are served by Catholic Charities? Do they know Catholic schools are the largest provider of private K-to-12 education in the country, with almost two million students, and the largest provider of private higher education, enrolling nearly one million students? Or that the national Catholic school graduation rate is 99.4 percent of high school students? And that of these graduates, 84.9 percent go on to college, compared with 39.5 percent of public school graduates?

Do they know that the Catholic Church is the largest resettler of refugees in the country? That U.S.-based Catholic Relief Services serves nearly 100 million people in need in 93 countries? That the Society of St. Vincent de Paul serves over 14 million people in need in the United States each year?

The Catholic Church is the most important nongovernmental source of social good in the nation, and almost no one knows it. Honestly, the bishops' conference need not do a thing but begin a more effective public relations campaign. It is time to show ourselves to ourselves—and to the nation—and build some pride.

Attention must be paid, of course, to those matters that embarrass churchgoers. At the moment, that includes a perceived lingering resistance when it comes to protecting children. We all understand that a bishops' conference cannot compel a local bishop to rigorously implement the revised *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, but a conference can chide, pressure, refuse to appoint a bishop to any committees and withhold other benefits of participation in the conference if one of their own refuses to comply. It is time for the conference to step up and use whatever collective powers it has at its disposal to compel nonconforming bishops to step in line on this. Like it or not, when it comes to child protection protocols, 98



percent compliance should be considered a scandal, not an accomplishment.

**Adopt good business practices.** The financial reserves parishes once assembled for a rainy day have been whittled away in recent years, as parishes spend more than they generate to make up for thinning collections. Dioceses are finding themselves supporting ever more parishes but unable to continue this support because their own finances are stretched. Some dioceses are stopping the pretense of calling financial help for parishes “loans,” since few expect the parishes ever to pay them back. Worse, the occasional media stories of parish collections being misspent and unaccounted for are said to be more common in practice than is realized.

To respond, most dioceses send new pastors to training in business affairs, but these programs are uneven and often cursory. The National Leadership Roundtable for Church Management has a set of standards that is a simple and powerful way to make sure a parish's financial and management practices are strong. The bishops' conference could do a great deal of long-term good—and avoid a great deal of future scandal—simply by creating an agreement among themselves to implement these standards in every parish in the United States.

It is time, too, to create strong, centralized diocesan systems of Catholic schooling (or perhaps even a national one), so that costs can be lowered through group purchasing, so that best practices can be implemented broadly and quickly and so that the larger system can “carry” schools in the poorer areas. These small local operations simply cannot survive on their own.

*Fund theological education.* This might sound surprising, but in fact, it is getting harder to find young theologians as well trained as those just a generation ago. When priests and religious were studying theology at the doctoral level, their tuition was fully underwritten by their religious order or diocese. This permitted them the luxury of a broad core curriculum of Scripture, philosophical groundings, church history, sacramental theology and spiritual practice. This gave context and meaning to everything they studied and showed how that doctrine shaped and gave rise to people’s spiritual lives and practices. These fortunate students specialized in a particular matter for their dissertations but only after a full and broad introduction to theology in its entirety.

That broad education mattered for many reasons, and not only because those theologians were called on to teach broad survey courses to university students. Theologians serve as experts for the entire enterprise. They are the content experts for the history of our religious knowledge, bringing it to bear on the questions we raise as a people. They teach those who will be ministers how to bring the best thinking of the church to bear in ministry. They teach the chaplains and catechists. They write the books that everyone turns to when they realize their religious answers are no longer sufficient for the complexities of adulthood. They are critical to the church’s life.

Today, when universities go looking to hire theologians, they find many lay specialists whose education was not underwritten by the church and who may have needed to get through their programs as quickly as possible to pay their expenses and meet family needs. People in such situations are good people and may well be good theologians, but they also may have been forced to approach their discipline narrowly as intellectual history or the sociological study of religion. These are valuable, but they do not fully serve the purposes for which the church desperately needs them.

That could change if the national bishops’ conference creates a funding plan for the next generation of lay theologians. If nothing is done, this invisible development will

continue, to devastating effect for the American church.

*Rebuild political capital.* Pope Francis has done the bishops a favor when it comes to the media and the church’s political influence. Just two years ago, the typical media story was a version of “the church at war with itself.” Balanced or not, fair or not, the press repeated it ad nauseam.

With Francis’ election, the nation has found someone who inspires them. The U.S. church, especially its leadership, has a rare opportunity to restore some of its political capital by echoing Francis’ message and rebalancing some of its political energies toward the issues the pope speaks about, like immigration reform and environmental stewardship. To be

effective, though, the tone must change. Experts will doubtlessly advise the use of warmth and humility, combined with the skilled use of personal example, as demonstrated so effectively by the pope.

## If the bishops want it, they have a rare opportunity to restore some of their political capital by echoing Francis’ message.

*Restructure the U.S.C.C.B.*

Unfortunately, the conference’s committee system prevents the organization from accomplishing ambitious collective goals. Committees set an agenda and staffers are expected to make progress on those items between meetings. But committees meet only twice a year and have a life cycle of three years before they receive new chairs and set fresh agendas. That makes a total of six meetings in all.

The conference’s history has countless examples of projects that were set aside, pocket-vetoed or simply lost track of because the committee structure stifles the setting and accomplishing of ambitious goals. The situation grew worse four years ago when a cost-saving restructuring simply combined committees but added no additional meetings.

It is time to bring in a proper management consulting firm and reorganize. Bishops should play strong oversight roles similar to corporate trustees, and expert staff should be recruited specifically for the goals to be accomplished. Many standing committees should be set aside and project-based task forces should be substituted. A strong executive committee of bishops as well as the individual task force chairs could receive regular updates on the major projects, give feedback and enable the projects to move faster.

Several of these larger ideas require funding, but my experience is that the easiest money to raise is for ambitious and important ideas. In the end, the point is a simple one. A few ambitious strategies and a bit of restructuring could make the bishops, and the church in the United States, more efficient and effective. **A**

# Holy Ones, Loved Ones

The journey from All Saints to All Souls

BY LEONARD J. DELORENZO

I had just seen my grandfather a few weeks before his death. He was in the hospital; and in accordance with the directives of his living will, the feeding tubes had been removed. He was unable to speak and mostly unable to move, but it was clear he knew when my brother and I walked into the room. I was the last one to leave his hospital room that night, staying behind to say goodbye and to whisper a prayer over him, tracing the sign of the cross on his forehead. It was the first time I had ever prayed with Louis DeLorenzo.

I had looked upon death with my grandfather once before, five years earlier. On a characteristically warm and wet Florida afternoon, I stood with my arm around my uncharacteristically vulnerable grandfather. The proudest and most

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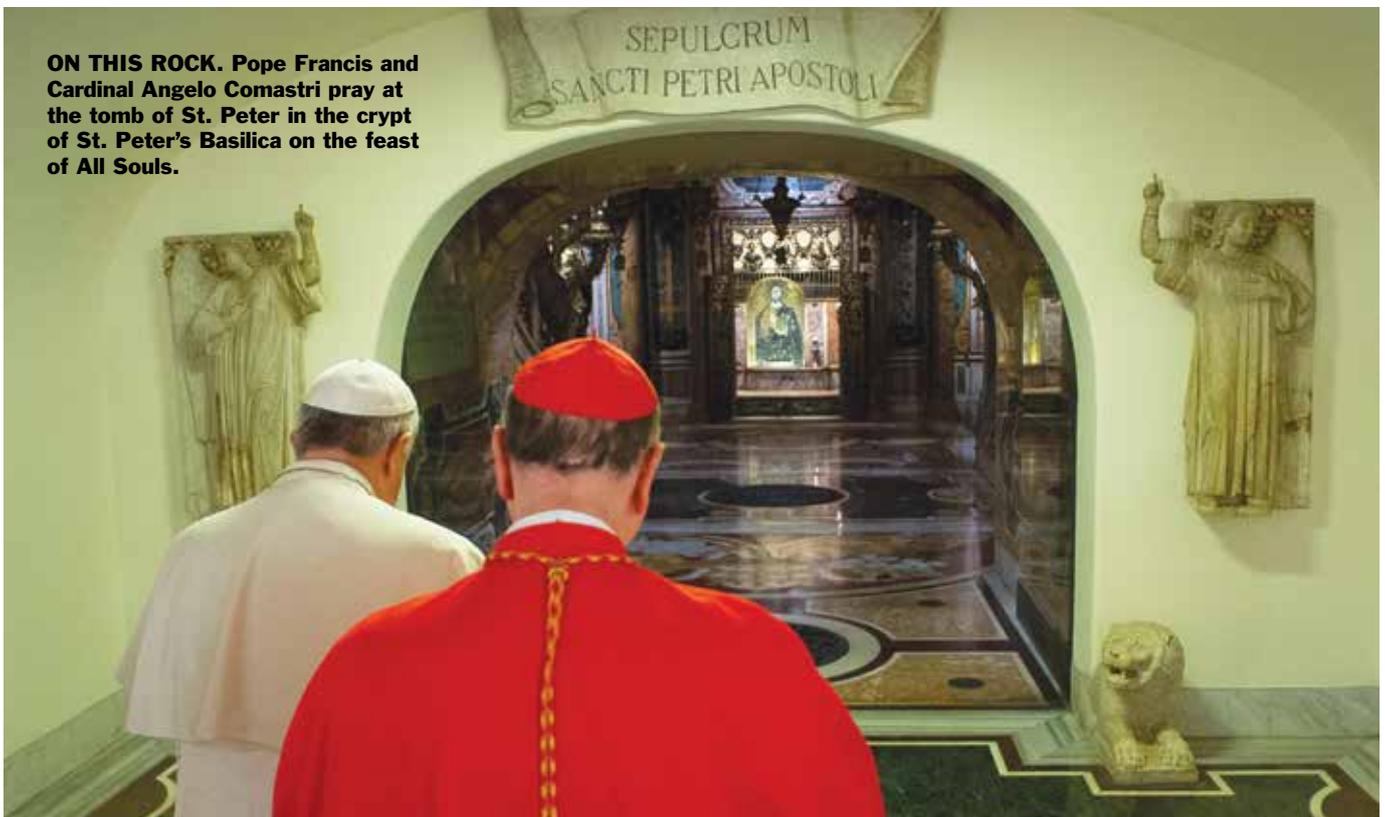
**LEONARD J. DELORENZO** teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame, where he directs *Notre Dame Vision*, the *Notre Dame Catechist Academy* and the *Notre Dame Character Project* within the *Institute for Church Life*. He has two books forthcoming: one on the theology of the communion of saints and one on the mystery of grace and the practice of storytelling.

stubborn man I have ever known was crying like a child in the rain. The woman who had been his wife for more than 50 years was lying in a cardboard coffin in the building behind us, awaiting cremation, and he had just kissed her forehead for the last time. Even at the end of a long and loving life, he felt her loss as an unmitigated tragedy. Dorothy DeLorenzo was gone.

The month of November opens with two feast days that have shaped my experience of celebrating and mourning the lives and deaths of my paternal grandmother and grandfather. On the solemnity of All Saints the church observes the treasury of blessings of the great number of holy ones. The next day, on the feast of All Souls, the church observes the mystery of reaching for departed loved ones, in prayer or simply in longing, whether or not we have rationally or emotionally accepted their deaths.

And while it might seem that the first day is pure celebration, while the second alone makes room for concern and yearning, the deeper truth is that even the day devoted to All Saints brings forth its own measure of concern. On that

**ON THIS ROCK.** Pope Francis and Cardinal Angelo Comastri pray at the tomb of St. Peter in the crypt of St. Peter's Basilica on the feast of All Souls.



CNS PHOTO/L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO

first day, the concern belongs to the saints and is directed toward those still living as well as those who have died. On the second day those still living practice taking on the concern common to the saints as we pray for our dead.

### Memories Within Memories

Although more than 1,600 days would pass between that day and his last day, a good part of my grandfather seemed to die when he was forced to let go of his wife. There was a hole in his life that nothing else could fill; and to be honest, I am not sure it was meant to be filled.

As far as I know, my grandfather never attempted to explain where his beloved went after death. It would have been comforting, I am sure, to imagine that she had slipped out of the confines of this life into a better, happier place. But there was a certain discipline and authenticity to the way he thought about her after death. Instead of trying to make her right for his own sake, he allowed himself to be wounded for love of her. He had been tied to her so deeply for so long that he could not replace her with a thought or a wish about where or how she was now. He refused to allow her death to be any less serious than it really was. She was gone, and that made a difference to him. He longed for her, but to what end?

It is hard, if not impossible, to give an account of exactly how someone has affected you. Not only am I unable to explain what my grandmother meant to my grandfather, but it is also difficult for me to explain what she meant to me. If I sat still long enough, I could conjure up countless memories of her: some that would cause me to chuckle, others that would irritate me, others still that would perhaps leave me with tinges of regret and many that would fill me with gratitude. Of all those memories, though, I find it curious which memory usually comes to mind first.

What I remember first about my grandmother—in a vivid snapshot memory—is her sitting at the kitchen table in the slowly intensifying light of the early morning. The house is silent. Her elbow is resting on the table, one hand pinching the skin above her brow, the other telling the beads of a rosary dangling near her knees. Her eyes are closed tight and she has the look of intense, almost painful concentration on her face while her lips mutter prayers into the stillness of dawn. Something of what she meant to me is wrapped up

in that memory, though I cannot wrap my mind around that meaning.

I do not have that memory of my grandfather's faith. I tend to remember his childlike laugh when he teased my little brother, whom he loved with a special kind of devotion. I remember his voice rising above its normal volume to correct or to command. I remember the picture of him clad in an orange hunting suit, smiling next to the carcass of the deer he strung up at the end of the day. He never came to Mass with us when I visited my grandparents for weeks every summer when I was younger. I cannot recall a time when I saw him pray. He was relentlessly disciplined and principled, though he certainly was not what one would recognize as a person of faith.

I loved both my grandparents, and because of that love I feel their loss

even today. I do not feel that loss as greatly or regularly as I should, but I do feel it. My love for them also springs forward in hope. I want them to live in some way, even though they have died and I feel their absence.

The difference between them for me, though, is that I lack for my grandfather what I have for my grandmother: a memory to anchor my hope. When I return to my faith and seek to entrust my grandmother to the love of God, I can move from what I myself have seen toward what I imagine God sees when he looks at her, even now. I can hope that God's first memory of grandma is something like my own—or that mine is something like God's, as it were. I hope that God sees her sitting at the table in the early morning, moving beads between her fingers, praying alone before the tasks of the day. Maybe that is who she truly was, beneath all the other memories.

For my grandfather, I just don't know what I hope that God sees. Does God see the delight of that childlike laugh? Does God hear that voice ascending over the humdrum of domestic life? Does God rejoice at a successful hunt? The man whom I last saw fading away when the feeding tubes had been removed in that lightly lit, modestly comfortable hospital room more than 10 years ago is the same man who I know entered into the darkness of death and was no more. Into that uncertainty I cast my hope—inchoate as my hope may be. Perhaps this is hope beyond hope: to believe that life may be called out of loss, without any assurance, without any fully explicable reason, save one.

**The strange logic of All Saints informs All Souls:  
To pray for the salvation of our loved ones is also to pray that they will enter into the unceasing prayer for our own salvation. Such is the mystery of the body of Christ.**

I have struggled to know where that hope begins in my imagination; but over time, the memory that has tended to recur most frequently when I think of my grandfather is of our last moment together in that hospital room. Part of me is still surprised that I had the audacity to trace the sign of the cross on his forehead and pray over him. Perhaps the meaning of who he was to me is mysteriously wrapped up in that memory, even though I am still trying to understand it.

### Searching and Sanctity

My grandparents are not the only loved ones I have lost and try to remember, but the simultaneous connection and difference between them places me in the troubling predicament of how to pray for each and for both of them together. Without the practice of the liturgy, I would be left to my own to try to figure out what my partial notions mean and what I am therefore to do, or even hope for. To begin to grasp the gift the church gives on these simultaneously connected yet different liturgical observances at the beginning of November, we might pay attention to the prayer over the offerings at Mass from each of the two days. This prayer is offered at the conclusion of the presentation and preparation of the gifts and at the threshold of the eucharistic prayer, when the work only God can do becomes the work the church engages.

On the solemnity of All Saints, the church prays this prayer over the offerings:

May these offerings we bring in honor of all the Saints be pleasing to you, O Lord, and grant that, just as we believe the Saints to be already assured of immortality, so we may experience their concern for our salvation. Through Christ our Lord.

In this one prayer, the church makes a concession and a request. It concedes that there is no need to harbor concern for those celebrated in this Mass—both those whose names are known and the anonymous saints—for they already share in the eternal glory of God. The request, therefore, is not for them but for ourselves: that we may “experience their concern for our salvation.” To celebrate the saints means celebrating those who concern themselves with our good. They pray for us, and we pray that their prayers may be fruitful.

I can recognize my grandmother in this prayer, if only indistinctly, as in a murky mirror. If she enjoys beatitude with God in Christ, then she also joins with all the saints in their “concern for our salvation.” This touches on the strangeness of All Saints’ Day: in celebrating them, we are celebrating their concern for us. To recognize the saints as saints means recognizing ourselves as the ones they are concerned about. If the hope I draw from my memory of my grandmother

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praying in the early morning at the kitchen table gives me confidence in her salvation (which I cannot see), then the liturgy teaches me that this confidence is also about accepting myself as well as my grandfather as the very ones to whom she would hasten in holy concern. I hope that she tells her beads for us.

But what about my grandfather? Unlike with my grandmother, my own memory and understanding make it difficult for me to locate him on the feast of All Saints. Instead, I feel myself forced to seek him on Nov. 2. He is one of those for whom I am called to pray. In doing this, however, I am formed for another kind of humility. Whereas the prayer of Nov. 1 beckons me to accept the saints' concern for us, the prayer of Nov. 2 leads me to offer my own concern to the Lord so that he may bring about what I can barely even imagine:

Look favorably on our offerings, O Lord, so that your departed servants may be taken up into glory with your Son, in whose great mystery of love we are all united. Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

This prayer is for those about whom we do still exercise concern. It is a prayer not to abandon but to commend: We entrust to the mercy of God those whom we have no power of our own to help. And to ask the Lord to take our own loved ones into that "great mystery of love [in whom] we are

all united" is to ask not only that those we love may be filled with new life but also that that life may be filled with concern for our own salvation.

The strange logic of Nov. 1 informs the strange logic of Nov. 2: To pray for the salvation of our loved ones is also to pray that they will enter into the unceasing prayer for our own salvation. Such is the mystery of the body of Christ.

What seems like an intellectual puzzle becomes a bodily practice in the work of the church's liturgy. By showing up for the liturgy on these days, I practice words and prayers I have to learn to understand and, in doing so, I slowly come to understand what it means to pray for Grandma and Granddaddy, even now. I learn to imagine what I could not otherwise imagine, and my heart moves.

As I learn to pray for them, I also learn the significance of yielding to the prayers of others for me. Like all acts of liturgy, those in the first days of November are practices in communion. But here, perhaps more than at any other time in the liturgical year, these practices of communion are ventured across the otherwise unthinkable difference and immeasurable distance between loved ones, when death intervenes.

In this way, the space between All Saints and All Souls is where we search in mourning, prayer and longing for the loved ones we have lost. And the church teaches us that in searching for them, we discover ourselves anew as the ones pursued in love. 



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America Media is seeking submissions from young writers for the first-ever Generation Faith essay contest. We want to hear from high school and college students interested in reflecting on the joys and challenges that come with living out (or struggling with) faith in the midst of real life. All entries should be true personal essays, between 800 and 1,200 words. The essays should feature strong narratives and real-life examples from the writer's experience as a young person in the church today. Writers should think creatively and broadly about their faith experience.

**The winning entry will be awarded \$1,000 and will be published in *America*.**

Additional entries may be chosen for publication in *America*. The judging panel will consist of the editors of *America* and The Jesuit Post.

To be eligible, you must be enrolled as a full-time high school or college student at the time of the contest deadline. Your submission must be previously unpublished (including on personal websites) and must be original work.

All entries must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. on January 10.

Submit your entry to [www.americamedia.submittable.com](http://www.americamedia.submittable.com).

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A JESUIT MINISTRY

# Grassroots Gospel

A seminarian reflects on Pope Francis' bold vision

BY ALEXANDER TURPIN

I have stopped trying to correct people when they tell me that Pope Francis is “so much more like Jesus” than his predecessor. Every institution has a public image and, fairly or not, for the first time in a long time the whole world sees a man of the people at the church’s rudder. I admire Francis and consider him saintly. But I am also convinced that the previous man to wear the white and gold, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, is saintly as well. I have found few sympathizers, however, even after I explain how Joseph Ratzinger’s compelling portrait of Christ helped lead me into the seminary.

I offer these reflections as a seminarian with no expertise (or interest) in ecclesiastical politics. But I studied at a secular university while working in a small-town pizzeria, so I have witnessed firsthand how ordinary non-Catholics are rebuffed by the authoritarian spirit they sense in the church. Whether these perceptions are accurate is irrelevant. If people say they are not being nourished by the church’s message, if they feel they are encountering “small-minded rules” instead of Christ, there very well may be something wrong with the way our message is being presented.

Pope Francis’ shift of focus toward “the mystery of the human being” is a bold restatement of what draws me—and many others—toward the ordained service of God’s people. It

is radical and pastoral and turns the doctrinaire view of Christianity on its head. Instead of reiterating the usual formulas that define right thinking and living, the pope is moving us back toward the church’s *raison d’être*: to initiate and sustain personal encounters with Jesus Christ. “The proclamation of the saving love of God comes before moral and religious imperatives,” the pope said in an interview published in *America* and other Jesuit journals (9/30/13).

In other words, we must place Jesus before everything if the world is to hear anything we say. Culture wars—and liturgical wars and theological differences among believers—be damned. The pope is directing us to preach the saving message of Jesus to individuals, into all the filth and stress of real human lives, which is how it was meant to be preached.

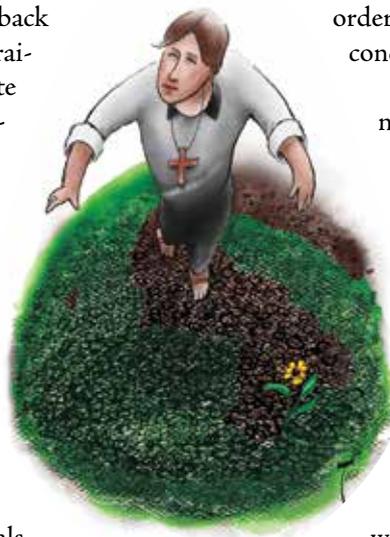
One of my brother seminarians proposes that our culture is in a fog. The Christian frame of reference has disappeared from both public and private life; our society is post-Christian in belief and pre-Christian in morality. In an environment like this, we cannot afford to be afraid of interacting with heterodoxy. Theological hairsplitting is necessary in seminary formation, but it

has little relevance for the average non-believer (or, frankly, the average believer). We must be willing to get our hands dirty and meet people precisely as free and thinking persons in order to take their beliefs and concerns seriously.

This approach does not mean making fluid the boundaries between orthodoxy and heresy; Francis himself has said that priests must know “how to dialogue and to descend into their people’s night, into the darkness, *but without getting lost*” (emphasis added). But we cannot hope to accom-

pany our people unless we are willing to run to the very edge of orthodoxy, straddle it and immerse ourselves in the fog that covers their eyes.

What matters most is that we claim to have a truth that is meant to illuminate the life of each and every person we encounter. If all we offer is a plethora of abstractions—“a disjointed multitude of doctrines to be imposed insistently,” in the words of Francis—they will find our message irrelevant to their concerns. Rather, we are being called by our new pope to bring the simplicity and profundity of Jesus’ message directly to people. It is a streamlined, missionary approach. A society that is free to accept any number of teachings does not perceive hope in a seemingly arbitrary set of guidelines. Instead, the church’s ministers, and especially



ALEXANDER TURPIN, a seminarian of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, N.Y., is a student at the Cathedral Seminary House of Formation in Douglaston, N.Y.

ART: TAD DUNNE

its future ministers, must keep in mind that they are to proclaim always “the freshness and fragrance of the Gospel.”

It was Pope Benedict XVI who insisted in “*Verbum Domini*” (2010), the post-synodal exhortation on the word of God, that the church’s highest task is “to enable the people of our time once more to encounter God, the God who speaks to us and shares his love so

that we might have life in abundance.” Pope Francis seems to be taking this charge seriously. He is not changing dogma, as some fear, but rather is urging those charged with preaching the Gospel to strip it down to the essentials for greater potency. His vision of the church as “a field hospital after battle” is particularly constructive: we, as the body of Christ, exist solely to help

heal the wounds and existential weariness of a world that does not know God.

Francis is calling the church to concentrate everything on this mission. “You have to heal [the person’s] wounds,” he said. “Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds.... And you have to start from the ground up.”

## GENERATION FAITH

# Stained-Glass People

Reflecting the light of God through our imperfections’

BY MARIELE COURTOIS

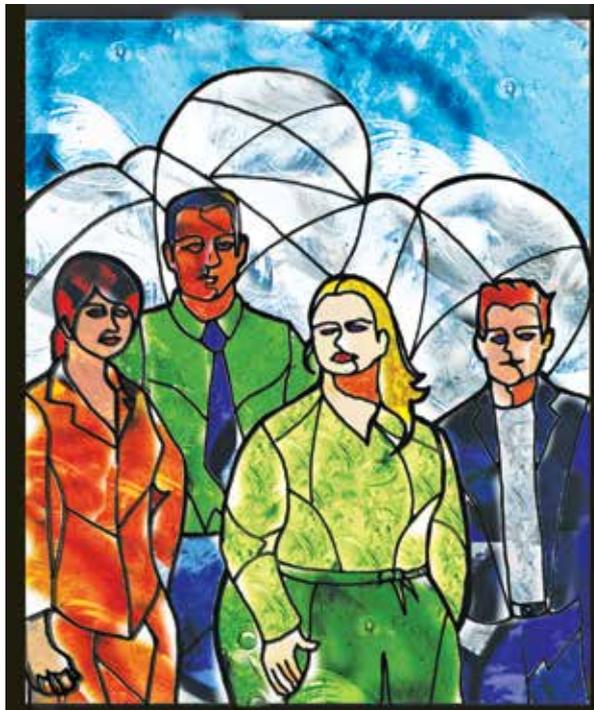
**W**e are surrounded by several young children. Some are eager to befriend us, and others are more careful. “How are you?” we ask one young girl. She looks at us. We talk to her. About school. About the beautiful day. About anything. It is not exactly a conversation. It is only an attempt to put her at ease. Her responses are short and guarded.

A woman breathing heavily with her mouth open lies in bed. One of the Carmelite sister staff members tells me the woman’s name and explains that the woman does not respond or receive as many visitors as other residents, but she still deserves

love. The sister brushes the woman’s cheek. I introduce myself to the woman. As expected, there is only silence and intermittent moaning. She looks past me. I talk to her. About school. About the beautiful day. About anything. It is

not a conversation. It is only an attempt to be present with her.

Along with many other Jesuit institutions, Loyola Marymount University makes service and social justice a priority in its educational mission. Many clubs, organizations, campus ministry programs and academic groups inspire students to follow in the footsteps of St. Ignatius Loyola by becoming men and women with and for others. Our community serves a broad range of human needs, including foster care youth, the elderly, battered women, people with disabilities or those who struggle with homelessness, often through direct individual interaction. Sometimes collegiate dialogue is stirred as to whether charitable time spent tutoring, conversing or simply being present with those who live on the margins of society is as valuable as civic work that can effect lasting change, like policy-making and advocacy. Furthermore, what happens when



**MARIELE COURTOIS**, a 2015 graduate of Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, is working toward a master’s degree in theological studies at the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Ind. She is a Sorin fellow at Notre Dame’s Center for Ethics and Culture.

ART: SONJA KODIAK WILDEF

our service seems to be of no avail or brings about no tangible results?

As a member of Loyola Marymount University's all-women Gryphon Circle Service Organization, I have often reflected on the words of our beloved late chaplain Peg Dolan, R.S.H.M. During her commencement address in 2008, Sister Peg encouraged students to "make the gift of your life become a masterpiece each day that will help make your life better for you and all you meet in your life journey, no matter where you are or what you do."

I imagine people who create masterpieces: the scientist who defends her characterization of a hypomorph, the dancer who strains in her pointe shoes and the inspired writer who casts bloodshot eyes over her novel. They are heroes in their moment. They are driven and self-sacrificing. Such is an active form of creation. You choose the medium; you choose the time; you choose the craft—something exquisite, like stained glass. The purposeful artist selects humble shards, fits them together in an unexpected pattern and then reveals her pictorial window, through which the world can gaze. But I think there is also an equal, passive form of creation, one experienced

by the stained glass itself.

Stained glass is impractical. It doesn't help the stone wall stand. In fact, it is the most vulnerable to breaking. It is made from broken pieces. It is a potential weak point in the wall. But it is through stained glass that light can bring color to the darkened nave. Its intricate array bears a secret in the night and a message in the day. It makes the sunbeam striking. By allowing something else to work through its stillness, it creates beauty.

### A Complex Beauty

At our service sites, we come into contact with people who embody some of these qualities as well: stained-glass people. They did not choose their medium, their time or their place. They did not ask for their challenges. They are people whom society reckons weak. They are sick, abandoned, deprived, vulnerable, too old, too young, lost, pained, marginalized or just in need of love. But we see a light that shines through them. By serving in friendship and with love, we rejoice in their complex beauty. We harmonize through solidarity and want to care for each other as members of an inclusive human family. In our gentle interactions with them, we discover that these relation-

ships illuminate a hope and a joy that the struggles currently faced will someday be vanquished. Before that time comes, we may have to accept that we cannot change their lives; we can only do what we can to make whatever light is present shine brighter. Even if the change never comes, this doesn't make their story any less a masterpiece.

It is important to challenge injustice, to charge forth where we feel emboldened to bring change. But this is an abridged experience of service. What if the time for a hero has not yet come? We do not simply wait alongside the road. What may be needed is a simple offer of companionship. We have the chance to better the lives of all individuals we encounter. We can provide accompaniment to others on their journey, even when they are many pages from the happy ending.

Sometimes there are sad, terrifying or painful moments that we do not want to include in the masterpiece of our lives. But isn't the reason we celebrate a masterpiece because we intuit that its creation involved a triumph over difficulty? In a masterpiece, there are elements of the unexpected. There are low notes in a song. There are chips in a mosaic. There are edges to an artwork. There is pain on the dance floor. Even broken pieces have found their purpose in creation: to come together.

We may have a terrible day. We may lose things on which we depended. The people we seek to help may turn away. The light may miss our stained glass completely. But we can still serve from wherever we stand, no matter how far from the turning point. It is true, we can make a gift of ourselves by being heroic. But at those times when swords cannot cut through shadow and glass cannot shine in darkness, we can make a gift of ourselves to others simply as signs of the light to come. Sometimes, even if it is just for one person, a glance through the window to the view beyond the wall makes the most transformative impact of all.



*"Family and home go together... I call on everyone: individuals, organs of society, authorities, to do everything possible to assure that every family has a place to live."  
- Pope Francis*

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## SACRED SPACE

*'The Christians' explores heaven and hell on stage*

While some studies have described church attendance as declining in this country, the same cannot be said for attendance at the shrines and temples of the theater, on Broadway and off; and many of the productions that people have flocked to have not shied away from religious themes. Matt Stone and Trey Parker's mega-hit "The Book of

Mormon" opened more than four years ago, won an abundance of awards and still plays to packed houses of theatergoers willing to pay \$299 for premium tickets.

Last season, the bizarre farce "Hand to God" told the story of a young man in an Evangelical church whose irremovable hand-puppet, seemingly possessed by the devil, spewed out a constant

stream of obscenities and insults. Then, late in the season, Jim Parsons of the hit television series "The Big Bang Theory" performed as a charming but befuddled God in a show called, appropriately, "An Act of God."

While the writers of "The Book of Mormon" claimed that they were poking fun at religious faith but ultimately treated it with respect, many critics (including yours truly) disagree. And while "Hand to God" never questioned the beliefs and practices of the congregation, it portrayed some hypocrisy, sexual repression and, ultimately, the idea that the devil-puppet might simply be the voice of the young man's shadow side. "An Act of God" was more straightforward, portraying God as imperfect, maybe not even real, and certainly not necessary for us to lead good lives or make the world a better place as humanists.

But these are all comedies. Finally, a quite dramatic production recently opened off-Broadway to strong reviews and already has extended its run. **The Christians**, written by the young playwright Lucas Hnath, is quite serious about the presence of religion in people's lives today. He has said that prior to writing the play, he "was having a difficult time thinking of other contemporary plays that took on the subject of religion, and specifically Christianity, that did so without satirizing it or prompting us to roll our eyes at 'those Christians'" (see the examples above). Hnath grew up in an Assembly of God church in Orlando, Fla. His mother was a minister, and he attended Christian elementary and middle schools, helping out with youth ministry and tagging along with his mother to seminary classes, but he does not answer questions about his current religious beliefs and practices.

The set is a brightly lit megachurch sanctuary with a 20-voice choir on-



TO THE CHOIR. Emily Donahoe and Andrew Garman in "The Christians"

stage, and the audience is treated as the congregation in the intimate space of this off-Broadway house, Playwrights Horizons. (The concept of the audience-as-congregation, one might recall, was used quite effectively in the stage version of “Doubt” 11 years ago and in “Mass Appeal” about 20 years before that.)

“The Christians” begins with a sermon by Pastor Paul (Andrew Garman) celebrating, for one thing, the fact that the congregation has paid off all its debts. It then morphs into a story to explain why Pastor Paul no longer believes in the existence of hell (he pres-

ents a pretty convincing case).

Everyone in the choir as well as Paul’s wife, Elizabeth (Linda Powell), sitting beside him, maintains a calm silence, but then the associate pastor Joshua (Larry Powell) gets up to express his firm disagreement with that message. Paul and Joshua enter into an impressive debate, primarily offering different interpretations of the scriptural references to hell and vivid descriptions of their own encounters with evil. Neither one budes in his belief, and Joshua leaves the church to form his own congregation. From then on, things descend into Pastor Paul’s personal hell on earth.

As the attendance at his church services takes a steep dive and the chairman of the congregation’s board of directors steps down, there is some question even of how Pastor Paul’s own wife will react to it all. Perhaps the most poignant episode involves a soft-spoken member of the choir, Jenny (Emily Donahoe), a single mother dependent on the church’s financial assistance, who quietly but relentlessly argues with him, even questioning his motives.

An unusual feature in the production is the constant use of stage microphones, which seem altogether fitting in the early scenes of the church service but continue to be used throughout the rest of the play in the conversations outside the church. Hnath has explained that “the prop of the microphones actually gives us a means to make visible the action of speaking or decisions or refusing to say something. We can all see the moment when a character leans into a microphone to speak.... And we can tell the difference between leaning into a microphone to speak versus yanking the microphone from its stand to speak.” Even the decision to use corded or lapel mics is intentional, as the cords—and the conversations—become more tangled as the play goes along.

Another novel feature of this production is the chalkboard in the lobby, which asks audience members to describe what religion they grew up with and how their beliefs may have changed. The theater also encourages them to discuss the show on social media.

Tim Sanford, the artistic director of Playwrights Horizons, maintains in an essay in the play’s program that the drama is not only about religious fundamentalism. He praises the play for showing “the human face of ideology.” He writes: “We live in a world wracked by violence stirred by intractable conflicts between warring belief systems [which] can be organized around religious precepts, political agendas, or... interpretations of morality. But the one common denominator sure to be found at the heart of any of these conflicts is the unslakable self-righteousness of each warring party.”

A week after this show opened, we got to witness the visit of Pope Francis to our shores and listen to his inspiring messages. One word that showed up quite often in his exhortations is *dialogue*. The members of Pastor Paul’s congregation do not seem capable of such a task. Why can they not focus on the multitude of doctrines which they share rather than the one on which they cannot agree, a teaching that can seem rather marginal in the Christian belief system? One critic also wondered why they are so devoted to the punishment of sinners rather than to trust in God’s mercy.

A production of “The Christians” has just opened in London, and another staging is scheduled for the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles. The play, with its small cast and its single setting, seems ideal for regional stages and community theaters around the country. I recommend joining the congregation if this comes to a theater near you.

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MICHAEL V. TUETH, S.J., is emeritus professor of communication and media studies at Fordham University in New York.

## C 24

Inside this monument a rain  
it doesn't want, coming by  
with winds and the flag  
  
this way and that reaching out  
as if the war ended  
smelling from all your letters home  
  
wet—they had to be wet, scented  
with thunder and kisses  
left on the ground, already  
  
this harvest—stones becoming  
other stones and blood  
that no longer returns to your  
heart.

### SIMON PERCHIK

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SIMON PERCHIK is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *Poetry*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *Almost Rain*, published by River Otter Press (2013).

## JUST HAVING LUNCH

During Pope Francis' recent apostolic visit to the United States I, like so many who were glued to television coverage or who made the pilgrimage to glimpse him in person, was captivated by the words and gestures, both large and small, that captured the attention and imagination of this nation and the whole world. From riding around in the visually humble Fiat to delivering poignant words addressed to Congress, it seemed as if everything Pope Francis said or did was destined to be of historical importance.

And yet, despite the abundance of notable encounters, speeches and actions that week, I found that I kept returning in my memory to an earlier image of him from last summer.

The image is of Pope Francis having lunch. Yep, that's it. Just lunch.

Sitting at an ordinary table in what appeared to be a cafeteria like any one of thousands around the world, the bishop of Rome sat in his white cassock amid uniform-clad employees of the Vatican pharmacy and facilities crew. And he ate his lunch.

That Pope Francis had lunch on July 25, 2014, is not what is really interesting to me. Nor is it that he chose to dine with employees of the Vatican. What is amazing was the way the world responded to this meal. Photographs provided to the Associated Press by the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* went "viral" on the Internet and appeared on the front pages of many of the world's most well-respected, international newspapers, including *The New York Times*.

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DANIEL P. HORAN, O.F.M., is the author of several books, including *The Franciscan Heart of Thomas Merton*. Twitter: @DanHoranOFM.

There was no major story accompanying the photograph: no peace-treaty brokered, no important speech delivered. It was just lunch. So what was the big deal?

It seems that the big deal was that popes—like presidents, prime ministers and other world leaders—simply weren't supposed to be bothered with ordinary, everyday people. According to this logic, lunches with the pope were occasions reserved for important discussions of an ecclesiastical or international relations issue with power players, who have their own entourages. That Pope Francis would elect to simply have lunch with just the entourage, the supporting cast, without any "important" people reflects the apparently unusual priorities of this bishop of Rome. Nobody was vetted in advance; no political favors were necessary to get in.

But such priorities would not have seemed strange to a certain first-century Jew from Nazareth. In fact, with the possible exception of an occasional physical miracle, most of Jesus' approximately three years of public ministry was spent without much fanfare or unusual behavior and with ordinary, everyday people. He spoke to them, even when others thought he shouldn't; he touched them, even when religious convention forbade it; he welcomed them, even when they were of another community or faith; he invited them to be his followers, even when there were smarter, more organized

and more loyal people out there. And Jesus had many lunches with them, the many anonymous people of no historical significance. Despite imaginations that suggest otherwise, most of Jesus' earthly life and ministry did not include grand gestures, fancy settings or important people.

There is an important lesson about Christian discipleship here. The Gospel is only lived out during the seemingly little things of the everyday. In office cubicles, on subway cars,

along rural highways, at home or at play—these places are where the quotidian reality of Christian life unfolds, or doesn't, according to our choices. Too often we look to saints or other exemplars of Christian living and romanticize their famous actions or behaviors. We forget that Francis and Clare of Assisi, Ignatius Loyola, Catherine McAuley and Dorothy Day all woke up each morning, went to bed each evening and tried

their best to follow Christ during the hours in between. What makes them models of Christian life is not some singular display of faithfulness but instead the culmination of a lifelong effort to make the little things, like lunch or work, moments of encounter with others that help proclaim the good news of God's love to the world.

Ever since that photo was published last summer, and even more since Pope Francis' visit, I have been trying to imagine a world in which simple acts of humility, kindness and concern for others were more commonplace. Perhaps then, such behavior, even by a pope, would not become front-page news.

Popes  
weren't  
supposed to  
be bothered  
with ordinary,  
everyday  
people.



# INTERCULTURAL WARRIOR

## THE PROPHET OF CUERNAVACA

### Ivan Illich and the Crisis of the West

By Todd Hartch  
Oxford University Press. 256p \$29.95

Ivan Illich became an almost big name briefly in the early 1970s, so why a book nearly four decades after his public intellectual sunset? After all, he solved no problems and was impossible to categorize. While often considered a revolutionary thinker (while he himself did not) he didn't get along with the anti-war activist Dan Berrigan, S.J., but got along fine with Cardinal Francis Spellman of "America right or wrong" notoriety. While both the left and the right of his era cited him, neither could claim him. The Federal Bureau of Investigation spied on him but then dismissed him as merely "an anti-Communist with a leftist-reform attitude." Some found him prickly, confrontational and difficult. Philosophically he was hard to fathom: a fierce critic of the political colonization by nations and of the economic colonization resulting from free markets, he was neither a liberation theologian nor a militant revolutionary.

In this extensive review of archival sources and personal letters, Todd Hartch, fair-minded and readable, shows Illich as understanding himself as standing for true revolution in society and true renewal of Catholicism. Little done by either the left or the right in the name of either renewal or revolution passed his truth test. Readers finding themselves uncomfortable with all the available reform-revolution categories will find this appreciative yet critical Illich biography a good read.

Ivan Illich's life prepared him for intellectual nonconformity. Illich was born in 1926 and grew up in Vienna,

his father an aristocratic Croatian and his mother a German from a family of Jewish converts. During World War II Illich was classified as a half-Aryan; and when his father died, the family fled to Italy, where Illich finished high school in Florence, studied chemistry at the local university and joined the resistance movement. For reasons that Hartch describes as murky, at 18 Illich decided to become a priest and was ordained in 1951. He earned a doctorate in history at the University of Salzburg, doing his thesis on the global histories of Arnold Toynbee and the epistemology of historical knowing. While working on his thesis, Illich returned to the Gregorian University in Rome to study philosophy and theology, wrote on Romano Guardini and read Thomas Aquinas informally with Jacques Maritain, who later viewed his writings as antimissionary and traitorous to the church.

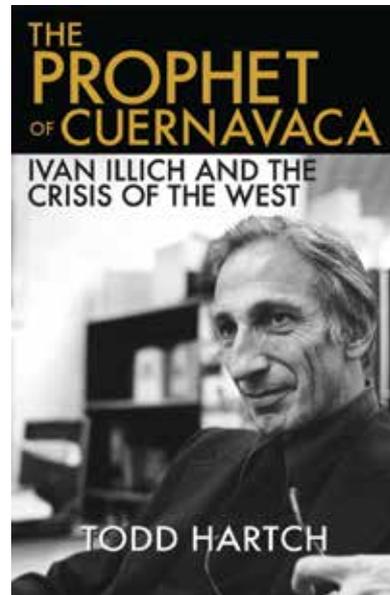
In the early 1950s he came to the United States and at Princeton University earned a second doctorate (on Albertus Magnus). It was in the United States, while serving at Incarnation Parish in New York City among Puerto Rican immigrants, that the many-rooted but unrooted intellectual Illich found his life's centering mission. Befriending Joseph Fitzpatrick, S.J., of Fordham University, and Fordham's president, Lawrence McGinley, S.J., Illich secured the money and social capital he needed to start a language training

school in Cuernavaca, Mexico, where Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York, Cardinal Richard Cushing of Boston and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops wanted to train North American priests and laypeople for missionary work in South America.

None of Illich's first supporters expected the scorching critique to come of what he called the instinctive Americanism of American missionaries, which, he taught, inevitably eroded the indigenous peoples' nontraditional but authentic Christianity by infecting them with a desire for an individualistic and competitive standard of living that inevitably vitiated the communitarian ethos of Christianity.

This theme pervaded all Ivan Illich's writing: The morally underdeveloped West could not resolve the problem of global inequality. Nor could the Western church. Following the criticism by bishops after the publication of such works as "the Seamy Side of Charity" (*America*, 1/21/1967) and his overt efforts to "de-Yankeefy" American missionaries, Illich left the active ministry (but not the priesthood) and repurposed the religious Center for Intercultural Formation, the training center for missionaries, into the secular Intercultural Documentation Center, which, in turn, he closed in 1976, very soon after he had attracted wider attention as a public intellectual and critic.

Hartch judges that Illich produced major works of lasting value, among them *Deschooling Society* (1970), *The Church, Change and Development* (1970), *Celebration of Awareness: A Call for Institutional Revolution* (1971), *Tools for Conviviality* (1973);



*Energy and Equity* (1974) and *Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health* (1976). He gives a thorough account of two of these, *Medical Nemesis* and *Deschooling Society*, which show Illich's distrust of what the sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) called the "routinization of charisma," whereby the institutionalization of some virtuous intent inevitably leads to self-serving arrangements that subvert the very good they once intended.

The first two sentences of *Medical Nemesis* provide a good sample of Illich's jolting style: "The medical establishment has become a major threat to health. The disabling impact of professional control over medicine has reached the proportions of an epidemic." Medicine, he wrote, had become counterproductive and was actually sickening the culture through "the medicalization of life," whereby people become consumers of the commodity of health care and in the process lose their ability and responsibility to care for themselves while becoming dependent on officially sanctioned experts. Anticipating the hospice movement, Illich found most dismaying the widespread fear of dying outside of a hospital, which, he thought, had reached the point of obliterating hallowed and ancient cultural resources that taught people the meanings and proper responses to disease, calamity and death.

Central to Illich's cultural argument was his distinction between pain, the physical sensation that humans shared with animals, and suffering, a practice and art leading to courage and an acknowledgment that reality is harsh and death inevitable. Modern medicine had neglected the deep human need for meaning and community and had transferred pain into a demand for more drugs, hospitals and medical services. "In a drug-induced stupor, medicated and managed to the last instant of life," he wrote, "the modern patient had little awareness of being human and even less ability to suffer in con-

scious communion with Christ."

Illich's anchoring focus was the person-in-community, who inevitably is absorbed by the mega-groups and metaphysics of modernity. Since Illich there have been many critiques of the top-down "tyranny of experts" practiced in think tanks, international financial agencies and private foundations. The components of the West's hubris—economic progress, technological prog-

ress, educational progress—to Illich are simply illusions that cannot create the human solidarity they erode. Better than anyone, Illich helps us to judge the term "expert," a pejorative unless persons and their communities are the agents of their self-betterment and not the objects of our progress.

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**JAMES R. KELLY** is an emeritus professor of sociology at Fordham University in New York.

PAUL LAURITZEN

## A SCAR ON THE SOUL

### KILLING FROM THE INSIDE OUT Moral Injury and Just War

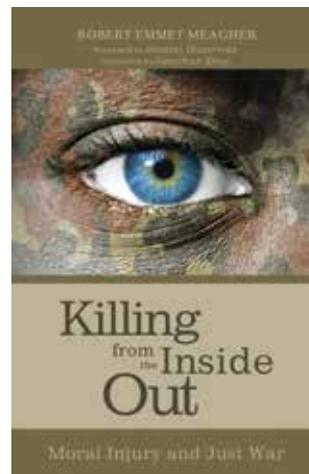
By Robert Emmet Meagher  
Cascade Books. 178p \$22

In February, the New York Times columnist David Brooks published an essay on the concept of moral injury in war. Noting recent literature on the topic of post-traumatic stress disorder, Brooks highlighted the fact that studies of the trauma U.S. soldiers suffered in Iraq and Afghanistan has rightly focused on the inescapable moral harm of war. In Brooks's words, civilians "live enmeshed in a fabric of moral practices and evaluations. We try to practice kindness and to cause no pain," but "people who have been to war have left this universe behind. That's because war—no matter how justified or unjustified, noble or ignoble—is always a crime."

In defending this claim, which will likely strike many as implausible, Brooks draws on David J. Morris's book, *The Evil Hours*, Phil Klay's *Redeployment* and Nancy Sherman's *Afterwar: Healing the Moral Wounds of*

*Our Soldiers*.

To this list of fine books I would add Robert Meagher's *Killing From the Inside Out*. Just as Morris, Klay and Sherman attend to the self-imposed "moral exile" that veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan appear to experience, Meagher begins with the grim statistics of veteran suicides in recent years: 33 per month in 2012, 22 per day in February 2013. Indeed, the title of the book is taken from a com-



ment that the mother of a suicide victim made to Meagher. Her son's mortal wound was not from an I.E.D.; his wound, she said, killed him from the inside out.

While Meagher would certainly agree with Brooks that war is always a crime, he goes much further than Brooks in condemning war and the traditions of moral thought that sustain war.

Pre-eminent among these traditions is the just war theory, which Meagher refers to as a "lie" sustained by Christian belief that must be cut out root and branch. The burden of the book is to perform this uprooting.

When summarized this bluntly, readers might be inclined to dismiss

Meagher's book as a polemical diatribe. That would be a mistake. This is a complex work that weaves together moral reflection, historical scholarship and psychological accounts of P.T.S.D. to frame an account of war that explains the inescapable moral injury that appears always to accompany war.

I cannot do justice to the many aspects of Meagher's argument, but two are worth noting. The first is his insistence that we hold ourselves accountable for actions done in ignorance or without intent to harm. Some will find this claim to be deeply counterintuitive, but Meagher argues powerfully for its moral truth. He asks us to consider the phenomenon of "forgotten baby syndrome." On average, 38 children die in the United States every year from heat stroke when they are left in a car by a parent who has forgotten they are in the car. In the vast majority of cases there is absolutely no evidence of ill intent or premeditation; a child care schedule has changed or a sleep-deprived parent is distracted by a crisis at work or something similar.

Nevertheless, in over half of these cases criminal charges are brought against the parent, and many of us would say that the parent has done something horrible. The fact that the parent did not intend the death of the child does nothing to change the fact that something horrible has been done. As Meagher puts the point, even the unintended taking of a life leaves one morally tainted. When we consider the self-lacerating reaction of those whose actions resulted in the inadvertent death of a child, we should not be surprised by the self-hatred that frequently afflicts combat veterans. Even if the actions of soldiers are defensible in moral terms, they killed.

This argument about the polluting nature of actions that result in death is intertwined with a second point about the role of Christian tradition and just war theory in framing the moral assessment of killing as depen-

dent on intentions. Meagher cites the words the author of Luke attributes to Jesus on the cross about his tormentors: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." "These words," Meagher writes, "bring us to a new place, a new conception of agency and responsibility that will profoundly reshape the discussion of war and sex... in the early Christian centuries and clear down to the present day."

According to Meagher, it is precisely the idea that actions are one thing and intentions and inner dispositions are quite another that Augustine uses to justify killing by Christians in war. Meagher quotes Augustine: "When a soldier kills an enemy, or when a judge or an officer of the law puts a criminal to death...the killing of a man does not seem to me to be a sin." This killing is not a sin because there is no malicious intent on the part of the soldier or the officer of the law.

According to Meagher, the Augustinian view that killing in war is not wrong so long as the war is justified and no evil intent is involved is

the heart of the just war tradition. Unfortunately, this view can make no sense of the idea that an agent is morally harmed if he or she brings about the death of another human being. The idea that killing another threatens one's very humanity, that killing irrevocably leaves a scar on one's soul, cannot easily be accommodated by the just war tradition. Just war thinking thus leaves us particularly unprepared to respond to the existential despair that veterans frequently experience.

There is much to contest in Meagher's volume, and it would have been better if he had directly engaged some of the most important theorists and historians of the just war tradition, like Michael Walzer or James Turner Johnson. Still, no serious supporter of the just war tradition can afford to ignore this frontal assault on just war thinking, particularly as it has been embraced and supported by Christian tradition.

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PAUL LAURITZEN is a theology professor at John Carroll University, University Heights, Ohio.

JAMES S. TORRENS

## THE SEARCHER

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### PURE ACT

#### The Uncommon Life of Robert Lax

By Michael N. McGregor  
Fordham University Press. 472p. \$34.95

*Pure Act* is a painstaking and readable tribute to Robert Lax, the bearded sage and avant garde poet who was a confidant of Thomas Merton. Lax became known to the world at large through Merton's conversion story, *The Seven Storey Mountain*. The two were drawn together at Columbia University on the staff of *Jester*, a sophisticated humor magazine that modeled itself on *The New Yorker*. With them were Ed Rice, the pioneer of *Jubilee* magazine, that banner of Catholic culture in the

1950s, and Ad Reinhart, soon to be a leading minimalist painter.

Lax, the son of Jewish immigrants, had that hole in his heart that only God could fill. As World War II was coming on, he and Merton and Rice spent summer months at his family's cottage near Olean, N.Y., "pursuing their sense of truth and of God," as the author, Michael McGregor, puts it. The pursuit led him to baptism at St. Ignatius Church in New York on Dec. 19, 1943.

Study of Thomas Aquinas during those years drew Robert Lax to the concept of God as pure act, a philosophical high point that St. Thomas reached with the help of Aristotle.

From God as pure act he derived a lifetime ideal of acting consciously yet spontaneously, and always with love. Lax found this exemplified in the Cristiani Bros. Circus, with which he traveled and which impelled him to a cycle of poems, *The Circus of the Sun*. Later the sponge fishermen of Kalymnos Island, poorest of the poor, were to impress him by the same conscious daring.

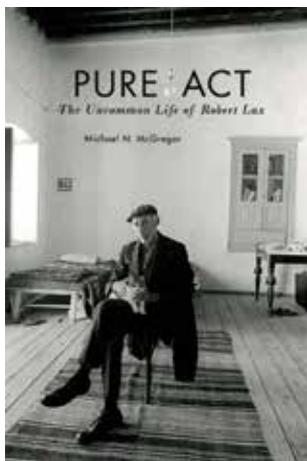
The major interest of *Pure Act* lies in its tracing of the stages of a totally poetic life. Robert Lax was not born for the labors of a 9-to-5 day. After college he had a brief job answering letters at *The New Yorker*, but the ambiance intimidated him. At Jubilee later he was judged undependable because he got so lost in his own poetry and journaling. And then began his years of wandering—the docks of Marseilles, the shrine of La Salette in the French Alps, the center of Jean Vanier near Paris—and wondering what he should do. One day a waiter in a Greek restaurant in New York urged him, “You should go to Greece.” That he did, for the latter half of his days. There it was, on Patmos Island in 1985, that Michael McGregor, now a professor at Portland State, Ore., happened upon him and fell under his spell.

Robert Lax deliberately chose insecurity, scraping by with some family aid and chance benefactions. And he chose to live as a celibate. Divine providence favored him. At Jubilee, he found Emil Antonucci, an illustrator and designer, to respond excitedly to his writing. Buying an old hand press, he produced broadsides of poetry chosen by Lax, and then slim volumes of his poems. He filmed the poet in interviews or readings. Later two people in Zurich founded a small press, Pendo Verlag, for his benefit. They became

his chief publishers and a depository of his papers.

Robert Lax and Merton both loved James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* for its clever diction, which they liked to imitate in their correspondence. But Lax’s poetic idiom grew ever simpler. He developed a stripped-down vertical style of just a few words per line, or even just one, or as little as a syllable per line. These spare poems were for the voice, for deliberate pacing and strategic repetition. He featured primary colors and the

stellar world. His audiences apparently loved hearing him. Lax’s ideal reader,



the one he claimed to be writing for, was Mark Van Doren, his Columbia teacher and mentor.

On Kalymnos, a Greek isle just off the shore of a hostile Turkey, his political naïveté cost Robert Lax dearly. During his absence in a crisis of the 1970s, suspicion spread that he was an American spy. On his return he tried to ignore this absurdity, but could not quite. He settled tranquilly on Patmos for his last 18 years, as appreciation for him as a poet grew in Europe and America. His health all the while was weakening until, in 2000, he was brought home to Olean to die. In the Greek isles, many expressed their grief to have lost their “saint.”

JAMES S. TORRENS, S.J., is a former poetry editor of *America*.

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# Widows and Scribes

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), NOV. 8, 2015

Readings: 1 Kgs 17:10–16; Ps 146:7–10; Heb 9:24–28; Mk 12:38–44

*“A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny” (Mk 12:42)*

Concerns about the economic teachings of Pope Francis, that he is a Marxist for instance, are bandied about whenever he criticizes unfettered capitalism. These concerns ought to be forwarded to a higher source, since the pope’s critique stems not from modern political divisions but from the biblical call to offer justice to those in need. For it is God “who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry.... He upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.”

The prophet Elijah demonstrates God’s concern for those economically oppressed when he goes to see the widow of Zarephath, a single mother, and asks for water and bread. The request seems thoughtless initially, for the widow has only a little food for her and her son, and it is about to run out. She asks Elijah to let her “go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.”

Elijah instructs her to make the food as she had planned, but he asks that she “first make me a little cake.” Elijah promises her that God has spoken and her food will be abundant, that she will not run out of grain or oil. The widow prepared what little food she had for the prophet and, true to God’s word, she was rewarded with an abundance.

The clarity of the widow of Zarephath giving all to God and being rewarded with abundance is, however, muddled in the Gospel account of another

widow, who gives all of her money to the Temple treasury.

Just prior to this passage, Jesus has said, “Beware of the scribes,” who “devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

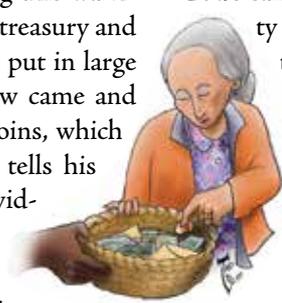
Immediately after giving this warning, Jesus sits down by the treasury and watches “many rich people put in large sums.” Then “a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.” Jesus tells his disciples that “this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Whereas Elijah asks for a little sustenance from the widow and returns God’s generosity to her and her son in abundance, here the widow has given “all she had to live on,” and it is not clear what she will receive from God’s representatives at the Temple.

There are two ways to look at her action. The first, in light of the story of the widow of Zarephath, is that since she has given all to God, she will likewise be rewarded, even if Jesus does not mention this. She demonstrated a love of God and love of neighbor by giving all she had to the Temple treasury. By doing so, she has acted on her belief that God will care for her and that she will rely on her neighbors to make God’s care for her known in her life.

The second is that this is an instance of how “widows’ houses” are devoured

by taking advantage of her religious piety. While the widow models “giving until it hurts,” who will supply her economic needs now or ameliorate her pain? Is Jesus praising her action by drawing attention to it or grieving that no one else would give all for God’s sake? Has the widow’s religiosity been exploited? Should it be the Temple and those who serve the Temple—or, in our context today, the church and those who serve the church—who give to the poor widow? We know that God gave abundantly to the



**PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE**

Reflect on the widow giving all that she had. How do we emulate her generosity? How do we care for those most in need?

ART: TAD DUNNE

widow of Zarephath through Elijah, but who will supply this widow’s economic needs?

Jesus is not focused on simply criticizing first-century Jewish scribes. After all, earlier a scribe is described by Jesus as “not far from the kingdom of God” (Mk 12:34). But Jesus is drawing our attention to the fact that it is the duty of God’s representatives to serve those in need. The issue for Christians today is to ask not only how we might model the widow’s generosity to God but how we can imitate God’s generosity toward the widow and those like her who have given all to God’s service.

**JOHN W. MARTENS**

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

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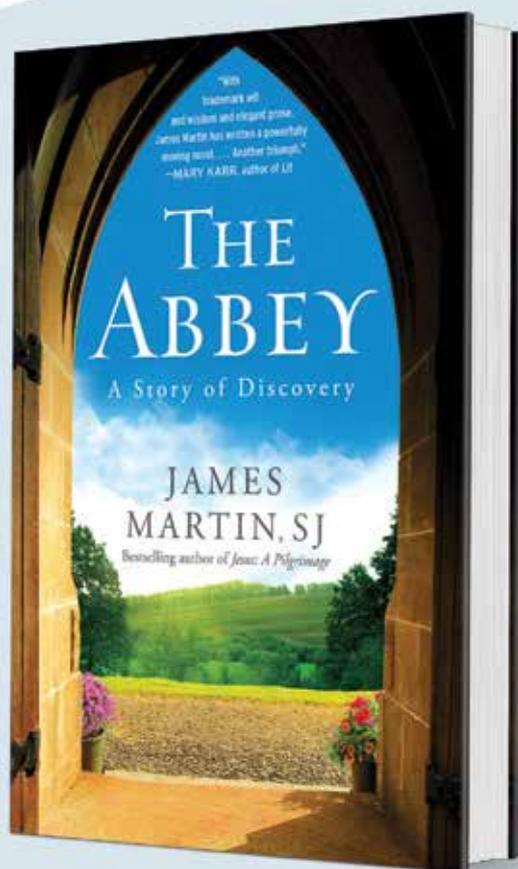
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