America
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Can Detroit Be Saved?
KEVIN CLARKE

OF MANY THINGS

At press time, just 36 hours have passed since Shane Victorino's bottom-of-the-seventh grand slam sent the Boston Red Sox to the 2013 World Series. That lone exuberant voice you heard yelping late Saturday night in Westchester, N.Y., where I was staying for the weekend, was mine. In Westchester, as in Manhattan, I am "a stranger in a strange land," as Moses once said, a lone Bosox fan among the countless minions of that diabolical "other," a certain Bronx ball club that is our nemesis, scapegoat and not infrequent excuse for another pint.

I confess to the sin of pride here. In my defense, however, the more than eight-decade World Series drought endured by my home town meant that it wasn't even possible to commit that particular sin during the first 32 years of my life; so you can cut me a little slack. Also, it's not entirely my own doing. I inherited my deep-seated fanaticism from my mother, who was born in New York and then moved to Massachusetts as an adult. My mother, therefore, was a convert to the Red Sox and, like many converts, she was especially zealous in the defense of her new faith.

All that aside, I can't shake the feeling that if I were a better man, a better Christian, I would've been rooting for the Detroit Tigers on Saturday night. If any place in the United States really needs a shot in the arm right now, an injection of hope and joy that a trip to the World Series can bring, then it's the city of Detroit. "A casual cruise through Detroit offers plenty of evidence of the municipal apocalypse often depicted in the national media," Kevin Clarke writes in this issue. Abandoned infrastructure, municipal bankruptcy, and lingering and pernicious racial strife are perduring themes in the story of modern Motor City. But Mr. Clarke tells us another side of the story: the indefatigable spirit of Detroit's people and their hopes for the future of their city.

The late John F. Kavanaugh,S.J., liked to remind his **America** readers that all stories—about Detroit, the church, the marketplace—are about people. "For John," Jeanne Schuler writes in her tribute to the Jesuit philosopher and social activist, "the human person is the perennial topic that provides the measure needed to think through the issues we face."

Father Kavanaugh's brand of personalism is also evident in John Savant's thoughtful reflection on the gap between economics and theology: "A fully human approach to economic justice," Dr. Savant writes, "would join the science of economics with the mystery of the human person."

Dr. Savant's article is a response to an article we published last May in which Dr. Stacie Beck asked whether Catholic social activists are too suspicious of market forces and too quick to reach for public sector solutions to economic problems. We got a lot of mail about Dr. Beck's article. Most of it was thoughtful and engaging; some of it was not. As I wrote at the time, if we are doing our job right, then you should read something in every issue that challenges you, something with which you might even strongly disagree. **America** is a ministry of the church; there is no faithful Catholic voice that is not welcome in these pages.

What is "a faithful Catholic voice"? Good question. There is no magic formula. Indeed, the more formulaic our answer, the more likely it is to be wrong. That's because, as this issue reminds us, the question involves people—people who are created in the image of God, in all of their beauty, in all of their maddening complexity. Whatever else is required, then, charity is the quality we need most; the kind of charity so many of you extended to Professor Beck, the kind of charity I regrettably failed to extend to the Detroit Tigers and, admittedly, I will always struggle to extend to the New York Yankees.

MATT MALONE, S.J.

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Cover: The inside of the abandoned Martyrs of Uganda Catholic Church in Detroit, Mich. in 2011. CNS photo/Mark Blinch, Reuters

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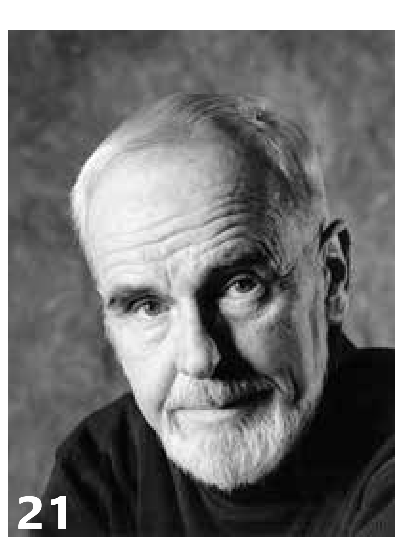
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Multimedia reporting from **Detroit**, and an archive of articles by **John F. Kavanaugh, S.J.** Plus, additional responses to the article **"Just Economics."** All at americamagazine.org.

Adamant Populism

Enrico Letta, the prime minister of Italy, in an interview with The New York Times on Oct. 14 after triumphing over the machinations of his rival Silvio Berlusconi in a recent parliamentary showdown and on the verge of his meeting in Washington with President Obama, was unusually frank about his political views. He identified the problem of governance with the rise of populist anger and intransigent populist politicians around the world. Ironically, Mr. Letta identified the political impasse in the United States as one example of the brick wall facing many governments, and his remarks placed the adamant Tea Party populists, though he did not explicitly name them, with the likes of the surging fringe elements in France, Greece and other European countries. Mr. Letta noted that Chancellor Angela Merkel's big achievement in the German elections in September was her defeat of populism, and he added that the next big risk could be the election next May of an "anti-European" European Parliament.

The strength of populist movements dramatically increased worldwide with the economic recession in 2008. In Europe the recession was exacerbated by austerity measures demanded by German financiers in at-risk economies like Greece, Portugal, Cyprus and Italy. That austerity has done little to bring down double-digit unemployment rates across most of Europe (more than 25 percent in Greece and Spain).

The parallels with the United States are telling, and the solutions seem equally obvious: improve economic growth, create jobs, focus on the flourishing of the middle class and strengthen safety nets for the poor instead of bailing out banks and giving a free pass to wealthy elites. If this happens, the populist fury might subside amid sighs of relief.

'Anonymous' Justice?

The loose collective of Internet hackers and activists known as Anonymous has made a name for itself with its high-profile cyber-attacks on corporations, government agencies and religious institutions. The movement's aims range from "getting laughs" to promoting online freedom and toppling authoritarian regimes. Its targets have included the Church of Scientology, PayPal, the Federal Bureau of Investigation—even the Vatican. But in the past year they have moved into surprising new territory: bringing justice to victims of bullying and rape.

The horrific case of young teens in Maryville, Mo., will sound all too familiar: two freshmen girls snuck over to the house of a senior football player, where they were given alcohol and allegedly raped, while another boy videotaped part of the act. The senior boy, age 17, who admitted to having "consensual" sex with the 14-year-old, was charged with sexual assault, only to have the prosecutor dismiss the case two weeks later, citing a lack of evidence.

Enter Anonymous. The "hacktivist" collective posted a message calling for an investigation into the handling of the case, warning, "If Maryville won't defend these young girls, if the police are too cowardly or corrupt to do their jobs, if the justice system has abandoned them, then we will have to stand for them."

How are we to judge this sort of online vigilantism? In cases like Maryville, and others before it, it is natural to sympathize with Anonymous and its support for victims of sexual exploitation. But as a society we cannot outsource justice to the online equivalent of a mob, an unaccountable collective that plays judge, jury and executioner and pays little mind to the concept of innocent until proven guilty. If our system is not working, we must fix it. Those who are fighting against injustice should not need to wear a mask.

Marathon Spirit

Almost 17 hours after starting the Chicago Marathon on Oct. 13, 2013, Maickel Melamed, a 38-year-old Venezuelan man with muscular dystrophy, crossed the finish line, placing last among more than 40,000 participants.

Born in Caracas, Mr. Melamed was diagnosed at birth with muscular dystrophy, which makes a person's muscles unusually vulnerable to damage. Many people who live with the condition have difficulty walking, and most ultimately require wheelchairs. In the first week of his life, this appeared to be Mr. Melamed's fate; doctors informed his parents that the chances that he would ever walk were almost nil.

Mr. Melamed, however, defied this prognosis and learned to walk. He went on to study economics and psychotherapy and eventually created a volunteer organization dedicated to helping young people achieve their dreams. Two years ago, he began following his own: competing in marathons.

With the help of his friend and trainer, Federico Pisani, Mr. Melamed began a training regimen that focused on strengthening his muscles through swimming exercises and gradual walks. Before his most recent marathon in Chicago, which he described as "the most challenging," he also participated in marathons in New York City and Berlin. Mr. Melamed insists that one must never give up on a dream. "If you dream it, make it happen," he said after the race in Chicago. "Your life is the most beautiful thing that can happen to you. So make the best of it."

EDITORIAL

Our Sacred Dead

A month ago a Navy SEAL team paddled ashore in the predawn hours in southern Somalia. Their mission was to capture Mohamed Abdulkadir, also known as Ikrima, who was suspected of being "associated with" various bomb plots. But as they approached the militants' seaside compound, its inhabitants opened fire. The operation commander did not order his team to charge and did not call in an air strike. Instead, he ordered them to withdraw. The compound was filled with women and children, and the SEALs would not have been able to capture Ikrima, whom they wanted alive, without killing or wounding innocent civilians. The logic: There would be other opportunities to arrest Ikrima, and the United States should follow the rules of armed conflict and respect human life.

The United States has not always responded this way. The consequences of the Iraq War, for example, are devastating. A study published in The Lancet in 2006 estimated 600,000 "excess deaths" in Iraq. No such study has examined the war dead in Afghanistan. As we leave Afghanistan, our self-examination on this life issue calls for a reckoning with the civilian dead in that country. The United States has claimed to occupy the moral high ground, but history shows we have not held that ground very well.

A report in The Nation ("America's Afghan Victims," 10/7) is the most comprehensive document available on the innocent war dead. (One of the reporters, Nick Turse, wrote about civilian casualties in the Vietnam War in *Kill Anything That Moves*, reviewed by Tom Fox in **America,** 3/25.) The report reveals that the International Security Assistance Force, the U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan, does not have accurate numbers on dead civilians despite a commitment made in 2008 to keep better records. Dozens of independent and governmental organizations, including the U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, are attempting to track these deaths, but there is no consensus. No one office is responsible, and the governments involved, including the United States, do not want to publicize how many noncombatants have been killed. Gen. Tommy R. Franks, the central commander in Afghanistan from 2000 to 2003, once said, "You know, we don't do body counts."

The best available academic study is from Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies, which estimates, based on U.N. reports, that 19,000 civilians in Afghanistan have been killed by all sides in the conflict. Afghan insurgents are responsible for most of these deaths. The report in The Nation concludes that only between 2,848 and 6,481 of the total civilian dead—including atrocities like an Army sergeant's killing of 16 people and an air strike that wiped out a wedding party—were killed by U.S. forces. That is small comfort for the Afghan people, who already resent the U.S. presence and are perhaps more ready to accept tragedy inflicted by their own countrymen than by airstrikes and night raids carried out by foreign interlopers.

As the war in Afghanistan intensified in 2008, the effort to keep count of civilian deaths increased, though many agreed the data gathered from Western media reports represented only the tip of the iceberg. The tension between the United Nations and United States increased. The coalition would claim they had killed insurgents, but the local population would tell the United Nations that the victims were farmers. A U.S. bombing in September 2008 killed 92 civilians in one village, and in May 2009 another airstrike killed 140. WikiLeaks revealed in July 2010 that the U.S. military secretly maintained files concerning 4,024 Afghan civilian war deaths between 2004 and 2009.

Killing civilians is not only immoral but also strategically counterproductive. Whether an attack using drones, or night raids on the ground, these actions lead only to new recruits for the Taliban. Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal often called this "insurgent math," and his aide said every additional civilian casualty generates 20 more insurgents, an increase in road bombs and an additional violent clash between insurgents and U.S. troops in the following six weeks.

In U.S. culture, respect for human life is narrow, sometimes to the point of indifference to the fate of innocent persons who are not military enemies, but whom we kill. We are slow to see those designated "terrorists" as our brothers and sisters. There is a need for a truly independent agency, akin to the Government Accountability Office, to record and publish the names and number of civilians killed on all sides of a conflict. The nightly news should acknowledge both American and foreign dead. Memorials and liturgies that demonstrate respect for all the victims of war would give life to the most challenging words in the Sermon on the Mount.

REPLY ALL

An Improvement

Yes, yes to Jack Selzer ("Hail, Holy Grammar," Reply All, 10/7), and yes again. The problem for me in the Hail Mary is that the words after "fruit of" sound like one name: "Thywombjesus." Or maybe "Thywomb" is the first name. It is a bit like Pip, the protagonist in *Great Expectations*, by Charles Dickens, who misreads his parents' tombstone and thinks his mother's name was "Also Georgiana."

Mr. Selzer's suggested change is clearer and rhythmically more emphatic but probably doesn't have much of a chance. God help us if "Liturgiam Authenticam" weighs in on it.

PETER FARLEY
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Workshop Lessons

"A Trinitarian Love," by Timothy P. O'Malley (9/23), finally gives voice to a long-neglected Catholic theology of adoption. We adopted an infant girl over 50 years ago. Back then, the church was even less supportive and the stigma more pronounced. We were, however, very fortunate to participate in a workshop for adoptive parents that brought together 15 couples to help all of us deal with problems specifically related to adoption.

We learned so much through the years, like when to tell the child he/she is adopted. The answer: Tell the child lovingly as a baby in your arms so there is never a time the child did not know, and then answer questions truthfully with age-appropriate information as the child grows.

We also learned not to panic when the child says, "I hate you, and I wish I had my real mommy." Only a child secure in your love would say such a thing, and all you need to do is reassure the child that you are his/her real mother and you love him/her very much.

This workshop was 50 years ahead of the times. If adoption had also been presented by the church as a blessed sacrament of love, it truly would have been Trinitarian.

JACQUES AND LOIS CHAZAUD
South Portland, Me.

Chosen Daughter

Timothy P. O'Malley writes, "Less than 20 years ago, it was considered anathema to tell a child of his or her status as 'adopted.'" Both of our children, who are now 40 and over, knew from early on that they were adopted. This caused a problem, however, when our 7-year-old daughter responded to a bully by telling him that she was chosen by her parents, but his parents had to take what they got. He went home devastated because he wasn't adopted.

This led to my wife and me being called to the principal's office to discuss (defend) our daughter and explain that adoption was something that our two children were proud of—as were we.

(DEACON) T. PATRICK BRADLEY
Spokane, Wash.

Expose the Heart

I much appreciate Timothy P. O'Malley's point that adoption is an opportunity to love someone, echoing God's love for us—unearned, freely given, generous and committed.

At one time I oversaw a specialized adoption agency, which viewed adoption not as a way of finding children for parents who did not have them, but as a way of finding parents for children who needed them. Screening was mostly a matter of helping applicants assess themselves and their readiness to be a parent for a special needs child. One might call it "discernment of one's particular parental charism."

Mainly, I came across very ordinary people—couples and singles—who had a special openness to one or another type of child. One might do well with mentally delayed children; another with children with spina bifida or cerebral palsy; and still another might have the skill and stamina to parent an emotionally disturbed child.

May I urge readers considering adoption to also consider whether they might have a charism to share with a child in special need. Yes, it is a scary proposition and not without risk. Whenever the heart is exposed, it is subject to breakage. But the value is transcendent.

JOHN F. BOYNE
Hackettstown, N.J.

A Child's Perspective

As an adoptive parent, I was fascinated by this theological reflection on adoption. I certainly do applaud the point that our Catholic parishes should encourage and support adoption more than we do.

But I am also bothered that this is a parent-centered piece on a topic that begs for a child-centered discussion. We are still discovering how emotionally painful it can be for a child to be raised outside her birth family—even when she recognizes intellectually why that could not have happened. Love transcends biology, but without a strong sense of biological love, a child may always feel somewhat displaced.

RON CHANDONIA
Online comment

Nazis Not Democratic

I enjoyed reading "End of an Illusion," by Timothy O'Connell (Vantage Point, 9/23), which originally ran in 1973; but I would like to question his statement that the government of the Third Reich "was democratically elected."

In July 1932, despite the Nazi brown shirts' wide-scale use of threats to intimidate voters, the Nazi Party received only about 37 percent of the vote. Eric D. Weitz points out in his book, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*: "Nearly two-thirds of the [German] electorate cast their votes against the Nazi Party." Weitz adds: "They [the Nazi Party] never would achieve a majority in a freely contested election."

Nor was Adolf Hitler ever elected in a freely contested election. In a backroom deal he was appointed chancellor of Germany in January 1933, after which he began ruling Germany with

an iron fist, sending in his goons to arrest vast numbers of those who were members of the Social Democrats and anyone else who opposed him, and imprisoning them in concentration camps. So began his "reign of terror," which would set the world aflame.

WILLIAM E. COONEY
Philadelphia, Pa.

What's Best for Kids?

I understand the purpose of publishing letters to the editor is to provide a forum for civil discussion, and that the views expressed may not reflect the opinions of the editors, but I found it disturbing that a Catholic magazine would publish "Interest of Children," by Charlie Davis (Reply All, 9/9). Should not the editors be more selective?

The writer, a Catholic parent, teaches his children that "God wants...children to be brought up in stable, loving, two-parent households, whether heterosexual or homosexual." As a Catholic parent, I do not teach this mentality to my children or to the children in my care. This mentality confuses the perceived sexual needs and emotional needs of the parents with the core issue: what is in the interest of children. It is a muddled and myopic argument.

Although each situation of a broken home or single parenthood varies, I suggest that embracing the virtue of chastity by the adults involved is often overlooked as a component in what really is in the interest of children.

MARGIT McCARTHY
Colorado Springs, Col.

Fund-Raising Idea

Re "Save Our Sisters" (8/26): The plea of James Martin, S.J., for the retired and aging sisters was touching. Each year, when the annual collection for retired religious is taken, similar stories come to the fore. This is a population that merits attention.

My suggestion: If the goal is to raise money, there are much more effective strategies. At a seminar on capital campaigns, I learned about the three A's: Affinity, Ability and Access. Without all three one has little hope of realizing a gift from the donor. One would hope that the students of these sisters, many of whom are in the prime charitable-giving ages (40 and 65), would have the ability to give and affinity with the cause. Therefore the lacking piece is "access."

God willing it is possible, with the sort of sleuthing that makes class reunions possible, to have access to those who received a Catholic school education, now decades after their graduation, and ask them directly for assistance. The direct ask is always the most effective. Sister N.'s pupils would be the best persons to ask to support Sister N. or her community.

(MSGR.) DANIEL STACK
Cartersville, Ga.

An Informed Voice

America recently published a review of *Wounds That Will Not Heal*, by Russell K. Nieli (8/26), a book that called for the repeal of "racial and ethnic preferences" in the United States. That this book would be considered for review, and the gentle review published, suggests a lack of editorial quality control.

In the book Professor Nieli stereotypes African-Americans as not work-ready, ignoring the millions who fill low wage jobs, and he consigns the "inner-city black underclass" to a form of boot camp to prepare them for nonexistent infrastructure repair jobs. Several actual causes of the "wounds" are missing, including the Nixon/Reagan Southern strategy, generations of housing and mortgage discrimination and Reagan's (political) war on drugs, a continuing scourge on black young men.

I beg for the unique resource of **America** to be an informed voice on the complicated issue of race. I have the utmost respect for the reviewer, M. Shawn Copeland, a brilliant theologian. But this topic is much broader than theology.

At some point one or more minorities will appear on the masthead. In the interim, **America** might assemble a list of black and Hispanic Catholic scholars to provide backup.

ALAN E. PINADO
Atlanta, Ga.

BLOG TALK

*The following is an excerpt from "Misreading Murray, Yet Again," by George Weigel, published in an online column of First Things (10/9). The column responds to "Murray's Mistake," by Michael Baxter (**Am.** 9/23).*

I don't doubt that ecclesial unity in the [Catholic] Church in America has fractured in ways that no one could anticipate when Vatican II convened in 1962. But to blame that current disarray on differences of political opinion (and on Murray) would seem to ignore the obvious historical fact that Catholics were bitterly divided over political questions in the past, but without the fractures in ecclesial unity that both Baxter and I regret today. [...]

What may appear to be politically-induced fractures in the unity of the church in the United States today are the result of something else: Too many Catholics in the United States, including prominent public figures, have ceased to believe and profess "all that the holy Catholic Church believes, teaches and professes to be revealed by God" (which is what converts confess when they enter into full communion with the Catholic Church). That dissonance is why unity within the church in the United States is so fragile these days.

GEORGE WEIGEL
Firstthings.com

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SYRIA

Christians Can Be a Witness For Peace as Conflict Continues

As the death toll mounts and the bombs and mortar shells continue to fall, "it's a vocation now to stay in Syria and to be a Christian and try to be a witness of the Gospel principle of nonviolence," said Nawras Sammour, S.J., the director of Jesuit Refugee Service Middle East and North Africa told **America**. The Jesuit agency is serving thousands of internally displaced Syrians in Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and other sites, Father Sammour reports. Father Sammour was visiting the United States to discuss the ongoing J.R.S. response to the crisis with Jesuit colleagues and specialists from the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations.

Speaking with **America** from Washington, Father Sammour welcomed news of renewed talks scheduled for late November in Geneva aimed at ending the conflict. A peaceful and united Syria at the end of such talks is "difficult to imagine now, but still possible," he said. There is no solution to the conflict except through inclusive dialogue, Father Sammour said, urging Americans to resist the temptation of sending more weapons into the fray.

"If you try to do something as a country, support all processes of peace," he said. He was leery of a more aggressive U.S. intervention on behalf of opposition forces. "Fighting and giving arms and weapons—it's much easier to give people hope. Hope is not going to come from arms; there is no solution by doing war."

Father Sammour added, "If we are going in the end to have one winner and one loser, it's not going to solve anything."

Outside Syria, J.R.S. is working with an already vast and still growing population of refugees in the bordering states of Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. The number of Syrians displaced by the

FORCED LABOR

New Estimate: 30 Million 'Modern Slaves' Exploited Worldwide

The Global Slavery Index, a new comprehensive measure of compelled labor, estimates that there are 29.8 million people enslaved around the world. The countries with the highest numbers of enslaved people are India, China, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Russia, Thailand, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Taken together, these countries account for 76 percent of the millions trapped in modern slavery, according to the report.

The inaugural index ranked 162 countries, reflecting a combined measure of three factors: estimated prevalence of modern slavery by population, a measure of child marriage and a measure of human trafficking in and out of a country. The index was published by the Australia-based Walk Free Foundation.

Mauritania, a West African nation with deeply entrenched hereditary slavery, is ranked number one. It is estimated that there are between 140,000 and 160,000 people enslaved in Mauritania, a country with a population of just 3.8 million. Haiti, a Caribbean nation with deeply entrenched practices of child slavery (known locally as the *restavek* system) is ranked second on the index. An estimated 200,000 to 220,000 people are in modern slavery in Haiti, a country with a population of just 10.2 million. Pakistan, with its porous borders to Afghanistan, large populations of displaced persons and weak rule of law, is third on the index with as many as 2,200,000 people in various forms of modern slavery.

The country with the largest number of people in modern slavery is India, with between 13,300,000 and 14,700,000 people enslaved. Slavery in India includes some foreign nationals, but by far the largest proportion of this problem occurs through the exploitation of Indian citizens, particularly through debt bondage and bonded labor.

China had the second highest number, with an estimated 2.8 million to

THEIR CITY IN RUINS. Children sit among rubble in a besieged neighborhood in Homs, Syria, on Sept. 19.

war is now estimated at more than 6.3 million—4.25 million struggle within Syria's borders and 2.1 million more are refugees. More than 115,000 have been killed in the two-year-old conflict.

J.R.S. within Syria is providing monthly emergency food rations to 35,000 families, and its field kitchens serve 22,000 people each day. In Father Sammour's hometown of Aleppo, the J.R.S. field kitchen makes up to 16,000 hot meals a day that are distributed to mosques, school-shelters and public buildings. The agency also cares for Syrians cut off from normal health care services or unable to afford medicine after months of disruption caused by the civil war. J.R.S. also offers educational and psychosocial support to nearly 10,000 children and women with a long-term eye on reconciliation in Syria.

"We have people coming from everywhere in Syria" looking for a secure, safe place to be, he said. "Although there is no more secure place for 100 percent right now in Syria," he added. "Outside it's random death. A blast could happen everywhere; mortars could fall everywhere; fighting could happen everywhere and that's it.

"If there's something that unifies all Syrians today, it's uncertainty and fear—for everybody. Nobody has today in Syria the monopoly of suffering. All Syrians suffer. It's not only about bad guys on one hand and on the other hand you have good guys. No, it's not like that."

Christian anxiety and vulnerability remain uniquely acute in Syria, he said, noting that in other recent regional conflicts—Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt—Christians have fared poorly. The Christian community is scattered throughout Syria; "the Christians don't have their own political party; they don't have their own region."

But, he adds, "that could be a grace for us because [it is] the vocation of Christians to be with everybody and for everybody." Staying in Syria, Father Sammour said, is "an adventure without any warranties or guarantees for the future, but that is the Gospel somehow."

KEVIN CLARKE

3.1 million. In China the forced labor of men, women and children can be located in many sectors of the economy, including domestic servitude and forced begging, the sexual exploitation of women and children and forced marriage.

The country with the third highest absolute number in modern slavery is Pakistan, with an estimated 2 million to 2.2 million people. The United States ranked 134 with an estimated 59,644 enslaved.

"Whether it is called human trafficking, forced labor, slavery or slavery-like practices (debt bondage, forced or servile marriage, sale or exploitation of children including in armed conflict), victims of modern slavery have their freedom denied and are used and controlled and exploited by another person for profit, sex or the thrill of domination," the index authors conclude.

A "staggering and harsh reality," some people are still being "born into hereditary slavery," according to the report, particularly in parts of West Africa and South Asia. "Other victims are captured or kidnapped before being sold or kept for exploitation, whether through 'marriage', unpaid labor on fishing boats or as domestic workers. Others are tricked and lured into situations they cannot escape, with false promises of a good job or an education."

Modern slavery can involve using children in the military, whether as combatants, porters, cooks or for other jobs. The chains of modern slavery are not always physical. Sometimes escalating debts, intimidation, deception, isolation, fear or even a "marriage" that is forced on a young woman or girl can be used to hold a person against her will without the need for locks or chains.

CHILDHOOD'S END. Boys pan for gold in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

'Nones' on the Rise Among Hispanics

Most U.S. Hispanics identify themselves as Catholic (53 percent); 25 percent identify as Protestant; and few Hispanics (6 percent) identify with a non-Christian religion. But perhaps the fastest growing "religious" demographic among Hispanics, according to a new report from the Public Religion Research Institute, is the religiously unaffiliated—or the "nones" (for "none of the above"), as they are known in other surveys. While the media and academic literature have noted the declining proportion of U.S. Hispanic Catholics, the narrative has often emphasized Catholics converting to evangelical or charismatic forms of Protestantism. The institute's Hispanic Values Survey of 2013 reveals that this is only half the story. When comparing the religious affiliation of Hispanic adults today with their religious affiliation as children, Catholic affiliation drops by 16 percentage points, but the ranks of both evangelical Protestants and the religiously unaffiliated have grown at roughly equal rates. Evangelical Protestant affiliation has increased by 6 percentage points (from 7 percent to 13 percent), while the percentage of those claiming no religious affiliation has increased by 7 percentage points—from 5 percent to 12 percent.

NEWS BRIEFS

Fleeing Cyclone Phailin

Caroleen Hensgen, S.S.N.D., **the first woman appointed superintendent of schools** for a U.S. diocese, died on Oct. 15 in Chatawa, Miss., at the age of 98.✦ On World Food Day, Oct. 16, **Pope Francis denounced widespread hunger** due to wasted food as a symptom of a "throwaway culture" and called for greater effort toward a worldwide "culture of encounter and solidarity" instead.✦ The University of Dayton and Catholic Relief Services plan a joint effort to address an **anticipated increase in labor trafficking** when the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games come to Brazil.✦ The Daughters of Charity, who first came to the Diocese of Nashville in 1898 to establish St. Thomas Hospital, announced they will **withdraw from the diocese** in the fall of 2014.✦ Auxiliary Bishop Gerald E. Wilkerson, president of the California Catholic Conference, on Oct. 11 hailed **Gov.** Jerry Brown's veto of a bill that would have reopened the **statute of limitations** for child sex abuse cases.✦ Church charities in India are preparing for a **massive relief effort a**fter Cyclone Phailin left nearly nine million people affected along the east coast of India on Oct. 12.

Suddenly Stateless In Dominican Republic

On Sept. 23 the Dominican Republic's Constitutional Court issued a decision effectively denationalizing an estimated 250,000 people residing in that country. The ruling retroactively denies Dominican nationality to anyone born after 1929 who did not have at least one parent of Dominican blood. Human rights groups plan to challenge the ruling before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, where it could in theory still be overruled. An immigrant census released earlier this year estimated there were 245,000 Dominican-born, first-generation children of immigrants living in the country. But the number affected by the ruling is likely to be exponentially higher, activists said, because it applies to other generations as well. The vast majority of immigrant children—210,000—were of Haitian descent. It's estimated there are another 460,000 non-native Haitian migrants living in the country.

Christian Persecution Increases Globally

The persecution of Christians around the world has intensified over the last two-and-a-half years, according to a review of religious freedom in 30 countries by the United Kingdom branch of the Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need. Christians also are persecuted by religious nationalists in some countries where they find themselves in a minority, said the Aid to the Church in Need report, which was published on Oct. 17. Persecution of Christians was a phenomenon "happening in many different contexts," said John Newton, a co-author. Among the main culprits were the adherents of violent interpretations of Islam. Newton said that in recent years, the problem of attacks by "well-resourced" Islamist groups has reached into several continents, spreading to such African nations as Nigeria, Mali and Tanzania. Christians in India, Sri Lanka and Myanmar also faced persecution from majority Hindu or Buddhist nationalists. Some of the worst instances of persecution, however, continued to be found in Communist or former Communist states. Foremost of these was North Korea, where imprisoned Christians routinely faced torture and beatings.

From CNS and other sources.

JAMES T. KEANE

Found in Translation

In the international media rumpus following the publication last month of a monumental interview with Pope Francis in this magazine and 15 other Jesuit journals, attentive readers might have noticed the stated desire among some commentators for "the original text" or "the complete interview." What did the pope really say? Another juicy papal interview published in La Repubblica a few weeks later with an Italian atheist (who admitted he had neither recorded the interview nor taken any notes) only upped the ante, leading to more wistful requests for "the unedited version" or "the pope's actual words."

It's nonsense. There's no such thing, or at least such a thing anyone could make heads or tails of. Everything is edited. While it is outrageously unprofessional not to record an interview or take notes, no writer in human history has provided readers with "what was really said." Have you ever seen the transcript of an oral interview? The most eloquent among us pepper our talk with ums and uhs and nonsensical utterances; we trail off in midsentence; we grunt when we mean yes, hiss between our teeth to mean no. Want proof? Record your last conversation with your best friend, and then type it out exactly as it sounded. You thought you were arguing about baseball, but why does it look instead like you were simultaneously suffering debilitating strokes?

Beyond this basic problem are issues of translation. I work full time as an editor (not at this magazine), and face translation questions almost every day. When a liberation theologian writes "hacer la verdad," is the correct rendering "do the right thing," which might be its sense? Or do we go with "do the truth," a most infelicitous phrase in American English? How about a more literal "construct the truth," which sounds suspiciously like monkeying with the facts? Even more complicated: how do you convey what someone like Pope Francis means by "I have never been like Blessed Imelda"? (The editors at **America** went with "a goody-goody," but left the original as well.) Different languages have different rules for double negatives, too—a literal translation can often convey the exact opposite of what the author meant. Thomas Aquinas more than once got Aristotle exactly wrong for this very reason.

> A literal translation can convey the opposite of what the author meant.

Occasionally one also sees the minor gaffe that gets cleaned up to make everyone look a little more eloquent. Neil Armstrong never said, "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind" when he stepped onto the moon. Instead, he said "one small step for man," a truly unfortunate gaffe that doesn't really make much sense unless one believes he was cheering because he had gotten one up on the ladies. To the moon, Alice! Similarly, Shakespeare gave Julius Caesar "et tu, Brute?" as his famous dying words, which sounds a bit more eloquent than the "tu quoque, Brute?" that any classics professor will tell you was the far more likely Latin cry. And all this ignores the report of the Roman historian Suetonius, that Caesar's dying words were actually in Greek! Awkward for the nativists.

There are surely few in our postmodern culture who cling anymore to the naïveté that a reporter or an editor is an unbiased conduit of information, printing "just the facts." We all bring our biases and our histories to the writer's keyboard and to the editor's blue pen. At the same time, it is equally naïve to imagine that any conversation, translation or observation somehow possesses a single explicit and unalloyed meaning in and of itself, or that only by banishing the mischief of the word-tinkerers can that meaning be retrieved. We're all editors, and everything is edited.

I will admit, of course, that sometimes an editor comes along who takes the license to craft meaning and convey the gist of things too far. I recently read the true story of a promising young student in a theological seminary who was inspired by the political events of his time toward Marxist revolutionary ideals. He abandoned his theology studies to become an editor instead. He later moved from newspapers into politics, though he retained his love of manipulating the written word throughout his life. In his seminary days he was known as Joseph Djugashvili, but later edited his own Georgian-sounding name for one just a little more Russian: Joseph Stalin.

JAMES T. KEANE *is an editor at Orbis Books in Ossining, N.Y., and a former associate editor of* ***America****.*

Can This City Be Saved?

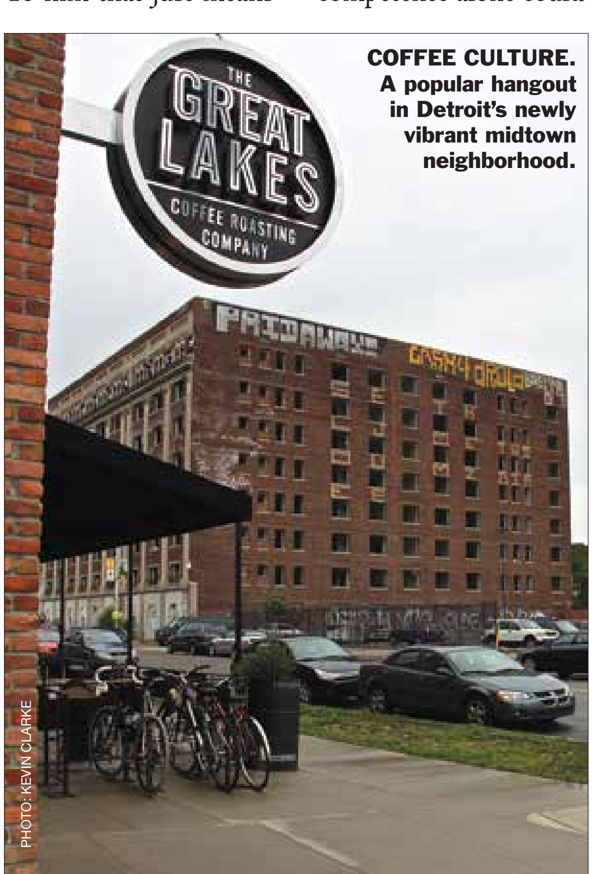
Reconstructing Detroit after bankruptcy

BY KEVIN CLARKE

It is Aug. 6, the feast of the Transfiguration, and Albert Aaron stands on a corner on the East Side of Detroit, political flyers in hand, ready to chat up anyone willing to hear why his candidate should be the city's next mayor. Three weeks earlier Detroit made national headlines with the largest municipal bankruptcy filing in U.S. history. Today Mr. Aaron is trying to get out the vote for the mayoral primary, pondering ways to transform Detroit and perhaps even his own life a little.

Mr. Aaron boils the complex of the city's many problems down to a mere two. "We need money," he says, "and we need jobs." He explains: "The private sector isn't bringing in jobs anymore, and the city can't do it." To him that just means the people of Detroit will have to step up. "We need to be creative," he says.

Just about 17 percent of Detroit's registered voters will make the effort to vote in the primary on Aug. 6. Maybe the stay-at-homes are wondering, what's the point? Much of the power wielded by the city's mayor has been handed off to Detroit's emergency manager, Kevyn Orr, a bankruptcy attorney who managed Chrysler's historic restructuring. Appointed by Gov. Rick Snyder in March, Mr. Orr confronted a mountain of long-term municipal debt and commitments—his team estimates $20 billion or thereabouts. On July 18 he declared Detroit insolvent and diverted the city's trickling revenue stream away from bondholders and toward life support for Detroit's diminished city services.



COFFEE CULTURE. A popular hangout in Detroit's newly vibrant midtown neighborhood.

PHOTO: KEVIN CLARKE

Municipal Meltdown

A casual cruise through Detroit offers plenty of evidence of the municipal apocalypse often depicted in the national press. Even "hot" neighborhoods like the city center, the riverfront and midtown are haunted by boarded-up specimens of 19th- and 20th-century architecture and abandoned, collapsing industrial sites. In outlying precincts wildflowers and grass rise as high as an elephant's eye in expanding tracts that are slowly making the transition back to prairie. Small outposts of occupied houses are often all that remain of neighborhoods that were once packed street corner to street corner with solid, single-family homes.

Conservative pundits blame Detroit's downfall on "unionized rapacity" and government corruption, but its cash-flow problems are more profound than what mere greed and incompetence alone could accomplish. Detroit's tale of urban woe would not be complete without some attention to the city's troubled race relations, "white flight" and the equally depressing force of deindustrialization and job loss, first to suburbs around the city, then to Nafta neighbors Canada and Mexico and finally all over the world. Detroit's population peaked at 1.85 million in 1950 and has collapsed to just about 685,000 today.

City services have been in decline for years and are now at mortally dangerous levels of dysfunction. Mr. Orr, in a devastating report on the fiscal and physical state of the city released in June, said it can take police as long as 58 minutes to arrive on the scene following a 911 call. (Police have challenged this claim.) The city's managers literally cannot keep the lights on. According to the report, streets lights in 40 percent of Detroit do not work, and Detroit is crowded with some 78,000 "abandoned and blighted structures" and 66,000 "blighted and vacant" lots.

If the bankruptcy proceeds, bond holders may receive as little as 10 cents on the dollar for their municipal holdings,

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A once vibrant neighborhood near downtown Detroit.

CNS PHOTO/REBECCA COOK, REUTERS

and more than 21,000 retirees may lose health coverage and face deep cuts in their monthly pensions. The pension cuts will be especially devastating for retired police and firefighters, who do not have Social Security to fall back on.

The institutions of the archdiocese have tumbled along with the fortunes of Detroit. Parish and school closings have signaled a vast retreat from the city over decades. "We are having to face a lot of the same realities as the civic order," Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron says. "We live in this world, not on planet Mars, so we have to figure out how we find a new way to be the Catholic Church within the city of Detroit."

Detroit is poised to become some kind of cautionary tale for other U.S. cities struggling with rising costs, declining populations and persisting job loss. Will it be a story of ruined retirees, lost civic treasures and scavenging vulture investors, or will it be a tale of shared sacrifice, reinvestment and civic reinvigoration that involves all members of a recovering community?

A Tale of Two Cities

Many residents, even some who are making it through rough times themselves at the Capuchin Soup Kitchen on Meldrum Avenue (one of two operated by Capuchin Franciscans in Detroit), have a sense that the bankruptcy may be an opportunity for a civic reboot, albeit an opportunity imperiled by competing political and economic interests. Benjamin Tolbert III stretches his weekly food budget by grabbing lunch at the Capuchin kitchen. "They've got some very good chefs here," he affirms as he finishes off his plate.

He thinks the bankruptcy might mark a turn for the better—finally—for his home town. "If it will allow things to become arranged where, economically speaking, the city can begin and start anew as far as their finances, it could be good," he says. "Detroiters are fighters, I know that from experience. I deeply believe that Detroit will bounce back from it."

Not everyone at the kitchen shares his equanimity. Enous Coleman, a widower who has been coming to grab lunch with the Capuchins since his wife passed, says there is a lot of undirected anger among his neighbors over what has happened to Detroit. He would love to focus it on the politicians. "You know they're all rats," he confides with cheerful certainty.

Mr. Coleman is incensed about plans to go after the pension packages of city workers. "Even the folks that don't have nothing are getting stuff taken," he says. "It's ridiculous." To his eyes, the attitude of the powerful and the policymakers now governing the city is, "Folks you don't need, sweep 'em

up under the rug." "Seems like we're being swept," he adds.

Steve Washington came as a client to the Capuchin Soup Kitchen 10 years ago. Now he is on staff and helps move 450 plates a day. The kitchen makes a crucial difference for many Detroit families, according to Mr. Washington, who often use it to supplement food budgets while they divert cash-on-hand to other necessaries. "With this bankruptcy, without this kitchen, a lot of people would have nothing," he says.

Like many others, Mr. Washington is a Detroit optimist, more or less. He says he has personally seen positive signs of civic life in recent months. He notes new development and vitality in neighborhoods like downtown Detroit and its midtown neighborhood and the commercial strip along Woodward Avenue. Even the dreaded gentrification is not necessarily a bad thing for Detroit, he says, if it brings people back into the city. But he wonders about how Detroit will invest what little resources it has to get the city back on its feet.

Reviewing the squalor of the neighborhoods and the hipster splendor arising in midtown—"Look, a Starbucks! A new Yoga studio!"—suggests the potential of a renewed Detroit emerging as a tale of two cities: bankruptcy facilitates development in central districts, but the surrounding city is abandoned. A handful of neighborhoods are clearly in a turnaround. What about the rest? Mr. Washington is skeptical of city development notions that have prioritized the construction of a hockey stadium while most Detroit residents are crying out for more police, better schools and street lighting. "It's good for downtown; it's good for other areas and other developments, but how much of that will get here to the people who really need it for housing, for the abandoned buildings?" Mr. Washington asks. "I don't know."

Detroit On the Rise?

Anne Stoehr, a one-time resident of Detroit who now lives in nearby Grosse Pointe Woods, is tired of the doom and gloom she keeps reading about Detroit. "Keep telling people that it's hopeless, they're going to believe it," she says. "It's not true; not if we just pull together."

Indeed, not all the news from Detroit is bleak. Local corporations have joined in an $8 million campaign to provide 23 new emergency medical service vehicles and up to 100 new police cars to replace the city's aging and poorly maintained municipal fleet. Quicken Loans brought its headquarters and 7,000 jobs to downtown Detroit in 2010, inspiring a rush of tech start-ups to join in. Cafes and restaurants are opening. New jobs are being created by entrepreneurs attracted to the city by its low overhead.

Mrs. Stoehr is volunteering along with some friends on a Tuesday morning at On the Rise, a bakery sponsored by the Capuchins. The business provides its east side community with wholesome fare that would otherwise be completely lacking and offers its employees, one-time inmates of Michigan's jails and prisons, steady work and new, marketable skills.

PHOTO: KEVIN CLARKE

FINISHING TOUCHES. Katie Yamasaki at work on a mural at a brand new Head Start facility located in a mixed residential and retail site developed by the Detroit Catholic Pastoral Alliance.

"These guys are really great," Mrs. Stoehr says, gesturing to the men working with her. "Sometimes people just need a second chance," she adds. Her friends nod approvingly as they hustle over trays of pastries being readied for a journey to the Eastern Market.

The bakers at On the Rise are getting that second chance partly through the efforts of the Detroit Catholic Pastoral Alliance, a community development agency that brought back to life the building that now includes the bakery and a number of market-rate apartments above it. Cathey DeSantis, C.S.J., is executive director of the alliance. A native of Detroit, Sister DeSantis is completely out of patience with national press reports that depict her beloved city as America's Midwestern basket case. She has even less patience with the "rubble porn" tourists from the suburbs—even from overseas—rubber-necking staggering neighborhoods to grab snapshots of their photogenic decay.

"People love to show pictures of the Packard plant [abandoned for decades] and neighborhoods where the grass is up to the windows," she says. "Well, there's some of us who live here every day. We know the story, and I don't know why everybody else has to see it.... It's just overkill to me."

She complains that kind of coverage encourages residents to "feel powerless to tell another story." And there is anoth-

er story to be told about Detroit, one of resilience and tolerance and commitment, she argues. Sister DeSantis is no Pollyanna; she knows the city has a hard course ahead of it, but she would rather talk about the successes her organization and others working to rebuild Detroit are having. The D.C.P.A. has restored homes, opened rental and retail sites and helped many Detroit homeowners maintain their homes and, more important, stay in them as their neighbors fled around them.

Are their efforts paying off? "Big time," she says. The agency's 100 rental units are all filled; the On the Rise bakery has become a neighborhood retail anchor; and the D.C.P.A. will soon open a new mixed-use development along Gratiot Avenue that will include a Head Start school and a cafe for On the Rise. The cafe will be just about the only place in the neighborhood to grab a cup of coffee and a danish. That may seem like a small thing, but such small civic graces are the stuff that viable neighborhoods are built upon, a D.C.P.A. staff member explains.

ON THE WEB
Video reports from Detroit.
americamagazine.org/video

Sister DeSantis calls the bankruptcy filing "a very mixed bag. "Some people are very happy about it. They think this is the end of the end of the crisis and the beginning of something new. And some folks see it as a takeover, one more swipe at Detroit" from the state government. She mostly worries about the bankruptcy's threat to Detroit's retired and current municipal workforce, who have already accepted a number of pay and benefit cuts to edge the city closer to fiscal balance. "To me it's really sad to see so much of it happening on the backs of folks that have been working for years and years and years," Sister DeSantis says. "On the other hand, hopefully what comes out at the end is an opportunity to bring it all back."

NEIGHBORHOOD LEAVEN. At a bakery sponsored by the Capuchin Soup Kitchen, ex-offenders get a rare second chance.

PHOTO: KEVIN CLARKE

If Detroit's tale of decline and abandonment shifts in the future, how is the archdiocese poised to respond? Even after years of parish and school reductions, Archbishop Vigneron says, "we still have a higher density of parishes within the city of Detroit than we do outside, more parishes per square mile, more parishes per resident.

"One of the most important things is to experiment and find new ways for a parish to do its mission in the context of the city of Detroit," he says. "I'm very hopeful that we'll be able to expand the mission of the church in the city of Detroit. Mergers are really about creating a healthy platform from which we can then do our mission of sharing the Gospel and serving our community.

"I think the people of Detroit are a lot more resilient than what the visiting media have picked up," says the archbishop. "It is a city of great faith," he adds. The people believe that "God is with us and God will get us through this," he says.

Christopher Prater is poring over his MacBook inside Great Lakes Coffee on Woodward Avenue. A young African-American entrepreneur, born and raised in Detroit along with 12 siblings, Mr. Prater returned last year to the city after a dozen years in Atlanta. He is rejoining the family construction business and has also opened a clothing store. For years Detroiters have watched their best minds accept diplomas from Wayne State University and then head straight out of town. Mr. Prater is just the kind of bright, energetic young person the city would love to have rejoin it for a comeback. And he is confident the city will overcome the setback of the bankruptcy, "however bad it seems."

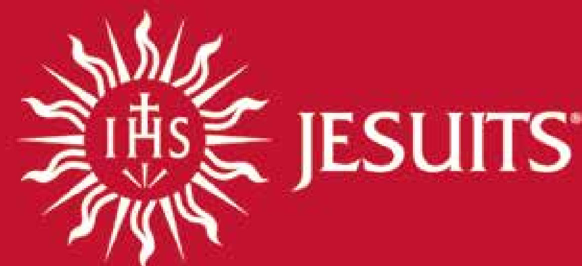
"With any reorganization, you start off at ground zero again," he says. "After we re-emerge there are going to be some unique opportunities in the city of Detroit; so I'm excited about it.

"At the heart of what Detroit is, we're a manufacturer," Mr. Prater says. "We have to get back to the roots of what we are, and that's making things," he adds, recalling Detroit's car-producing heyday and its critical manufacturing role during World War II. "If we can [move from] making a car to making a tank," he says, "we can make hangers; we can make an Apple computer."

Detroit's future is not a yard sale, he says with confidence. Detroit, the Arsenal of Democracy, can return to prominence again. "No question about it," Mr. Prater says. "You are going to see some very great things coming out of Detroit." A

"The Church needs you,
relies on you and continues
to turn to you with trust,
particularly to reach those
physical and spiritual places
which others do not reach
or have difficulty in reaching."

*Pope Benedict XVI to the
35th General Congregation
of the Society of Jesus*



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Why Mystery Matters

Martha, Mary and the gap between economics and theology

BY JOHN SAVANT

In "Just Economics," (**Am.** 5/6/13) Professor Stacie Beck offers a clear and well-reasoned interpretation of social justice, though it is one that seems to stand at some distance from conventional church teaching and, even more, from Pope Francis' most recent comments on global economics. Despite the logic and the compassionate grounds of her argument, I cannot wholly accept her conclusions.

My disagreement is not with the logic of her thesis, but with what I consider the incomplete context within which she develops it. That context is the science of economics—a context inseparable, but qualitatively different, from that of theology. For both economics and theology, social justice is a critical issue. How they approach this issue, however, and with what differences, what limitations and what authority, is most pertinent to the topic at hand. Current theologians like John F. Haught, in the forefront of the modern and revolutionary dialogue between religion and science, take pains to identify the difference between the respective objects of scientific and theological study and note the significant ramifications following therefrom.

Economics, a social science, is by its nature committed to quantifiable information. Even when it addresses non-quantifiable phenomena in its deliberations (intuition, faith, aesthetics and so on), economic methodology employs quantifiable evidence; its propositions grow out of empirical information, and its justifications are based upon numbers, frequencies, measurements and the like.

Theology, on the other hand, while attentive to all that human learning and science continue to provide, is committed to the entire phenomena of human reality, including issues whose answers lie beyond the province of human investigation. These issues we call "mystery," a concept that identifies the primary territory of religion. Mystery refers to those questions and intuitions that have enduring force in our lives even as we realize that their answers lie beyond our means. Mystery poses questions like: Why is there anything and not nothing? Why do the good often suffer and the evil prosper? Why do we have transcendent longings? What explains quantum leaps in the advance of the universe from

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inanimate matter to human thought and achievement? And especially, why must the progress of our universe, including the rise of human civilization, entail violence and evil, depravity and loss—despite our longing for goodness, peace and beauty?

Paradox and Parable

Regarding mystery, the Book of Job is instructive. Addressing Job's overwhelming afflictions, his conventional counselors offer some concrete advice, but advice that effectively reduces the challenge of inexplicable evil to the quasi-quantitative resolutions of legalisms and virtuous deeds. To put it another way, they aspire to dismiss one expression of the mystery of evil with the human "magic" of merit: Do this, this and this, Job, and God will have to restore you to prosperity. Job, of course, in his ornery integrity, refuses to bribe God with

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virtue and, eschewing human explanations, enters the whirlwind of divine mystery. Here he comes to realize a relationship with God is infinitely more reassuring than any human proposition. His subsequent recovery, the story compels us to see, is due not to his virtuous deeds, but to his humble acceptance of God's unconditional love. He leaves the whirlwind with no more answers than he had before, but with the ontological conviction, "My savior lives" (19:25).

The story of Job demonstrates the inadequacy of unaided human reasoning in approaching the familiar challenge of injustice in human affairs: Job has indeed done all that law and tradition require; the extremity of his plight compels something beyond the logical equivalencies of compensatory justice. Extrapolating from Job's story, we can understand how the "logic" of the marketplace is, of itself, inadequate to address the totality of human motivation and behavior. And we must conclude that any valid prescription for the organization of human society or the welfare of its citizens must take into account the totality of its human subject—mystery and all.

ON THE WEB
Read other responses
to "Just Economics."
americamagazine.org/just-economics

This totality of vision may explain why great literature is so often enduringly complex, irreducible to conclusive analysis and yet resonant with some shared human sensibility that spans ages and continents. It is this mysterious reality that may explain why so much of Jesus' teaching relies upon the "illogic" of paradox and parable, why it is so often countercultural, offensive to common sense. That the 11th-hour workers, for example, should receive compensation for a whole day's work might confound our human sense of proportion and reward—until the parable moves us to see that it is not merit but simple human need to which the master responds (Mt 20:1-16). Paul Klee, a Swiss artist, observes that "art does not reproduce what we see, it makes us see." This statement helps us to understand why Jesus relied upon the indirection and suggestive power of parable to express realities beyond the resolutions of human thought and devising.

Again, in terms of ordinary judgment, how can we say that "Mary has chosen the better part" (Lk 10:42), when Martha is the one who makes certain the platters are filled, the cups refreshed, the lamps trimmed and the butcher paid? The "Martha" in all of us is generally well-meaning, generous and practical. Without her, the home would be in disorder. (Interestingly, *economy*, from the Greek *oikos*, connotes something like "home management.") Without the Martha in us, the daily bread might be neither well-baked nor paid for. And yet Jesus cautions us that we live "not by bread alone" (Mt 4:4).

We ponder what to make of these tensions, if not to realize that something inclusive of but beyond the empirical urgings of economics must inform our pursuit of justice, must balance the practical concerns of the Martha within us with Mary's reverence for the mystery of the divine—that divinity abiding in all-day and 11th-hour workers alike, the mystery that may explain Jesus' unconditional love for the poor. And we ponder also the principles these reflections might compel for the organization of a fully human society. In my thinking, it comes down to the difference between the concepts of organization and organism.

Many Parts, One Body

When society is conceived as an organization, its component elements are useful, as they enable the system to function. Should they become obsolete or ineffective, they can be disposed of and replaced as the system may require. Though its primary agents are persons, its functioning is, ironically, impersonal. When conceived as an organism, however, every individual of a community is understood as some part of a living whole, so that the health of every part is a measurement of the health of the whole. In this conception, a cancer in the toe is a threat to the entire organism, and therefore its earnest concern.

The Christian concept of the mystical body elevates this metaphor to the level of mystery. Our sense of the divine immanence, most manifest in the human person, compels our

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reverence and concern for the mystical body's most diseased, unfortunate, contrary or despised members, so manifest in Christ's predilection for the lost sheep, the outcast, the public sinner, the alien.

If this metaphor holds, it may help to explain the ongoing mystery of violence in the human community: how it is that we can so long for beauty, order and peace, even as we build ever more dangerous implements of destruction, even as divisions and acts of terrorism increase.

In *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads*, the philosopher Gil Bailie explores the mystery of violence in society. He finds its catalyst not only in the more obvious injustices of territorial encroachment, deprivation, enslavement or brutalization, but in a comparative instinct that perceives blatant disparities in the apportionment of the goods of creation as offensive to a people's sense of being human. This is a comparative intuition active both within and among nations. That this intuition is a reality is, in itself, some part of the mystery of the human. How we may deal with it wisely requires some acceptance of mystery in the pursuit of the just society. Aligned with this intuition and likewise offensive to one's sense of personal dignity is the common affirmation that poverty is a failure of moral exertion, a betrayal of free will. This affirmation fails to understand that free will is contextual, dependent not only on a worthy economic goal, but upon the perception that this goal is realistically attainable. An economy that has witnessed an appalling and steady increase in income disparity is not likely to enhance that perception.

A fully human approach to economic justice, then, would join the science of economics with a reverence for the mystery of the human person. Such an approach would honor human need before productivity, would encourage enthusiasm and responsibility through a culture enhancing the relation of worker to product and would guarantee compensation designed to diminish our scandalous income disparities. Such an aspiration may seem, like most visions of God's kingdom on earth, as beyond possibility. But we live in an age of unconscionable inequities in wealth, nationally and globally. This reality, together with nearly unimaginable advances in communications and an unsettling access to instruments of enormous menace, render anarchy and violence serious possibilities. If the struggle for economic dominance simply means an ongoing contest between world powers, we shall have achieved little toward defusing this menace.

Perhaps, alas, our only redemption will follow the old evolutionary template—and the sad wisdom—of progress born of violence. Perhaps, however, science informed by faith, will lift us above the momentum of egoism and greed, will conspire to effect a worldwide metanoia, a moral quantum leap, driven by the conviction that we are, indeed, one with one another and with all of creation. A

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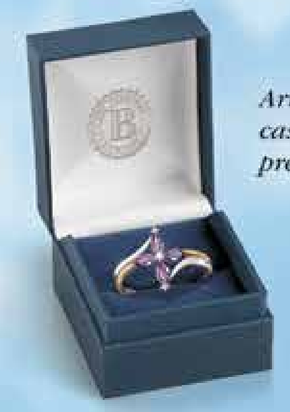

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Love of the Person

John F. Kavanaugh's liberation philosophy

BY JEANNE SCHULER

John F. Kavanaugh, S.J.—teacher, scholar, journalist and priest—died one year ago this month. For years his essays in **America** shed light on films, Scripture and the ethical and political debates of the day. I first learned philosophy from John at St. Louis University and followed him to Washington University for graduate school. During the Vietnam War, when a group of students came together to form a community, John was there with encouragement and direction that continued through the years. John celebrated the Mass and sang when I married a member of the community. Whenever we were in St. Louis, we rode the elevator with John to the roof of Jesuit Hall. Surrounded by plants and vistas of downtown, we would talk politics, family, film, the church and especially philosophy. He was a mentor and friend. John's life is celebrated for many reasons, in particular for showing that philosophy serves human liberation in a first-world setting.

John Kavanaugh with Mother Teresa in 1975.

PERSONAL PHOTO PROVIDED BY SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY

The call to liberation usually evokes theology in the context of developing countries. John, on the other hand, was a liberation philosopher whose thinking was rooted in the thick of advanced capitalist culture. Like Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., of the Universidad Centroamericana in San Salvador, John drew from Scripture, Aquinas, Marx and other sources to confront the dehumanization, idolatry and violence that grip this world. Philosophy is a foundational understanding that digs out the concepts underlying ordinary knowledge and experience. For many, philosophy is a nod to the past, a quaint legacy with little relevance to the science, politics and global economics of the present. But in his books *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance* and *Who Count as Persons? Human Identity and the Ethics of Killing*, John practices philosophy as a living knowledge that belongs at the core of Jesuit education and in the public square.

For John, the human person is the perennial topic that provides the measure needed to think through the issues we face. The interpreting present for John stretched from Hollywood to Washington, from medicine to war, and in-

JEANNE SCHULER *is an associate professor of philosophy at Creighton University in Omaha, Neb.*

cluded the struggles of the poor from St. Louis to Calcutta. John drew from Aquinas to respond to Fox News, making connections that elude less integral practitioners of philosophy. Thinking that stays alive stays attuned to its world.

The biggest challenge for philosophy, as John saw it, is to sound out the meaning of the human person. Catholic social teaching is rooted in the dignity of persons, but what does this familiar phrase mean? At different times in history, philosophy began with being, God, method, perception or logic. John's answer to where philosophy must take its stand today is "with persons." His first book, *Human Realization: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Man,* was an inquiry into the human person. John explores how an enlightened scientific and capitalist world can foster strange, even fantastic accounts of persons; how we are more conversant with black holes and stock options than with our own nature. A leading philosopher, Daniel Dennett, observed in The New York Times, "I'm a robot, and you're a robot, but that doesn't make us any less dignified or wonderful." Such views are less startling to students than you might imagine. The sympathy for claims that are vaguely linked to science runs high. In this popular conception, one science leads to another, and the entire edifice is self-grounding or rests on math or logic.

The biggest challenge for philosophy, as John saw it, is to sound out the meaning of the human person.

For John, equating all knowledge with science constitutes "thing knowing," a prejudice fostered by consumer society, in which endless things produced to be sold for profit captivate our minds. Humans come to view themselves as appendages to the gross domestic product: we exist to make economic growth possible. Capitalism unchecked becomes a totality or false gospel that reveals humans as things. Losing touch with the meaning of human existence is what John calls idolatry. The golden calf worshipped by the wandering Jews did not so much dishonor God as reveal humans sadly out of touch with their own personhood. Consumerism is one of countless ways that a society can lose touch with the incalculable worth of human existence. In idolatry, persons reverse roles with things: commodities take on human powers and humans are the "dead" ones that recover humanity through the intercession of possessions, income and status. Kavanaugh hears echoes of Psalm 115 in Marx's exposure of the fetish character of commodities. Kavanaugh shares the fear of Søren Kierkegaard, Walker Percy and other existentialists that scientific and economic advances coincide with a loss of the self. Ironically, the very societies formed in enlightened defense of individual liberty spawn the skeptical view that freedom is an illusion.

In John's view, the very idea of a self-grounding science reveals persons out of touch with their own existence. Like Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* and St. Augustine in the *Confessions,* John recognizes that all inquiry presupposes an understanding of human existence. It is the unavoidable background to all questions we can raise. Immanuel Kant named "What is man?" the fourth, and encompassing, critical question. How we grapple with electrons, brains, abortion, war, money, medicine, God, poverty and the planet is shaped by our implicit views of persons. We cannot opt out of harboring an understanding of human existence. Taking oneself as a robot is a prior understanding that shapes one's experience and work.

The first task of philosophy, as John understood it, is to determine whether these inescapable views of human existence are accurate or defective. Are persons robots? The answer to this question is sensitive to science, but the question is not a scientific one. It is phenomenological—that is, it involves experience-based inquiry directed at formulating fundamental concepts adequate to experience. Robot is not a concept adequate to our experience of human beings. The robot lacks the self-understanding that grounds human life and projects.

This view of philosophy is contested. Some regard the topic of persons apologetically, as if the energy poured into grasping the self is drained from the needs of the world: "Stop gazing at your naval and tackle the problems we face." Some fear that probing into our own existence will only confirm the skeptical conviction that all knowledge is tainted by the human touch and hence reducible to human interests. Varieties of pragmatism—"whatever works"—replace truth. For some, it is impossible to encounter the other while the self blocks the way; genuine care means that the self must disappear. For some, my self is the flypaper of life, and egoism motivates all my actions and thoughts. To these eyes, self-love invariably means selfish. The self epitomizes bias that derails knowledge and morality. As education grows more technical and professional, the impatience with the inquiry into human existence can be felt: Has not everything been said on that topic already? But the retreat from inquiry into personal existence allows flawed conceptions to strengthen their hold.

It would be a mistake for the philosophy core required in Jesuit education to abandon the courses on human existence that broke open the scholastic format after the Second Vatican Council. A central goal of these courses should be to show how an understanding person disrupts the skeptical

spiral into subjectivism, relativism and constructivism. If an understanding of persons is unavoidable, there is no other way to confront skepticism than with an improved phenomenology that shows persons open to the world. The first task of a phenomenology is to challenge the dualisms that split off the self from the world and from other selves.

For John, humans exist as embodied consciousness from the start. While embodiment sounds simple, it is as much a sticking point for grasping human existence as is the incarnation for God. The habit of splitting up inseparable aspects of human existence is difficult to break. It is easy to conceive of persons as combinations of body, thought, emotions and drives. But embodiment is not a conjunction of mind and body. A human mind does not enter into a relationship with the body because mind and body are inseparable to begin with. Embodiment is phenomenology's response to the mind-body "problem" that struggles to grasp how the immaterial mind and material brain could interact. A person is one embodied being. Every idea and desire takes its shape as belonging to embodied consciousness. Human hunger differs from the primates'. We think and thirst as human—a point on which Aquinas insisted.

Embodiment means that we exist with others from the start. Other persons are the condition of my existence. For us, being social by nature, the question is not how do we enter into the reality of others, but rather how our involvement allows us to be known and loved. Philosophers do not differ from ordinary people in struggling with the finite. We want to be something more than a creature marked by needs and limited possibilities. A key task of Jesuit education is to reverse this assessment of the finite. John repeatedly makes the case that persons in their finiteness are something more. What John calls the ontological poverty of humans is the beauty that belongs to us precisely because we are not self-sufficient or self-made. In our smallness and vulnerability even before we have done one thing, we are worthy of infinite love. John echoes Gerard Manley Hopkins in seeing how our being catches and reflects the light of God.

Embodiment makes possible the recovery of freedom as human. In our day, extreme views distort the meaning of freedom. For some, scientific achievement implies that freedom is an illusion. Humans, like other species, are governed by natural laws. B. F. Skinner, for example, urges us to think "beyond freedom and dignity." The sooner we kick the habit of recognizing humans as distinctive and free, the better. Libertarians by contrast treat persons as contracting agents whose choices underlie all actions. Absolute freedom separates individuals, and no one is responsible to anyone else unless he chooses. The social conditions of privilege and oppression disappear into this ideology of all-consuming choice.

What are students to think? In business and social science classes, we are preference-maximizing agents; in theology class, we find God in the least among us. The kind of liberty rejected in theology as a caricature underlies much of the curriculum. For many students immersed in consumer culture, it is the libertarian view that resonates as real and affirming.

John follows existentialists like Kierkegaard in rooting freedom in the distinctive human power of self-reflection. I not only see the sunset, I am aware of seeing it. For humans, every experience reveals the self engaged in the experience. This inward reflection, called by some the "space of reasons" and by John awareness of awareness, is how freedom emerges. From awareness of how experience is for me, meanings and possibilities open up. The strict dualism—we are either free or determined—gives rise to the actual human situation: embodied freedom is shaped by culture, biochemical states and personal history. Embodiment is not an obstacle to freedom; if we could step outside the limits of our situation so that "anything is possible," no action could be taken.

Jesuit education fosters love of God, persons and the world. For John Kavanaugh, philosophy contributes to this goal by challenging the caricatures that block our understanding of human existence. These caricatures are legion. It is a mistake for philosophy courses to follow the textbook format, which lines up arguments pro and con. Assessing

"Who are you going to believe—me or hostile campaign ads by my rivals?"

CARTOON: HARLEY SCHWADRON

arguments always draws on an implicit understanding of persons. Whether the topic is science, ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, politics or logic, the human context in which questions arise should be evident in how we teach. Like literature, philosophy works through language to show us how to see the world. When John moves, in his book *Who Count as Persons?*, from the phenomenology of persons to euthanasia, abortion, capital punishment and war, the reasons to oppose killing are already there. Once the nature of persons unfolds, the incongruity of killing this kind of creature in any circumstance is evident. Love of persons arises from many sources, primarily experiential. But the careful study of human existence—perception, feelings, desires, memory, reflection, choices and appetites—is one important source of care for persons and their dignity.

For violence to occur, persons must first be seen as objects. It is difficult to kill someone whom I recognize as being like myself. The ways to objectify persons are pervasive, as John describes in *Following Christ*:

> Once a man or woman, be he or she oppressor or oppressed, whether dressed in silk or sprawled in a Calcutta slum, whether on a battlefield or in a delivery room, whether bourgeoisie or proletariat, whether criminal, president, or both, is perceived as a thing or in terms of the commodity, he or she is thereby rendered replaceable. The fetus is a "blob of protoplasm," the criminal is "scum and vermin," the brain-damaged are "vegetables." The poor are "like animals." The Iraqi is "the enemy." The wealthy or the police are "pigs." The "enemy" is an obstruction—quantifiable, repeatable, manipulable, expendable, the legitimate object of our hatred and violence.

The threats to personhood can be overwhelming. Prophetic warning does not predominate in John's writings. From a lifetime of close friendships, spiritual direction and work with small communities, John knew how to stay rooted in our humanity in everyday life. Like Aquinas, John lays out five ways: first is daily prayer and meditation to fight the emptiness endemic to consumer culture; second is the cultivation of committed relationships in which we are known and loved; third is the delight in things that simple living makes possible; fourth is the lifelong work for justice; and fifth is ongoing involvement with those at the margins, who show us the beauty in simply being persons. Liberation arises within and between persons who are grounded in the meaning of existence. John Kavanaugh's practice of philosophy as liberation is a model for teaching in the Jesuit tradition. A

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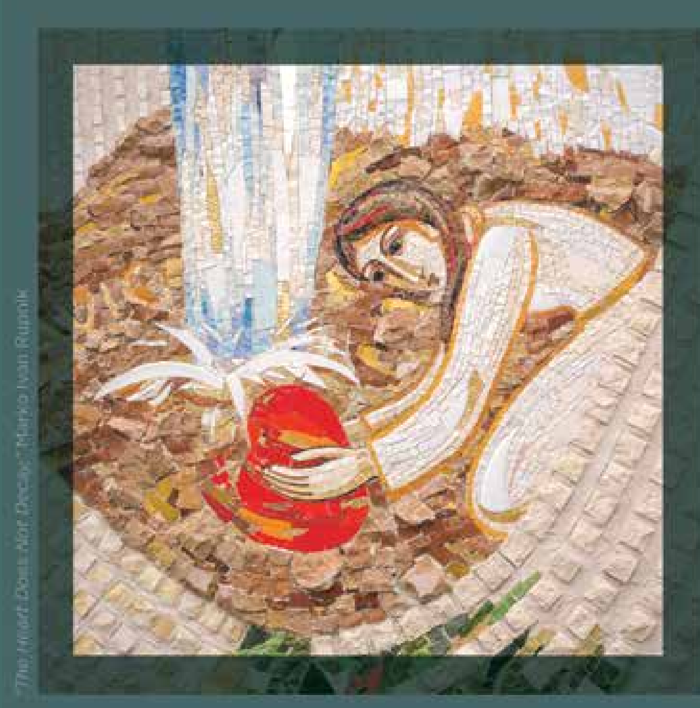
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Are We Winning?

Coming to terms with the fog of war

BY JOHN J. McLAIN

Eleven years is a long time to devote to answering a question. But that is how long I have been thinking about this one: "Are we winning?" In 2002 I returned from my first tour in Afghanistan. The United States was still reeling from the savage blow of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and we did not yet live in the shadow of the Iraq War and its questionable justifications. At that point, there were relatively few American service people deployed in the Afghanistan theater. Upon returning, we were welcomed home warmly, a sharp contrast to the experience of returning Vietnam era service members. And so it was that people who discovered I had served in Afghanistan would ask me that troubling question: "Are we winning?"

I was taken aback, unsure, given my experience, of what winning would look like. I resorted, perhaps in a typically Jesuitical fashion, to answering their question with my own questions: "Well, what do you mean when you say 'winning'? What would 'winning' look like to you?"

I believe now that what people really wanted to ask, what they hoped for, was an answer to the question: "Are we safe again?" Has this military response to acts of terror made our homes, our loved ones, our country safe, the way it felt before Sept. 11? Like so much back then, I am not sure we had the language even to know that is what we desperately, secretly desired, even when deep down we knew that because of the nature of time and events and human hearts, we could never go back to the way things were.

According to the psychologist Abraham Maslow, the second tier of our most basic needs is to feel safe in body, family and resources. The average American's sense of security, especially on our own soil, collapsed along with the World Trade Center towers. The new reality on U.S. shores was that we were vulnerable and exposed, just as much of the rest of the world has long been exposed to uncertainty and violence.

HONOR ROLL. George McVey helps read the names of troops who have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

CNS PHOTO/MIKE CRUPI, CATHOLIC COURIER

Like the gnawing ambiguity of "are we winning?", the women and men who served in the military are also susceptible to the nagging nuance and inconsistency of their experience in war. The people who decide to join the armed forces do so for a variety of reasons, some more well-discerned than others, but somewhere near the core of that decision for all of them is the idea of serving their *polis*, their community. They see their service as protecting home and family—in both the personal and the communal senses of these words. Like everyone else, they want their service to be meaningful, and they want to be reassured that what they are doing is right, especially in light of the potential cost to their lives.

The soldier and Prussian military theorist Carl Von

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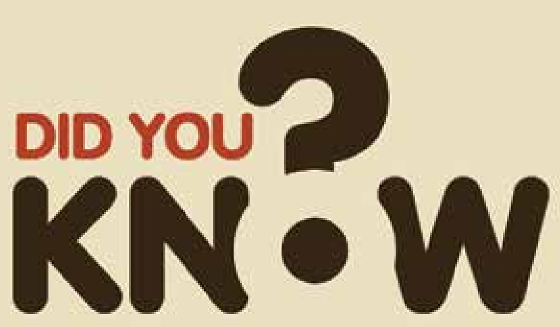
Clausewitz used the expression "fog of war" to describe the hazy uncertainty that envelopes individuals, especially leaders, on the battlefield. Things there are rarely as they seem. Emotion, excitement, confusion, urgency and many other internal and external factors combine into a potent cocktail of subjectivity that leaves individuals overwhelmed.

For service members and their families, navigating these conflicts has been no less fraught with ambiguity, uncertainty and memories of bitter tears and joyful smiles. The fog of war rolls off the battlefield and blankets the lives of those associated with armed conflicts: people who live in conflict zones, families of those who serve in them, politicians who create the policies that the military executes. All of these people are affected by and, by their presence and existence, create factors that compound and complicate the fog of war. The deep need for security and the profound desire to do good are thrown together, a stew of confusing moral circumstances and difficult environments and moments. The people caught up in those moments can spend a long time in "if onlys," second- and third-guessing their choices and decisions, an experience that can prove especially damaging when they are rehashing decisions that led to terrible outcomes.

The average American's sense of security collapsed with the World Trade Center towers. We were vulnerable and exposed, just as much of the rest of the world has long been exposed to uncertainty and violence.



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The Dark Spirit

In a completely different circumstance, I dealt with a parishioner a few years ago who had been a member of a fathers' cycling group at our school. Another young father, who had just turned 40, suffered a heart attack and collapsed during a ride. This parishioner had performed CPR for 30 minutes until the ambulance arrived and pronounced the victim dead. I called him to thank him for what he had done and ask how he was. Fine, he assured me.

Before hanging up, I said, "Look, later you're going to start asking yourself, 'Did I really do everything I could? What if I had... If only I had...' Don't. That is the Dark Spirit that will be telling you that. And it lies and it wants to paralyze you." There was a pause on the phone and a choked sob, and he said: "I know. And thank you. I wondered if I was the only one who thought those things."

That is one of the curses of combat that soldiers learn to carry, the terrible wondering about what might have been. Could they have changed what was? It is a stark confrontation with human limitedness that we rarely have to address in normal life, and when it gets its hooks into us, it can keep us tied up for a very long time. I suspect I am not alone as a soldier who wonders about the "what ifs" of his actions and inactions, of all I have done and all I have failed to do.

So much has changed about how we wage war in the last decade—the rise of drone warfare, the evolution of cyber warfare and surveillance technology that can now peer into the private lives of any of us, the huge boom in the outsourcing of private security and intelligence contractors. These "advances" have helped members of the military do their jobs when applied appropriately, but they have also created enormous pressure and moral quandaries for service members when misapplied. There is always the human cost. During the last decade, the number of military-related suicides has spiked dramatically.

I can say from my own experience that one of the most traumatic things about being in a combat zone is the disorienting range of emotional states you can experience in next to no time. One minute you are checking your e-mail, lifting weights or watching a movie, and you have been bored for

weeks. The next you are fighting for your life and possibly the lives of those around you in a heightened state of alertness and primal fear. This swing from one extreme of experience to the other may damage us the most. We are pliable beings, but the constant flexion between pure adrenaline and the mundane wears down the psyche. We are resilient, but not infinitely so, and when we cannot stretch between those two poles anymore, the people in our lives pay the price.

Beyond the Battlefield

But the fog of war does not cloud the judgment only of those on the battlefield. It has often had the same disorienting affect on the political and military leadership in Washington. They suffer their own variant of battlefield doubt and ambiguity in decisions celebrated too soon or deeply regretted.

In May President Obama said, "This war, like all wars, must end." And he is right; wars need to end. Men and women in uniform can do many things for our country; they will go where our government asks them to, and, within reason and morality, will do what we ask them to do there. They will give much of themselves, including their lives, to accomplish the missions set before them. But no matter how brave they are or how much they are willing to give, they cannot defeat an idea, and that is what our global war on terror has been. As a soldier, you can occupy and control terrain, but you cannot occupy an idea. The presence of our military can inform and influence people's actions, and it can bring about behavioral compliance, but it cannot induce people to change their hearts or minds; this is only possible by entering into a nonmilitary relationship with people.

Von Clausewitz's other famous axiom is "War is the continuation of *Politik* by other means." He could have substituted "economics" and still been correct. But when you decide to make war on an ideology, you have already created a situation where the conditions of victory will never be met. Ideas as immutable truths do not acknowledge or bow to politics or economics, and so can be impervious to military action, even if it is well intentioned, well planned and well executed.

What has not changed in the last decade is the goodness of people, especially those selfless enough to serve our country in uniform. Nearly all the soldiers with whom I served believed in the fundamental goodness of people, even people who resisted and resented their presence in their countries and lives. Our military personnel have no desire to be seen as invaders or as the instruments of imperialism. They are willing to wrestle with the multiple shades of gray that armed conflict in the 21st century brings with it. And they are willing to do this for people they have never met or who may not approve of their mission. They will do this nonetheless, seeking to do the right thing, not for any reward or recognition, but only because they want to protect the place that means more to them than their lives. A

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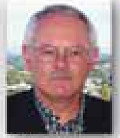
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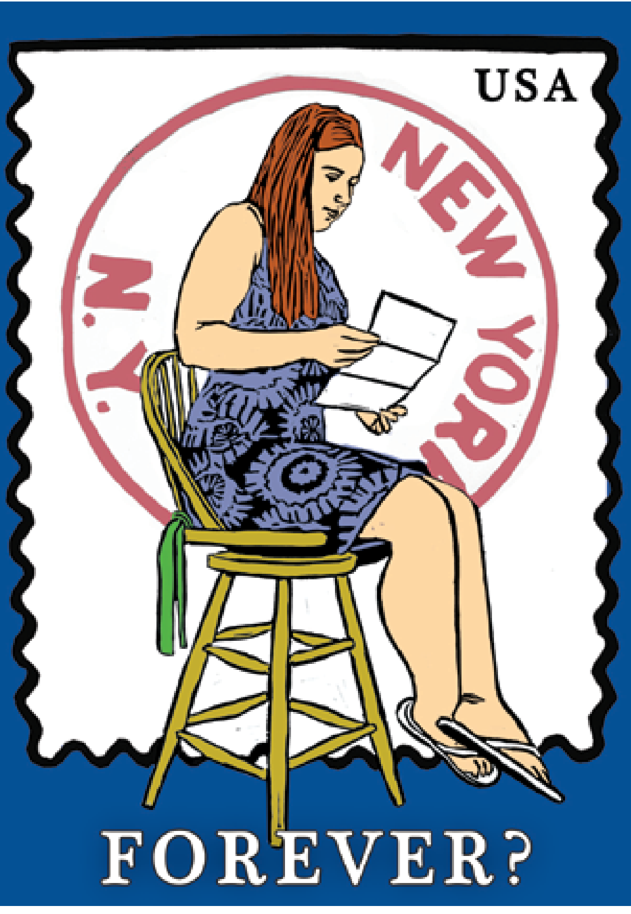
I’ve Got Mail

On the art of letter writing

BY AMY ANDREWS

The U.S. Postal Service announced in February that it would discontinue Saturday deliveries. When members of Congress strongly protested, the post office suspended its plans, but the reprieve may be short-lived. Polls show that most Americans approve of cutting Saturday delivery.

My fellow citizens seem happy to help the postal service save $2 billion annually by forgoing another day of sorting through bills and catalogs. I suppose I would feel the same if not for the sense of anticipation I have every time I check my mailbox. For often, tucked in the midst of the junk, I find a real letter, address scrawled across the front, a handwritten note over the seal (my favorite: “Brace yourself for the lamest letter in the history of letters”), stamp askew.



For the past eight years, I have kept up a regular, sometimes daily, correspondence with a friend. It began in 2005 as a Lenten discipline, a letter-a-day for the 40 days of Lent, but through that intense first run, writing letters became a habit, and we have been writing ever since. So now I have an odd fondness for the big, blue boxes, which stand like tributes to a bygone age, on fewer and fewer street corners, and regard my own mailbox as something of an oracle. On any day it could offer up a missive from my friend on the state of her soul or the burden of doubt or how the sky that afternoon and a thought of God and her aching heart came together in such a way that she had to get it down in writing before the moment was lost to time. And somehow it is difficult to imagine these letters coming through e-mail or having the same effect if they did.

A Great Calm

Even harder is imagining some of the great epistolary writers texting their thoughts. When I think of Flannery O’Connor on her farm in Georgia, I imagine her simple desk, wedged behind her bed, the window open to the hot breeze, peacocks screaming from the rooftop and yet a great verbal calm over everything, only her own thoughts clicking out on the typewriter and filling the room with sense. And then I imagine those lines she wrote to Louise Abbot about the difficult but necessary way of doubt: “You arrive at enough certainty to be able to make your way, but it is making it in darkness. Don’t expect faith to clear things up for you. It is trust, not certainty.”

Or imagine St. Teresa of Avila alone in her cell, all wood and white and stone, writing to Señor Lorenzo de Cepeda. Thinking she might be quoting St. Augustine, she tells of the spirit of God, which “passes without leaving any mark, like an arrow which leaves none in the air,” and then brightly mentions a hair-shirt, which she is sending along to help Lorenzo prevent distraction and revive love.

St. Teresa closes the letter with a line so funny and self-aware it makes her sound very much like O’Connor’s spiritual mother. “I cannot help smiling,” she says, “to see how you send me sweetmeats, delicacies, and money, and I send you a hair-shirt!”

Or even earlier, imagine St.

ART: SEAN QUIRK

AMY ANDREWS, *a recipient of the Annie Dillard Award for creative nonfiction, is the co-author with Jessica Mesman Griffith of* Love & Salt: A Spiritual Friendship Shared in Letters *(Loyola Press).*

Augustine himself, in the unimaginable quiet of the fourth century, quill in hand, writing a long letter on the nature of prayer to the widow Proba. "It is said that the brothers in Egypt have certain prayers, which they recite often," he writes. "But they are very brief, and are so to speak, darted forth rapidly like arrows, so that the alert attention...does not fade and grow heavy."

Would those lines have had the same effect had they popped up in Proba's inbox? Or would we still be reading O'Connor's grim words of hope if Louise Abbott's iPhone had announced their arrival with an 1980s-synth-song ringtone? No, we would not be reading them, they would not have the same effect, because I doubt those lines would have been written at all. Maybe all this could be dismissed as simply pious nostalgia for an earlier time of ink and wood and quiet afternoons. And of course there is some of that—a naïve longing for a time we only imagine was simpler or at least less loud—but I do not think that is the whole story.

Acts of Faith

I recently came across a beautiful essay on letter writing by the essayist Vivian Gornick. She says, "A letter written in absorbed silence is an act of faith." *Absorb* comes from the Latin *absorbēre,* which means to swallow up, devour, submerge or gulp down. Imagine such a silence, so incompatible with the frenzy of digital talk! Imagine swallowing it down and enduring it (yet another meaning of absorb), holding it in long enough that your own thoughts begin to swell and spread out. Imagine, then, the longing you would have not to be so alone with your thoughts. And then it becomes clear why writing a letter is an act of faith—for in order to devour that silence and convert it into thought, you must be able to believe in the possibility of response.

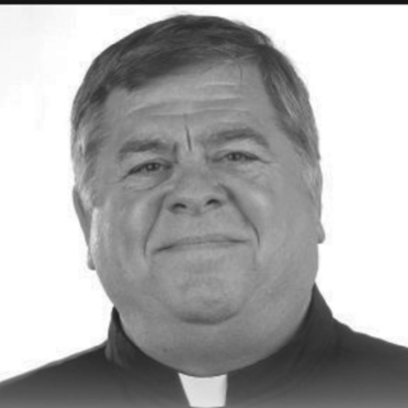
The twin desires of letter writing—to make meaning from silence and to receive a response—are really religious longings. One of my favorite poems by Randall Jarrell describes a sick child in his bed trying to imagine a letter he would most like to receive. But nothing he can dream up, not even a letter from outer space, satisfies him, for they are all products of his own mind. In the end he cries out, almost like he is praying, "All that I've never thought of—think of me!"

Writing a letter or receiving one from a friend will never quite satisfy us, just as in prayer our hearts will forever remain restless. But it will give us some foretaste of what it will one day be like to be submerged in silence and then finally come face to face with all we had never thought of.

In 1920, when the mail arrived seven times a day in Brooklyn and at least twice a day everywhere else, letters may have seemed like an intrusion. But now, silence of any sort is hard to come by. We even carry the chattering world in our pockets when we take a walk in the woods. And I am no different from anyone else. Yet, when I manage to sit down to read a letter from my friend or compose one of my own, the feeling is much like that moment when I finally kneel down and pray, that a little sense and silence has been allowed into my otherwise hectic day.

When the day comes when the blue boxes stand dormant on Saturdays, it will be a sign to me that the world has become a bit less capable of silence, and the possibility of response more distant.

But in some sense I am being ridiculous. There is no need to blame the policies of a struggling pseudo-governmental agency when the problem is really me. On any given day there is nothing stopping me but my own bad habits from unplugging the computer, shutting down the phones and taking a few gulps of quiet, letting my own thoughts take shape or, better yet, just sitting with the silence in the hope of response.



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FILM | JOHN ANDERSON

PORN AND PENANCE

Joseph Gordon-Levitt channels St. Augustine in 'Don Jon'

The legend of the pre-Renaissance reprobate Don Juan has inspired Mozart, Molière, Franz Liszt, Bertoldt Brecht, Lord Byron, George Bernard Shaw and now Joseph Gordon-Levitt, the very likable actor-turned-director whose brisk, drollish **Don Jon** depicts a world so vulgar—ours—that even Amadeus would be quavering in his brocaded heels.

Exploitative sex is everywhere in this world, having permeated advertising and entertainment to a degree that one can barely avert the eyes. Human discourse has disintegrated to the point where an English sentence consists of a noun, a verb and four F-words.

Gordon-Levitt situates his film in New Jersey, which seems an unnecessary slap at a state that already has image problems. But he needed the accent: the world of the Italian-American and very Catholic Jon Martello is a place of such numbing coarseness that any possible lilt of language needed to be nipped.

No, this does not sound like a comedy. But it is, one that, like most adaptations of the Don Juan story, has a redemptive trajectory through a forest of titillation, an Augustinian journey through cinematic excess (make my movie chaste, but not yet). Jon is called Don because he is able to pick up gorgeous women every weekend at the bars he frequents with his two regular wing men (the terrific Rob Brown and Jeremy Luke). They are a trio that judges women the way one might judge cuts of meat, but without the finesse. Although Jon is culling from a very specific herd, outside of which his particular brand of wiseguy machismo might be rendered less effective (Gordon-Levitt's voiceover suggests nothing if not Ray Liotta's narration in "Goodfellas"), one can see his good points. Despite being a narcissistic knucklehead, he has his loyalties, his priorities and a considered list of things that matter: "My body, my place, my ride, my family, my church, my boys, my girls, my porn."

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MORALS LESSON. Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Scarlett Johansson in "Don Jon."

Yes, his porn. The original title of "Don Jon," which was both directed and written by Gordon-Levitt, was "Don Jon's Addiction." Losing the A-word was a good move. There is no question Jon is hooked on Internet sex; he watches it daily. You want to compliment Gordon-Levitt on being so frank regarding his knowledge of the subject, as well as his insight into what laptop porn means not just for interpersonal relationships but for American productivity. Still, "addiction" doesn't quite do the Jon phenomenon justice.

It's a charmed life he leads. A bartender by profession, Jon really has no problems, apart from the rancor he shares at the Sunday dinner table with his football-addicted father (a hilarious Tony Danza), the relentless "why don't you settle down" lobbying of his mother (the great Glenne Headly) and no visible relationship at all with his sister, Monica, whose cell-

phone virtually does not leave her ear, even at Mass. Played with eye-rolling perfection by Brie Larson (of the excellent, new "Short Term 12"), Monica is as potent a symbol of obsessive behavior as is Dad or Mom or Jon, with his sexual escapades—or his recitation of Hail Marys and Our Fathers at the gym, doing his penance while toning his delts.

Ah, yes. Penance. The idea of life being a series of routines is one that Gordon-Levitt builds into his film's vocabulary—the trips to the gym, the trips to the church, the trips to the computer, the tissue hitting the wastebasket, all are repeated for comic effect but also to illustrate the rut from which our hero needs to escape. Occasionally, the director gets mired in cleverness. Some visual devices—Monica texting at Mass, for instance—may come around once too often. But the effect is good overall, and Jon's habits include his trips to the confessional, which he uses in much the same way he uses the shower at the gym or the car wash for his superd-up Chevy SS—as divine hygiene. He goes in, recites his shortcomings, including his massive porn diet, at which one can't help imagining the priest blanching. Absolution is then granted. It's like the drive-through at Wendy's. "For these and all the sins of my past life I am truly sorry," Jon says, meaning none of it. It's the same priest each time, so he is complicit.

The sacrament is being used as a gag, which is a little offensive, but the crux is, again, habit and routine. As regards many things, Jon simply does not think about what he is doing, including what follows once he spies Barbara Sugarman (Scarlett Johansson), who is the most beautiful woman he's ever seen, at least that night in that bar, which has a decor inspired by the Starship Enterprise. Barbara proves his erotic downfall. She won't go home with him, won't sleep with him until she meets his friends and family, talks him into going back to school and, when she catches him watching porn, threatens to end the relationship. He promises to be better. He may as well be talking to his priest.

For all its cheap jokes and calculated crudity, "Don Jon" is actually a very moral movie and a good career move. Johansson, who has not really been interesting since she was brunette and playing in "Ghost World" and "Lost in Translation," may have found her ideal role: a trashy, manipulative blonde whose appeal to Jon says everything about his erotic aesthetic and his need for a leash. She couldn't be less like Esther (make what you will of the name or, for that matter, Barbara's initials).

ON THE WEB
Michael V. Tueth, S.J., reviews "The Glass Menagerie."
americamagazine.org/theater

Played by a delightful, moving Julianne Moore, Esther is a classmate of Jon's at night school, an older, wounded woman who hasn't changed her style of clothing since the '80s and even buys Jon a "classic" porn movie when she spies him watching sex on his phone. His encounter with Esther, rather than night school, provides Jon his much-needed education and sets up Gordon-Levitt's very old-fashioned conclusion that it is not plenty or ease one needs in life, but true passion and true love.

In getting us to this point, Gordon-Levitt takes an often amusing, albeit circuitous, harsh and occasionally hostile route. It's a bit like taking the New Jersey Turnpike to the Emerald City. But Jon isn't in search of a brain; he's got one. He just needs to elevate it a little.

JOHN ANDERSON *is a film critic for Variety and The Wall Street Journal and a regular contributor to the Arts & Leisure section of The New York Times.*

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OPINION | RAYMOND A. SCHROTH

UP CLOSE AND SUFFERING

Lined up, but down on their knees, foreheads scraping the earth, seven men grovel, their backs bare and beaten, while rebel troops with automatic rifles hover behind awaiting the signal to blow out their brains. The picture, from a year-old video, on page one of the New York Times (9/5), startles. The executioners are Syrian rebels. Weren't they supposed to be the "good guys"?

Most likely the photo editor felt this shot was just too dramatic not to be on the first page; yet maybe he felt a twinge of grief at the vulnerability of those bare backs with no faces. Later, how did he feel about the picture of the dead Afghan suicide bomber (6/11), his bearded face in the upper right corner, his right arm stretched to the hand of an Afghan security worker that reaches into the frame to take the dead man's fingerprints? Without the caption the touching hands are a symbol of tenderness, like the fingers of God and Adam touching at creation. We can deduce from the corpse's shredded shirt and shoulder that the rest of his body has been blown away. Why can't war photography teach us that the spread of this senseless cruelty will either kill or corrupt us all?

Susan Sontag half answers this in *On Photography*: "To suffer is one thing; another thing is living with the photographed images of suffering, which does not necessarily strengthen conscience and the ability to be compassionate. It can also corrupt them. Once one has seen such images, one has started down the road of seeing more—and more. Images transfix. Images anesthetize." How do we know what they mean? Sontag says, "All photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their captions."

Yet they are powerful enough that governments, which know they will again and again wish to lead their people into war, censor them.

Among my family treasures is the huge (529 pages, 16 inches by 11 inches) *The War of the Nations Portfolio, 1914-1919*, whose sepia pages crumble as I turn them: 89 pages of kings, presidents, generals, emperors and now long forgotten famous persons; then endless marching armies, trenches, gutted cities, factories, artillery, airplanes and boats; and a two-page world map featuring faces representing the 45 races who had joined the Great War. In a picture of inductees in Trenton, N.J., I searched for my father's face. But where were the dead? A picture of a distant, unidentified body and another of two German soldiers represent the millions lost.

Images transfix. Images anesthetize.

I am in awe of *War/Photography, Images of Armed Conflict and Its Aftermath*, by Anne Wilkes Tucker and Will Michels with Natalie Zelt, based on an exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts, in Houston, Tex. It investigates the relationship between war and photography through more than 480 images by 280 photographers from 28 nations from 1848 to the present. Rather than progress chronologically, the authors move through categories of pictures: recruitment, training, the fight, aftermath, death, grief, property damage, prisoners, executions and the end.

Some scenes are familiar: the little naked Vietnamese girl running from the napalm attack and the dead G.I.'s on the New Guinea beach (1943), the first picture released of a dead soldier. President Roosevelt ordered its release because he feared the public was growing complacent about the human cost of the war.

Finally, the sting of two less familiar images will last forever. Eugene Richards, for his book *War Is Personal*, interviewed 15 veterans whose lives had been radically, tragically transformed by the Iraq War. Sgt. José Pequeno lost almost half his brain and can no longer talk, walk or do anything alone. One photo shows him from behind in his tearful mother's loving embrace. The whole left side of his head is gone. Richards writes, "War all comes down to these tiny little stories about peoples' lives that will never be the same."

In Vietnam in 1966 Larry Burrows, in an embattled aid station, a "blasted, muddy landscape filled with chaotic activity" as wounded are borne in and out, sees Sgt. Jeremiah Purdie, a blood-soaked bandage tied around his head, lurching forward, reaching out to his friend, a wounded, glassy-eyed marine covered with reddish-brown mud and propped up against a shattered tree truck. Titled "Reaching Out," today it hangs on Sergeant Purdie's wall, connecting him to the Marines "who never made it home."

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

BOOKS | PETER REICHARD

A POLITICAL CLUB SODA

THE CENTER HOLDS
Obama and His Enemies

By Jonathan Alter
Simon & Schuster. 448p $30

In *The City of God*, St. Augustine describes how the destruction of Carthage led to Rome's demise. The cloud placed over Rome by its fierce rival kept its morality in check. When Rome destroyed Carthage, "a crowd of disastrous evils forthwith resulted from the prosperous condition of things.… The lust of rule, which with other vices existed among the Romans in more unmitigated intensity than among any other people, after it had taken possession of the more powerful few, subdued under its yoke the rest, worn and wearied."

In *The Center Holds: Obama and His Enemies*, Jonathan Alter tells the tale of "the more powerful few" in the American empire and their lust for rule. But what does it say to the rest of us, the worn and wearied?

Alter speaks from within the chambers of the powerful few. The son of a Chicago politician, he attended Philips Andover, edited the Harvard Crimson and moved swiftly into a prime columnist slot at Newsweek, which he occupied for nearly three decades. During that time, he held fast to the inside track of the Democratic Party.

During his years at Newsweek, Alter was an informed pundit, a fizzy standby. If reading Anthony Lewis was or David Brooks is like sipping a nice brandy, then Alter offered a club soda.

This is what Alter offers in *The Center Holds*, an insider view of the last political season, but with little depth as to the meaning of it, other than that it prevented a rightward swerve. For campaign strategists, political junkies and Washington operatives, the book might be required reading. For the average educated citizen, it's soda water.

Take Alter's treatment of campaign finance. He gives colorful details about major individual financiers—familiar names like Adelson, Soros and the brothers Koch. But do not look for much insight as to where the current of campaign finance is taking us.

One problem is that the book comes too soon. Here we have, just months after Obama's re-election, a book about the president's first term and how he got re-elected. The same book about Eisenhower or Reagan or Clinton would be more compelling—not because their stories are more compelling, but because the passage of time allows for greater perspective. *The Center Holds* sometimes feels like reading a year-old newspaper.

On the other hand, because we are just past the midpoint of the Obama presidency, parts of the story already feel dated. Alter tells us, for instance, that Mr. Obama will someday "be seen as the president who pioneered the use of digital technology that, in various forms, will now be a permanent part of politics around the world." There, he is not talking about Edward Snowden or Prism, the secret surveillance data mining program. He is talking about the Obama campaign's use of data in electioneering. Prism was still behind the curtain when Alter's book hit the presses.

In recent months, we have learned that the National Security Agency is collecting U.S. citizens' phone records, e-mail and Web visits for future reference; that the Justice Department confiscated Associated Press phone logs; and that the Federal Bureau of Investigation has been maintaining a secret fleet of drones for domestic surveillance. Had Alter published a few months later, would he have commented on how President Obama has presided over the expansion of an architecture for mass surveillance?

For a clue, let us look to the ramp-up in overseas drone strikes under the president. Alter assures us, without irony, that "Obama was worried that a successor wouldn't be as careful as he was in assessing targets, though the expansion to so-called signature strikes (targeted on 'likely' enemy combatants, not specific individuals known to be dangerous) had already greatly increased the casualties." Alter makes a passing reference to the C.I.A.'s targeted killing of a 16-year-old American boy and his friends in a Yemen restaurant in 2011 as "collateral damage." But he says nothing about the killing of 21 children in a drone strike in 2012. Nothing on the "double taps"—a second bombing on the same target that kills first responders. Mr. Obama has let the drone genie out of the bottle, and Alter declines to delve.

Of course, Alter might not be in the best position to squawk about the "war on terror." In November 2001, Alter

penned a column that waved forward the Patriot Act and encouraged the use of torture or "transferring some suspects to our less squeamish allies."

In *The Center Holds*, Alter again comes off as jaded when he describes Mr. Obama as the man who "had all but pulled the trigger and blown Osama bin Laden's brains out." Alter also reveals a bit of his worldview when he faults President Obama and his team for spending "endless hours confronting a crisis that would soon be forgotten" instead of focusing on political problems. The forgettable crisis in question? The BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the biggest environmental disaster in U.S. history. Alter is interested in the president's ability to obtain and keep power, not in whether he wields it justly.

Still, *The Center Holds* depicts a president whose distaste for the grubbier aspects of politics has diminished his ability to rule. Mr. Obama is portrayed almost as a modern philosopher-king. One thinks of Marcus Aurelius, a deep thinker surrounded by shallow, divisive egotists. (Leave aside that the empire began to fall apart upon his death.)

Alter deals gently at times with Gov. Mitt Romney. But he also reminds us, in case we had somehow forgotten, just how obscene a collection of candidates the Republican Party put forth in the 2012 primary, a "clown car" of panderers and narcissists. The few candidates who refused to embarrass themselves in their lust for rule never had a chance.

It could also be that the Obama who was elected in 2008 never had a chance to be the president he promised to be. He gave many the hope that he would turn America away from the path of empire, that he would bring a renewed sense of moral direction to the White House. But beyond arguing that things would have been worse under Mr. Romney, Alter offers little to encourage that subset of worn and wearied Americans that their hope was well-placed.

For Alter, it is enough that Obama held the line against the barbarians he sees swarming in the Republican Party and middle America. The president's principal flaw, to this loyal insider, is that he is too noble to deal effectively with the knaves crowding the earthly capital. If true, there are serious implications for the rest of us. Unfortunately, Alter does not explore these. Like so much in politics, his book is mainly about winning.

PETER REICHARD *is a writer and public policy researcher who lives in New Orleans.*

PATRICIA McGUIRE

ACADEMIA NUTS

MUDWOMAN
A Novel

By Joyce Carol Oates
Ecco (Reprint Edition). 480p $14.99

A college president who is not already a wee bit nuts might easily become so when exposed to the competitive dysfunctionality and rampant absurdity that pass for normal behavior in the academy. But while curious characters abound, no university leader is quite so unhinged as M. R. Neukirchen, the improbable president of a fictional university in New Jersey that strongly resembles Princeton, the author's academic home.

Joyce Carol Oates has surpassed her own rather high standards for strangeness in portraying the emotionally ill protagonist of *Mudwoman*, a child abandoned and left for dead in remote Adirondack mudflats. Rescued, she climbs to the heady heights of academic leadership, only to suffer spectacular meltdowns as the stress and loneliness of the college presidency unleash long-repressed memories.

Oates seems to have it in for women leaders. People who think that women are too unstable to be reliable leaders will love this book. The rest of us who have spent years trying to be taken seriously as women leaders are left to wonder with some irritation why Oates chose a madwoman—Mudwoman—to be the first president of a prestigious university.

Despite the setting, this book is not really about academia, but rather about the appalling psychological damage of child abuse. M. R. Neukirchen's unraveling is not because of her position (though stress may be a trigger for some of her more bizarre behaviors) but rather because of long-unresolved emotional issues from her abysmal childhood. Absent good counseling, which apparently M.R. never had, she would have come apart in just about any job by the time she hit mid-life.

Certainly, parts of Oates's narrative are familiar to academic leaders, some in a chilling way. I happened to read the first part of the book on a weekend when I had escaped my own responsibilities as a college president, leaving no forwarding number as I roamed the desolate tidal marshes of Bombay Hook along the Delaware coast, where the peace and quiet are always restorative. Later, in my hotel room, as I read the first chapters, in which President Neukirchen skips out of a professional conference to make a secret drive north to the Adirondack mudflats of her repressed memories, I shuddered in recognition of the irresistible urge to abandon all duties, to leave no forwarding numbers, to drive fast and far away from a room full of people waiting for the president's major speech. Most of us manage to get a grip.

For President Neukirchen, the line between hallucination and real life is

blurred, and Oates plays games with the reader as the narrative shifts without warning from reality to fantasy. Left to die as a toddler on the muddy banks of the Black Snake River by her mentally ill mother, Jedina Kraeck never conquers her fear of abandonment. Rescued by a trapper, Jedina claims the name of her lost sister Jewell as a renunciation of the self she left buried in the mud. Later adopted by a kindly Quaker couple, she becomes Meredith Ruth Neukirchen, a good girl known for her scholarly ways, strength and competence, and deep desire to please others.

Academic success takes M.R. first to Cornell and then Harvard, where she meets her astronomer lover, who is, quite simply, a narcissistic jerk. He forces her to leave Cambridge after graduate school—"exiled" is M.R.'s word—to find a position at the New Jersey university because he, Andre Litovik, is also married and does not really want his mistress around. Her obsession with Litovik and desperate desire for his love and affection, which he is utterly incapable of sharing with her, is another thread in the theme of loneliness and lovelessness that winds through this book like the coldest, darkest river of dreams. Oates wrote *Mudwoman* after her own beloved husband died, and the book's alternate subtitle "A Widow's Story" suggests autobiographical threads that may partially explain M.R.'s shattered psyche in search of love as she roams across bleak landscapes.

Professor Neukirchen becomes an academic star at the New Jersey university, climbing the ladder to the presidency; her selection vindicates her need for approval. A reader more familiar with modern presidential search methodology might wonder how someone so emotionally fragile got past the first round.

There are almost no sympathetic characters in this book. As M.R. quickly devolves into madness during

OH TIGRIS, OH EUPHRATES

Oh Tigris, Oh Euphrates watching Greek armies,
Roman archers, legionnaires armed to the teeth, British
forces, American military, empire-building further, further
east and south across your deserts, hills, ravines, cities,
villages, their shape-shifting alliances, offensives, counter-
insurgencies, crushing the centuries old silk-trade routes

Oh Tigris descending Armenian highlands,
Oh Euphrates born in Kurdistan, watering Kunsa's
garden of Eden, marrying as one grand current sweeping
through Basra emptying into the Persian Sea

Oh Tigris, Oh Euphrates witness of Greeks, Romans,
British, Americans sighting enemies over the next ridge,
ever expanding military exploits taking a toll on men,
women, children, plants, animals, here and at home:
the homeless, the unemployed, the sick, the orphans,
the widows, the aged, the rich richer, the poor poorer

Oh Tigris, Oh Euphrates seeing generations of generals
crossing your sacred shores, their unquenchable thirst
for wealth, power, influence, aiming to outdo others,
not forgetting Alexander's legendary exploits in Persia

Oh Tigris, Oh Euphrates birthing Babylonian, Persian,
Shiite, Sunni, Kurdish girls and boys by your endless flow
of waters, while the Greeks, Romans, British, Americans
sought your artifacts, resources, strategically set
at the crossroads of civilization, *Oh Tigris, Oh Euphrates.*

CAROLYN GRASSI

Carolyn Grassi*'s poetry books are* Journey to Chartres *(Black Swan Books, Connecticut) and* Transparencies *(Patmos Press, San Francisco). Her forthcoming collection is* Heart and Soul *(Patmos).*

her first year living alone in Charter House, the historically dreary president's residence, her staff are mere foils at the edges of consciousness like flighty sparrows who cannot match the ominous presence of the King of Crows, whose cries on cue signal the darker passages of Oates's strange dreams. She has an unpleasant encounter with a disturbed student, whose fate becomes a weird thread in the story. She falls down steps, wears heavy makeup to obscure her injuries (Oates revealed in an interview that this image came to her in a dream), is late for meetings with trustees and big donors and seems distracted in ways that signal serious deterioration of a rational personality.

For anyone acquainted with the rage that the slings and arrows of academic administration can kindle in even the kindliest of souls, the dream sequence in which President Neukirchen kills and dismembers the leader of her faculty opposition is delicious depravity. In today's collegiate environment, such a dream would have the president taken hostage immediately by the Campus Threat Assessment Team.

Ordered to take time off to rest and recover, M.R. goes on a journey to confront her childhood demons. She discovers the goodness of her adopted father and the empty-eyed existence of her aged birth mother. After more meanderings through mudflats, her lover calls and wants her back, and we last see her driving south on I-81 toward New Jersey, allegedly free of her demons. I do not think so. She is running back to the arms of Andre Litovik, her presidency a mere afterthought. If I were her board chair, I would buy out her contract immediately.

Mudwoman is entertaining, but also highly improbable. Oates writes with her usual careful attention to detail and colorful descriptions of locations, but unfortunately, her characters come across as depressing stereotypes. *Mudwoman* can be a good beach book, but among Oates's works, I much preferred the Wonderland Quartet.

PATRICIA McGUIRE *is president of Trinity Washington University in Washington, D.C.*

WILLIAM REHG

GETTING BEYOND DOUBT

GOD IN PROOF
The Story of a Search From the Ancients to the Internet

By Nathan Schneider
University of California Press. 272p
$34.95

Demonstrations of God's existence have long been a staple in philosophy courses taught at Catholic colleges and universities. The heritage is venerable, stretching back from the present day to the ancient Greeks. In his eminently readable *God in Proof*, Nathan Schneider presents this history of proving not as a merely academic exercise but as an existential quest of the highest importance in his own life.

Though the book is informed by considerable scholarship (as evidenced in his ample footnotes, which rely almost entirely on primary sources), Schneider's audience includes anyone with an interest in intellectual history and faith. Tracing the philosophical dialectic in a manner both responsible to the issues and accessible to the ordinary reader, Schneider weaves together intellectual history with his own quest for faith. A motivational puzzle drives the project: "Why is it that for some of us, everything depends on these proofs, while for others they're completely beside the point?" In other words, why care about proofs at all?

Schneider's parents raised him on the premise "that I should choose what to believe about religious things, since they were still choosing for themselves." By adolescence he felt a keen need for answers to the big questions, and "no answer seemed more satisfying than a proof." His early enthusiasm for proving fits nicely with his exposition of ancient and medieval efforts in the early chapters, which cover not only Plato, Aristotle and Christian theologians, but also Muslim, Jewish and Indian thinkers.

Up to the early modern period in Europe, an optimism about the abilities of reason marked the practice of proving God's existence. This was as true of rationalists like Descartes as of Aristotle, Anselm and Aquinas. As Schneider finishes his first year of college, his quest for answers has led him to the Rite of Christian Intiation of Adults and baptism into the Roman Catholic Church. Chapter 4 is particularly effective in linking the rationalists' quest for certainty with Schneider's struggles to maintain his precarious confidence in Catholic belief in the face of doubts and challenges. Baptism had proven to be no panacea against doubt, but rather the beginning of a process of purgation on the way to a "more interesting kind of faith." At this point, he notices that the whole work of proving—a tradi-

tionally male-dominated, often solitary enterprise—leaves out crucial elements of his new-found Catholic faith: Christ, the poor and community. Schneider has learned that a "God worth believing in would have to pull me out of myself, beyond what delusions my head could conjure for its own comfort."

Chapters 5 to 7 trace the ripening skepticism about reason and God, from Hume through Darwin to the atheist scientists and philosophers of the 20th century. Along the way, Schneider notices a striking shift in audience. In previous eras, both sides of the debate were believers, concerned primarily with testing arguments so as to find the best proofs. As atheists publicly declared themselves, however, the debates took on a deeper existential significance, a life-and-death matter of the very possibility of reasonable Christian belief. The problem of evil makes the God question all the more urgent and difficult: how can an all-good, all-powerful God permit the massive amounts of suffering and evil we observe? Schneider articulates this challenge to faith quite sharply, conveying the sense that atheists seem to have the easier answer. In their view, suffering is a mere byproduct of an indifferent, evolving universe. In his own life, these chapters coincide with his personal maturation into the life of faith, as he recognizes the atheism that still lurks in his heart. As he confesses to his atheist uncle, a scientist, "a part of me has never stopped being an atheist."

Chapters 8 to 10 bring us through the second half of the 20th century to the present day. Supplementing primary literature with interviews, Schneider does a good job of clearly communicating the dialectic of argument and counterargument, moving from the academic revival of analytically rigorous Christian philosophy (sparked above all by Alvin Plantinga), through the attempts to support belief in God with contemporary scientific reasoning, to the popular debates that pit the New Atheists (Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett) against evangelical apologists—both sides aided and abetted by a hyperactive blogosphere.

So why care about God proofs? Schneider's answer emerges over the course of the book, partly through his deft interweaving of his own quest for belief with the back-and-forth of intellectual history, and partly through his vivid description of those involved in current debates. Parties on both sides keenly desire that their belief or unbelief be demonstrably true. For some—again on both sides—that desire grows into a proselytizing zeal. Where does Schneider himself stand on the issue of God's existence, after all his searching? Though he confesses that God still "remains a question" for him, his musings in the final chapter link such doubt to a more profound answer to the question, why care? The genre of proving, he ventures, "is a gift (or a burden) not given to everyone, one whose recipients share a common bond." Thus those who participate in the practice of proving represent a "subcommunion of saints." In the end, Schneider hints that the practice of proving, ever inconclusive, is itself an opening on the divine.

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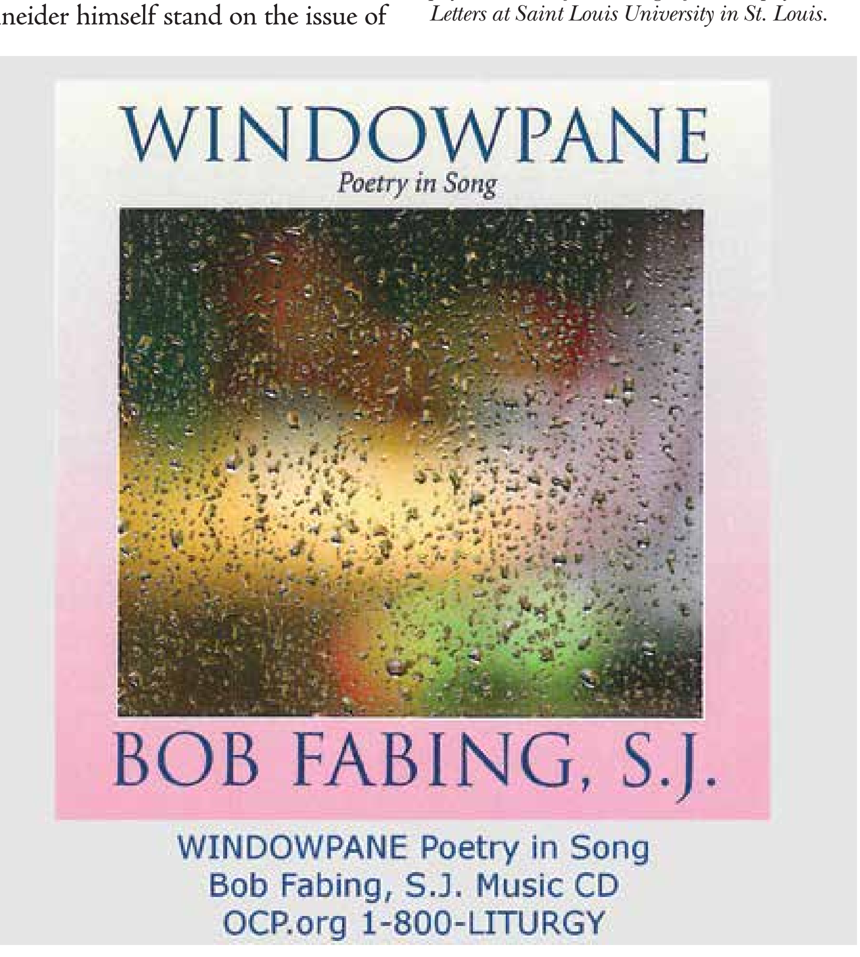

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The Living God

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), NOV. 10, 2013

Readings: 2 Mc 7:1–14; Ps 17:1–15; 2 Thess 2:16–3:5; Lk 20:27–38

"Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living" (Lk 20:38)

As we ponder Jesus' confrontation with the Sadducees regarding life in the world to come, we are compelled to ask, "Do I believe in resurrection?" How one answers this question orients how we live today. It is a question that is not so much answered intellectually, though it is not beyond reason, as in the ordering of our loves. Who or what is our true love? Do we find our loves fulfilled in the living God or in the promises of this world?

To answer yes to resurrection is not a polemic against this world or our embodied nature, for the promise of resurrection of which Jesus speaks is not the denigration of our bodies or the rejection of our wholeness but the goal of our being. At some point we will all die; and that reality, and the hope of a future resurrection, does not diminish the importance of this life but makes it all the more significant.

The Sadducees, who answered no to resurrection, have tradition and, it seems, the Torah on their side. Apart from Dn 12:1–4, little is said about resurrection in the Old Testament. The Sadducees, a priestly, elite party, accepted the authority only of the Torah, and they did not find there any claims to resurrection. Indeed, what they found in the Torah was the law of levirate marriage, outlined in Dt 25:5–10. If a man died childless, his nearest male kin was to marry his widow, and the first child born to them was considered the child of the dead man, "so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel" (Dt 25:6).

The Sadducees propose to Jesus a ludicrous scenario as a means of demonstrating the foolishness of belief in resurrection. A woman was married to seven brothers, one after another, all of whom died childless. "Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her." Jesus does not dismiss the question as foolish or reject it as a carefully designed trap, but uses it as an opportunity to teach.

First, Jesus says that marriage is about this world and the things of this world, not about the world to come, so the carefully crafted conundrum is rejected. Second, Jesus draws on a passage from Exodus in which God says to Moses that he is "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (3:15). Jesus understands this as proof of the resurrection, for if God speaks of the current existence of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, this demonstrates that "he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."

It is striking biblical interpretation, head-spinning really, for it suggests the untapped depth of Scripture, but it was an essential proof for those who accepted the scriptural authority of the Torah alone.

In fact, however, the majority of Jews in Jesus' day believed in resurrection, as had been the case since the Hellenistic period. Most groups, like the Pharisees, accepted resurrection, and many texts written in this period speak of it directly and often. But Jesus' interpretation grounds belief in resurrection not just in a text the Sadducees would accept but, more important, in the nature of the living God as one who gives life to his creation and sustains that life beyond the limits of our understanding: the dead are never lost to God.

This belief and hope are seen in the seven Jewish martyrs of 2 Maccabees, all brothers, and in martyrs today, who offer their lives not out of a lust for suffering or as rejection of this world, but in trust of the living God. As the mother of the Maccabean martyrs says to them: "It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again" (2 Mc 7:22–23). This world and our choices matter, for it is the beginning of a life that God has ordered to go on forever.

JOHN W. MARTENS

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Imagine yourself listening to Jesus with the Sadducees. Do you have a question for Jesus about the resurrection?

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

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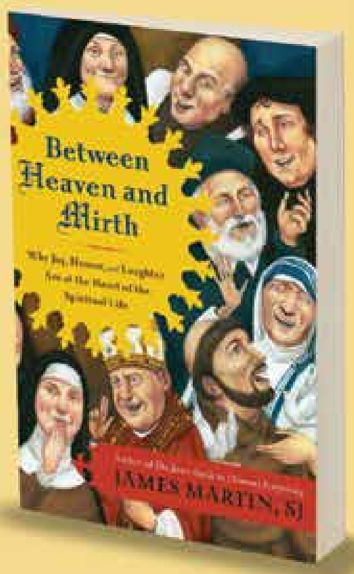

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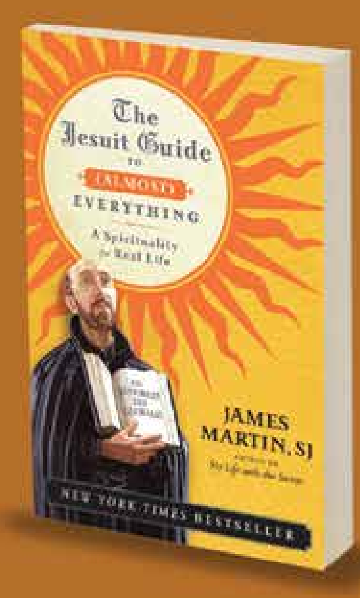

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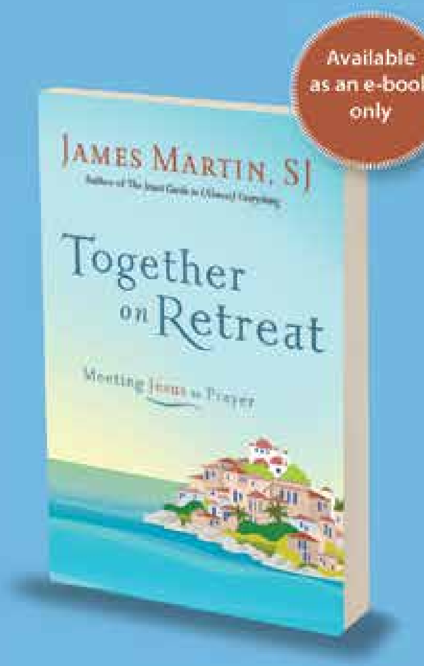

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