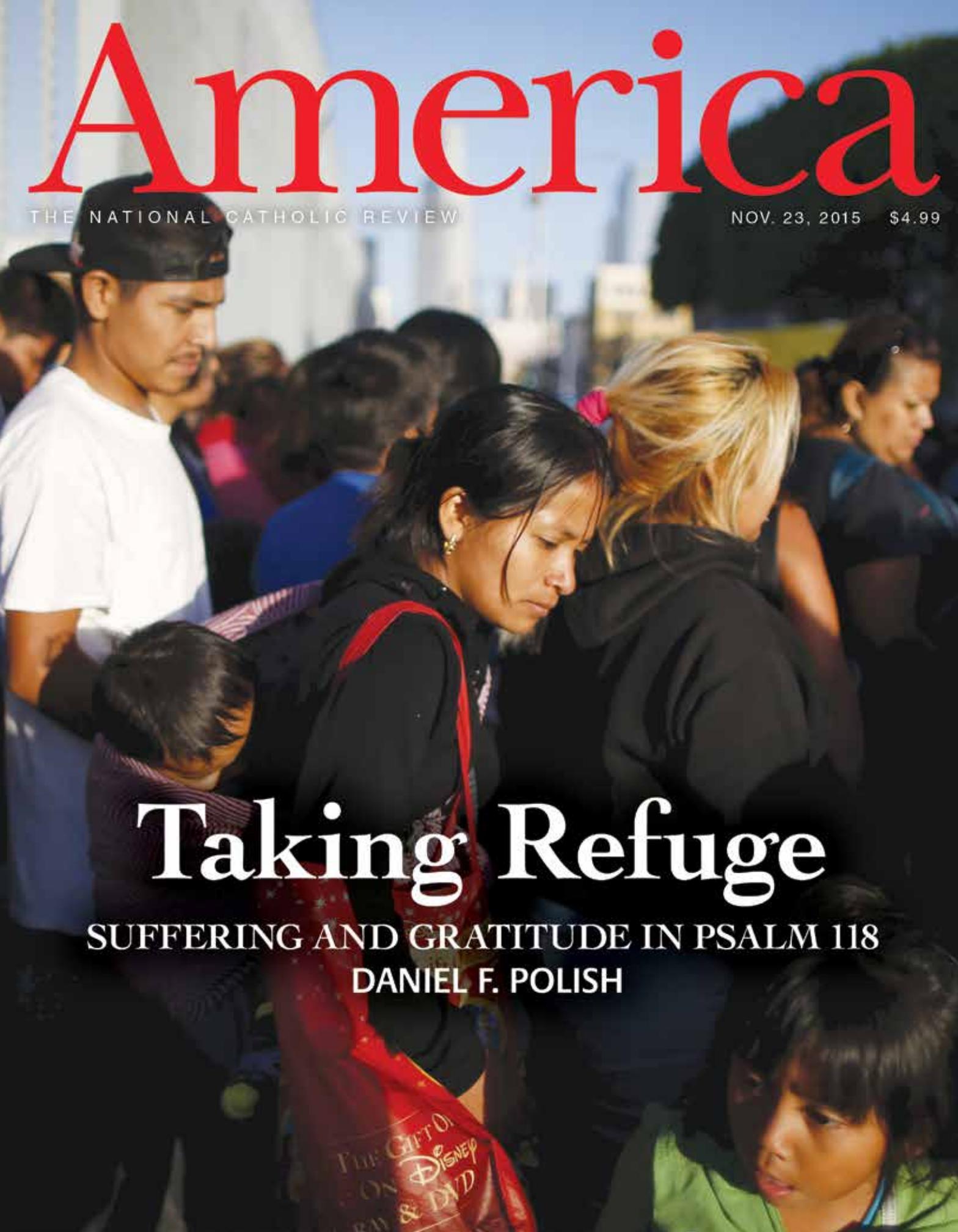


America



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Taking Refuge

SUFFERING AND GRATITUDE IN PSALM 118

DANIEL F. POLISH

THE GIFT OF
ON
& DVD

OF MANY THINGS

The conference room in Senator Elizabeth Warren's office suite on Capitol Hill can comfortably seat a dozen people. But on a Monday morning earlier this month, triple that number had crammed themselves into it. A few minutes past 11 o'clock, three Warren staffers squeezed their way into the crowd and, after brief introductions, a young man in jacket and tie rose to address them. "As people of faith," he began, "we are motivated to work for justice. And so we are here to share our concerns about some of the issues our country faces." The young man, a student at Holy Cross College, then motioned to his 30 or so companions. All of them, he explained, were constituents of Warren's.

For the next half hour, the students offered the staffers a seminar on three key issues troubling them: immigration reform, climate change and U.S. relations with Central America. As these impressive students were meeting with Warren, some 1,200 others—most of them from Jesuit high schools and universities across the country—were conducting similar visits at other congressional offices.

The day on Capitol Hill marked the culmination of an annual three-day conference that brings together students from across the Jesuit universe and beyond. It's called the Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice, and this year, its agenda featured a keynote address by Helen Prejean, C.S.J., and breakout sessions on topics ranging from income inequality to migration to human trafficking, intellectual disability and "Laudato Si." There was plenty of laughter and tears, reflection and prayer to go around, too.

The teach-in traces its history to the early 1990's, when, after the deaths of the Salvadoran martyrs in 1989, Jesuits and others began gathering informally each year at Fort Benning, Ga., on the anniversary of the assassinations. Fort Benning was the location of the School of the Americas, where the Salvadoran military leaders behind the murders

were trained. The gathering grew in size and scope until it was formalized as the Ignatian Family Teach-In in 1998. This year, a record-breaking crowd of 1,600 attended.

If you're like me, you greeted with dread the release of recent Pew polls showing religion among millennials in free fall. But then you attend an event like the teach-in, and you're reminded: Ah, right; Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to the church until the end of time. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst." And where 1,600 are gathered, there is faith and hope and joy in absurd abundance.

The young people who show up at the annual teach-in do not approach faith casually. They strive daily to embody the Beatitudes. In the delegation packed into Senator Warren's office was a Boston College student who tutors prison inmates, two others who have just spent a semester with *campesinos* in El Salvador, a woman who volunteers at a school in a low-income neighborhood and many others like them.

America Media was privileged to be a part of it all. James Martin, S.J., roused the crowd with a talk based on his book *Jesus: A Pilgrimage*. Kerry Weber moderated breakout sessions, and The Jesuit Post team handled all social media for the event. In partnership with the Ignatian Solidarity Network, we also tried something new: a collegiate social justice film festival called Voices From the Margins. The contest attracted nearly 70 entries from dozens of schools. We hope the film fest can become another example of the kind of Jesuit and lay collaboration in the arts that Mark Bosco, S.J., writes about in this issue (pg. 14).

So if you ever find yourself in need of a reminder that the church's future is in excellent hands, have a look at America's recap video from the weekend, available on our website, or peruse the winning film fest entries at filmfest.americamedia.org. Or pick up the phone and call your congresspersons. Even they will tell you.

JEREMY ZIPPLE, S.J.

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Cover: People wait in line at the Fred Jordan Mission annual giveaway of shoes, clothing and backpacks for more than 4,000 homeless and underprivileged children in Los Angeles, Calif., on Oct. 1. Reuters/Lucy Nicholson

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ON THE WEB

Announcing the release of the new book **Praying With America**. Plus, **Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I.**, right, talks about Christ's Passion on "America This Week." Full digital highlights on page 29 and at americamagazine.org/webfeatures.



Other People's Families

What may be history's longest experiment in population control ended in late October with China's announcement that it will abandon its infamous "one child" policy. Chinese families are still limited to two children, so the experiment is not quite complete, but the demise of the uniquely harsh "one child" rule is welcome news. Not only did the policy create a severe gender imbalance in Chinese society; it also led to a multitude of horrors, from forced abortions to involuntary sterilizations. It is incredible that the international community allowed these gross human rights violations to continue for so long with so little protest.

Or maybe it isn't. The Chinese policy was a natural, if extreme, outgrowth of the international population control movement, which sees the "population bomb" as a dire environmental threat that must be addressed. These warnings often come from elite quarters of the developed world and are usually aimed at the poorest corners of the developing world. China may be the most prominent example, but it is not the only state to fall prey to these cruel ideas. It is now clear that population control measures have an especially harsh effect on women, a tragic fact that public opinion is finally beginning to notice.

Pope Francis received criticism this summer when, in "Laudato Si," he rejected population control as a path to environmental sustainability. Yet he is right when he argues, "To blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some is one way of refusing to face the issues." A society that seeks to preserve its way of life by controlling the growth of other people's families of families—at home or abroad—has much to answer for. China's policies may have been widely vilified, but they did not develop in a vacuum.

The Mark of Blaine

Nevada has ranked last in education four years in a row in a national survey of child well-being conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. What to do about that sorry outcome remains a matter of sometimes scalding dispute.

Some Nevada parents no longer have the patience to await another systemic fix; and in legislation passed last June, Republican lawmakers offered them a way to opt out. The state began one of the nation's broadest school choice programs this September, allowing parents to establish educational savings accounts for their children in lieu of attending public school.

The program was quickly challenged by the American Civil Liberties Union, among others, which argues that the proposed disbursements to parents violate the Nevada

constitution's "robust protections against the use of public funds for religious education." The amendment that provides that "robust protection" was added in 1880. It was among similar additions to state constitutions, passed at a time of rising anti-Catholic bigotry, known as "little Blaine amendments"—named for the Maine politician James G. Blaine, who proposed an amendment to the U.S. Constitution with the aim of denying public resources to "sectarian" education. Noting that odious lineage, the Washington-based Becket Fund filed a friend of the court brief defending the Nevada program on Oct. 28.

Other Western nations have long funded or subsidized both public and religious schools. Could the Nevada option offer the United States an opportunity to reconsider its bigoted 19th-century denial of support to Catholic schools? A Nevada court, and perhaps ultimately the U.S. Supreme Court, may have to make that call. But families in Nevada are already beginning to vote with their feet: 3,600 of them at last count.

Turkey's Putin?

Given the landslide victory that voters gave the Justice and Development Party in the parliamentary elections in Turkey on Nov. 1, there are concerns that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will use the electoral returns as an excuse to further his aims by consolidating all political power in himself. His goal seems to be to rewrite the nation's Constitution to reflect that fact.

Ever since he lost a parliamentary majority back in June, Mr. Erdogan has strategized about how to restore that lost power and, more important, how to enhance and keep it. After calling for the snap election back in August, he has taken several steps to do just that. He has renewed the war against the Kurds. He has proceeded to systematically curtail or eliminate in every possible way political opposition and public dissent, specifically by cracking down on all forms of social media as well as the traditional press. And he has not been averse to using tear gas and water cannons as well.

As a public demonstration of his enhanced stature, Mr. Erdogan has built a 1,150-room presidential palace, at a cost of some \$600 million, which is 30 times the size of the White House, complete with a laboratory with a staff of five, whose sole purpose is to be presidential "food tasters"—all of which speaks volumes about the president and his conception of leadership.

To some, Mr. Erdogan is guilty of "pulling a Putin"—consolidating power in a manner unworthy of his position as the head of a secular democracy that straddles both East and West. The nearly 80 million Turkish citizens deserve better.

Family Time

Speaking to a gathering of Christian business executives on Oct. 31, Pope Francis addressed the need for maternity leave and strikingly insisted that women should not be forced to choose between work and family. They “must be protected and helped in this dual task: the right to work and the right to motherhood.” He argued that the harmonization of work and family life is a way of recognizing that employees are the most valuable resource of a company.

While respecting employees’ duty to their families is certainly in line with the Catholic faith, the pope’s insight is not one that must come only or even primarily from the Gospel and the church’s social teaching. Netflix made news in August by allowing unlimited paid parental leave during the year after a child’s birth or adoption, matching their unlimited vacation and sick leave policies. Announcing the shift, they explained that it would provide employees “the flexibility and confidence to balance the needs of their growing families,” helping the company because “experience shows people perform better at work when they’re not worrying about home.”

Other tech firms have made similar moves, with Microsoft and Amazon also recently announcing improvements to their parental leave policies. But the recognition that more generous leave is important is not limited to Silicon Valley’s hyper-competitive talent market. In July the Navy tripled the length of its maternity leave in order to help recruit and retain women in the service.

These moves should of course be applauded, but they also raise the question of what befalls employees whose skills are not in great demand or who are not lucky enough to work for companies whose executives might hear the call to be “missionaries of the social Gospel.”

In fact, many whose work is directly connected to the Gospel do not benefit from the kind of policies Pope Francis called for, which is a scandal. Church employees—in parishes, schools, social service agencies and diocesan offices—are covered by a patchwork of different family leave arrangements. Since many of these Catholic organizations operate essentially as small nonprofits on shoestring budgets, they often find it difficult to offer adequate (or sometimes any) paid leave. The church should lead the way in making support for family through paid leave a baseline component of employment rather than a perk. National norms or a model policy from the bishops’ conference would help to set a standard for Catholic institutions to reach.

But private initiatives, even of the large scope possible for the U.S. Catholic Church, will not be enough. In the United States, uniquely among developed economies, new mothers (and fathers) are guaranteed nothing but 12 weeks of unpaid leave under the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act, and then only if they work full time for a company with 50 or more employees. In 2013, the Bureau of Labor Statistics determined that just 11 percent of workers in private industry had access to paid family leave. Only three states—California, New Jersey and Rhode Island—require large employers to provide leave.

Opposition to a federal guarantee of paid family leave focuses on the imposition of a one-size-fits-all plan on employers and especially on the way this would affect smaller businesses less able to absorb the costs. Programs need to be designed to spread these burdens out structurally instead of simply mandating employers to pay for time off. Existing state-level programs, which are structured and funded similarly to temporary disability insurance, provide a good model. A report prepared for the Department of Labor in 2014, evaluating studies of the first decade of California’s program, found that this approach worked well, with positive effects on women’s employment and on children and families. Roughly 90 percent of employers reported no effect or positive effects on productivity and profitability.

The sometimes exaggerated concerns from the business community highlight the fact that more attention is given to the needs of employers than to “the right to work and the right to motherhood,” as Pope Francis put it. We cannot allow having children and participating in the workforce to be traded off against each other, as if workers’ becoming parents is some outside interruption to the normal course of their careers. This approach commodifies parenthood, valuing it at the cost of a worker’s lost wages and an employer’s lost productivity. It is an insult to the worker, who is reduced to the value of his or her job, and to the business that is reduced to extracting that value at the lowest possible cost.

The right answer, which is pro-woman, pro-family and pro-life, is to take family obligations off the market by supporting programs at both the state and federal level that offer a baseline guarantee of some time to welcome a newborn into the world without losing a paycheck.



REPLY ALL

Model of Discourse

Re “Keep It Civil,” by Bryan Vincent (11/2): I welcome Bryan Vincent’s thoughtful analysis of the current trends in American civic discourse. With a few reservations, I find he presents a sensible way of convincing our fellow citizens of the correctness and appropriateness of our various pro-life positions. I do find it ironic, however, that within our churches the pro-life position on abortion is expounded, taught and enforced by a simple fiat rather than by the methodology proposed by Mr. Vincent. I have always been of the opinion that we need to convince simultaneously our own members of all the various pro-life positions as we attempt to do likewise in the broader American society. Mr. Vincent presents the way. Pope Francis follows it. Now if only we American Catholics would do the same!

VINCENT GAGLIONE
Online Comment

A Source of Division

To a secular person, the idea of centering an effort to foster a more civil discourse on pro-life advocacy seems tone-deaf and ridiculous. What issue has been more to blame, aside from the segregationist cause, for angry and uncivil discourse than the so-called pro-life movement? The far right in this country embraced a southern strategy in the 1970s but also sought the support of Catholics and Evangelicals through exploitation of the abortion issue. The deep polarization we see today rests on the twin foundations of racial resentment and anti-abortion

zealotry. I’d love to see a more civil public discourse, but it is bound to fail if you take a “pro-life approach” to the project.

NEIL PURCELL
Online Comment

Euthanasia in the Netherlands

“Euthanasia in California” (Editorial, 11/2) is excellent. We need only look to the Netherlands for a clear-eyed view about where our Brave New World may be heading. Since euthanasia was legalized in that country in 1981, it has increased at approximately 15 percent per annum. In the case of elderly individuals seeking euthanasia, family pressure is often one of the motivating factors. It is also becoming easier to qualify for state-legitimated euthanasia with such non-life-threatening physical or mental conditions as depression, autism or blindness. In addition, children 12 to 15 can seek euthanasia if they have parental permission; there are social pressures to lower the age limit still further. Dutch authorities have also noted an increase in “double euthanasias,” where the spouse of someone seeking euthanasia also requests the procedure because life will be unbearable without the spouse’s partner. To my mind, any state-supported euthanasia regime will be fraught with abuse in its application.

BILL COLLIER
Online Comment

All God’s People

Re “Breathing Space,” by Alex Milkulich (10/26): My brother is a Jesuit brother and just began teaching at a Jesuit high school. I am so proud of the manner in which he is challeng-

ing his students to think about and reflect on institutional racism. Many of our Jesuit schools taught us about solidarity and promoting the dignity of all. As alumni we must also do our part to fight racism. Many of us belong to institutions—in industry, higher education, social services or health care—that tolerate, if not sometimes propagate, racial disparities. It’s not just Jesuit schools that need to do more. Alums, parents, boards and donors must also work for the greater glory of God and for all of God’s people.

MARY HOMAN
Online Comment

Inner-City Needs

On Alex Mikulich’s article about Jesuit institutions and racism: as a graduate of Creighton’s nursing program in the 1960s, I was fortunate to attain a position as a school nurse in an inner-city area. The dropout rate is high in our inner-city high schools. Yet the Jesuit presence in urban areas at this time is generally one high school per city. The needs are great for this age level. I wonder what the early Jesuits would think if they wandered our city streets. Perhaps the influence of today’s Jesuits could be focused on the high school level for the sake of the children of our nation. I applaud their discernment on this issue.

MICHAELE ANN RITCHIE POKRAKA
Riverside, Ill.

Yonkers’ Heroes

Re “Communal Combat,” by Maurice Timothy Reidy (10/26): I will admit I did not watch HBO’s “Show Me a Hero,” but I did read the book it is based on during the first month of my assignment at Sacred Heart in Yonkers, N.Y. “Show Me a Hero” does tell a riveting story—but how I wish they had interviewed some parishioners of mine!

What the book and Mr. Reidy’s essay both miss are the real stories of Yonkers: a community that has continually bound itself together through family and faith as major industries



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have left the locale. Is Yonkers perfect? Of course not. But if you want to be shown some heroes, just come and visit.
MATT JANECKO, O.F.M.CAP.
Yonkers, N.Y.

Hard Readings

Re “Costly Scripture,” by Corinna Guerrero (10/26): Something is lost when we read only the passages in Scripture we like. Why, in the Lectionary, are the last lines of Psalm 137 not fully given? “Blessed are those who pay you back for the evil you have done to us. Blessed are those who seize your children and smash their heads against the walls.” We live in a wicked and brutal world. How and why God allows such violence and how grace works in this den of iniquity are questions that need to be addressed in any theology course and in any Christian church. They should not be ignored, skipped or papered over with false excuses and non-explanations.

HENRY GEORGE
Online Comment

Ask Not

“Church-Shopping,” by Kaya Oakes (10/19), was subtitled “Why is it so hard for young Catholics to find the right parish?” Those of us with pastoral duties are always interested in ways we might better reach out to people. Unfortunately, the article reveals what many of us in pastoral ministry already know. Young people are too often trapped in the mindset of “How can this parish [or Jesus] entertain me?”

Ms. Oakes’s spiritual director has the right advice: focus on the Eucharist. For within the Eucharist is found the selfless sacrifice, the most complete expression of love anyone is capable of: the hard message of Christ’s cross. This is the message that must ring out again and again from parishes.

Regarding parishes being welcoming communities, all mature Christians are charged with engaging in the new evangelization of all people, including our departing youth. We must adopt

the mindset of “ask not what your parish can do for you, but ask what you can do for your parish.”
(DEACON) PETER BROUSSARD
Coos Bay, Ore.

Not Optional

Re “The First Canon: Mercy,” by the Rev. Kevin McKenna (10/12): When I read that Pope Francis said, “Mercy is not just a pastoral attitude, but it is the very substance of the Gospel of Jesus,” what I heard is that orthopraxy is inseparable from orthodoxy. Belief and practice, faith and works, these all go hand in hand. Too often, we treat practices as a secondary status, as icing on the cake—as if beliefs are absolute but practices are optional. We do this in our sacramental life. No matter how sinful a priest may be, the sacraments are still considered “valid” as long as protocol is followed. Mercy is not seen as essential. It’s nice if a priest is kind and compassionate in the confession booth, for example, but not necessary.

There’s a beauty in this theology that grace can come despite our human weaknesses, but also a horror as we remove all humanity from our liturgical life. Scripture tells us that without love all our actions are nothing but a clanging gong, yet we never view love as essential in our sacramental practices.

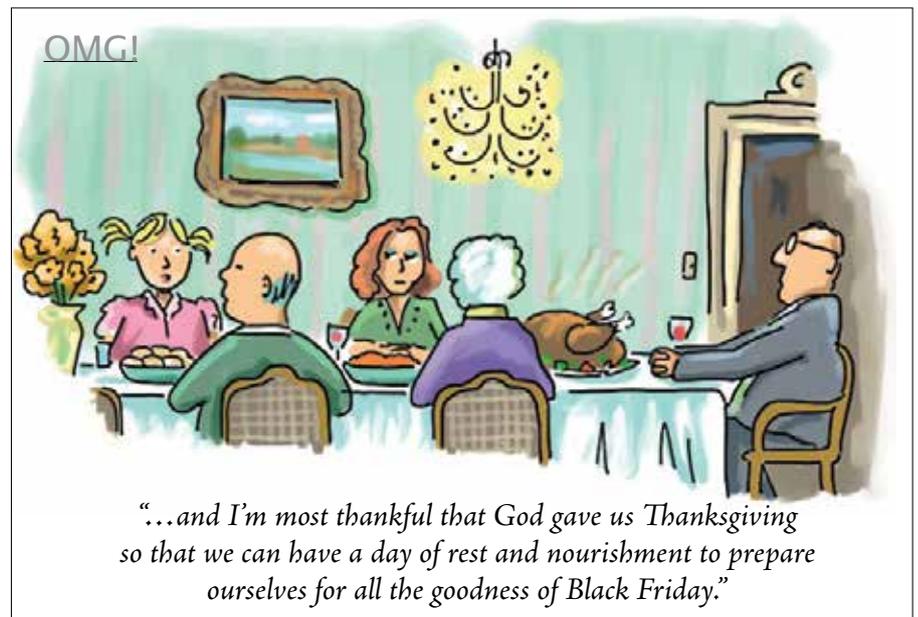
Francis is causing us to rethink all of this if we dare to pay attention.
FRANK LESKO
Online Comment

Call to Conversion

“Doctrinal Challenges,” by Peter Folan, S.J. (10/12), is a thoughtful essay, but I would rather look to Blessed John Henry Newman and his essay on doctrinal development than to Father Rahner. I would also look to the classic formula of St. Vincent of Lerins regarding orthodoxy: that which has been believed in the church “everywhere, always, by everyone.” The living tradition of the church is always a vital source of the belief and morals for Catholics.

Yes, we must look to pastoral realities with respect to doctrine; but we must never use the excuse of “pastoral realities” as a source for doctrinal change. Nor should we oppose pastoral practice and doctrine, relegating difficult doctrinal teachings to the realm of ideals, as is done by some regarding the church’s teaching on contraception. Doctrine is often the call of the church to conversion, and for that God provides his grace. We hear the refrain every Lent: Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel.

LEONARD VILLA
Online Comment



CARTOON WRITTEN BY JAKE MARTIN, S.J.; ART BY BOB ECKSTEIN

ENVIRONMENT

Long-Debated Keystone XL Pipeline Shut Down by President Obama

After hovering for years in political limbo, the long-proposed Keystone XL pipeline, intended to move heavy Canadian crude oil through America's heartland to the Gulf of Mexico and ultimately out into the world market, was brought to ground on Nov. 6 by President Obama. After noting that Secretary of State John Kerry had completed the State Department review of the proposal and determined that the pipeline "would not serve the national interest of the United States," President Obama simply said, "I agree with that decision," bringing years of political drama to an end.

The president said that the United States is now a global leader in action against climate change. "And frankly, approving this project would have undercut that global leadership. And that's the biggest risk we face—not acting."

According to the president, the State Department ultimately rejected Keystone because the pipeline would not make a meaningful long-term contribution to the U.S. economy and would not lower U.S. gas prices. He added that "shipping dirtier crude oil into our country would not increase America's energy security."

Reacting to the White House call on Keystone, Dan Misleh, executive director of the Catholic Climate Covenant, said, "President Obama's decision...is another sign of the growing awareness that business as usual with regards to fossil fuels is not sustainable.

"As Pope Francis said in 'Laudato Si,' we need to begin to envision a new future for our children and to begin to reduce our use of fossil fuels." Mr. Misleh added, "It seems to me that we have to accompany this big and symbolic 'no' with an affirmative and actual 'yes' on what we can do to not only reduce our dependence on fossil fuels, but to invest in and deploy cleaner, more sustainable energy technology and sources."

Mr. Misleh said that the Catholic community, with its size and resources, "ought to quickly become a leader in this new, exciting and sustainable future...to show our love of the Creator through love of creation."

In his statement the president said that debate about the Keystone Pipeline "has occupied what I, frankly, consider an overinflated role in our political discourse."

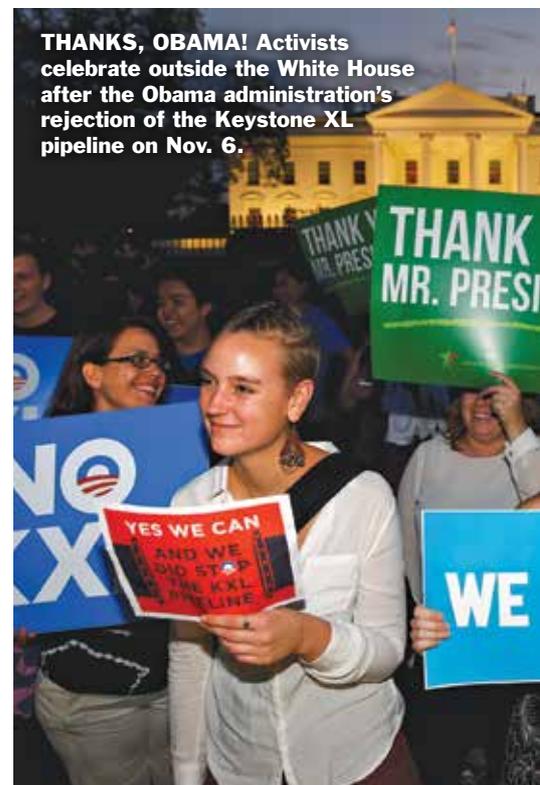
"While our politics have been con-

sumed by a debate over whether or not this pipeline would create jobs and lower gas prices," he said, "We've gone ahead and created jobs and lowered gas prices." He described the pipeline as a symbol "too often used as a campaign cudgel by both parties rather than a serious policy matter."

"And all of this obscured the fact that this pipeline would neither be a silver bullet for the economy, as was promised by some, nor the express lane to climate disaster proclaimed by others," he said.

Patrick Carolan, executive director of the Franciscan Action Network, described himself and the members of the network as "elated" by the apparent end of the proposed pipeline. He said the decision was long overdue.

"This sends a real strong signal going forward to Paris about [the U.S.] commitment to bring about serious action on climate change." Carolan was



THANKS, OBAMA! Activists celebrate outside the White House after the Obama administration's rejection of the Keystone XL pipeline on Nov. 6.

referring to the upcoming U.N. sponsored conference aimed at hashing out national commitments to respond to the various threats of global warming, which begins at the end of November.

Mr. Carolan said that the president's decision reflects the culmination of six years of grassroots mobilization and coalition building, "groups that you would never think could work together coming together" to resist the pipeline. Remembering scores of demonstrations and hundreds of arrests, he said, "It's been a long battle."

Mr. Carolan recalled the mockery endured by activists standing against Keystone's formidable alliance of industry and political interests in the early days fighting against the project. "People said resistance was a waste of time, that this was a done deal, that there was no way we could stop it. This just goes to show you that—with coalition building, coming togeth-



er, taking it out onto the streets—things can happen, things can change.”

KEVIN CLARKE

VATICAN

Pope’s Reforms Will Continue

Pope Francis on Nov. 8 denounced the stealing and leaking of confidential documents from the Vatican as “a crime.” At the same time, he confirmed his determination to press ahead with the financial reforms that he started in July 2013 and that are now underway in the Vatican.

It was the pope’s first public comment about the theft and leaking of confidential documents regarding Vatican finances and the mismanagement, difficulties, failures and even criminal activities that have taken

place in relation to these over past years. The leaked documentation was gathered by a commission specifically set up by Francis in July 2013 to investigate the whole situation of Vatican finances.

Two members of that commission—a Spanish monsignor who worked in the Roman Curia, Lucio Angel Vallejo Balda, and an Italian public relations expert, Francesca Chaouqui—were arrested for allegedly leaking the documentation to two Italian journalists. While Msgr. Vallejo Balda, 54, is still in a Vatican prison, Ms. Chaouqui, 33, is back in her home, released because she had begun to collaborate with the investigators.

America has learned that there was another reason for the rapid release. Ms. Chaouqui is more than two months pregnant, and sources say the pope did not want her held in prison given her condition. This also explains why she was detained in a convent of women religious inside the Vatican and not in a prison cell, as Vallejo Balda was. He is in the same cell that was occupied by Benedict XVI’s butler, Paolo Gabriele, author of the original Vatileaks scandal three years ago. Since being released, Ms. Chaouqui has maintained her innocence in conversations with journalists, and on Facebook and Twitter she stated: “I am not a mole. I have not betrayed the pope. I never gave a page to anybody.” She blames Vallejo Balda for dragging her into the scandal.

After greeting thousands of pilgrims gathered in St. Peter’s Square, Pope Francis spoke publicly about these criminal acts and the negative publicity they have generated in the me-

dia, following the publication of the two books—*Merchants in the Temple* by Gianluigi Nuzzi, and *Avarizia* by Emiliano Fittipaldi—based on the leaks.

“I know that many of you have been upset by the news circulating in recent days concerning the Holy See’s confidential documents that were taken and published,” he told them.

“For this reason,” he said, “I want to tell you, first of all, that stealing those documents was a crime. It’s a deplorable act that does not help.”

He told the crowd, “I personally had asked for that study to be carried out and both I and my advisers were well acquainted with [the contents of] those documents and steps have been taken that have started to bear fruit, some of them even visible.

“I wish to reassure you that this sad event certainly does not deter me from the reform project that we are carrying out, together with my advisers and with the support of all of you,” Pope Francis added. He concluded, “I therefore thank you and ask you to continue to pray for the pope and the church, without getting upset or troubled, but proceeding with faith and hope.”

GERARD O’CONNELL



FULL PRESS. Italian journalist Gianluigi Nuzzi is surrounded by the media after a news conference for his new book *Merchants in the Temple* on Nov. 4.

Declaring Unity

Drawing on five decades of dialogue, the Catholic and Lutheran churches together have issued “Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry and Eucharist.” It includes 32 statements of agreement describing points of convergence on church, ministry and the Eucharist. It also notes the differences which remain between Lutherans and Catholics and suggests possible ways forward. Among its recommendations is “the expansion of opportunities for Catholics and Lutherans to receive holy Communion together.” Bishop Denis Madden, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Baltimore and co-chair of the declaration’s task force, said there are already accepted provisions for ecumenical gatherings at which “both Lutherans and Catholics can come together at the communion table.” He hoped the declaration would encourage pastors from both denominations to “take advantages of those provisions and how they might be widened.”

Mandate Challenge

U.S. Supreme Court justices said on Nov. 6 they will hear seven pending appeals in lawsuits brought by several Catholic and other faith-based entities against the Obama administration’s contraceptive mandate. Among the plaintiffs are the Little Sisters of the Poor, the Archdiocese of Washington, Priests for Life, Southern Nazarene University, Texas Baptist University and several Catholic institutions in Pennsylvania. Under the federal Affordable Care Act, most employers, including religious ones, are required to cover employees’ artificial birth control, sterilization and abortifacients, even if employers are morally opposed to such coverage. In all the cases to be argued before the high court in March, appellate courts in various jurisdic-

NEWS BRIEFS

After a deadly **outbreak of violence** around his parish in the Central African Republic’s capital of Bangui, Moses Otii Alir, a Comboni priest, expressed the hope that Pope Francis’ planned visit would open people’s hearts to God’s love and “renew the face of this beautiful country drenched in blood.” + Meeting in Cairo on Nov. 5, the executive council of the Middle East Council of Churches urged “heads of state and religious and political decision-makers in the world, Arabs and Muslims” to work toward the **preservation of religious pluralism**, saying it is “the most precious treasure of the East.” + Speaking on Nov. 5 at the National Press Club in Washington, former U.S. Representative Patrick Kennedy argued for **equal access to treatment** for those needing addiction or mental health treatment, calling it a “moral imperative.” + Rescuers were still looking for at least **18 people who disappeared** in the town of Bento Rodrigues, Brazil, on Nov. 6, the day after two dams from a nearby iron ore processing plant gave way. + **René Girard**, the influential literary critic and Catholic philosopher, died in Stanford, Calif., on Nov. 4 at the age of 91 after a long illness.



Central African Republic

tions sided with the Obama administration. The rulings said the religious entities’ freedom of religion was not burdened by having to comply with the mandate as they have argued, because the federal government has in place an accommodation for a third party to provide the contested coverage. But the religious groups object to that notification, saying they still would be complicit in supporting practices they oppose.

The Earth at Risk

On Nov. 3 Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, gave the keynote address at Santa Clara University’s two day conference on “Laudato Si’”: “Our Future on a Shared Planet: Silicon Valley in Conversation with the Environmental Teachings of Pope Francis.” Some of the cardinal’s most

striking comments regarded a more integral development of technology. Cardinal Turkson noted the pope’s concern that “the more that people live through their digital tools, the less they may learn ‘how to live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously.’” As the Vatican makes a concerted effort to influence the outcome of the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Paris later this month, Cardinal Turkson told **America** that civil society and business leaders must play a role in the success of the meeting of world leaders. “It is not just now a matter of politicians and political leaders and policy makers meeting to decide anything,” he said. “But the awareness is now very well shared that the earth is at risk, and there is something that needs to be done to ensure that life on this earth is sustainable.”

From CNS, RNS and other sources.

Wage Theft, a 'National Disgrace'

The dignity of work and workers' rights are recurring motifs throughout Scripture. "You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy workers, whether other Israelites or aliens," says the Book of Deuteronomy. Pope Francis, in his address to Congress, stressed worker concerns, saying he spoke for "the thousands of men and women who strive each day to do an honest day's work, to bring home their daily bread...to build a better life for their families."

Even in the modern age of labor regulation, many American workers still don't receive a full day's pay for a full day's work. These employees usually occupy the lowest rungs of the pay ladder, working in fast food, retail, garment assembly, poultry processing, the service industry and building trades.

Some companies cited are part of familiar national chains we might patronize on a regular basis. Take, for example, Papa John's Pizza. Four of its franchises in New York recently agreed to pay close to \$500,000 in back pay owed to workers. Before closing all its restaurants in 2014, Chicago-based HomeMade Pizza, once a favorite of TV personality Oprah Winfrey, was forced to pay back wages to six workers who said they were paid less than the minimum wage and were denied their final paycheck.

Helping workers at those two companies—and many others—is a small advocacy group working out of a fourth-floor office belonging to

the Edgewater Presbyterian Church on Chicago's north side. For 20 years, Interfaith Worker Justice has been a consistent, sometimes solitary voice investigating wage theft and other worker abuses.

Wage theft occurs when employers fail to pay the legal minimum wage or overtime, force workers to work off the clock, withhold tips or final paychecks and misclassify workers as in-

Ordinary citizens can also take action, ask how much workers will be paid.

dependent contractors to avoid paying payroll taxes, workers' compensation and other benefits. Interfaith Worker Justice estimates that about \$50 billion in wage theft occurs each year. Executive Director Rudy Lopez calls it "a national disgrace."

From the start, Interfaith Worker Justice tied its mission to religious principles. Its charismatic founder, Kim Bobo, started the organization with a \$5,000 inheritance from an aunt. Bobo believed religious institutions represented natural partners for promoting worker justice.

When she began calling local churches, she often found staff or volunteers who worked on alleviating hunger or homelessness. "When I got on the phone and asked who was handling labor issues, it was like, huh?" Bobo recalls.

That changed once Bobo enlisted the help of several well-known Chicago religious leaders, including Rabbi

Robert Marx, Bishop Jesse DeWitt of the United Methodist Church and the late Msgr. Jack Egan. Bobo's message to churches was simple: hunger, homelessness, domestic violence and the breakdown of families are often directly connected to the inability to earn a living wage.

In its early days, Interfaith Worker Justice promoted union membership, fair wages and employee benefits. Bobo often confronted religious institutions as well, including Catholic hospitals, parishes and schools, about the way they compensated their own employees. "Those were some of the most horrible conversations," she recalls. Still, the Interfaith Worker Justice movement spread, and now includes 20 worker centers across the country that assist and advise employees.

I.W.J. has designated Nov. 18 a "Day of Action" to highlight wage theft. Lopez says he hopes an increasing number of churches will form committees and discussion groups dedicated to workplace concerns. The group is also advocating several reforms, including targeted federal investigations of industries where wage theft has been a problem; requiring employers to supply workers with pay stubs that show hours, deductions and how wages were calculated; removing the statute of limitations on wage claims; and creating stiffer minimum penalties for violations.

Ordinary citizens can also take action, Lopez says. In hiring a contractor or service provider, ask how much workers will be paid. Will they be paid overtime? Leave cash tips when possible or ask how a server will be compensated for a credit card tip. Founder Kim Bobo says I.W.J. also plans to highlight ethical business owners. "We've got to start affirming the good guys," she says.

JUDITH VALENTE

JUDITH VALENTE, *America's Chicago correspondent*, is a regular contributor to NPR and "Religion and Ethics Newsweekly." Twitter: @JudithValente.



The Pregnancy of Mary

This time of year, the Mother of God is very pregnant. The skin around her belly stretches to hold the weight of her child. She feels him squirm and settle as no one else ever will. He presses against her organs. She gets short of breath and has trouble finding a comfortable position at night for sleep. She wonders if she can stretch any more than this to contain her son and all he will become, yet each day she does.

As Advent nears, Christians wait for the child to come. We count the days and prepare for celebrations. In our preparation, though, we can neglect the gestation. Nativity scenes center on a bloodless and unattached child in the manger. We skip straight from Ordinary Time to anticipation to infancy, neglecting to dwell on the precious journey of the figure Christians for centuries have venerated as Maria Gravida—Mary, Mother-to-Be.

What did Mary feel in pregnancy, labor and birth? Did she have pain? Some mothers do more than others, and the canonical Gospels are sparse with details.

Many of the church fathers, from Augustine to Aquinas, held that Mary, free of sin, was surely spared the pain of childbirth. The apocryphal Protoevangelium of James depicts Joseph seeing Mary, nearing active labor, apparently suffering and then suddenly laughing. “I see two people with mine eyes,” she explains, “the one weeping and mourning, the other laughing and rejoicing.” When she wants to be taken off her donkey, she says, “that which is in me presses

to come forth.” She then sends Joseph to find a midwife in Bethlehem, and when he returns with one, Mary gives birth in a burst of bright light.

The Quran—which refers to Mary more than the New Testament itself does—describes her leaning against a date tree in agony during labor, to the point of preferring that she were dead. But she has the aid of an angelic doula; a voice from the ground announces that God has run a stream beneath her and instructs her to shake the tree so its ripe dates will fall. “Eat and drink, and be at peace,” says the voice, and we hear no more about the pain after that. (In 2011, clinical researchers in Jordan reported a correlation between eating dates during pregnancy and higher mean cervical dilation.)

The image of Mary imprinted on Juan Diego Cuauhtlatotzin’s cloak at Guadalupe in 1531 wears the attire of an Aztec woman in pregnancy. The stars on her veil and the crescent under her feet have made it common to identify her with the woman in the sky of Revelation, who “wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth.” As the woman flees with her newborn son, a child “destined to rule all the nations,” Michael and his angels fight the dragon, Satan, who wants to devour the boy.

Another common interpretation of that passage identifies the woman in the sky with the church—ever in labor to manifest her savior. Pope Benedict XVI has insisted that there need not be any contradiction in accepting that she stands for this and for Mary, both. She represents a Hebrew girl 2,000

years ago no less than she represents us, now—especially at this time of year, when we can accompany that girl in her strange, miraculous pregnancy.

The pregnancy of Mary, this year, coincides with pangs of violence in the land where she gave birth. Bethlehem overlooks the Palestinian sprawl of East Jerusalem and the manicured Israeli settlements scattered throughout it. Just to the north, along an apartheid wall covered with militant graffiti, the Aida refugee camp has stood for 65 years and counting. Just as there was no room for Mary in an inn, Palestinian women have given birth—or have tried—while stopped at the region’s ubiquitous checkpoints on the way to a hospital.

Closer to home, the United States remains one of the few countries in the world that does not guarantee paid maternity leave. God may have dispatched legions to defend the woman in the sky and her child, but too few American mothers have even the protection of time. We often treat pregnancy and birth as a kind of disorder, resulting in a Caesarian section rate of more than 30 percent—twice the national rate that the World Health Organization recommends.

Perhaps we need to meditate more on the active work of Advent, not just the waiting. We can walk with the Mother of God through her pregnancy and labor, then meet her child while he is still covered in blood and tied to her with an umbilical cord. We can be her, her midwives, her doulas.

Perhaps
we need
to meditate
more on
the active
work of
Advent.

NATHAN SCHNEIDER is the author of *Thank You, Anarchy and God in Proof*. Website: TheRowBoat.com; Twitter: @nathanairplane.

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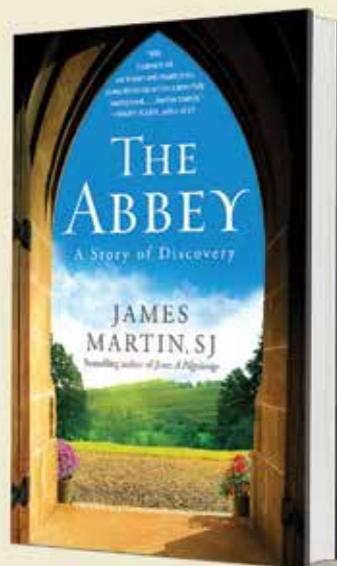
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Kindred Spirits

Catholic writers inspired by Jesuit friendships

BY MARK BOSCO

At a recent conference focused on the future of the Catholic literary imagination in the United States, I was asked to be part of a panel entitled “The Jesuit Literary Imagination.” There are lots of ways one might explore the modifier “Jesuit,” though I would be prone to use the word “Ignatian” over “Jesuit”: an Ignatian imagination finds inspiration not in the structures of a religious order but in the more inclusive and universal experience of Ignatian spirituality. The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola are a series of imaginative forays into concretizing the universal drama of Christ in the singular life of a person. Ignatius developed this series of meditations, prayers and contemplative practices out of his own personal experience of God at work in his life. He gathered this wisdom into a carefully designed framework of retreat so that others might grow in union with God and discern God’s will. The Exercises, done with the assistance of an experienced spiritual director, lead one on a journey of spiritual freedom and enthusiastic commitment to the service of God.

The language of the Spiritual Exercises is structured in a way that brings literary language and theological language together: the composition of place in any Ignatian meditation; the application of the senses entering into our imaginations; the centrality of the Incarnation throughout but especially in the second week of the Exercises (“The Call of the King,” “The Two Standards”); the narrative journey of sorrow and witness in Christ’s passion; the imaginative moment when the risen Christ appears to his mother and then to his disciples; and the surplus of love and joy felt in making a decision for Christ. In many ways, then, the Exercises are a work of art, an encounter with divine love that re-visions one’s life, gives a salvific cast to one’s personal history—especially one’s brokenness, sinfulness and strangeness—all in order to regain a sense of hope, a felt sense of interior freedom. For those who have experienced the “grace” of the Spiritual Exercises—in one form or another—this quick summary will ring true. This Ignatian way of redeeming the imagination, of reforming the imagination, offers a way to know oneself in order to know, love and serve another. The great Jesuit scholar of the Spiritual Exercises, David Fleming, once said that its sole aim is to draw one into a deeper friendship with Christ.

MARK BOSCO, S.J., is a professor of English and theology at Loyola University Chicago.

As I began to consider the conference’s title—“The Future of the Catholic Literary Imagination”—I was struck with the fact that perhaps this future can be glimpsed by looking back at the great Catholic writers of the 20th century who participated in Jesuit friendship, who regularly corresponded with Jesuits, who entered into spiritual direction with them and used them as confessors. I want to suggest that spiritual friendships deepen the spirit as well as the art of the literary imagination.

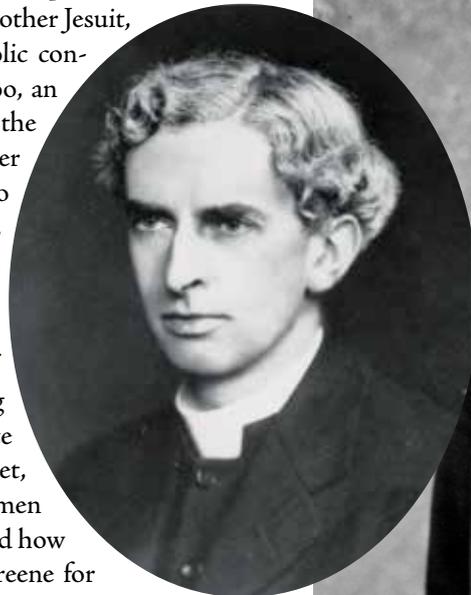
A Jesuit Inspiration

In Great Britain, the Jesuits Martin D’Arcy and Philip Caraman informed Evelyn Waugh’s Catholic imagination. Father D’Arcy, the master of Campion Hall (the Jesuit college at Oxford University) and a future superior of the English Province of the Jesuits, shows up everywhere in Waugh’s correspondence and biography—noted at his dinner parties, family gatherings, liturgies and on various retreats. It was Father D’Arcy who gave Waugh access to the Jesuit archives to write his history of Edmund Campion, the Elizabethan Jesuit martyred for the faith. Waugh’s imaginative history, *Campion*, is still a good read today. (In 1947 Waugh gave a share of his royalties from *Campion* to the English Province; and in 1948 and 1950 he gave all the paperback royalties from *The Loved One* and *Vile Bodies* to the Jesuit missions.)

If Father D’Arcy was mentor to Waugh’s deepening understanding of the faith, then Philip Caraman, S.J., one-time editor of the Jesuit journal *The Month*, was even more a friend and spiritual companion. Father Caraman, a young protégé of Father D’Arcy, had a remarkable bond with many British writers, Catholic or not. It was Father Caraman who celebrated for Waugh the Easter Mass of 1966, with permission to use the so-called Tridentine rite—Waugh was despondent about the new liturgy—and on the very afternoon after this Easter Mass, Waugh died of a heart attack.

Graham Greene, an exact contemporary of Waugh, was rarely without a priest confidant his entire adult life. Not all of them were Jesuits, but two very influential friends, who served as both confessors and companions, were Philip Caraman, S.J., and the C. C. Martindale, S.J. Part of the fun of researching my book on Greene was coming upon so many exchanges between these men. Father Caraman was Greene’s confessor. Given what is publicly known about Greene’s personal life, that must have been quite a task. It was Father Caraman who gradually encouraged Greene to

end his affair with Catherine Walston, the inspiration for the character Sarah in his novel *The End of the Affair*. So psychologically distraught was Greene that he both blamed Father Caraman for meddling in his affairs and pleaded with him to help him make sense of his life. The other Jesuit, C. C. Martindale, himself a Catholic convert, was a friend and confidant, too, an Oxford philosopher and a curate at the Jesuit church in Farm Street. Father Martindale was especially close to Greene in the late 1940s and '50s and a constant correspondent as Greene tried to take the theological themes from his novels and reimagine them for the dramatic stage of the West End. I enjoyed coming across some of their correspondence in the Jesuit archives at Farm Street, impressed with the way the two men loved and appreciated each other and how Father Martindale would thank Greene for sneaking in a bottle of whiskey for them to share.



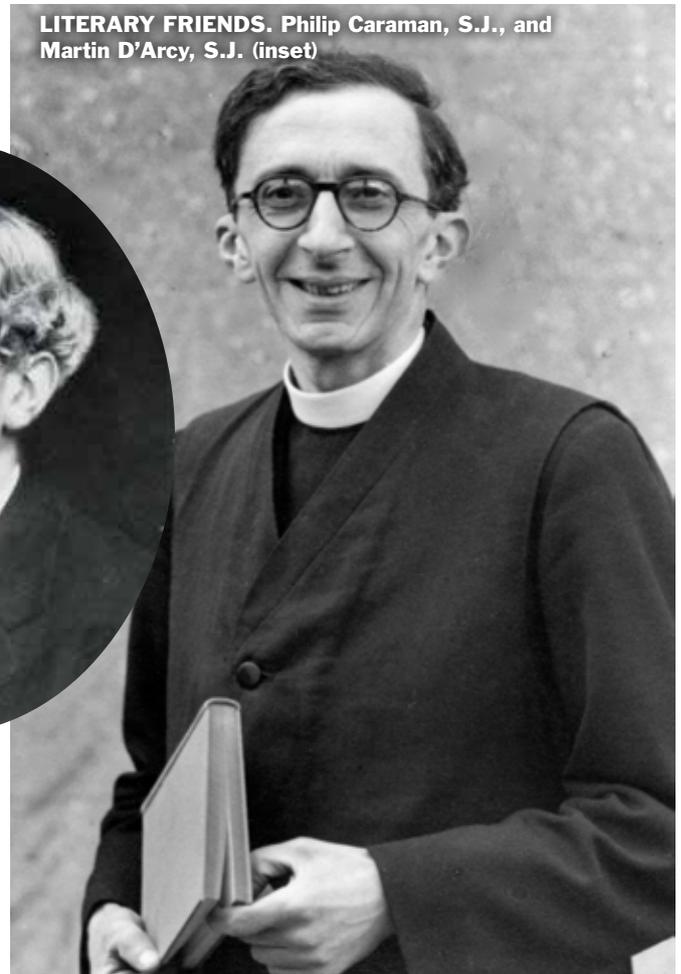
Dame Muriel Spark, years younger than Waugh and Greene, met Father Caraman in 1953, a year before her conversion. In her autobiography she writes:

On the way home from a lunch at the Ritz I bumped into Father Philip Caraman, a "Farm Street" Jesuit, editor of *The Month*. Philip Caraman was a much-loved friend of a great many writers, known and unknown, Catholic and otherwise. Philip said if I would walk back with him to the office he would give me a book to review. On the way there, I felt in the mood to entertain him with some amusing stories. He gave me the book to review and a cheque for 15 pounds for having made him laugh.

Spark made her first confession with Father Caraman, and he assisted her with editing a selection of John Henry Newman's letters, lending her original correspondence between Newman and some English Jesuits. They kept up a correspondence until the day he died.

In the United States, Flannery O'Connor had a wonderfully rich correspondence with James McCown, S.J., known as Hooty, a Jesuit pastor in Macon, Ga., 40 miles from Andalusia, O'Connor's family farm in Milledgeville, Ga. Father McCown visited O'Connor and her mother, Regina, regularly for the last eight years of O'Connor's life, and Father McCown's personal characteristics appear re-imagined in her short story "The Enduring Chill"—in the one-eyed Jesuit. It is with Father McCown that we get a long-ranging correspondence on politics and the Cold War, the prospect

LITERARY FRIENDS. Philip Caraman, S.J., and Martin D'Arcy, S.J. (inset)



of nuclear annihilation, civil rights activism, Southern agrarian thought and an assessment of the Jesuit scientist/mystic, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, whom Flannery was reading and reviewing for the newspaper of the Diocese of Atlanta. The literary historian Ben Alexander, who has seen the entire collection of unpublished letters (I have only seen some of them) notes that Father McCown served as her spiritual director and offered her great support in her writing.

But probably the most important Jesuit interlocutor for O'Connor was William Lynch. There is no epistolary correspondence between them, but O'Connor admits she owed a great debt to Father Lynch, especially his work in the journal *Thought*, published by Fordham University, and in his books *Christ and Apollo* and *The Image Industries*, both read and commented upon by O'Connor. Father Lynch's work validated O'Connor's particular modernist, even postmodernist proclivities and her own artistic claim to a Christic imagination. Father Lynch argues straight out of the *Spiritual Exercises* that the Incarnation is not a temporary blessing but a Christification of the world that renders the human sacred—as depicted both in the infant Jesus in a Christmas crèche and in the Christus figure on a crucifix above an altar. Finite and infinite realities coalesce; so for Father Lynch, as

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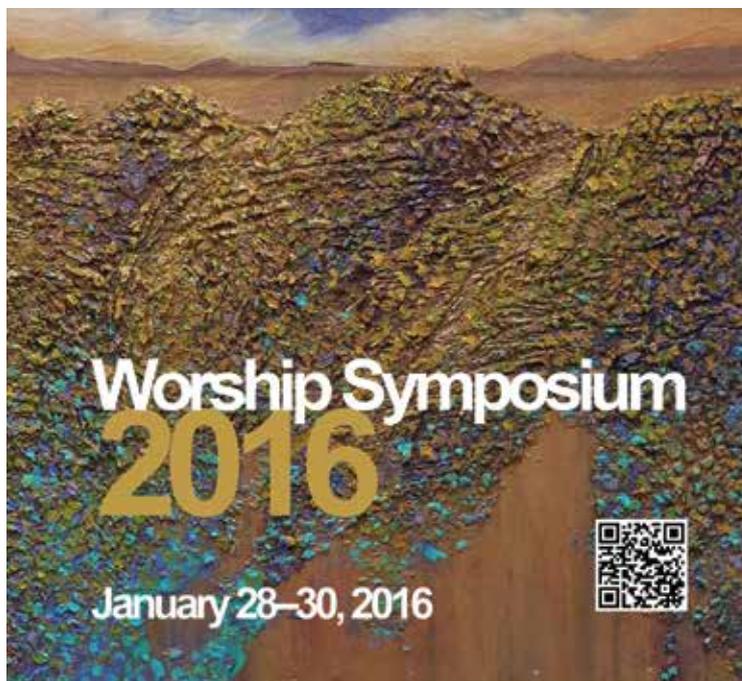
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for O'Connor, there is no need to pull together what has never been separated. O'Connor, echoing Father Lynch, wrote to a friend that "the resurrection of Christ seems the high point in the law of nature," a loaded observation that underlies much of her fiction.

Let me end with a few words about Walker Percy. It was a Jesuit church in New Orleans on whose door Percy knocked in 1947, asking to see a priest. He received instruction from the priests at Loyola University New Orleans and would attend retreats at Jesuit retreat houses, themselves weekend distillations of Ignatian spirituality. And it was the Jesuit Patrick H. Samway, a former literary editor of *America*, who became Percy's biographer and remained very close to Percy and his family during the last 12 years of the artist's life.

What might we learn from all this? Simply that in the very recent past the Catholic literary imagination was fostered in the art of spiritual conversation, and at least with the artists mentioned above, it was a distinctly Ignatian conversation: about the composition of place, about moving from being a flat character into a three-dimensional one of depth, of desires, of choices; about how characters leap off the page because they take God seriously, they take grace seriously and they see the Christian adventure played out in thousands of places, lovely in limbs and lovely in eyes not his, to the Father, through the features of human faces. ■



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with Robert J. Batastini, Peter Choi, Karin Maag,
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Joyce Ann Zimmerman, moderated John D. Witvliet

In 2017, churches around the world, both Protestant and Catholic, will mark the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. How we mark this milestone will say as much about us, and our own sense of identity, as it does about the events of five centuries ago. Indeed, the history of past milestone anniversaries (100, 200, 300, and 400 years ago) reveals stunningly different ways of remembering this history—and some crucial lessons about what to avoid this time around. Come for a fast-paced tour of histories of the Reformation and vigorous discussion by both Protestant and Catholic leaders about how we can do our remembering in profoundly sanctifying ways.

Navajo Canyon by Don West (www.donwestart.com)

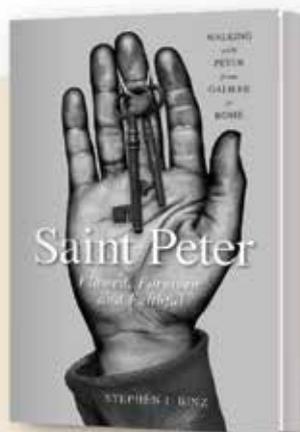
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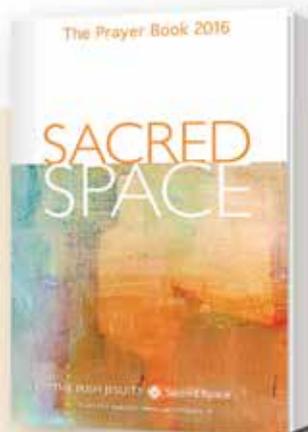


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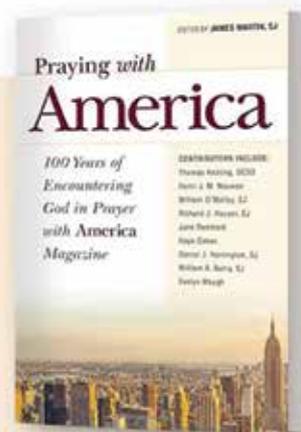
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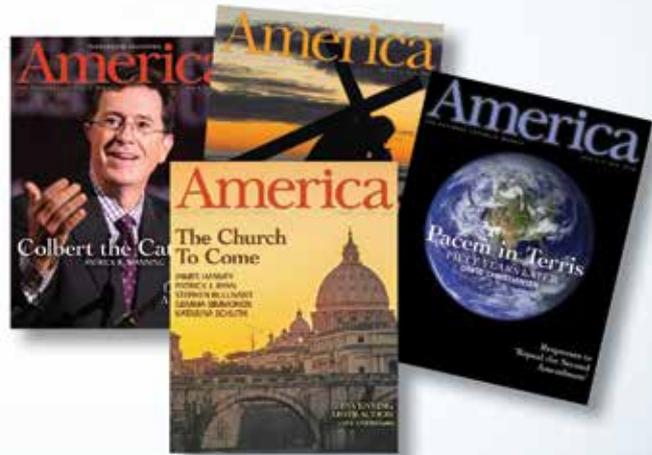
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Seasons of Prayer

Spirituality for every stage of life

BY PATRICIA COONEY HATHAWAY

The seasons of the year provide for many people an intuitive metaphor for understanding seasons of our lives. The lyrics to Frank Sinatra's poignant "September Song" need no explanation: "Oh, it's a long, long while from May to December/ But the days grow short when you reach September." Over the years I have found that the seasons also provide a helpful lens through which to describe our lives of prayer. While no two people journey to God in exactly the same way, the metaphor of seasons can give insights into the ups and downs, peaks and valleys, periods of intimacy as well as times of staleness that make up each stage of our spiritual lives.

PATRICIA COONEY HATHAWAY, a professor of spirituality and systematic theology at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, Mich., is the author of *Weaving Faith and Experience: A Woman's Perspective* (St. Anthony Messenger Press).

Spring of Life: Awakening

Spring is a time of blossoming, a season full of promise and possibilities. On a spiritual level, spring involves "waking up" to the discovery of God as personal in a way that is possible only when we have grown into the capacity to fall in love with another. Here we are invited to begin to personally experience God as friend, companion, disciple, beloved daughter or son. Such an awakening can be gradual or abrupt. And it can occur at any time in our lives. Its defining quality is the discovery of God as real.

Dorothy Day provides us with an example of such an awakening. As she began to read the Bible for the first time, she realized "a new personality impressed itself on me. I was being introduced to someone and I knew almost immediately that I was discovering God.... Life would never again be the same."

Using the analogy of friendship, spiritual writers describe

this season of prayer as the “getting to know you” phase. Our initial step in pursuing a relationship with God often begins with vocal prayer. We use someone else’s words to begin a conversation with God: the Our Father, Hail Mary or reciting the rosary. St. Teresa of Avila encouraged such prayer, reminding us that vocal prayer, faithfully recited with a realization of who it is that we are addressing, has the power to carry us ultimately into the deepest depths of contemplative prayer.

Such vocal prayers can be helpful through the whole of our lives as well. While sick with cancer, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin found that praying the prayer of St. Francis, “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,” brought comfort and peace.

Spring invites us to “come and see.” Getting to know the one we are drawn to love leads us to the Scriptures. In John’s Gospel, Jesus’ invitation to two of John the Baptist’s disciples to “come and see” expresses his invitation to each of us as well. As we spend time with God through reflecting on his words and actions, we come to know what kind of person Jesus is, what his values are and what becoming his friend will entail. As one young man I worked with commented, “Before I commit myself to this relationship, I want to know who it is I am committing to.” As in any relationship, we cannot love someone we do not know.

As we seek to put on the mind and heart of Jesus, we are challenged to get our life in sync with our desires. Motivated to cultivate a life of virtue, we gain self-knowledge regarding the myriad ways in which egocentricity and selfishness block our ability to grow in love of God and others. We begin to strive to love God with all our hearts, mind and strength, to align our will with God’s will and to love those who are a part of our lives with the same loving kindness that characterizes God’s love for us.

Summer of Life: From Knowing to Loving

Summer brings images of warm, sunny days. The rich smells and vivid colors of nature are in full bloom. Many spiritual writers employ the imagery of summer to describe the honeymoon phase of our relationship with God, similar to that of a good marriage or a deepening friendship. Our one-on-one prayer time with God is filled with consolation. We feel the warmth of God’s love and presence; we enjoy spending time with him.

Our prayer becomes more spontaneous, devotional and affective as we open our minds and hearts to God in prayers of petition, thanksgiving, praise or adoration. As we come to know God more intimately, we are also drawn more to listen than to talk. We find ourselves more content to simply be present to God in love. We become aware of the divine draw-

ing us to the center of our souls where the Holy Spirit joins our spirit. Jesus invites us to “Abide in me and I abide in you” (Jn 15:4).

Summer invites us to find God in the world. As we learn to be present to God within, so too should we be developing the habit of finding God in the context of our daily lives. Most of us in the summer of our lives are involved in raising a family, earning a living, caring for people in ministry, etc.

How can we live a deep prayer life while leading such full lives?

Jesus is our model. He did not leave the world to find God; on the contrary, he lived each day in the midst of people, and he found God there. Yet he often went off to commune with God—early in the morning, late afternoon—before all his major decisions. As Jesus had a rhythm to his life, so must we. We can pray anywhere—driving to work in the morning, waiting in a doctor’s office, walking along a beach. Our life of prayer should center us, enabling us to be

more intentional as we discern God’s presence in the people and activities of daily life.

Autumn of Life: From Satisfaction to Value

The season of summer gradually shades into autumn. The season begins with Indian summer-like days, brisk, clear air, leaves reaching their peak of brilliant colors. Gradually the days get shorter, grayer and the trees begin to let go of their leaves to reveal the barrenness of limbs.

In one of my favorite books on prayer, *Experiencing God*, Thomas Green, S.J., describes the invitation of this season: “After the Lord has gotten us hooked on himself, then he says, ‘Okay, now we have to go about the serious business of transformation. You’re going to have to let me work to make you divine if you’re ever going to realize the kind of union with me that you desire.’”

That work begins with the invitation to deepening contemplative prayer, that is, a resting in God—a quiet, wordless, being present to God in the core of our being. In this resting or stillness, the mind and heart are not actively seeking God so much as being receptive to God’s presence and action within it.

At times, God is close, and prayer is easy and joyful. At other times, and more frequently, God seems far away and our prayer feels empty and dry. Drawing on his own experience, one student commented, “I feel like I’m in the desert, and occasionally I come upon an oasis.” A woman offered this reflection during a spiritual direction session: “I’d have to say that for about a year and a half I’ve been more aware of God’s absence. It has been emptiness, longing, yearning, darkness. And then there are times when we come together. When the

shift comes, I experience God moving toward me. Then my prayer is relaxation, a receiving and an affirming.”

Autumn asks us to move from lives of pleasure to self-giving. As with prayer, so too with life. We all begin life with great desires, and we spend years experiencing the satisfaction of achieving our goals. But it is important that we realize there will come a time when every significant relationship with God and others will reach an impasse—that is, we will experience its limits, its inability to satisfy us in the way it did before. Through these life experiences, God encourages us to make the passage from loving, serving and being with him and others because of the pleasure and joy it gives, to loving and serving God and others out of self-giving love.

Father Green provides the following example. Two people getting married at the age of 25 say to each other, “I love you because you fulfill all my desires. You make me happy.” This is nice, but still essentially self-centered. Hopefully, by the age of 60, after many years of marriage, the couple now say, “I love you, and therefore your joy makes me joyful, your happiness makes me happy.” This is the kind of transformation God is working in us. God prunes us, stretches us and enlarges our capacity to receive him not only in prayer but in life.

Winter of Life: From Loving to Truly Loving

The season of winter conjures up a mixture of sentiments. On the one hand, winter is biting, bleak, desolate, barren, frigid; on the other, it is peaceful, calm, clear, stark, tranquil. While the wintry season of prayer can and does occur at any time in a person’s life, for many women and men it describes the mixture of blessing and diminishment that characterizes life’s final season.

For many, prayer at this time is a quiet abiding with God in gratitude for all of life’s blessings. It is also a time when, in taking stock of our lives, we seek God’s forgiveness for the hurt we caused others along the way. In deep trust and surrender of our one and only life to God, contemplation continues to be a look of love that simplifies and deepens.

For others, the habits of prayer—learned and practiced through the former seasons of life—kick in to offer sustenance during times of suffering and loss. The poet and writer Kathleen Norris describes how the Liturgy of the Hours became a constant companion helping her to cope with the difficulty of her husband’s illness and death. She describes going to visit him in the hospital on a day when the air was so frigid that it hurt to breathe: “As I cursed the cold and the icy pavement under my feet, these words of the canticle from the Sunday divine office came to mind: ‘Bless the Lord, winter cold and summer heat.../ Bless the Lord, dews and falling snow.../ Bless the Lord, nights and days...’”

Unaccountably consoled, Norris was grateful that the Liturgy of the Hours she had prayed so often was having the desired effect. The words were now a part of her, and when



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she most needed them, the rhythm of her walking had stirred them up to erode her anxiety and remind her that blessings may be found in all things.

Winter invites us to be at home in darkness. For many in this wintry season, God seems distant and prayer feels barren and dry. It is at this time that many are tempted to stop praying because they feel nothing is happening. But St. John of the Cross encourages those in this state to be content with a simple loving, peaceful attentiveness to God without concern, without effort, even without desire to taste or feel him.

After many years of experiencing God's consoling presence, Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta found herself immersed in darkness, feeling abandoned by God. Through a good spiritual director, she realized that her very longing for God was indeed an experience of God. Thus, she learned to be at home in the darkness, trusting that God was drawing her into an ever-deepening union with him. She found hope and reassurance in knowing that loving surrender to God at this time was not a feeling but a choice of the will.

She chose to believe in God, hope in God and love God as the source of her deepest meaning and fulfillment—and deep joy and peace returned.

A Light in Latter Days

The journey of prayer through the seasons of life should gradually bring us closer to its final goal: transforming union

with God. This is a union of wills and a partnership with God that is the source of fruitfulness in every aspect of our lives.

At a conference I once gave on prayer, a woman shared her experience of God in this final season of life. Her words expressed the joyful outcome of a life lived in love and fidelity through the challenges and graces of each season:

Years have mellowed me considerably so that I've come to be much more gentle and forgiving with myself and others, because I've experienced a God who is so gentle, loving, forgiving, inviting and patient—an ever-present God. The "beloved" of God in John's Gospel has become a faith model for me. The beloved was a witness to the light. That is my relationship with God at this point in my life—to be a witness to the light.

As a spiritual director, I have found that while many people are graced with similar experiences of being the beloved of God, others often become discouraged or lose their way because they are not familiar with the church's rich teaching on prayer and the spiritual life. I hope this description of the seasons of our relationship with God will strengthen the conviction of fellow pilgrims to stay the course, trusting in God's personal, loving presence and guidance through each stage of our journey to fullness of life in God. ▲



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Photos: (left) Sister Ann Hipp, CPPS, 95; (above from left) Brother Anselm Allen, OSB, 76; Sister Luanna Brucks, CPPS, 90; Sister Rosemary Zaffuto, ASCJ, 87. ©2015 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC. All rights reserved. Photographer: Jim Judkis.

Reversal of Fortune

The topsy-turvy world of Psalm 118

BY DANIEL F. POLISH

Some accounts tell us that when Lord Cornwallis surrendered to George Washington after the Battle of Yorktown in 1781, the band played the then well-known English ballad called “The World Turned Upside Down”:

Listen to me and you shall hear, news hath not been this thousand year:

Since Herod, Caesar, and many more, you never heard the like before...

Yet let's be content, and the times lament, you see the world turn'd upside down.

For Lord Cornwallis at that moment the notion of the world turning upside down certainly would have signified a cataclysm. But it need not always be so. There are times in our lives when things are sufficiently awry that the only solution to our dilemma would be for the world to upend itself.

A more recent song title, from Richard Farina, asserts, “Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up to Me.” All of us have times when we have been down. Things go wrong for us with our health, in our personal relationships, professionally, economically. These can be painful, difficult times. And when we are in the midst of such times, it seems as if we cannot imagine a way to get out. At moments such as these, Psalm 118 and others like it can be particularly precious.

They promise us that the world can turn upside down—in our favor. As still one other folk song suggests, “The world is always turning toward the morning.” The world can turn to a brighter side for us. And that is what Psalm 118 celebrates.

If there is one theme that we can trace throughout the Book of Psalms it is the pattern that I like to think of as “reversal of fortune.” Repeatedly it describes things moving in one direction and then abruptly reversing themselves for the better. There are many examples of what in classical Greek drama is called *peripeteia*: the point when a sudden reversal occurs. We see a *peripeteia* in Psalm 30:

*For His anger is but for a moment
His favour is for a life-time
Weeping may tarry for the night,
But joy cometh in the morning...*



TURNING TOWARD MORNING. Archbishop Blase J. Cupich of Chicago blesses a rosary for Jaime Dones as he visited with patrons during a Thanksgiving dinner put on by Catholic Charities on Nov. 27, 2014. The dinner is held for the homeless and the hungry.

DANIEL POLISH, the Rabbi of Congregation Shir Chadash of the Hudson Valley in LaGrange, N.Y., is vice-chairman of the International Committee for Interreligious Consultations with international religious bodies and the author of *Bringing the Psalms to Life*. In honor of the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council’s “Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,” *America* has invited Rabbi Daniel Polish to reflect on the psalms. This article is the second in a four-part series.

*Thou didst turn for me my mourning into dancing;
Thou didst loose my sackcloth, and gird me with gladness*
(Ps 30:6,12)

Elsewhere in Psalms we read:

*God maketh the solitary to dwell in a house;
He bringeth out the prisoners into prosperity*
(Ps 68:7)

*Who is like unto the Lord our God,
That is enthroned on high,
That looketh down low
Upon heaven and upon the earth?
Who raiseth up the poor out of the dust,
And lifteth up the needy out of the dunghill;
That he may sit him with princes
Even with the princes of His own people.
Who maketh the barren woman to dwell in her house
As a joyful mother of children.
Hallelujah.*

(Ps 113:5-9)

This reversal of fortune talks to us in the most direct, personal terms. We can read it when we are most troubled, letting its words become our own. As we find ourselves celebrating

the reversal of fortune, the story becomes unique to us and we can feel ourselves moving from darkness to light, from dejection to hope and then onward to praise and thanksgiving. What could be more uplifting than to hear—as our own story—the words of Psalm 118:

*Out of my straits I called upon the Lord;
He answered me with great deliverance.*

*The Lord is for me; I will not fear;
What can man do unto me?*

(vss. 5, 6)

We read of travail and triumph, just as we ourselves have experienced. We are challenged, threatened, oppressed—and yet we prevail:

*They compass me about,
yea they compass me about;
Verily in the name of the Lord
I will cut them off*

(v. 11)

The psalm speaks in direct, graphic language. It tells its story—and ours—in rich poetry. It declares, “I will not die but live/ And declare the works of the Lord” (v. 18). And “The voice of rejoicing and salvation/ Is heard in the tents of the righteous” (v. 15).

And perhaps the most heartening and powerful image in the psalm—perhaps the most forceful words of hope in the entire Book of Psalms:

*The stone which the builders rejected
Is become the chief corner-stone*

*This is the Lord's doing
It is marvelous in our eyes*

*This is the day which the Lord hath made
Let us rejoice and be glad in it*

(vss. 22–24)

The poet David Rosenberg has captured in modern idiom the spirit of the reversal of fortune in verse 6:

*cry yourself to sleep
but when you awake
light is all around you*

Psalm 118, and so many other songs in the Book of Psalms, recognizes that we all have times when we enter the valley. It holds out for us a vision of the mountaintops that can be ours.

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It affirms that no matter what sloughs we may find ourselves in, there can be a reversal of fortune. The world can turn upside down and what is but a distant vision of contentment and joy can become our immediate reality. That hope is one of the great gifts of this remarkable book.

Psalm 118 also gives us the opportunity to explore one unfortunate chapter in the use of the psalms and in the relations between Christians and Jews. The “father of English Hymnody,” Isaac Watts (1674–1748), wrote over 750 hymns. His hymn “O God Our Help in Ages Past” continues to be sung in, and is beloved by, many Protestant churches. It turns out that, representative of his time and place, Watts’s religious perspective caused him to have profound contempt for Jews and Judaism. Watts believed that the psalms were never really understood by the Jews who first sang them but came into clarity only after the advent of Jesus. His antipathy to things Jewish is reflected in one of his several paraphrases of Psalm 118.

Watts builds on the New Testament’s own interpretation of the “stone which the builders rejected” in verse 22 as referring to Jesus (Mt 21:41, Mk 12:10, Lk 20:17, Acts 4:11 and 1 Pt 2:7). Watts reflects that New Testament perspective in strident terms in his rendition of that verse:

*See what a living stone
The builders did refuse
Yet God hath built his church thereon
In spite of envious Jews*

*The scribe and angry priest
Reject thine only Son;
Yet on this Rock shall Zion rest
As the Chief corner-stone.*

This is hardly a sentiment we would recognize in our time of mutual recognition and respect between these two sister traditions. Watts’s vituperation reminds us just how far we have come.

In yet one final hymn based upon Psalm 118, Watts includes none of his interreligious disputation and has created a lovely interpretation of several verses of this psalm that demonstrate the unity in which, amid our topsy-turvy, upside-down world, we are united by one God:

*Like angry bees, they girt me round;
When God appears they fly;
So burning thorns, with crackling sound,
Make a fierce blaze and die.*

*Joy to the saints and peace belongs;
The Lord protects their days;
Let Isr’el tune immortal songs
To his almighty grace.*





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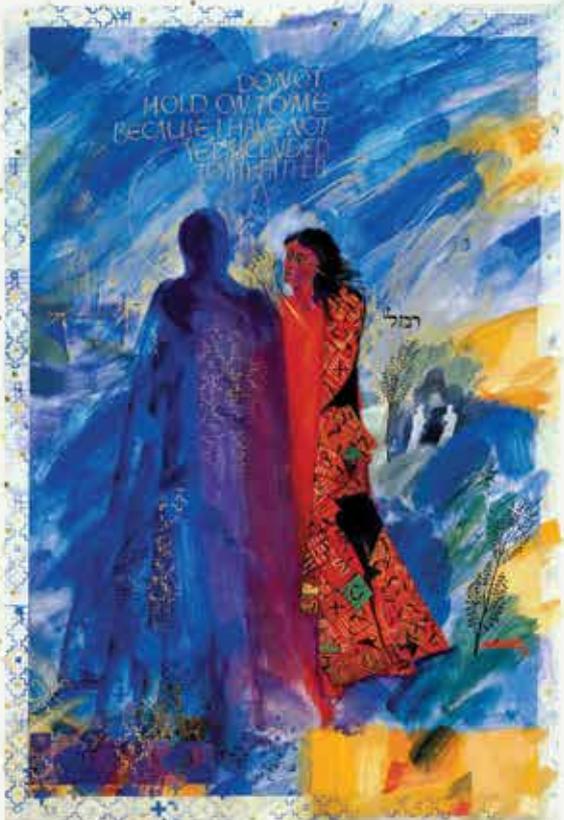
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Francis Looks East

Could Pope Francis make important breakthroughs with Beijing's government and with Moscow's Russian Orthodox patriarch within the next 12 months? This cannot be excluded, I think, and if either or both were to happen, then it would surely be a major achievement for his pontificate.

A number of signs suggest that progress is being made on both fronts. Here I offer a first take, starting with Beijing.

On Oct. 11 a six-person delegation from the Holy See arrived in Beijing for "talks" with their Chinese counterparts. The delegation, comprising officials from the Vatican's Secretariat of State and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples departed on Oct. 16, but so far neither side has revealed the content of their conversations.

The one question that would certainly have been on the agenda is the nomination of bishops in mainland China. That has been at the center of discussions for many years, and the periodic failure to resolve it has led to illicit ordinations, excommunications and tensions. The absence of such negative elements in recent times, and the ordination of a bishop approved by both sides, suggests that the Sino-Vatican dialogue has entered a positive phase.

The reason for this may well be that both sides "agreed to leave aside, for the time being, negotiations on the more thorny questions" as the Rev. Jerom Heyndrickx, a veteran

Sinologist at the Verbiest Institute of Leuven Catholic University, said in a recent interview with UCA News. In fact, this is the strategy advocated by Pope Francis, as he spelled out in his talk to young people in Havana last September.

It avoids dealing immediately with such problematic questions as the detention of Baoding's Bishop James Su Zhimin; the status of eight illicit bishops and of the underground bishops, as well as of Shanghai's auxiliary bishop, Ma Daqin; the question of the number of dioceses; and other issues, including the question of freedom of movement for the Chinese bishops.

The October meeting in Beijing was the second since Francis became pope, and it appears to have gone well. I say this because the Holy See's delegation visited the National Seminary in Beijing (which is under the Patriotic Association's control) on Oct. 15. There he was welcomed by the rector, Bishop Ma Yinglin, who was ordained without papal approval and is president of the government-sanctioned bishops' conference, an entity not recognized by Rome. On past visits, the Holy See delegation always avoided meeting Patriotic Association officials and the bishops' conference leaders. That it happened now suggests something important has changed in Sino-Vatican relations. Also noteworthy, though less important, was the delegation's meeting with Bishop Li Shan of Beijing on Oct. 14. In the past, delegates of the Holy See were not allowed to meet the city's bishop, though he was ordained with papal approval, except when one

was seriously ill in the hospital.

That all this happened is without precedent since Sino-Vatican talks started three decades ago, and it certainly could not have occurred without high-level clearance. One may conclude, therefore, that China and the Holy See are not only talking but have also begun walking together on the road to the normalization of relations. It is not clear how long the journey will take, but one cannot exclude the possibility that they could reach their destination within one year.

Something important has changed in Sino-Vatican relations.

On the Moscow front, too, there are indications that the Holy See and the Patriarchate of Moscow are actively working toward the first-ever encounter between the bishop of Rome and the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church. Francis has often expressed his wish for such an encounter, and it now appears there is willingness on the Russian side as well. The Russians ruled out meeting in Moscow or Rome, so alternative venues are now under consideration.

The latest positive signal on this front has come from Bishop Tikhon, the new vicar for the Diocese of Moscow, a rising star in the Orthodox Church and long considered Vladimir Putin's spiritual advisor. Speaking in Rome on Sept 28, he predicted "something concrete" will come with respect to a meeting between Francis and Patriarch Kirill. If such were to happen on the eve of the Pan-Orthodox Council in 2016, that would be truly significant.

GERARD O'CONNELL

GERARD O'CONNELL is *America's Rome correspondent*. *America's Vatican coverage is sponsored in part by the Jesuit communities of the United States.*

When Did I See Him?

Bringing the Beatitudes behind bars

BY CHRIS BRUNO

“Chris, I brought you some of the material. I thought you might want to...”

“No,” I said, cutting off my sister, Liz. “I don’t want to pre-read any of the material. It’s my weekend—I’m not working.”

She asked me again a few days later: “Chris?”

“Ugh—” My grunt of negation was meant to be pre-emptive. She addressed me by name only when she was going to ask me for something I did not want to do. She was in profile now, driving through the countryside toward Puget Sound in an S.U.V. she was constantly either apologizing for, because the interior was coated with dog hair, or bragging about because it wasn’t. “Do you want to go over a bit what you’re going to say?”

“No,” I said. “I’m not going to say anything—I’m not going to do anything except listen to you. You do everything.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course, I’m sure, Liz.” I put in my earbuds to drown out the Christian rock station that she had started listening to. (*Christian rock?*, I thought, *what’s next? Books on tape by Joel Osteen?*)

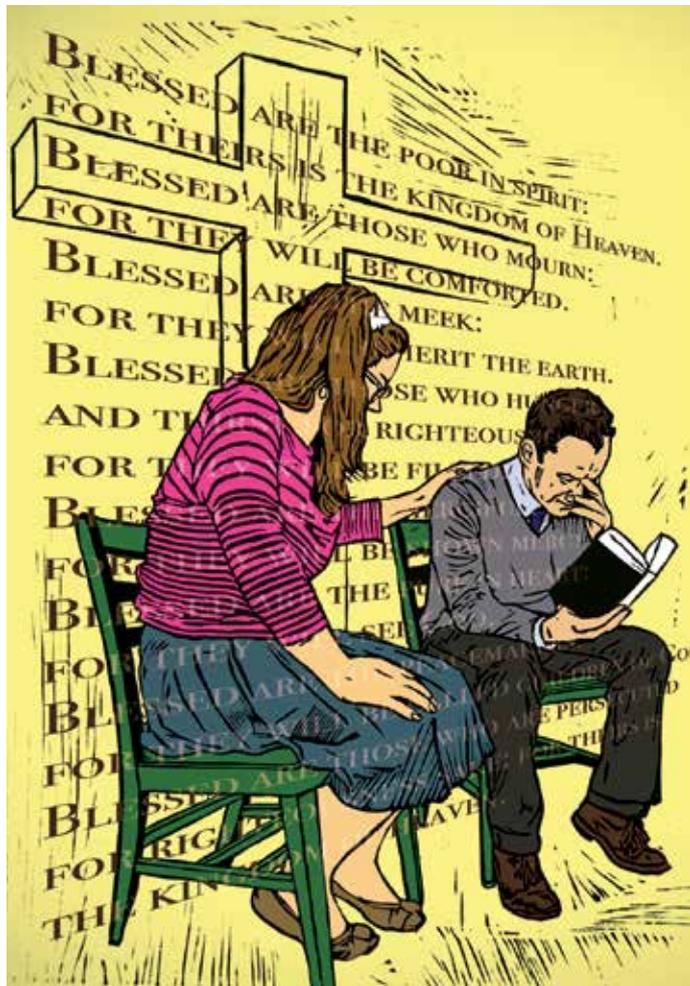
She parked the car in a one of those seaside Washington towns that looked like a typo—Steilacoom—on a day in which the entire Northwest

appeared to be staged for “The Truman Show.” The water was glass. The air was still. Trees in the distance looked like fur on the land. A family was throwing crab rings off a neighboring pier, and cars were lining up to board an adjacent ferry.

We walked down the ramp to a pier on which a large white building stood—it had an antechamber with secured doors on either side of a guard standing behind a glass partition. We slid our ID’s through, and Liz picked up the conversation she had left behind the last time she was here—all smiles and laughter with the three guards who signed us in and led us through the metal detector.

The empathic powers Liz deploys in her day job as a therapist in psychiatric lockdown wards border on the clairvoyant: Daily she talks people out of suicide, consoles them as they attempt it over the phone—“Joey, I’m hanging up now and calling 911; I will see you when you arrive”—looks into their eyes as they emerge from their most recent unsuccessful attempts to kill themselves.

When reunited, Liz and I alternately spend our time telling each other how great we are—an adolescent



holdover from our attempts to bolster our egos when we were outgunned intellectually in our youth by our two older siblings—and humiliating each other in public, because people who suffer from megalomania are such easy targets.

Liz said I had to watch a safety video before getting on the ferry, so I walked over to the television monitor playing with no sound. I stared at it for a while and then turned around. Liz and the two female guards started laughing at

CHRIS BRUNO is a graduate of Santa Clara University. A basketball jersey with the surname of Bruno hangs from the rafters at the athletic center there. John '80, Liz '82 and Chris '84 all lay claim to it. Katie '81 is simply too short to be believed.

ART: SEAN QUIRK

me. "There's no safety video! Just get on the boat and hang on!"

McNeil Prison grew in size before us. It was closed now, but like Alcatraz, which I spied often through my swim goggles, its hundred-year penitentiary past and current ghost town status were irresistible to me. We were headed deeper into the island to the Special Commitment Center, where 300 level-three sex offenders reside. Most have been imprisoned for decades and will never know freedom again.

For the past decade, Liz had made it her mission to bring the good news to these men—to read them the readings from Mass once or twice a month and bring them Communion from her parish in Redmond, Wash. She had been telling me for years stories of "her guys," as she called them, and always asked me to come with her some time. I was game.

We entered a building by way of a tunnel that dips beneath the security fences and were ushered into a central area, which resembled the check-in desk of a slightly outdated health club. There were no heavy fortifications inside—no phalanx of 12-gauge-toting guards or steel catwalks up above, which was my preconceived image of the place. Liz and I were ushered into an empty room with chairs and a temporary altar already set up.

'When Did We See You?'

The men walked in one at a time. Of the eight men, one impressed me as unusually old. Another was so short his jeans had to be hand-hemmed; he looked too young. There were two black men—one older and one younger. There was a rural type with a lazy eye, who was married. And one thin, very quiet man, European-looking, whose speech was so indistinct it scared me a little. One of them, I knew, was a pedophile; I was told not to speak of children in their midst.

After initial introductions, the men

took turns at the readings and responsorial psalm and the Gospel acclamation. We stood as my sister read the Gospel. As we sat back down to hear what I assumed would be her reflection, I was about to say, "Liz, please do not be boring," when she turned to me

Jesus might be sitting there right now before me, it seemed. He might. How would I know?

and said, "Chris, do you want to read the Beatitudes?"

"The what?" I looked over at her.

"The Beatitudes—it's on the hand-out I gave you."

I picked up the paper and looked at it—it was short. So I read it:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth....

I finished. "Can you read it again?" she asked. I read it again. And then looked at her.

"Can you tell the guys what it means?"

"What it means?" I wondered.

I looked down at the words. And they began to swim on the page. The tears in my eyes caused everything to blur, like saltwater had seeped into my swim goggles again. I am a professional speaker, but words could not come. The harder I tried, the less I could see and the more impossible it was to speak. Tears dripped on the paper. One of the inmates to my right put his hand upon me. He was a serial rapist, who had attacked female guards when he was first imprisoned.

He rubbed my back—this was against the rules. "It's O.K.," he said.

It was not the Beatitudes that were making it hard for me to see and speak. It was some other words that came to me: "When did we see you in prison and come to you?" "Truly I say to you, as you have done it for one of the least of my brothers, you have done it for me."

This thought, of being face-to-face with Jesus, of sitting across from him here on this remote island, in this Special Commitment Center—of having him listen to me in the flesh—this tore through me. I did not lift my eyes. He might be sitting there right now before me, it seemed. He might. How would I know? I continued to cry.

He would not find me now meek, pure of heart, a peacemaker or particularly merciful—as he might have when I first read these words, as a boy in parochial school. At this age he would see me as I actually was and not how I hoped I would one day be.

I think I wanted to visit McNeil Island partly to see a freak show. I think my curiosity got the better of me. Orange being the new black, I aspired to improve my wardrobe. But sitting there, among those men, unable to speak, I realized that I was the freak. I was the oddity: a free man imprisoned at this moment by his emotions—by a part of me I did not understand or was scared of or wanted to go away. Everyone remained silent. My sister did not say a word.

On First Hearing

I cleared my throat.

"The most astonishing account of Jesus I have ever read," I said, "is from a history book written by a husband and wife couple named Will and Ariel Durant. A volume of theirs entitled *Caesar and Christ* illustrates how revolutionary was the appearance of Jesus during ancient Rome's domination of the world.

"The Beatitudes represent an inversion of what was then the human

condition. The concept that the poor or the meek or the persecuted or the mournful had any value at all—or would receive some reward, in time, owing to their condition—was incomprehensible at that age.

“What always struck me about this passage, because it is so short, is that thoughts of this inversion must have come to Jesus one by one. He didn’t begin preaching at 17. He was a tradesman. We have this quaint notion of his hammering wood in the dirt of some backward town, but he grew up just one hour away on foot from an exceedingly cosmopolitan city [Sepphoris—which itself looks like a typo]—but this fact is lost on us. He was exposed to the best of Greek and Roman sophistication. He saw an upscale but corrupt city, where he probably had a lot of customers—makes sense, doesn’t it? I imagine as he walked back home and compared what he saw with the people he lived with these thoughts came to him—‘Blessed

are the meek, etc.’

“So these thoughts, I think, came to him, one at a time, as he pursued this particular line of reasoning until it made such an indelible imprint on him that he was able to recall each of these inversions in a lot, almost as a poem, when pressed by the multitude to speak.

“For their part, these words must have been so radical to hear initially that some of the people who heard them committed an individual line or two to memory at the hearing of it. Imagine being a kind and generous person in an empire that extracts blood from men and hearing that one line, ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.’ Wouldn’t you walk home after hearing that one sentence and repeat it to everyone you met, rejoicing that of all the things Jesus could have said, that he included a description of you and your life in his revolution of the status quo? The things Jesus said were unforgettable at

their first hearing.

“I, of course, haven’t heard anything he said myself. I haven’t met him, but as I look at these words I realize someone conceived them. Historically, they are ascribed to Jesus. In my heart, I recognize these words as God’s.

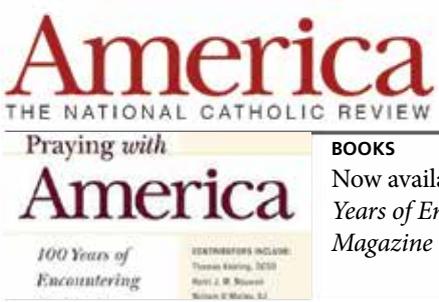
“So, Liz,” I said, looking back at my sister, “that is what the Beatitudes mean to me.”

“Thank you,” Liz said. She smiled a large artificial smile at me, developed decades ago in our near Irish-twinship to communicate nonverbally that something we did was really stupid or that we were probably in big trouble again with Mom. “Thanks for preparing!”

By preparing, I presume she referred to my 16 years of Catholic education versus her 18, including her master’s degree, which, to my mind, was being diminished minutely by her exposure to Christian rock.

“You’re welcome,” I said, returning that smile in kind. 

DIGITAL HIGHLIGHTS



Join the conversation.

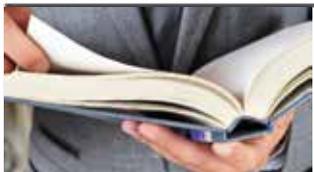
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—WINIFRED HOLLOWAY, “ANXIETY AND SANCTITY”





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THEATER | ROB WEINERT-KENDT

MISSED CONNECTIONS

'The Humans' offers a fresh take on the family drama.

The social-conservative notion that the family is the basic unit of society is uncannily mirrored by the common leftist and feminist critique of the family as a factory for authoritarian values—a basic unit, all right, but of a corrupt and joyless social order. You can sometimes hear a similar complaint about American playwrighting:

that it keeps returning, like an aimless adult child who never moves out, to the family as a default template for drama. From Eugene O'Neill to Arthur Miller, from Lorraine Hansberry to Tracy Letts ("August: Osage County"), the "great American play" often seems stuck in the living room.

Of course, many iconic American plays, from "Our Town" to "Angels in

America," have a much wider canvas. What is more, a focus on family is hardly a uniquely American predilection (see the Oresteia, "King Lear," "A Doll's House"). It is among the signal achievements of Stephen Karam's stark and beautiful new play **The Humans** (now running Off-Broadway at the Roundabout's Laura Pels Theatre through Jan. 3, 2016, and scheduled for a Broadway transfer next spring) that it seems, from its first moments to its last, to transcend the confines of the "family play."

Yes, Karam assembles a basically intact nuclear clan over a Thanksgiving dinner, at which they bicker, josh and



NUCLEAR OPTION. Clockwise from top: Sarah Steele, Cassie Beck, Arian Moayed, Jayne Houdyshell, Reed Birney

PHOTOS: JOAN MARCUS

mutually disapprove across generations. There are tensions, revelations, half-reconciliations, a bit too much alcohol consumed. But context is everything: The setting for this uneasy gathering of the Irish Catholic Blake family of Scranton, Pa., is the low-ceilinged basement of a largely unfurnished duplex apartment in New York City's Chinatown, into which Brigid (Sarah Steele) has just moved with her sensitive, grad-student boyfriend Richard (Arian Moayed). Brigid's parents, Erik (Reed Birney) and Dierdre (Jayne Houdyshell), have driven in for the meal from Scranton, bringing with them his dementia-stricken, wheelchair-bound mother, nicknamed "Momo" (Lauren Klein), for what Erik grimly calls "her last big trip." Also on hand is Brigid's sister Aimee (Cassie Beck), a lawyer recently dumped by her longtime girlfriend and hence going through the familiar first-holiday-without-a-loved-one jitters.

And yes, this is one of those dramas in which a faltering patriarch gives a toast, a little too emphatically and with more than a trace of desperation, about how family is all that really matters, even as he is watching his own fray and crumble before his eyes. Erik voices this sentiment twice in "The Humans," but with a kind of abashed diffidence that suggests he is trying to convince himself as much as his wife and daughters. He never quite makes the sale, but Karam has written no big, declarative speeches to strip this flawed father of his illusions or to give us a clear sense of where he has arrived by play's end. Instead, as far as dialogue goes, Erik simply makes a brief announcement, faces a moment of reckoning and some testy exchanges—and then it is straight into the logistics of getting everyone home safely. (Call a car service? And how much will that be?)

Indeed, the big moments of Karam's play aren't strictly in the dialogue. There's a warm but wary Irish family singalong, a pre-meal prayer that fleet-

ingly snaps Momo back to coherence, a few startling spills and spats and a climactic fit of writhing dementia and subsequent calming that are as harrowing yet tender as anything I've seen on a stage. Meanwhile, the lights in Brigid's new apartment keep successively failing; there are shocking, never-explained

thumps and bumps from an upstairs apartment and the occasional forbidding hum of the trash compactor. It is no spoiler to say that these eerie, rootless environs ultimately prove strangely both enveloping and isolating—a literal dark night of the soul.

If this all sounds unremittingly

When the Wing Gives Way

I

How to feel his death? On the street.
The shots. My friend's scream.
One cracked the air, the other
pierced the thin veil, a usual evening
returning from somewhere,
returned from many times before.

When I look for where to fix the broken city that I love,
the whole tower wobbles. What the government hasn't done.
What the gunmen's' parents didn't do. What hands the drug lords forced.
What? What I haven't done with my puny song?

And now: the sirens.

And now: the neighbors say, "Did he resist?"
And now: how can I live in this place or any place?
Can I live with myself—a part of his self, lying there,
a part of the selves who dropped him there.
All of us, under the wing that is no wing.

II

In my mind-voice, without knowing why
or from where it came, a whisper:

"When the wing gives way..."

"When the wing gives way..."

I want to be more ready than I am today.
Ready to let what is left lift me, draw me into meanings
that will shatter me more than this.

JENNIFER WALLACE

Jennifer Wallace is a poetry editor at *The Cortland Review* and a founding editor of *Toadlily Press*. *CityLit Press* published her book of poems and photographs, *It Can Be Solved by Walking* (2012).

bleak, rest assured that Karam—whose previous plays include the tetchy “Speech and Debate” and the sleek, yearning “Sons of the Prophet”—is also a nimble showman with an eye for small, comic absurdities. There are laughs amid the aches and pains, in other words, though they spring less from a joke-writer’s eagerness to please than from the playwright’s sense of family itself as the ultimate inside joke. Under the director Joe Mantello, the play’s flawless cast executes an exquisitely subtle choreography of eyerolls and small exasperations, not to mention barely suppressed arguments-in-waiting, that give the play’s characters a convincing scope beyond their 90 minutes’ traffic on the stage. We get the sense that the Blakes have lived, and will go on living,



Left to right: Sarah Steele, Arian Moayed, Jayne Houdyshell and Lauren Klein in “Humans”

for better and worse, outside our time with them.

Still, there’s no way around it: This is a heartbreaking play, and not only because Karam has matter-of-factly folded into it so many markers of millennial middle-class malaise: economic insecurity, health-care horrors, even the long twin shadows of 9/11.

But the most tragic thing about “The Humans” is its unflinchingly authentic depiction of the way most families in fact don’t have the big, cathartic fights and clean breaks we often see in plays and films—that instead we spend so much of our time together just dealing with the exigencies of living, cleaning up after ourselves and each other, snatching moments of connection and comfort but otherwise

managing or medicating our problems rather than resolving them. Like poor, anxious Erik, we will all eventually call that car service and wait in the dark for it to arrive.

ROB WEINERT-KENDT, an arts journalist and editor of *American Theater* magazine, has written for *The New York Times* and *Time Out New York*. He writes a blog called *The Wicked Stage*.



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WAITING IN HOPE

Nearly a billion people watched the live news feed as the 33 men slowly emerged, one by one, from the chamber that had held them 200 stories below the earth. It was October 2010, and for the previous 69 days much of the world had been captivated by the ongoing efforts to rescue these miners from the depths of the collapsed San José mine near Copiapo, Chile. Although there had been notes and video communications with the men after it was learned they were alive, no one could be certain that any of the men would make it out, and those awaiting their loved ones on the surface still knew little of what the men had endured together.

Five years later, we have a fuller picture of their suffering—the hunger, high temperatures, the fear of death—but also of the hope and camaraderie that existed within that darkness, that time of waiting. This lesser-seen story is one that is movingly captured in the new film *The 33*, directed by Patricia Riggen. Filmed on location in two Colombian mines and in the Atacama Desert in Chile, it depicts the struggles of the families above ground, but even more poignantly depicts the journey of the men who were trapped below, both by their circumstances and by their own failings.

The story at its core is one of hope, forgiveness and community, and so, although the entire world knows how it will end, it is these personal encounters and relationships that maintain the dramatic tension necessary to carry viewers through to the end. Their rescue depends on the tools and the persistence of those on the surface, but their true survival depends on their interactions in the mine: “If we can be good to each other, we might

find a way out of here,” says one miner.

Depictions of the miners’ faith lives are plentiful in the film, but not overbearing. The men make the Sign of the Cross as they pass a statue of Our Lady when entering the mine; they pray together in stressful moments. But the film generally resists overly pious platitudes and avoids the use of faith purely as a narrative tool. The men in the mine are men of faith in real life, and so the film simply works to demonstrate this, with powerful results.

In one scene, the men have had no sign that they might be rescued and are down to the last of their food: a single can of tuna fish to be split 33 ways. Each is given a few spoonfuls of a watered-down mixture. As the final bites are taken, each man imagines the meal he wishes he had, the person he wishes was bringing it to him—all of them knowing that this may indeed be their last supper together, all of them still holding out hope that this suffering might be taken away. Then, in a moment reminiscent of “Sullivan’s Travels,” the men find a reason to laugh even in this desperate situation.

No individual or corporation was ever held accountable for the collapse of the mine, and the men have since returned to their regular routines—for the most part. In October, on the fifth anniversary of their rescue, the 33 traveled to Rome and were greeted and blessed by Pope Francis during a general audience. The men presented him with a miner helmet covered in signatures. “I think any one of them could

share with us what the meaning of hope really is,” Pope Francis said during the audience. “Thank you for having hope in God.”

In a strange way, the film is a perfect one to watch as the Advent season begins. In one of the film’s final scenes, the last man to leave the mine pauses in the darkness before he climbs into the cage that will carry him out. He takes a moment to consider a message the men have carved into the wall of the mine: “God was with us.” Even as the mine collapsed around them. Even in those darkest moments. Even as they fought and starved and prayed and forgave one another.

It is a sentiment that Pope Francis echoed in another papal audience, reminding us that, wherever we go, Christ is always there first:

“When we arrive, he is there waiting,” Francis said. Of course, this is not always easy to remember, and even when we know it, often difficult to recognize.

In trying times, it is not always easy to feel or find God’s presence. Jesus’ own disciples struggled to recognize the risen Jesus: On the road to Emmaus, Jesus arrives in the midst of daily life and walks alongside the disciples as they are “conversing and debating.” He stays with them and urges them forward, even though they cannot yet understand. His presence on that road reminds us that, all too often, that which we are searching for is beside us all along. If only we could recognize that burning in our hearts for what it is and follow it.

Wherever
we go,
Christ is
always there
first.



INEVITABLE VIOLENCE?

THE 51 DAY WAR Ruin and Resistance in Gaza

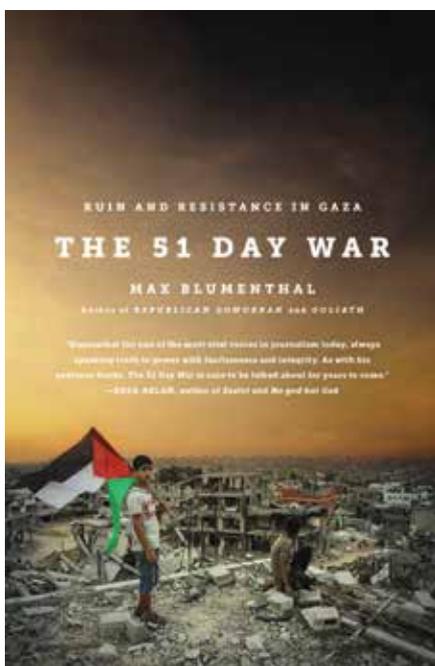
By Max Blumenthal
Nation Books. 272p \$25.99

One year after a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas ended the third Gaza war in seven years, no one expects that this recent conflict will be the last. Prime Minister David Cameron of Britain has described Gaza, with 1.8 million inhabitants crammed into a narrow strip of 141 square miles under tight Israeli surveillance, as “an open air prison or even concentration camp.” Although Israel withdrew its soldiers and settlers from Gaza 10 years ago, continuous hostility and the absence of a long-term truce between Israel and Hamas make another round of violence likely.

The expectation of another war explains in part why Gaza is still in ruins despite a commitment by international donors of \$2.5 billion in reconstruction funds when the cease-fire was announced on Aug. 26, 2014. Donors have been reluctant to honor their pledges; Palestinians have continued their infighting; and Israeli approval of reconstruction permits has proceeded glacially. As a result, not a single one of the nearly 18,000 homes destroyed or damaged in Gaza is habitable; only one-fourth of the rubble has been cleared; 100,000 Gazans remain homeless; and unemployment stands at 43 percent. Meanwhile, international attention to Gaza’s misery has been supplanted by the rise of the Islamic State, the Syrian civil war and Iran’s nuclear program.

The 51 Day War seeks to return the focus to the suffering of Gaza’s civilian population. Max Blumenthal, the author of a book about the Israeli occupation, arrived in Gaza on the 38th day of the war and began interviewing

victims of the violence and their families. By the time the conflict ended two weeks later, Blumenthal reports that the “Israeli military had not only torn through the civilian population like a buzz saw...killing some 2,200 people—more than 70 percent were confirmed as civilians—and wounding well over 10,000; it had pulverized Gaza’s infrastructure,” including schools, hospitals and mosques. By comparison, Israeli



losses amounted to 66 soldiers and six civilians killed and 576 wounded.

Blumenthal’s aim, however, is not to show this statistical disparity of suffering but to allow Gaza’s survivors to tell what happened to them. A witness described how his unarmed 23-year cousin returning to his home in Shujaiya to search for missing family members was killed by a sniper’s three shots when he waded into a pile of rubble. A man in Khuzaa’ recounted a tank commander’s shooting of an unarmed elderly man trying to escape the closed military zone. A man in Rafah said Israeli snipers used him as a hu-

man shield while they pinned him to a window and fired at his neighbors. An older Rafah man stated: “This didn’t start yesterday. When I build a house, the Israelis bomb it. When I try to make a living, they destroy my business. When I try to raise a child, they kill him.”

Blumenthal explains that the Israel Defense Forces had been planning a major assault against Gaza since late 2013. The I.D.F.’s assaults on Gaza stem from a military doctrine that uses massive force against the civilian population instead of targeting its guerilla foes. To maintain the status quo, the I.D.F. must, according to an Israeli journalist, periodically do “maintenance work in Gaza and to ‘mow the lawn,’” including regular assassinations of Hamas leaders and occasional invasions. What distinguished the 51-day war was the unprecedented amount of firepower the Israeli military deployed.

The kidnapping and murder in Hebron, in the West Bank, of three young Jewish hitchhikers on June 12, 2014, by “a rogue Hamas cell” furnished the Netanyahu government with a pretext to round up hundreds of Hamas members who had been released under a 2011 prisoner swap for an Israeli captive soldier. Although Netanyahu knew that the Jewish teenagers had been murdered, he continued to dispatch armed search parties and mounted a propaganda campaign against Hamas that included biblical and revenge rhetoric. When Jewish extremists killed and burned the body of a 16-year-old Arab high school student in retaliation, Hamas elements in Gaza began firing rockets into southern Israel. The Hamas leadership eventually took credit for further rocket attacks, and the war was on.

In an effort to avert war, Hamas proposed a 10-year truce, including the release of the prisoners that had been arrested after the killing of the three youths, the lifting of the siege and

opening of border crossings, and withdrawal of Israeli tanks from the Gaza border. Hamas wanted relief from the siege; Israel wanted to preserve the status quo. Emboldened by the refusal of Egypt and the United States to consider these humanitarian demands, Israel flatly rejected them and insisted on a return to the status quo of siege and surveillance. Blumenthal shows that throughout the war, the Obama administration accepted Israel's explanations for its actions at face value and continued to replenish I.D.F.'s supplies, while professing to be "heartbroken" by the suffering of Gaza children torn apart by Israeli shrapnel.

Blumenthal falters in his refusal to consider Hamas's responsibility for the suffering of its people. He claims that unlike the I.D.F., Hamas focused its most lethal force on military targets. This argument strains credulity.

The U.N. Independent Commission of Inquiry in a June 2015 report, while finding Israel responsible for most of the possible war crimes, also cited Hamas's firing of rockets at population centers and its execution of 21 suspected Gazan collaborators as violations of international law. Blumenthal glosses over these events and fails to hold Hamas responsible for its actions. Although Blumenthal's sympathies are clearly with the Gazan people, one must ask whether they are being well served by a government willing to sacrifice so many of them. In the final cease-fire, the only concession to Hamas was the extension of Gaza's fishing limit from three to six miles. Was this gain worth the human cost?

MARK J. DAVIS is a retired attorney who lives in Santa Fe, N.M.

Southern Gothic writer, stricken with lupus as a young woman and forced to abandon a nascent literary career in New York to convalesce on her mother's farm in Georgia. Her fiction lingers on the grotesque and strange. Her stories are populated by misfits and cast-offs, ugly people acting badly whose marginality elucidates the broken, beautiful nature of God. O'Connor's Catholicism was daily Mass with her mother, a near-monastic schedule and the contemplation of evil, truth and beauty.

Blessed Oscar Romero was the archbishop of San Salvador assassinated by a government-backed death squad sniper as he celebrated Mass. He was killed because he loudly and steadfastly condemned the state terrorism committed against religious educators, peasants, workers and students—a popular movement for political change in El Salvador—and against anyone remotely suspected of sympathizing with that movement. Romero had turned his Sunday homily into a weekly catalogue and denunciation of massacre, murder, abduction, rape and torture. His was the Catholicism of community, the establishment of a human rights office of the archdiocese, the running of a refugee and relief operation, meetings, speeches, defending God in the dispossessed and finding himself in advocating for them.

Flannery O'Connor: Fiction Fired by Faith, by Angela Alaimo O'Donnell, and *Oscar Romero: Love Must Win Out*, by Kevin Clarke, are both carefully crafted, slim but densely packed books. They are part of Liturgical Press's fine "People of God" series on the lives of prominent contemporary and near-contemporary Catholics. (Both authors are **America** contributors.)

EILEEN MARKEY

HAUNTED BY THE INCARNATION

FLANNERY O'CONNOR Fiction Fired by Faith

By Angela Alaimo O'Donnell
Liturgical Press. 152p \$12.95

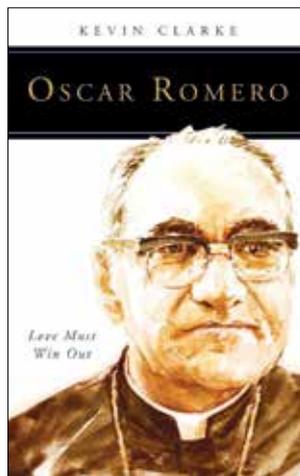
OSCAR ROMERO Love Must Win Out

By Kevin Clarke
Liturgical Press. 164p \$12.95

Raymond A. Schroth, S.J., *America's* literary editor and the most unrelenting and exacting (for my own good) professor I had at Fordham University, assigned me a double book review. It seemed at first a generous offer, a chance to read a book I'd already been planning to read and yet be able to call it work. But immediately the assignment came to seem like a perverse challenge. I was to review two biographies, about two radically different kinds of Catholics, in the same piece.

It reminds me of a trick my father used to play on us kids, urging us to pat our bellies and rub our heads at the same time. But I suspect the old Jesuit is still trying to teach me something.

Blessed Oscar Romero and Flannery O'Connor do not have much in common, except that they are among the most recognized 20th-century Catholics—particularly among non-Catholics. They appear to represent polar extremes of Catholicism, not in the way of our current quasi-left/right, evolutionist/orthodox antagonisms but in the age-old tension between the cloister and the cathedral, the private and the public. Flannery O'Connor is the reclusive

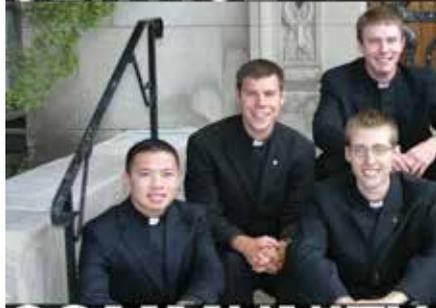




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O'Donnell, a poet and professor at Fordham's Curran Center for American Catholic Studies, introduces us to Flannery O'Connor's childhood, family and the social world of a small Southern Catholic community. But we really grow to know O'Connor as a young writer leaving her parochial home for the Iowa Writers' Workshop, a naif with incipient talent carrying her God-haunted vision into the secular literary establishment.

"O'Connor's artistic vision is radically incarnational, in every sense of that word. Her deeply Catholic sense of the world posits belief in the creation as good (albeit misshapen by sin), in the human being as made in the image and likeness of God and in a world that is immanent with the divine presence," O'Donnell writes.

O'Donnell does good work weaving the story of O'Connor's life, examining her cherished, intimate and, for much of her life, long-distance friendships, exploring the tension in the oddball author's relationship to her rural community. O'Connor was from Georgia—its people and mores populate her stories—but she was not of it. She was an outsider, a watcher. Drawing on O'Connor's letters, O'Donnell helps the reader understand O'Connor's vocation as an artist and her embrace of her own suffering as a way to draw closer to God.

But the strength of O'Donnell's book, what makes reading it as enjoyable as dropping in on a senior seminar led by an expert professor, is the deep literary exegesis of O'Connor's work. Many of us have read O'Connor's stories at some point, and probably a visceral impression of the haunted characters remains with us. But O'Donnell plumbs each short story and novel,

examines its meanings and relates the themes to profound Christian ones. Through O'Donnell, the reader comes to know O'Connor as an artist whose vocation is to contemplate the Incarnation, to make us recognize, even—especially—in the horrors, that, as Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, the world is charged with the grandeur of God.

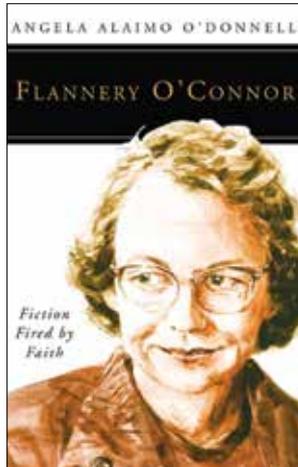
The learned and loving discussion of O'Connor's work in this book makes the reader want to go back and read O'Connor's stories again, one by one, while flipping back to *Fiction Fired by Faith*.

Oscar Romero: Love Must Win Out is a deeply researched and carefully annotated retelling of the

archbishop's conversion from a clerical and rule-bound, though gentle and sincere, practitioner of charity to an inspired and daring advocate for justice. Clarke, like O'Donnell, synthesizes earlier biographies of his subject but brings his own reporting and analysis. What he achieves, in a fast-moving 140 pages, is an intimate portrait of a man searching for God, struggling against his own demons of scrupulosity, need for control and loneliness before he becomes the Monsignor Romero we know.

This is a valuable examination of Romero's inner life, his longing for connection—communion—particularly now as canonization approaches, elements of the Salvadoran church and society attempt to depoliticize him, and gauzy pieties threaten to reduce him an image on a T-shirt. Through Clarke we meet a stilted and often awkward man who struggles to serve God in his people, as the world and his church shift beneath him. We meet a pastor forced to confront horror and evil.

Love Must Win Out lays out the political realities of 1970s El Salvador in some detail, a welcome and nec-



essary inclusion if readers are to understand the promise and challenge of Romero's martyrdom. He did not speak on behalf of some faceless and mute "poor." Romero was critical of a specific economic system and the state violence employed to preserve it. Readers learn about the primacy of the export economy, the steep stratification of Salvadoran society, the role of the church as ally in enforcing the status quo and the bubbling up of resistance to this system.

Clarke spends ample time exploring Romero's early antipathy to liberation theology and his contentious relationship with Jesuits. He was so frightened by the thinking emerging from the Latin American Episcopal Conference meeting at Medellín, which articulated a preferential option for the poor and condemned the violence of structural or social sin (concepts now closely associated with him), that he developed a facial tic at the mere mention of the name Medellín, Clarke tells us.

Before becoming archbishop, Romero used his weekly column in the diocesan newspaper and appearances on television and radio to call out "subversives" in the church and attempted to roust the Jesuits from a San Salvador high school where they had established night classes for poor students and their parents and were taking rich students on eye-opening visits to poor barrios. These Jesuits taught that Christ was incarnate in the suffering people, the body of Christ broken again and again in the violence of poverty. When Romero was invited by members of the already numerous base Christian communities to a Mass in the early 1970s, they admonished him for his positions. Romero grew uncharacteristically hot-tempered, shouting, "You are not doing pastoral work here at all. You are doing political work. You haven't called me to a Mass, you've called me to a meeting of subversives!"

His conversion to a Catholicism that specifically embraced liberation

from poverty and degradation and celebrated the incarnational notion of God beside the brutalized people was anything but a road to Damascus. It played out slowly and interpersonally, spurred famously by his friendship with Rutilio Grande, S.J., who was assassinated by the right wing in 1977. But it emerged earlier, too, in 1975, when as auxiliary bishop in Santiago de María he witnessed the aftermath of a National Guard massacre. "The villagers reported that the victims, all members of one extended family, had been pulled from their beds, tortured, then murdered in cold blood with bullets and machete.... Their blood still stained the walls, the floorboards still held the stench of blood."

The violence and ugliness O'Connor invoked in fiction to expose readers to deeper lessons were real in Romero's El Salvador. One saw Christ cut down every day.

Clarke tells us that Romero was silent and pensive as he walked to his car

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one day with one of his priests. Once inside he said, "We have to find a way to evangelize the rich, so that they can change. So that they convert."

As Romero saw firsthand the grotesque horrors inflicted on suspected subversives and witnessed the daily brutality of poverty in a country with an infant mortality rate of 60 percent,

he changed. His lifelong devotion required that he defend that Incarnate God in the people being cut down. But in finding courage, including the courage to allow himself more love and less judgment, he also found connection. His loneliness abated.

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Clarke and O'Donnell tell the stories of two dramatically different people, each haunted and driven by the Incarnation.

EILEEN MARKEY is the author of *A Dangerous Woman*, to be published by *Nation Books* next year, a biography of Maura Clarke, one of the U.S. churchwomen killed in 1980 in *El Salvador*.

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Preparing With Love

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (C), NOV. 29, 2015

Readings: Jer 33:14–16; Ps 25:4–14; 1 Thes 3:12–4:2; Lk 21:25–36

“The days are surely coming, says the Lord” (Jer 33:14)

While the season of Advent is imbued with remembering, recalling Christ’s first coming as an infant, when divinity became incarnate, it is also a time of anticipation, as we reflect on and await Christ’s second coming. But Advent is not only a celebration of the past and an eager expectation of the future; it is a season that asks us to meditate on the present and delight in Christ’s presence with us now. It is this very season that concentrates our hearts, minds and souls on Christ in order to make present the days that have already been and the days that are surely coming.

Jeremiah said, “The days are surely coming,” when God would “cause a righteous branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.” A sense of imminence looms over Jeremiah’s prophecy, as does the mystery of its fulfillment. Its surety is promised—what God has promised, God will do—but its arrival could only be anticipated.

But what was anticipation for the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled in Christ’s birth centuries later. According to Luke’s Gospel, in the little southern Judean town of Bethlehem, his humble parents called there by a Roman census, the future became the present. For those of us raised on the Charlie Brown Christmas specials it is hard not to recall Linus reciting Luke’s Christmas story in the King James Version, remembering that the “good tidings of

great joy, which shall be to all people” initially were heard only by a few shepherds (Lk 2:8).

Yet Jeremiah’s day had come. That was the time when an unknown baby was born “in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2:11). The infant savior grew to manhood, gathering disciples, that momentous incarnation becoming not only the beginning of a human life but a touchstone of human history and destiny.

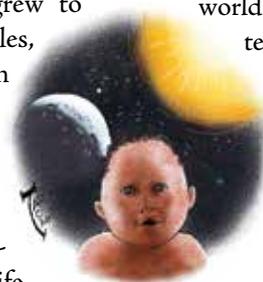
As Jesus prepared his disciples for the end of his life, though, he did not direct them to his beginning but to the future, when he would return. He promised them that “there will be signs in the sun, the moon and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay... in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” These powerful apocalyptic images point us to the coming redemption, the days that are surely coming.

And bracketed by the birth of the infant savior and coming of the cosmic redeemer, there is the now: the present, the preparation. What does it mean to prepare at Advent? In Luke’s Gospel Jesus warns his disciples against twin threats—not to become “drowsy” with partying or to become anxious with the worries of day-to-day life but to immerse themselves in the promises of the past, the hope of the future and the joy of the present. Jesus counsels a vig-

ilance “at all times.” This is not a passive caution but an active preparation.

The preparation for the apostles was life with Christ, as it must be for us too. Christ walks with us as we look to the past and await the future, in the Scriptures, in the church and in the world with our brothers and sisters. Revelation, a living thing, emerges from the pages of the Scripture for us; it comes to us in the liturgy, lives with us and guides us to our future.

The apostle Paul also gave concrete direction to the



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

As you think about preparing for the coming of Christ, what is one thing that helps you focus your attention on Christ? How can you grow in love and holiness this Advent? How can you do so more and more?

church in 1 Thessalonians as he aided them in preparing for the future. In anticipation of the “coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints,” Paul prays that God will make them “increase and abound in love for one another and for all” and that their hearts would be strengthened “in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father.” Paul acknowledged that the Thessalonians were living with love and holiness, even as he encouraged them, but asked that they “do so more and more.” More and more love and holiness now, to honor the infant who came to us then and in preparation for the days that are coming.

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