

America

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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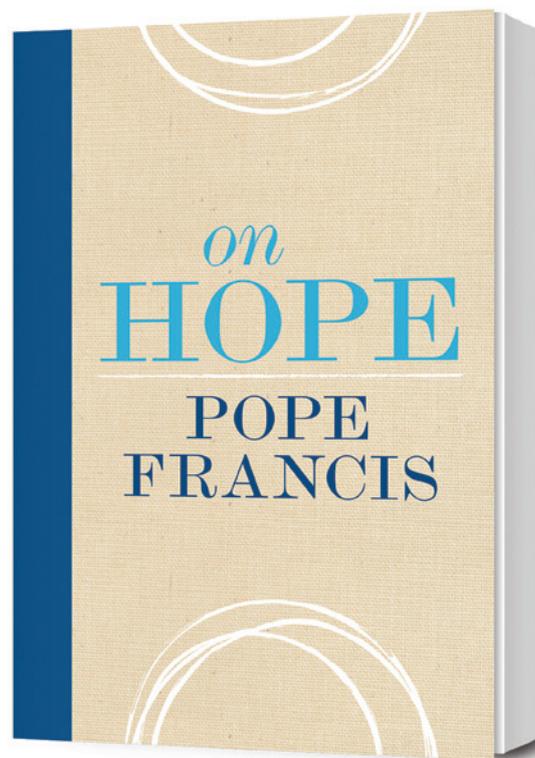
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Standing With the Unborn

The March for Life, the annual gathering of pro-life activists, clergy and civic leaders, will take place in Washington, D.C., on Friday Jan. 19. In our pro-life commitment, **America** is allied with the sentiments expressed in the statement by the Society of Jesus of the United States, “Standing for the Unborn,” which was published in **America** on May 26, 2003. As is our annual custom, we republish excerpts from this text as an expression of our solidarity with the women and men who will march this month in the nation’s capital.

—
Matt Malone, S.J.
 Twitter: @americaeditor.

When we, the leadership of the Society of Jesus in the United States, survey the developments unfolding in our culture, we are deeply distressed at the massive injustices. A spirit of callous disregard for life shows itself in direct assaults on human life such as abortion and capital punishment, as well as in senseless violence, escalating militarism, racism, xenophobia and the skewed accumulation of wealth and life-sustaining resources. These realities compel us to speak out against what Pope John Paul II called “the culture of death.”

Jesuits draw upon a long and rich tradition of reflection, professional study, experience and spirituality that brings many resources to the complexities of the abortion issue.

Abortion is a human rights issue. It is also a social issue, and not simply a personal decision made in artificial isolation from wider social reality. Attempts to frame the issue

as merely a question of personal preference or private choice ignore important features of abortion as a public policy. Because the state and society as a whole have an intense interest in promoting respect for life, we may not with a clear conscience relegate such life-and-death issues to the private realm, no matter how appealing and convenient such arguments may appear on the surface. Abortion policy contains embedded cultural assumptions, values and attitudes that have wide repercussions for the way we collectively treat all human life. The whole array of potential threats to life and human dignity is interrelated, and the Christian imperative to oppose it calls forth from us a consistent ethic of life.

Some influential voices posit a zero-sum conflict between “women’s reproductive rights” and the right to life of unborn children. Jesuits ought to find their place among those who demonstrate the obvious confluence of women’s rights and respect for life in all its forms. Pope John Paul II summed this partnership up when he wrote: “Therefore, in firmly rejecting ‘pro-choice’ it is necessary to become courageously ‘pro-woman,’ promoting a choice that is truly in favor of women.”...

As Catholics and Jesuits, we would naturally prefer to live in a country where every citizen, voter and court consistently favor legal recognition of and protection for the unborn.... We must acknowledge, however, that phrases such as “the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”...are phrases with contested meanings that others un-

derstand differently than we do.... The more attractive option seeks neither to flee nor to dominate situations of pluralism. It commits us rather to a process of engaging those who initially disagree with us on some issues, seeking to create an acceptable consensus wherever possible by building upon those truths on which we can reach agreement....

This path of “proposing, rather than imposing” was described by the great American Jesuit theologian of the past century, John Courtney Murray. While emphasizing the value of tolerance and mutual dialogue, he also advised against any sort of moral relativism....

Another way of describing this stance is to say that Jesuits are committed to narrowing the gap between the current civil law of our nation and the demands of the moral law as we understand it. Our long-term goal remains full legal recognition of and protection for the unborn child—from the moment of conception.

In the near future, we cannot realistically expect complete agreement among all participants in the abortion debate. We must listen respectfully to others’ opinions, just as we expect a fair hearing of our own arguments against abortion. Our confidence in the persuasive power of well articulated defenses of pro-life positions sustains us, even as we acknowledge the long struggle ahead.... In the meantime, our common calling is to stand in solidarity with the unborn, the “least of our brothers and sisters” (Mt 25:40), through prayer and political activism.



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Palestinian protesters east of Gaza City wave the national flag following U.S. President Trump's decision on Dec. 15 to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Photo: Mohammed Talatene/picture-alliance/dpa/AP Images
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What is the biggest obstacle to addressing a culture of sexual harassment?

When asked if they had experienced sexual harassment, 89 percent of all respondents to our recent survey answered yes, while 76 percent told **America** that they had seen someone else experience harassment. Ninety-seven percent of the women who took our informal survey said that they had experienced sexual harassment first hand.

“Sexual harassment is so commonplace in its different forms that it is easier to name the times and places it has not occurred,” wrote one reader from Medford, Ore. When asked to indicate the settings in which they experienced or witnessed harassment, readers most frequently named the workplace (78 percent), public places (62 percent) and school (45 percent).

Despite these sobering numbers, the majority of readers (77 percent) told **America** that they have noticed new efforts to respond to sexual harassment in the last decade. “I think a great deal changed in the workplace after Anita Hill,” a reader from Boston wrote.

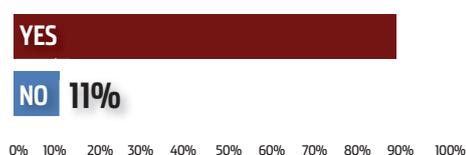
Other readers noted productive efforts by their communities to end harassment. “My diocese has a program that trains all volunteers and employees in understanding both abuse and sexual harassment,” wrote a respondent from Austin, Tex. “Personal accountability and communal responsibility

are priorities.” A reader from New York City described the usefulness of online communities in this respect, singling out the #MeToo social media campaign. “#MeToo has helped me and others gain a voice against perpetrators,” she said.

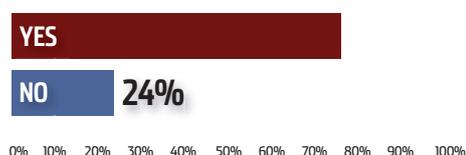
Readers described many obstacles to addressing a culture that permits sexual harassment. One respondent said that “victim-blaming and making perpetrators the ‘victims’” is the biggest obstacle to moving forward. She gave an example: “Saying, ‘It’s a horrible time to be a man today,’ overlooks the fact it has been a horrible time to be a woman for a long, long time.” Another reader, from Pasadena, Calif., pointed out that society’s attention has been disproportionately focused on high-profile harassment cases. “While we relish the downfall of powerful, abusive men,” he said, “we refuse to recognize the ways we are already complicit in this culture.”

A respondent from Pottsville, Pa., suggested that putting women in leadership positions could help: “Men tend to protect and shield other men even when they are guilty... [They can be more] concerned with the perpetrator’s dignity than that of the victim. (We have seen this with our own clerical sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church.) More women need to be in positions of leadership and power because when we are not, we are more likely to be targeted as victims.”

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED SEXUAL HARASSMENT?



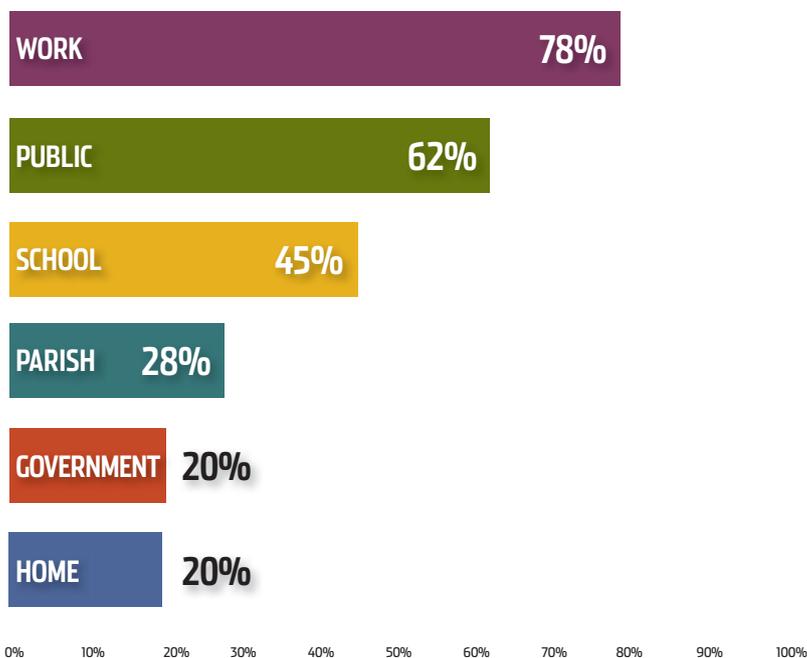
WITNESSED SEXUAL HARASSMENT?



“In many communities, women are blamed and considered ‘tempters’ because of the way they dress or act. This kind of thinking must change.”

New York, NY

WHERE HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED/WITNESSED SEXUAL HARASSMENT?



These results are based on reader responses to a poll promoted on Facebook, Twitter and in our email newsletter. Because of rounding and the option to select multiple answers, percentages may not add up to 100.

Pernicious Angle

Re “The G.O.P. Tax Plan Is Deliberately Designed to Collapse” (Our Take, 12/25): The most pernicious angle of this tax bill is that it is a set-up for cutting Social Security and, more important, Medicare and other socially needed programs. By ballooning the deficit, the Republicans will have a ready-made excuse to cut spending programs. House Speaker Paul Ryan has said as much.

Alfred Chavez

Online Comment

Most in Need

“Tax cut” is just a snappy title. Cutting federal spending on socially needed programs and letting the states take over the health insurance market is the true aim of the bill. Fifty smaller insurance pools will not be able to cover those most in need; insurance needs the largest pool possible.

Let’s face it: No one except a few super-wealthy people can afford to care for themselves as they age and become more dependent on others. Individuals cannot save enough. There has to be some pooling of resources, or most people will suffer.

Jim Lein

Online Comment

In Good Conscience

Re “A Catholic’s Immigration Wish List,” by J. Kevin Appleby (12/25): The author is correct that U.S. immigration policy and practice desperately need revamping. However, he makes some points that a Catholic in good conscience can disagree with. For one, he claims that “the Catholic position would be to bring the vast majority of undocumented immigrants who are not a threat to our communities out of the shadows to register with the government and continue on a path to citizenship.” Implementation of immigration policy is a matter of prudential judgment. There is no guarantee that immigrants who entered the U.S. illegally will willingly register as aliens or that they have any intention of becoming U.S. citizens.

There needs to be reasonable and reasoned approaches to our immigration needs and issues. There is no one “Catholic” way to address these, as the author implies there is.

Dan Acosta

Online Comment

Taking Us Nowhere

Re “What Catholics Can Learn From Silicon Valley,” by Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry (12/25): Thank you for this truly thought-provoking essay. I was particularly caught by the comment, “We should be alarmed that it is mostly secular

scientists who are taking on the project of creation-repair, for there is no good reason to believe that they, working from a deficient materialistic metaphysics, or profit-seeking businessmen and investors are up to that challenge, or that their cure will not be worse than the disease.” I am a strong supporter of STEM education, but I also think it is critical to develop a strong foundation of service to the Gospel (or at least an awareness of its calling) among today’s students. Otherwise, tomorrow’s great discoveries may end up taking us nowhere.

Kenneth Feldt

Online Comment

God’s Vision

Despite 12 years of Catholic education and innumerable homilies, I do not think I ever got this sort of activist message: to dream big and do your part, no time to waste. There was plenty about social justice, to be sure, and that is fine, but that is not quite the same thing as connecting my own vision (necessarily myopic and limited) of how things should be with God’s vision (the really big picture). We accept that our little earth-bound, time-bound attempts are bound to be small and sometimes discouraging. Yet that is where all those helpful parables come in to describe how the kingdom of God works (mustard seed, etc.). We do not have to do it all ourselves or in our own lifetimes, but we do have to do it. How encouraging. Pity I never got this message back in my 20s.

Kate Gallagher

Online Comment

Keeping Faith

Re “Christmas Classics on Screen, Familiar and Unexpected,” by John Anderson (12/25): I love movies in general, and I especially love Christmas movies. I love several of the movies you list here, but I really think you have misrepresented and misinterpreted “It’s a Wonderful Life.” The point of the movie is not negated by the happy ending. The point of the movie is the happy ending: that one man’s life affects so many other lives, that the little things we do to help others ultimately make a big difference, even if we do not realize it. Additionally, I think it has a very Catholic perspective. It emphasizes the importance of one’s community and the role the community plays in helping us keep faith. In the context of post-war America, or in the context of today’s political climate, I think these are very important points to be made.

Lauren Rotella Bergesen

Online Comment

CHIP Deserves More Than Life Support

On Dec. 21, Congress passed a last-minute continuing resolution to fund the government through Jan. 19, 2018. This resolution also finally reauthorized federal matching funds for the Children's Health Insurance Program after their expiration on Sept. 30. The extension will allow the program to continue functioning through March. After that, CHIP will once again face a funding crisis, imperiling a program that provides nine million U.S. children with low-cost health insurance and covers over 300,000 pregnant women.

During the last months of argument over CHIP funding, House Republicans put forward a plan for five more years of funding. However, they proposed paying for the extension by

diverting money from other public health programs, which Democrats rejected. This robbing-Peter-to-pay-Paul approach and the willingness to use CHIP as a bargaining tactic highlight the misplaced priorities of the current congressional leadership and majority.

In October, Bishop Frank J. Dewane of Venice, Fla., writing to Congress on behalf of the U.S. bishops to urge support for CHIP, reminded them that the program has "garnered widespread support from both parties and from an overwhelming majority of the nation's governors and state legislatures." Sadly, it has been pulled into the ongoing brinkmanship that has displaced real legislative work. Families deserve the secu-

rity of dependable health insurance for their children, and legislators should be cooperating to provide it, not waiting to see who will blink first.

The guarantee of ongoing funding for this important program deserves an up-or-down vote, not one tied to other more controversial changes in health care spending. In the meantime, the media, which has too often waited for legislative crises to draw its attention, should keep asking legislators between now and March about whether they are willing to continue risking CHIP's failure. And voters should demand that their representatives stop running out the clock and start cooperating on real priorities.

What We Owe America's Farmworkers

U.S. agriculture is facing a silent crisis. The Trump administration's crackdown on undocumented immigrants has sown fear among farmworker communities, making workers harder to find than ever. Farm owners across the country are anxious about meeting their labor needs. Millions of dollars worth of crops are at risk of rotting.

The present labor shortage reveals U.S. society's dependence on farmworkers. The hands that pick what Americans eat are hands the country relies on. And with almost no native-born Americans willing to do the job, Latino immigrants have become indispensable. Even in the midst of the severe fires in California, farmworkers could not stop working lest harvests be lost.

Yet the nation's collective reliance on farmworkers is not reflected in the way they are treated. In California, which produces two-thirds of the nation's fruits, rates of food insecurity for farmworkers and their families range from 40 percent to 70 percent. Farmworkers' low wages directly contribute to growers' profit, but farmworkers regularly cannot afford to buy the food they pick.

Working conditions for farmworkers can be harsh. Even under the best conditions, a day of work is one of hard manual labor, with long hours and often high temperatures. The Trump administration's Environmental Protection Agency has approved the use of a pesticide known to be harmful to human beings. Farmworkers have already gotten sick on the job as a result.

Society's failures toward farmworkers extend beyond poor working conditions. The children of migrant farmworkers endure seasonal displacement that can make staying in school difficult. Social mobility is weak for those born into farmworker communities, creating a generational cycle of poverty. State and local governments resist attempts by farmworkers to organize for greater protections. And despite being dependent on farmworker labor, many local communities are openly hostile to migrant workers.

It does not have to be this way. In 2016, California recognized the right of farmworkers to equal overtime pay. In Florida, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers secured commitments from fast-food chains to buy only from ag-

ricultural sources that meet improved standards on pay and work conditions. That model of direct pressure on major companies is spreading. In Vermont, immigrant dairy workers just claimed victory in an agreement with the ice cream maker Ben and Jerry's.

It is curious that so many Americans care about eating ethically (vegan, vegetarian, organic or free range) but do not think as much about the poverty and exploitation among the largely Latino farmworkers who are making their meals possible. Labeling programs, including the Equitable Food Initiative label, the Food Justice Certified label and the United Farm Workers Union label, support the fair treatment of farmworkers, but there is little indication that products carrying those labels are sought out by consumers.

The United States must do more to treat farmworkers with justice. A huge step would be to lift the threat of deportation that looms over many farmworkers by passing comprehensive immigration reform that recognizes both the need for labor in the United States and those laborers' right to dignity and opportunity. Rectifying the injustice of the 1930s—when farmworkers were excluded from new federal labor standards—and finally offering farmworkers the same labor protections as other workers is also necessary. Farmwork, like all work, carries an inherent dignity and should be a viable path for immigrant families into the American middle class.

The common thread in all the challenges farmworkers face is a lack of urgency. Perhaps every time Americans say grace before a meal, they could spare a moment to remember those who make that meal possible.

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The opioid crisis cannot kill our Christian hope

At the shopping plaza a few blocks from my childhood home in Crafton, Pa., someone overdoses from heroin or fentanyl at least once a week. In a neighboring parish where I am an altar server, I sometimes serve at funerals for people who died in their 20s or 30s and see families too devastated and ashamed to acknowledge the cause of death.

Most of the roughly 64,000 drug overdose deaths in the United States in 2016 involved opioids. And drug overdoses are expected to spike in 2017 thanks to the growing use of carfentanil, an elephant tranquilizer 100 times more lethal than fentanyl. Meanwhile, lobbying by the powerful pharmaceutical industry lobby has stymied national and state efforts to stem the flow of black-market prescriptions—even as people die, families are destroyed and communities disintegrate.

The metastatic advance of the opioid epidemic over the past few years has produced frenetic desperation on the ground. Instead of pursuing long-term preventative strategies like health education and community development, public officials and first responders are forced to focus on simply keeping people alive long enough—through numerous naloxone-fueled revivals—to enter recovery. Recovering addicts are then left to combat the stigma and specter of addiction for the rest of their lives.

Jesus, we are told, “saves.” Is this what salvation looks like in the face of the desperation and suffering epitomized by the opioid crisis? Hopelessness is one option. But it is not the Christian one.

I find hope in Westmoreland County, Pa., a rural area where the over-

dose death toll just rose for the ninth consecutive year. There, after a series of listening sessions, Bishop Edward Malesic wrote a pastoral letter on the drug abuse crisis, “From Death and Despair to Life and Hope.” The letter calls the Diocese of Greensburg “to reach out in [Jesus’] name to help those who are hurting” through prayer and education. Initiatives include a new bishop’s advisory group composed of experts in the field, diocesan-sponsored educational sessions and prayer services, and preaching tools and intercessory prayers provided by the diocesan office of worship.

I find hope in Carnegie, a blue-collar town in southwestern Pennsylvania, where St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish recently launched its HOPE Alliance (“Heroin Outreach, Prevention, and Education”). The effort was spearheaded by the parish’s pastor, the Rev. David Poecking, and a parishioner, Christine Simcic, who says she simply “wanted to make a difference in the world.” The group will listen to the stories of those struggling with addiction and work to remove stigma, build relationships to improve social capital in the community, introduce pastoral counseling for afflicted families and host workshops for both naloxone training and awareness raising.

I find hope in Huntington, W.Va.—a town that made national headlines on Aug. 15, 2016, when 26 people overdosed in the span of four hours—where Dr. Stephen Petrany, informed by his Catholic faith, helps lead efforts to address the crisis. An alumnus of Georgetown School of Medicine and current chairman of the department of family

and community health at the Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine of Marshall University, he regularly treats his “fellow brothers and sisters in Christ” struggling with addiction. This often requires a vulnerable willingness on the part of caregivers to “love even when you don’t get loved back,” he tells me.

All three cases demonstrate the strength of Christian hope in the face of the seemingly deterministic nature of the psychological, economic and social tangle that fuels the opioid scourge. It is a hope enlivened by an ever-greater God who alone can fulfill the restlessness of our infinite desires and liberate us from the suffocating narrowness of all addictions.

It is a hope that sanctions the boldness of Catholic social teaching’s vision, most recently articulated in the “integral ecology” of Pope Francis’ encyclical letter “*Laudato Si’*,” a hope that can marshal the necessary resources to respond to the multifaceted complexity of sin.

It is a hope justified by the transformation of trepidation to courage, sadness to joy and death to new life wrought by the Resurrection, a paschal grammar that allows Christians to gloriously proclaim, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (Jn 1:5).

Lucas Briola is a doctoral candidate in systematic theology at The Catholic University of America. He currently coordinates the ecological culture section of the recently formed International Institute for Method in Theology.

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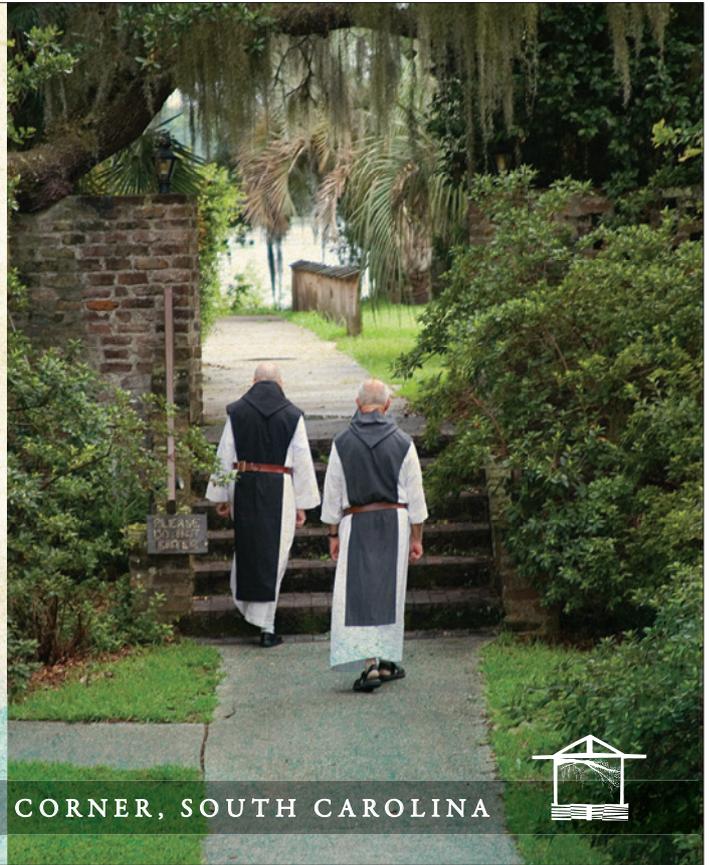
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FOLLOWING FRANCIS: THE POPE'S SOCIAL MEDIA MINISTRY TAKES OFF

Last month, to mark the fifth anniversary of @Pontifex, the papal Twitter account, Pope Francis sent a message thanking his followers and offering a prayer, of sorts, for social media more generally.

“Thank you for following @Pontifex, which turns five years old today,” the message read. “May social media always be spaces that are rich in humanity!”

Olivia Messer, a reporter for The Daily Beast, tweeted in reply, “who wants to tell him,” a playful nod to the fact that these days, Twitter is known more for its harassment, bullying and general abuse than for being a space “rich in humanity.” In fact, Twitter itself acknowledged this, somewhat, in mid-December when it took steps to banish a number of ac-

counts tied to hate groups, including one that was recently shared by President Trump’s personal account.

But the Vatican has apparently decided that the value of Twitter—and other social media—as communications platforms far outweighs their hazards.

Just last month, Bishop Paul Tighe, secretary of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Culture, told Bill McCormick, S.J., of The Jesuit Post, that the church must consider, “How are you going to get present in the environs in which [people] are living their lives?” That means being online.

In addition to amping up the pope’s Twitter account, the Vatican also launched a papal Instagram account in

Among Pope Francis' top photos on Instagram: Visiting the Western Wall in Jerusalem (327,439 likes); meeting with people from indigenous communities in Colombia (352,640); and beginning a "journey dedicated to reconciliation and peace" in Colombia from Rome's Fiumicino Airport (322,932).

2016. In less than 12 hours it amassed one million followers, reaching that milestone in record time.

Regarding Twitter specifically, Bishop Tighe acknowledged that while Pope Francis and his team seem to excel at using it, the platform might not be a good fit for everyone. "Some people can be good on Twitter, and other people can realize that Twitter brings out the worst in them," he said.

Pope Francis' tweet marked the fifth anniversary of the day his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, tapped a few buttons on an iPad on Dec. 12, 2012, to publish the first—and up to then only—tweet ever sent by a pope.

The former pope's message was simple: "Dear friends, I am pleased to get in touch with you through Twitter. Thank you for your generous response. I bless all of you from my heart."

About two months after Pope Benedict sent his first tweet, he shocked the world with news of his resignation. But before he left office, he published 39 tweets, most of them short reflections on Scripture or a thoughtful question for his roughly three million followers to consider. As I wrote in my book *The Tweetable Pope: A Spiritual Revolution in 140 Characters*, the tweets themselves were not particularly memorable, but the fact that Pope Benedict tweeted at all was a sign of his openness to moving the church into the social media realm.

When Pope Benedict retired in February 2013, all his tweets were deleted and the papal Twitter account went dark, a social media *sede vacante*. When Pope Francis was elected the following month, he sent two tweets in the first week of his papacy, an indication that he planned to continue using the papal account.

The pope's English- and Spanish-language accounts are his most popular; each has more than 15 million followers. The others are Italian (4.8 million); Portuguese (3.4 million); French (1 million); and Polish, Latin, German and Arabic, each with under a million followers.

From his English-language account, Pope Francis has tweeted about 1,400 times, or about six times each week. A small team in the Vatican culls the pope's homilies, statements and speeches for short messages that will help bring attention to what is on his mind.



Pope Francis 
@Pontifex

10 MOST RETWEETED

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 02/18/2017 | 65,580 |
| How often in the Bible the Lord asks us to welcome migrants and foreigners, reminding us that we too are foreigners! | |
| 06/18/2015 | 62,851 |
| The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth. | |
| 09/07/2017 | 61,126 |
| Dear young people, do not be afraid of the future! Dare to dream big! Keep joy alive, a sign of a young heart that has encountered the Lord. | |
| 03/27/2016 | 50,165 |
| Jesus Christ is risen! Love has triumphed over hatred, life has conquered death, light has dispelled the darkness! | |
| 03/18/2017 | 46,776 |
| I invite you not to build walls but bridges, to conquer evil with good, offence with forgiveness, to live in peace with everyone. | |
| 05/28/2017 | 40,608 |
| I encourage everyone to engage in constructive forms of communication that reject prejudice towards others and foster hope and trust today. | |
| 09/04/2016 | 39,749 |
| Let us carry Mother Teresa's smile in our hearts and give it to those whom we meet along our journey. | |
| 11/14/2015 | 37,322 |
| I am deeply saddened by the terrorist attacks in Paris. Please join me in prayer for the victims and their families. #PrayersForParis | |
| 7/8/2017 | 36,384 |
| Migrants are our brothers and sisters in search of a better life, far away from poverty, hunger, and war. | |
| 8/19/2017 | 35,253 |
| I pray for all the victims of the attacks of these days. May the blind violence of terrorism no longer find room to exist in this world! | |





Pope Francis

@Pontifex

@PONTIFEX BY THE NUMBERS

AVERAGE NUMBER OF RETWEETS

8,520

AVERAGE NUMBER OF LIKES

19,550

TOTAL TWEETS

1,397

TWEETS PER WEEK

5.6

FOLLOWERS BY ACCOUNT

ENGLISH	15,699,639
SPANISH	15,520,826
ITALIAN	4,790,341
PORTUGUESE	3,383,780
FRENCH	1,043,970
POLISH	999,296
LATIN	857,557
GERMAN	573,864
ARABIC	399,545
TOTAL	43,268,818

Sources: @Pontifex Twitter accounts as of Dec. 15, 2017. Data on tweets per week and average retweets and likes from Export Tweet report, as of Dec. 13, 2017.

Sometimes the pope himself will weigh in on which topics he would like his team to tweet about, and he approves each message before it is sent out. He has tweeted about God more than 300 times, used the name Jesus at least 175 times and mercy or love about 300 times. And those messages have global reach.

Among the pope's most popular tweets, measured by the number of times people shared his message with their own followers through retweets, were a call in 2017 to "welcome migrants and foreigners," his tweet in 2015 about the earth looking like "an immense pile of filth" and an exhortation to young people from last fall to "dream big."

Back in early November, Twitter caused an uproar with many of its users when it announced that it was doubling its iconic 140-character limit to 280 characters. Many tweeters said the messages were too long, and some vowed not to take advantage of the new limit, pledging to keep their tweets within the old bounds. While Pope Francis never made such a public declaration, it appears that he agrees with the critics.

Between Nov. 7, when the change was announced, and this writing in late December, Pope Francis tweeted 42 times from his English-language account. For all his reformer's instinct, Pope Francis seems wedded to Twitter tradition. Only one of those tweets, "Without the support of the prayers of the faithful, the Successor of Peter cannot fulfill his mission in the world. I am counting on you too!" exceeded the old limit of 140 characters.

And even then, he posted only 141 characters—one beyond the old limit.

The Vatican's gamble on social media seems to be paying off richly. Pope Francis was the most "influential" global leader on Twitter in 2013, 2014 and 2015, according to the social media analytics group Twiplomacy. In 2016, he was knocked down to number four, with former President Obama and then-candidate Donald J. Trump beating him out. The pope and the president continue to battle it out for the title of the world's most followed global leader on Twitter, though Mr. Trump has led consistently since last summer.

But neither man should let their roughly 40 million followers go to their heads. They have a long way to go to catch up to the likes of pop stars Katy Perry (108 million followers) and Justin Bieber (104 million).

Michael J. O'Loughlin, national correspondent.
Twitter: @MikeOLoughlin.



Daniel Galan and Antonia Alvarez began a fast for the passage of the Dream Act near the Capitol building in Washington on Dec. 5.

A countdown to deportation? Dreamers wait in hope for a legislative fix

Without action from Congress, Paulina Ruiz could face deportation this year. She is one of 800,000 undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children.

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, created under an executive order by President Barack Obama, had protected this group of immigrants, popularly known as Dreamers, since 2012. But in September, President Donald Trump announced that this protection would end on March 5, 2018.

“There are thousands of DACA recipients who have already lost their status as we speak, so now it’s even more urgent for a solution to come about,” said Ms. Ruiz.

Ruiz’s parents brought her to the United States from Chihuahua, Mexico, when she was 6, seeking treatment for her cerebral palsy.

“The medical treatment in Mexico was very costly,” Ruiz says. “There wasn’t much doctors could do to help me have a better, healthy life.” Now, facing the possibility of deportation, she says life back in Mexico for a person with disabilities would be challenging.

“We are ready to fight for a solution, but we are also preparing for the possibility of our [legal] status being lost,” she said of herself and other Dreamers.

As the end of the year approached, it was unclear if Congress would be able to pass legislation to protect them. Kevin Appleby, senior director of international migration policy for the Center for Migration Studies of New York, said the Dreamers’ plight was being overshadowed by other legislative priorities, including a federal spending bill and the final push on the Republican tax plan.

“Every day, 122 DACA recipients [become] exposed to deportation because their qualifications expire. So this is a very urgent issue,” Mr. Appleby said. “Dreamers will be deported to countries they do not know.... Every day that a deal is [put off] you’re going to make more young people go back into the shadows and live in fear.”

There is bipartisan support in Congress and among the general public for a legislative fix. On Dec. 5, 34 House Republicans sent a letter to Speaker Paul Ryan urging Dreamer legislation before the end of the year. And a recent Marist poll found that 83 percent of Americans—and 74 percent of Republicans—believed Dreamers should be allowed to remain in the United States.

“We’re starting to see a growing chorus of individuals who are saying we have to come to the table and find a solution here,” said Ashley Feasley, director of migration policy and public affairs at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

“Every day that we wait, we play with their lives,” said Christopher Kerr, executive director of the Ignatian Solidarity Network. “These are young men and women who are studying, working, have families, and they don’t know where they’re going to be in the next few months. It hurts them, it hurts their families, and it takes away their potential contribution to this country.”

This uncertainty is one Carlos Mendez, 27, who came to the United States with his parents when he was 3, knows well. The filmmaker graduated from California State University-Long Beach and has already produced several documentaries. He also knows the exact number of days before his DACA status expires—409 at the time of his interview with **America**. Many of his friends have fewer.

“I know a lot of people who have 200 or 100. It’s a countdown of what’s going to happen next,” Mr. Mendez says. “Am I going to have to go in the shadows? It’s tough. These are not little kids. These are young adults. They have a family structure, have a mortgage. But now, this can all be torn away.”

J. D. Long-García, senior editor. *Twitter: @JDLongGarcia.*

A U.N. investigation offers a stark assessment of poverty in America

Essentially alone among its peer states in the West, the United States, despite its wealth and advanced technology, has maintained a policy of prolonged indifference to conditions of poverty that is thwarting the advancement of millions of its citizens. That was the stark assessment of Philip Alston, the special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights for the United Nations, in a report issued after the completion of a fact-finding mission in December.

Infant mortality in the United States is “the highest in the developed world”; and owing to inadequate sanitation, “neglected tropical diseases are making a comeback,” he told reporters in Washington on Dec. 15. Because of its failure to provide universal health care and its market-driven model of health care delivery, “Americans can expect to live sicker and shorter lives,” he said, than the citizens of any other advanced economy. Youth poverty in the United States is the highest among the nations of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, “the rich countries’ club,” he added, and “the United States ranks 35 out of 37 in the O.E.C.D. in terms of poverty and inequality.”

Mr. Alston visited pockets of poverty around the country in Alabama, California, Puerto Rico and West Virginia. Much of what he encountered came as a personal shock, he said, measured against the overall wealth of American society.

People in the United States often speak of its egalitarianism and American exceptionalism. They take pride in “the American dream,” he said. But, he warned, “a child who is born into poverty has almost no chance to move out of poverty in the United States today.”

Not far from the site of his press conference, final discussions were taking place on a tax plan that could ultimately mean greater burdens on the poor even as it directs more wealth into the hands of the nation’s richest people. “For a country able to transfer a trillion dollars to its wealthiest not to be talking about taking care of basic health needs is stunning,” he said.

According to international law, he said, “every person has the right to an adequate standard of living and where that seems impossible, it is the role of government to assist them.” A significant challenge to human rights in the United



States emerges out of the problem of unaddressed needs. “I believe that current trends in the United States are actually undermining democracy,” Mr. Alston said. “What we see are the lowest voter turnouts in any developed country; we see overt efforts to disenfranchise people.”

Ultimately the poor in the United States, he warned, are unable to significantly contribute to the political process or influence the policies that affect their lives. A criminalization of poverty through civil fines and penalties and harassment of the homeless, he argued, further exacerbates their disenfranchisement.

The poor in the United States, more than 40 million people, according to the Census Bureau, could easily be able to lead lives with dignity if minimal social commitments were met, according to Mr. Alston. “Surely it’s the



Homeless people organize their belongings in Washington in June 2017.

obligation of a society to ensure basic goods,” he said, pointing out that the poor in America also struggle to get dental care and access mental health services, two other major obstacles to finding the jobs that could lift them out of poverty.

Many of the homeless he met, he said, were suffering from mental health problems or were U.S. military veterans struggling in the aftermath of their service. “In a country like the United States, homelessness could be eliminated pretty quickly.” This is not being done, he said, because Americans simply “don’t want to put the money into it.”

Kevin Clarke, chief correspondent.
Twitter: @ClarkeAtAmerica.



CNS photo / Susana Vera, Reuters

A Rohingya woman holds her infant as she scuffles to receive relief aid on Nov. 28, 2017, in the Kutupalong refugee camp near Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

As Rohingya crisis continues, C.R.S. responds in Bangladesh

On Dec. 5 the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva passed a resolution alleging that crimes against humanity have “very likely” been committed against the Rohingya Muslim minority being driven out of Rakhine State into Bangladesh. As solutions to the crisis continue to be debated, Catholic Relief Services in Bangladesh, supporting Caritas Bangladesh, has been delivering food and critical survival supplies to thousands of Rohingya families.

In mid-November Caroline Brennan, the emergency communications director for C.R.S., traveled to the region to report on conditions in the fast-growing refugee camps.

Based on what she heard from Rohingya refugees, Ms. Brennan said, the nature of the violence they have experienced “is truly beyond imagination.”

While C.R.S. plans for the stabilization of the refugee camps in the coming months, in the near term it will focus on delivering urgent survival aid, according to Ms. Brennan.

More than 620,000 Rohingya villagers have arrived so far. The camps they are throwing together are far from orderly; fresh water and survival supplies are hard to come by; shelter is inadequate.

“But people talk about feeling safe,” Ms. Brennan said. “They can sleep. Their children can make noise. A lot of mothers describe just...begging their children to stay quiet so that they wouldn’t be found as they were crossing fields and forests at night, or even streams at night. So there is at the very least a sense of safety.”

Kevin Clarke, chief correspondent. Twitter: @ClarkeAtAmerica.



Puerto Rico was home to widespread poverty and on the verge of bankruptcy. And that was before Hurricane Maria.

AFTER



Photo: J. D. Long-García

FESTORM

By J. D. Long-García

TODAY, YOU COULD THINK OF OUR HISTORY AS BEFORE AND AFTER HURRICANE MARIA.



José Luis Vázquez, 83, lost his home in a rural town in Puerto Rico. Relief was slow to come to the town as it took weeks to clear debris from the roads.

José Luis Vázquez sought refuge in his daughter's house as Hurricane Maria ravaged the mountainous village of Las Marías, Puerto Rico. The storm snapped bamboo like toothpicks.

Some of his neighbors died when mudslides swept away their homes. After the hurricane had passed, Mr. Vázquez, 83, peeked out the door and saw the roof of his house in the middle of the road.

"I had never experienced anything like that," he says. "We felt the earth shake during that storm. It left the roads covered with trees. We don't expect to have electricity for, I don't know, two years." A tractor driver slid over a cliff and lost his life as he tried to clear debris. It took weeks to clear the roads.

Mr. Vázquez says he has seven children living in the United States. "I haven't spoken to them for years," he says through tears. Reconciliation will have to wait, as telephone lines have been knocked down and Mr. Vázquez cannot afford a cell phone.

Stories like his are common across the island.

"One of the things Hurricane Maria has done is to uncover the great amount of poverty that there is in Puerto Rico, which had been camouflaged by the trees, the leaves, the forest," Archbishop Roberto González Nieves of San Juan says in an interview with **America**. "Now it's all out in the open."

The archbishop welcomed us into his humble office at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in San Juan. His workspace, complete with sugary, strong coffee, water and a refrigerator, also serves as a breakroom for the staff.

Stacks of St. Francis of Assisi and Blessed Oscar Romero prayer cards sit on the archbishop's desk as he speaks. His residence is still without power. The church and parochial school rely on a generator to serve the community.

Yet the parish community is better off than most. Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico on Sept. 20, flooded the coastal valleys and unleashed mudslides in the mountain terrains of the small Caribbean island. The hurricane came at what may have been the worst possible time. The island was still recovering from Hurricane Irma, which hit weeks before Maria. These tragedies only added additional hardship to a territory that since 2006 has been in the middle of a severe economic crisis.

For years the church in Puerto Rico worked to raise awareness of the 60 percent of children who live in poverty on the island, but the efforts met with a disappointing response. "It seems to me that some people, especially [government] leadership, did not believe that the percentage is that high," the archbishop says. "Now, it's unquestionable. It's impossible to not see it." The high level of poverty among the elderly, many of whom rely only on their monthly Social Security check, which typically ranges from \$500 to \$800, has also been laid bare.

"It is very difficult to pay for your medicines and adequate food supply, your rent, your water, electricity," Archbishop González says, adding that the hurricanes have uncovered the island's poverty and unemployment.

'THE WORLD'S OLDEST COLONY'

Murals decorate walls lining Calle Tiburcio Reyes, a street



The damage caused by the hurricanes was an additional hardship for a territory that since 2006 has been in an economic crisis.

in Old San Juan. “The World’s Oldest Colony,” one reads; “PROMESA es Pobreza,” reads another. The latter refers to the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act, which gives power to approve the island’s budget to board members appointed by the president of the United States. The street leads to Castillo San Felipe del Morro, a 16th-century citadel that the Spanish built to defend the island after they conquered it. Santa María Magdalena de Pazzis Cemetery, where remains of prominent Puerto Ricans have been buried for hundreds of years, sits just outside the walls. The hurricanes damaged some of the graves.

El Morro, one of the oldest such structures in the Caribbean, is a symbol of both fortitude and conquest. Columbus encountered Taíno Indians when he arrived here in 1493. While the Spanish adopted some things from the Taínos, like straw huts, hammocks and maracas, the population of the native peoples plummeted not long after the European arrival. Boricua, another name for Puerto Ricans, has its origin in Borikén, the Taíno name for the island.

Columbus renamed the island San Juan Bautista after Jesus’ cousin. After colonists found gold in the river, it was renamed Puerto Rico, or Rich Port. For 400 years, Puerto Rico remained under Spanish rule.

As early as 1868, beginning with an uprising known as The Cry of Lares, separatists began working for the independence of Puerto Rico. Thirty years later, during the Spanish-American War, the United States invaded Puerto Rico. In 1898 Spain ceded the island to U.S. governance through the Treaty of Paris.

According to Nelson Hernández, a history professor at San Juan’s Universidad Sagrado Corazón, Puerto Ricans hoped the United States would grant them more freedom than they had under the Spanish. Perhaps someday they would become an independent nation like Cuba. The U.S. Congress dashed those hopes with the Foraker Act of 1900, which established a U.S.-controlled government in Puerto Rico. While residents would vote for local representatives, they would not have a vote in the U.S. government.

“Through the Foraker Act, the United States absorbed much power,” Mr. Hernández says. “It marks a beginning of U.S. colonization and imperialism.” The law lasted 17 years, during which the promise of independence was not fulfilled, he says.

The Jones-Shafroth Act of 1917 granted Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship and the right to vote in presidential primaries, but residents still do not have an electoral vote or a voting representative in Congress. The Jones Act, also known as the Merchant Marine Act of 1920, mandates that U.S.-flagged ships be used between U.S. ports. Those ships must be built in the United States and staffed by U.S. legal residents. While it benefits U.S.-owned shipping companies, the regulation drives up the cost of imports for Puerto Rico, an island that relied heavily on imports even before the hurricanes.

“It is really strangling us,” Archbishop González says. “If we buy Bibles in Spanish, for example, from Colombia or Peru or wherever, you have to put them on a ship to the United States and then from there to Puerto Rico. So that doubles, triples the cost of the Bibles.”

Mr. Hernández says that in the 1940s Puerto Rico began receiving a series of minor concessions from the United States. In 1948 the island elected its own governor. “But in essence, little changed,” he says. In 1952, the title of Associated Free State of Puerto Rico, known as ELA, an acronym from the Spanish, was adopted when the island drafted its commonwealth constitution.

Puerto Rico’s economy slowly began to pivot from sugar cane, coffee and tobacco to pharmaceuticals and technology manufacturing. Starting in 1976, tax incentives lured more corporations to the island. The incentives ended in 2006, but some economists argue that it helped investors more than Puerto Rico residents.

PUERTO RICO'S SHKINKING POPULATION WILL MAKE RECOVERY EVEN MORE DIFFICULT.

Many believe the loss of incentives led Puerto Rico into a deep recession in 2006, one from which it has yet to recover. Trade agreements, like the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994 and the Dominican Republic–Central American Free Trade Agreement in 2003, weakened Puerto Rico’s exports. Puerto Rico sought bankruptcy protection this year for its \$70-billion debt crisis.

Puerto Rico’s relationship to the U.S. mainland continues to be a contentious issue. A poll conducted this fall found that nearly half of Americans did not know that Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, *The New York Times* reports. This despite the fact that there are more than five million Puerto Ricans living on the U.S. mainland. In 2012 Puerto Ricans voted on statehood for the fourth time. The majority of voters wanted a change from its current status as a commonwealth. Some states, like Massachusetts or Kentucky, refer to themselves as commonwealths. Puerto Rico, while it calls itself a free state in its Spanish-language constitution, is not a commonwealth in that sense, nor is it a state.

Puerto Rico is also referred to as an unincorporated territory, but that name does not fit perfectly either, because Puerto Rico elects its own government. Some economists argue that this mixed relationship with the United



States contributes to the island’s sputtering economy, and resolving it might be a step toward recovery. But, Mr. Hernández says, Hurricanes Irma and Maria have put talk of statehood on hold indefinitely.

MIGRATION TO THE MAINLAND

Hurricane Maria blew the roof off Françoise Cepeda’s two-story house in San Juan. The flooding destroyed the first floor. “What wasn’t ruined from above was wrecked from below,” she says.

The single mother of three young boys has nothing—no furniture, no clothes, no food. In what is left of her home, there is no access to electricity and no water. Her boys—ages 5, 8 and 10—had to change schools because their old one has yet to reopen. Ms. Cepeda spends \$20 a day on public transportation to get them to class on time, and her em-

Archbishop Roberto González Nieves of San Juan says the hurricanes revealed the great amount of poverty in Puerto Rico.



Photo: J.D. Long-García



Photo: J. D. Long-García

The Military Sealift Command hospital ship U.S.N.S. Comfort, pictured in San Juan Bay on Nov. 9, arrived at the island on Oct. 3 to offer aid in the wake of Hurricane Maria.

ployer has not given her hours to work since the hurricane.

“These aren’t the ideal circumstances, but we have to fight through it,” she says. She is standing in front of a Santurce community outreach center supported by Universidad Sagrado Corazón. She will receive clothes, food and toiletries to help her get by. The boys, donning their aqua blue school uniforms, stand close to her. The eldest flicks the ear of the youngest. Even before the hurricane, Ms. Cepeda’s life was far from ideal. She lives in a San Juan neighborhood run by gangs.

Residents there crammed ruined furniture and debris between the cramped cement homes. Mosquitos and flies multiplied after the flooding. Streetlights dangle from broken wooden posts, but they do not come on at night.

Puerto Rico’s population had been steadily growing until 2004, according the U.S. Census Bureau. That year, the population topped out at 3.8 million. Today there are fewer than 3.4 million Puerto Ricans living on the island, and many estimate the number may sink below three million in the aftermath of the hurricane.

Pascual Cubero, a teacher at José Celso Barbosa School in San Juan, says his sister left the island after the hurricane. She returned eventually, but then left again because “she couldn’t take it.” His mother, who lived in rural San Sebastián, left because she could not count on getting access to medication for her diabetes.

“I can get up at 4 a.m., I can go out to look for food, but I can’t expose my mother to that,” Mr. Cubero says, adding that some of his coworkers also left. A number of his students’ homes in San Juan were destroyed.

Many schools in Puerto Rico have yet to reopen, Mr.

Cubero says, and some parents have moved to the U.S. mainland to ensure their children’s education continues. Power and water were restored quickly at Mr. Cubero’s school, however. “We live close to the governor’s house,” he says with a laugh.

The shrinking population will make recovery even more difficult, according to Jorge Iván Vélez-Arocho, president of the Pontifical University of Puerto Rico. The majority of those who have been leaving the island over the years are young. As a result the median age has been steadily increasing, to 36 in 2015 from 18.5 in 1950. There is some fear that the exodus will leave towns abandoned, Mr. Vélez-Arocho says.

“The new generation has confronted the fragility of this island for the first time,” he says from the university campus in Ponce. “The devastation is physical, emotional and social. Puerto Rico has fallen decades behind. More than half of Puerto Rico still does not have electricity. Today, you could think of our history as before and after Maria.”

Yet Mr. Vélez-Arocho also notes that many young people, especially students at the university, have responded to the hurricane with a humanitarian heart. In Guaynabo, a San Juan suburb, Jorge Javier Díaz Sánchez says he has gotten involved with a local group of Puerto Ricans in their 20s who are helping those in need. He has both power and water at his home.

“You have to take to the street and do all you can to help in the rebuilding,” says Mr. Díaz, who drives for Uber. Many are desperate for basic necessities, he says. Mr. Díaz answers a call on speaker as he drives. It is his

mother. She does not have power at her home yet, and she wants him to bring her ice.

WIDESPREAD POVERTY

While there are some wealthy and middle class Puerto Ricans, nearly half live below the poverty level. The median salary is under \$20,000. Father Enrique Camacho, executive director of Caritas Puerto Rico, says many in the middle class were losing their jobs even before the hurricanes.

“We were working very hard because there are many communities that don’t have enough to feed their families. That was before Maria,” Father Camacho says. “The problem with the poverty in Puerto Rico is sometimes you cannot see it directly.”

Visitors to Puerto Rico may be impressed by the highways or high-rise buildings and beaches. But Father Camacho says that going to the mountains or even the poorer neighborhoods in San Juan will reveal a different story.

“People sometimes said, ‘No, Puerto Rico is part of the United States, they are not poor.’ But now, the people are looking at the images [and] seeing that we’re not really rich,” he says. “We are in need and Maria has helped people see that.”

In Punta Santiago, a beach town where Maria first hit the island, winds topped 200 miles per hour. The town was flooded from all directions, from the ocean, rain and nearby rivers, according to Father José Colón, pastor of Nuestra Señora del Carmen.

“They lost everything. They didn’t have anything to eat—some even lost their dentures,” the bearded, spectacled young priest says. “We were battered by the waves from the sea. The church was left standing, so on the second day after the hurricane, we began the process of trying to rebuild Punta Santiago.”

Father Colón says residents were left to sleep on the floor with only the clothes on their back. So on the third day after the hurricane, the church started offering meals.

THE NEXT PUERTO RICO

Despite obstacles, Father Colón believes Puerto Ricans are strong enough for the recovery ahead.

“We’ve so often heard, ‘Puerto Rico will pick itself up.’ But Puerto Rico will only pick itself up when we can do so on our own,” he says. “We’re not asking for handouts. We’re asking for the tools to be able to work. We’ve simply stumbled and fallen. Now we will pick ourselves up and keep

walking. We just need a push.”

Mr. Vélez-Arocho of the Pontifical University of Puerto Rico says that Puerto Rico today is like the field hospital that Pope Francis speaks about: “There are wounded, there are dead, there are those who are leaving.”

The next Puerto Rico should be judged according to Catholic social teaching, he says: It should right past wrongs and be built on sustainability. That includes alternative energy sources that make use of the Caribbean island’s climate, like wind and solar power. The island needs to prepare for future natural disasters, like another hurricane or an earthquake.

“We must be a people that empowers individuals to move from misery to poverty to development,” Mr. Vélez-Arocho says. “There are actions we need to take as we look toward the future so that we do not suffer as we have in the past.”

Father Camacho of Caritas Puerto Rico believes the hurricanes have also revealed something deep inside the spirit of the people. In his relief efforts, he met a formerly homeless person whom Caritas had helped to find shelter.

After the hurricane hit, “he came with a lot of one-dollar bills and nickels and other coins in his socks,” Father Camacho says. The man had brought all his money—\$138—which he had raised recycling cans, even though he was still without electricity, water and food.

“I still have a home,” he told Father Camacho. “So, as I was homeless, I know what people are passing through. So, I want to give this to the people who are in most need.”

In this way, too, Hurricane Maria has revealed something about Puerto Ricans, the priest says. They are people who care for the vulnerable.

“We’ve been passing through difficult moments but very peacefully trying to help each other,” Father Camacho says. “It’s a sign that we are good hearted people, and there is a lot of hope for the future that we are going to construct together.”

J. D. Long-García is a senior editor at America. José Dueño contributed reporting to this story.



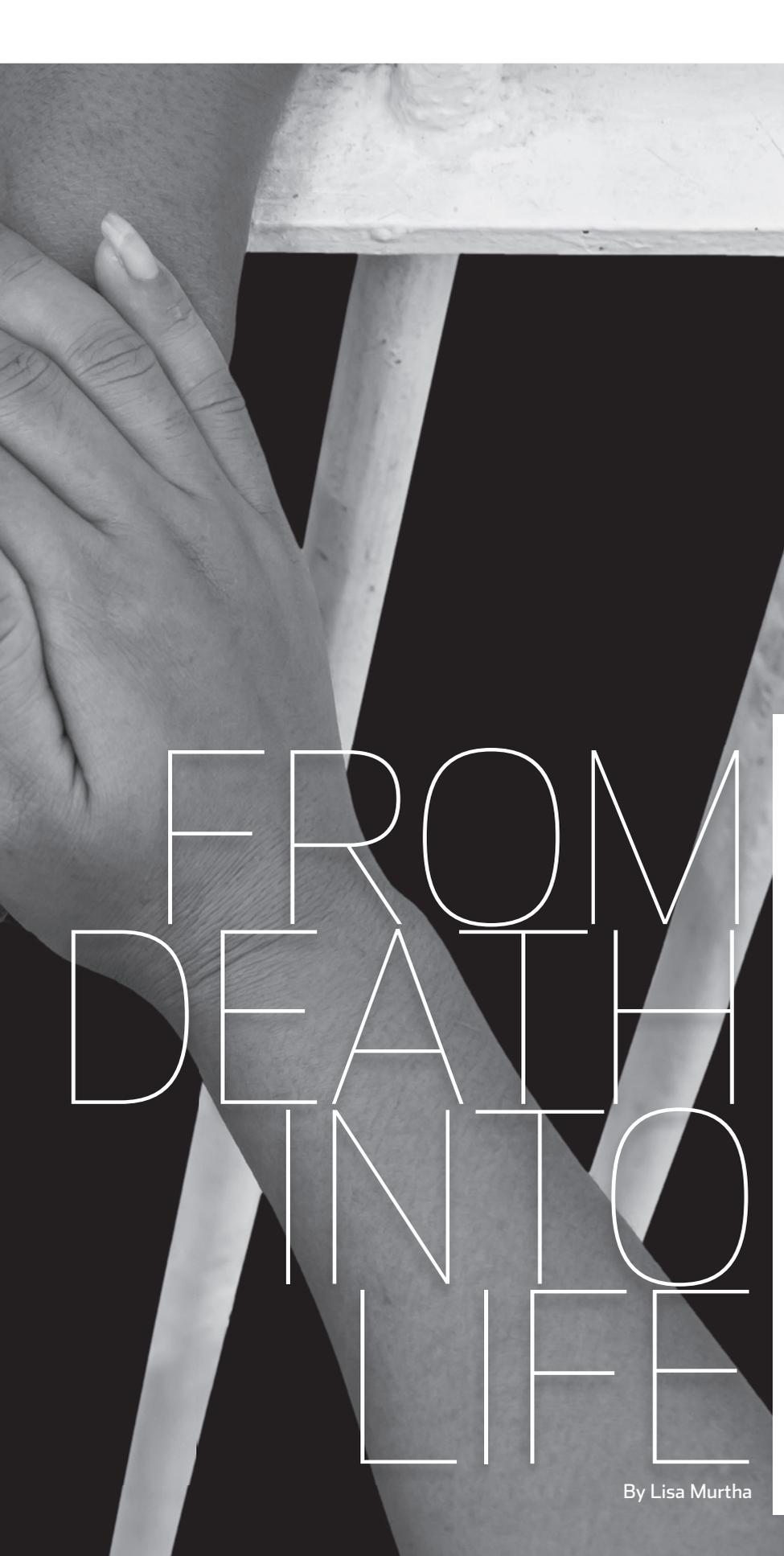
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FROM DEATH INTO LIFE

By Lisa Murtha

Some of the strongest opponents of the death penalty are the family members of victims.

On a warm October day in 1997, 10-year-old Jeffrey Curley hopped into a car in Cambridge, Mass., with two men, lured by the promise of a new bike. It was the final ride of his life. His abductors tortured and killed the boy before dumping his body in a river. They were eventually caught and found guilty, and they both received hefty prison sentences. The death penalty was not an option because Massachusetts abolished it in 1984. Bob Curley, Jeffrey's father, was crushed with despair over the loss of his son, a feeling only aggravated by what he believed to be a lack of justice in such a disturbing case. That despair led him on an emotional, yearslong crusade to reinstate capital punishment in his state. "I really felt the death penalty might prevent something like this from happening [again]," he said.

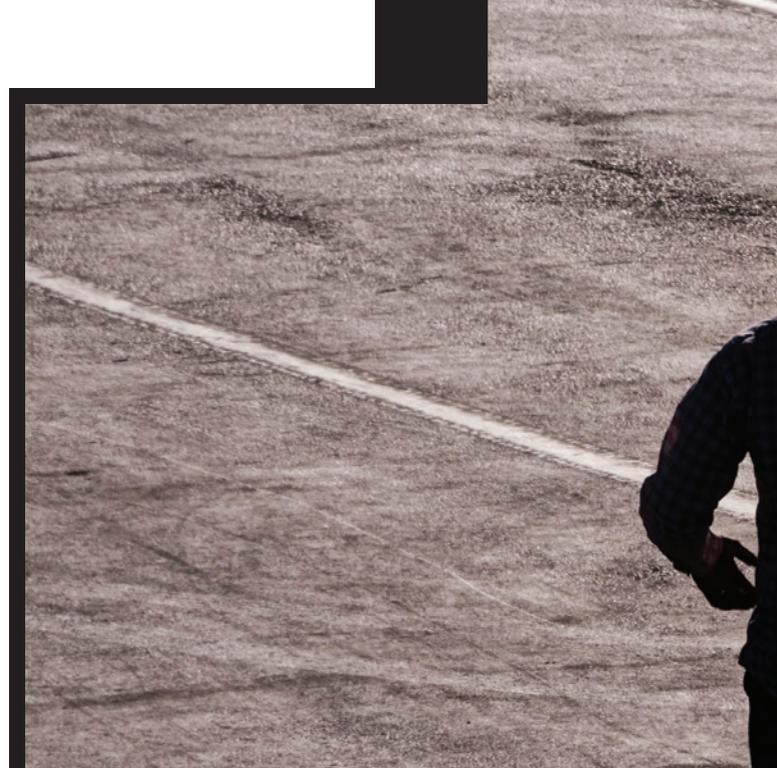
THERE IS NO SINGLE RESPONSE FROM FAMILY MEMBERS OF MURDER VICTIMS. ”

By the time Mr. Curley stepped up to a Boston College podium in 2001, he was well known as a Cambridge mechanic and father of three who had fulfilled his promise to fight publicly and passionately in favor of the death penalty. But the man who spoke that day had a different message—one he had first shared publicly just days before, on a local television program.

At Boston College, Mr. Curley was addressing the first nationwide conference held by Murder Victims Families for Reconciliation, a group whose mission statement is to mobilize “victim families and help them tell their stories in ways that disrupt and dismantle the death penalty and create pathways for wholeness, reconciliation and restoration.” At the conference, Mr. Curley spoke of his personal transformation, one that included turning away from fury and vengeance. After Jeffrey’s killers were sentenced, Mr. Curley found himself wondering whether asking for the death penalty for his son’s killers—a sentence fraught with its own injustices, both legal and moral—was, in fact, disrespectful to his son’s memory.

His transformation gained momentum two years later, when he met and debated against Bud Welch, a death penalty abolitionist whose daughter, Julie, had been killed in the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995 and who fought ardently against the death penalty even as one of Julie’s murderers faced it. It was a transformation that finally landed Mr. Curley, four years after his son’s death, in that Boston College auditorium, where he would speak out decisively against capital punishment.

In many ways, Mr. Curley’s winding path mirrors that of the United States as a whole. Although the death penalty has been legal since our country’s inception, Americans have embraced it in varying degrees over the years. Executions peaked at 197 in 1935, dipped down to one in 1966 (a



year when just 42 percent of Americans supported the death penalty, according to Gallup) and rose again to 98 in 1999, with roughly 70 percent of Americans supporting capital punishment. So far in 2017, 23 out of 2,843 people on death row in the United States have been executed (up slightly from the total of 20 in 2016), and Pew and Gallup polls show public support for the death sentence at 49 percent and 60 percent, respectively. In other words, the country is once again “in the midst of a climate change on its views about the death penalty,” says Robert Dunham, the executive director of the Death Penalty Information Center.

Discussions on the relevance of capital punishment usually center on whether it serves as a deterrent or whether there are any other means of administering adequate justice, especially in the case of heinous crimes. But one thing discussions of capital punishment do not often address is how death sentences affect the people who are left behind—the victims’ families.

These are people who know firsthand the pain and suffering of losing a child or parent or extended family member to a shocking and heartless crime. Their own lives have sometimes crumbled in the aftermath. They have lost sleep, homes, jobs, marriages, emotional stability and even sanity. Some have forgiven the perpetrators, some have not. Either way, they live daily with the knowledge of the suffering and pain their family members endured. Collectively, they have every right by U.S. law to ask prosecutors to seek the harshest possible punishment. And yet, a growing group is doing the exact opposite. They are advocating for the killers’ lives.



Photo: iStock

The reasons for opposition to the death penalty among victims' families span a wide range, from faith-based forgiveness to worry over the possibility of wrongful conviction to concerns about the exorbitant cost of the decades-long judicial process to the belief that criminals should be given the opportunity to change. But another compelling and less discussed reason is that for many, the death penalty provides neither the closure nor the healing that legal and political systems oftentimes promise. Instead, a growing number of victims' families are saying it inhibits that healing.



The first days after Marietta Jaeger Lane's 7-year-old daughter, Susie, was abducted—she was torn from the family's tent while sleeping during a camping trip in Montana in 1973—were an excruciating blur. By the time police began dragging a nearby river in search of Susie's body roughly two weeks later, Ms. Lane's anger had only grown. "I went to bed saying to my husband: 'Even if the kidnapper were to bring Susie back alive and well this moment, I still could kill him with my bare hands,'" she says. "I meant it with every fiber of my being."

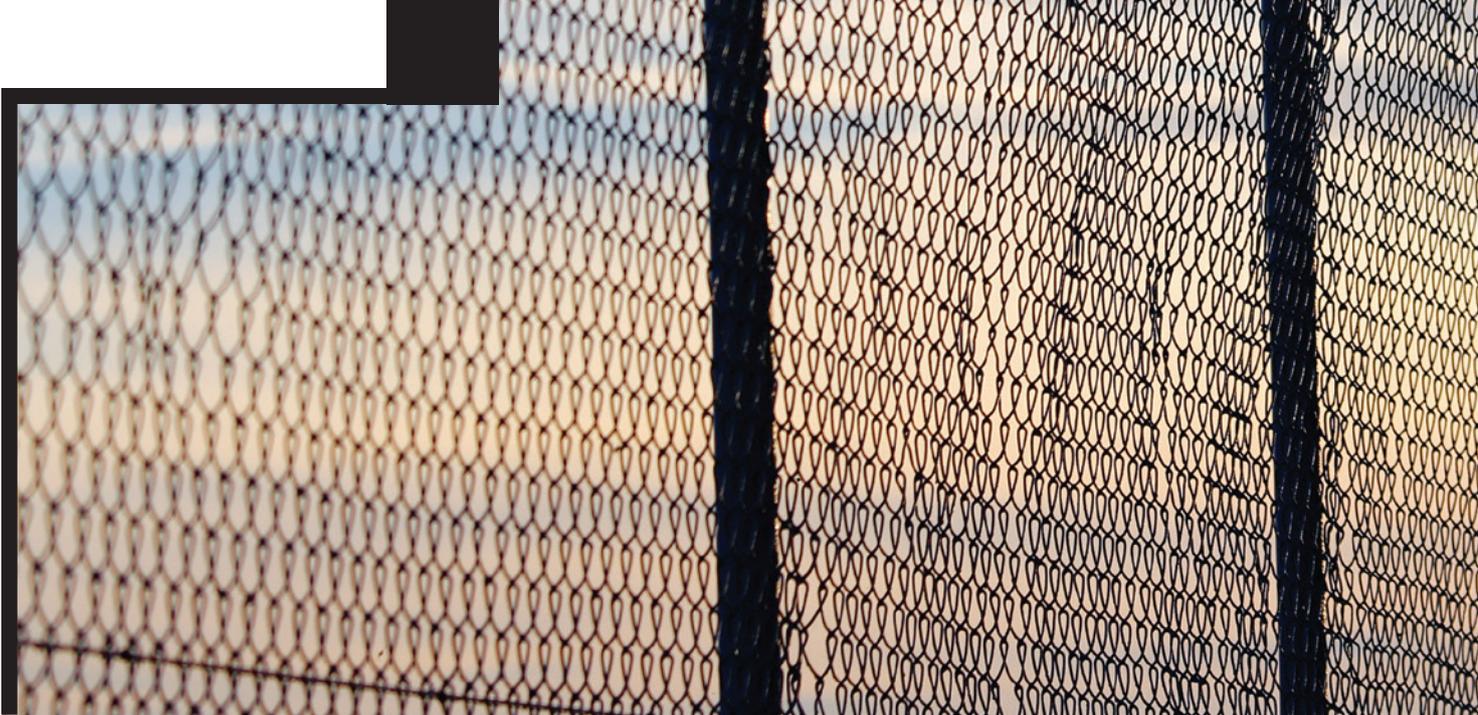
Mr. Dunham of the Death Penalty Information Center emphasizes that "there is no single response from family members of murder victims" regarding the death penalty; but he says, if you talk to enough of them, a common theme emerges in the way they process the death. Ms. Lane says that initially many people are consumed with near-unbearable sorrow, rage and a natural "desire for revenge."

Mr. Curley agrees. In fact, he says, "I don't really know how I could feel any other way than to be in favor of the death penalty at a time like that."

For many murder victims' families, this stage of grief is as far as they can go. Consider the family and friends of 3-year-old Sheila Marie Evans, who was raped and beaten to death by her mother's boyfriend, Ronald Phillips, in Akron, Ohio, in 1993. Twenty-four years after her death, they maintained a Facebook page dedicated to Sheila Marie and filled with calls for executing Phillips. When he was finally put to death last July, the status was updated to say: "Fly high sweet Sheila. He will forever rot in Hell..."

The unfortunate reality of the death sentence in the United States today, though, is that it is not an end for most victims' families. Instead, it is the beginning of a yearslong and often decades-long process that can leave families in a nearly permanent state of emotional limbo as they await a promised justice. This is mostly due to inmates' appeals, which have increased in number. Between 1984 and 2012, the average time a prisoner spent between sentencing and execution rose from just over six years to nearly 16; today, some wait three decades or more for a resolution. In the meantime, says Ms. Lane, "the families of the victims are waiting 30 years for quote-unquote closure. All that time the family is having their wounds opened again and again, listening to the ugly stories again and again."

That concept of closure is precisely what many politicians and prosecutors promise grieving families when they seek the death penalty on their behalf. But "that is a false promise," wrote Ami Lyn White, whose mother was murdered when Ms. White was 5 years old. "[N]o amount



of killing will bring my mom back,” she wrote in a Houston Chronicle Op-Ed, published on Oct. 18. Mr. Curley agrees. “There is no such thing as closure in a situation like this,” he says. “It’s something that’s always going to be with you, a significant trauma you have to manage.”

In 2016 alone, five different victims’ families in multiple states spoke out against the death penalty in publications ranging from Missouri’s Columbia Daily Tribune to Vox to Time magazine. Their reasons varied widely. One learned how profoundly the murderer had changed in prison, another just wanted the appeals to stop and another discovered that the men originally convicted of the crime were actually innocent. The fact is, say many family members, that to truly move forward after experiencing horrific loss one must find paths to healing outside the legal system. It involves moving decisively away from the “powerful emotions” of anger and hatred, says Mr. Curley, which can lead survivors down “a bad path.” This is why he and others share their stories; they want to help others understand that authentic healing after violent crime and murder comes only from within.

Ms. Lane is now a public speaker on forgiveness and co-founder of Journey of Hope, an anti-death penalty organization run by family members of murder victims. The same night that she, a lifelong practicing Catholic, went to sleep wanting to kill her daughter’s abductor, Ms. Lane had what she calls “a wrestling match with God.” No matter how hard she argued for her feelings of anger and rage, she says, “God just kept calling to me, very gently and persistently: ‘But that’s not how I want you to feel.’” Finally, she “surrendered [and] did the only thing I could do, which was [give] God permission to change my heart.”

She says she started by “reminding myself on a daily basis that however I felt about this person, in God’s eyes he had dignity and worth.” Without knowing where her daughter was or who had her or even what they were doing to her, she began to pray for the person who abducted Susie. “I tried to be really authentic and not just say words but really feel them,” she says.

Bill Pelke, co-founder and president of Journey of Hope, lost his grandmother, Ruth Pelke, in 1985. The 78-year-old woman was brutally murdered in her own home by a group of teen girls looking to steal cash. In November 1986, four months after a 15-year-old was sentenced to death for his grandmother’s murder, Mr. Pelke—a practicing Christian who says he “didn’t have much of an opinion on the death penalty” at first—was sitting in the cab of a crane at Bethlehem Steel, where he worked, when he had a revelation similar to Ms. Lane’s. “God touched my heart,” Mr. Pelke says. “That night I was convinced, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that my grandmother would have had love and compassion for Paula Cooper [the convicted killer] and her family and that she wanted me to have that same sort of love and compassion. I learned the most important lesson of my life that night. I realized I didn’t have to see somebody else die in order to bring healing from Nana’s death.”

Even for Catholics, forgiveness in the case of brutal murder is a tough sell. “When the church says the unborn should not be aborted, almost all Catholics are willing to get on board about that,” says the Rev. John Gillespie, pastor of Florida’s San Sebastian Church and friend of the Rev. Rene Robert, who was abducted and murdered in 2016 by a man Father Robert knew. But “if you buy into that and sit with it for a little while, it begins to spread, multiply and



Photo: iStock

grow. It transgresses boundaries. You start to say: ‘If all lives are sacred to God, what about the terminally ill? Prisoners of war? A starving person in the slums? Someone who has murdered someone else?’”

Like Mr. Pelke and Ms. Lane, many who oppose the death penalty cite their Christian faith as a crucial driving force behind their opinions. But in a country where nearly 25 percent of citizens do not identify as Christians, this cannot be the only motivator in an effective case against the practice. “I tell people you don’t have to be Christian to forgive,” says Mr. Pelke, noting there are both Buddhist and agnostic members of Journey of Hope. “All a person has to know how to do is love.”

A study published in the *Marquette Law Review* in 2012 compared family members of murder victims in Minnesota, which does not have the death penalty, to those in Texas, where the death penalty is a viable sentencing option. “They followed people from the time the legal proceedings commenced through the completion of the appeal, either by the death penalty being taken off the table or execution occurring,” says Mr. Dunham. “What they found was that the family members of murder victims in Minnesota were physically, psychologically and emotionally more healthy at all stages of the proceedings than their counterparts in Texas.”

Anti-death penalty advocates also point to concerns about racial profiling and poor legal representation for defendants without means. Additional concerns include the fact that what warrants a death sentence versus life in prison can vary from state to state and even person to person. Those inconsistencies, in part, led the Supreme Court to place a four-year moratorium on executions and new death penalty sentences in 1972. They are also what ultimately led Mr. Curley, a Catholic who says his “religion didn’t come into play as far

as my thinking on the death penalty,” to do an about-face and come out publicly against capital punishment.

The two cases that made Mr. Curley change his mind were those of Manny Babbit and Ted Kaczynski. Mr. Babbit was a poor African-American Vietnam War veteran and Purple Heart recipient (and paranoid schizophrenic), who murdered an elderly woman from Sacramento, Calif., in 1980. Mr. Kaczynski, better known as “the Unabomber,” was a Harvard-educated, Caucasian “man of means” (Mr. Curley’s term), who killed three people by mail bombs in the 1970s, ’80s and ’90s and injured 23 more. Both men were turned in to authorities by their brothers. Mr. Kaczynski “killed more people than Manny,” notes Mr. Curley, but received an arguably lighter sentence. Mr. Babbit was executed in a California prison in 1999, and Mr. Kaczynski was sentenced to life in prison without possibility of parole.

...

Seven states have abolished the death penalty since 2000, which brings the running total to 19. If more follow suit, Mr. Dunham notes, “the Supreme Court will have to consider whether a national consensus has developed against the death penalty as a whole.” In the meantime, the death penalty is in a sort of legal limbo; it is available in 31 states but not widely sought. There were only 31 new death sentences issued in 2016, down from 49 in 2015. The number of death sentences has declined yearly since 1999, when 279 were issued.

Reasons for this downturn include considerations about the lengthy appeals process and the increasing



IT'S A MATTER OF HOW DO I BEST HONOR MY LITTLE GIRL'S MEMORY.

cost of such proceedings. A 2014 Forbes article stated that death penalty cases, tried or not, can cost anywhere from \$470,000 to \$1 million more than other cases and that housing a prisoner on death row can cost over two times more per year than housing a prisoner in the general prison population. Public awareness is also growing around the worrisome number of wrongful convictions (the D.P.I.C. website reports, "Since 1973, more than 155 people have been released from death row with evidence of their innocence.") and the need for an "improved quality of representation" for defendants, says Mr. Dunham. It also helps, he notes, that "life without parole is an alternative sentence in every death penalty state, so a prosecutor who simply wanted to ensure the defendant would not return to the streets has an alternate mechanism for doing that."

Organizations like Journey of Hope and Murder Victims Families for Reconciliation remain heavily focused on what is best for victims' families, holding up people like Ms. Lane, Mr. Pelke and Mr. Curley to powerfully illustrate how a changed mind-set can lead to healing and near-miraculous emotional achievements.

At 2 a.m. on the one-year anniversary of Susie's abduction, the man who had abducted Ms. Lane's daughter called Ms. Lane to taunt her. When she answered the phone and heard his voice, even she was shocked by her reaction to the man she had once wanted to kill. "To my own surprise and amazement," Ms. Lane says, "I was filled with genuine feelings of concern and compassion" for the man who had taken her daughter. She spoke to him for nearly an hour and a half, asking how he was and if she could help him in any way. He broke down in tears. At the F.B.I.'s request, she later met him face-to-face. Her encounters with him helped police solve Susie's case (they learned she had been murdered and cannibalized after being kidnapped and



Photo courtesy of Bill Pelke

raped) as well as the abduction and murder cases of other victims. For Ms. Lane, being against the death penalty is not just about adhering to Catholic teachings. "It's a matter of how do I best honor my little girl's memory," she says. "I just think she deserves a more noble and honorable and beautiful memorial than a cold-blooded, state-sanctioned, premeditated killing of a defenseless chained man or woman."

For the families involved in support groups, the healing comes not only through their advocacy for justice and reconciliation, but from their new understanding of community and in the ability to connect with others who have had similar experiences. Mr. Curley received a phone call from Bud Welch almost immediately after he announced on that local talk show that he no longer supported the death penalty. Mr. Welch happened to be in the Boston area that same week, for the M.V.F.R. conference at Boston College. He was so moved by the testimony that he asked Mr. Curley to speak at the conference, at the last minute, about his change of heart. By multiple accounts, Mr. Curley's speech was so moving that the audience was brought to tears. Mr. Curley also met both Ted Kaczynski's and Manny Babbit's brothers at the event—"the two stories that made me change my view of the death penalty," he says.

"How did this all come together?" Mr. Curley wonders today. "How do I meet these two people at the Boston College conference that I had no idea was going on? What made me all of a sudden decide that I wanted to get this off my chest, that I was opposed to the death penalty? And the thing to this day that just blows my mind is that was Jeffrey's birthday, June 9. How does this happen? It's got to be something bigger than us."

When asked now what he would tell someone going through a similar loss, Mr. Curley pauses, then says: "The best advice I give is the best advice I got: It's bad enough

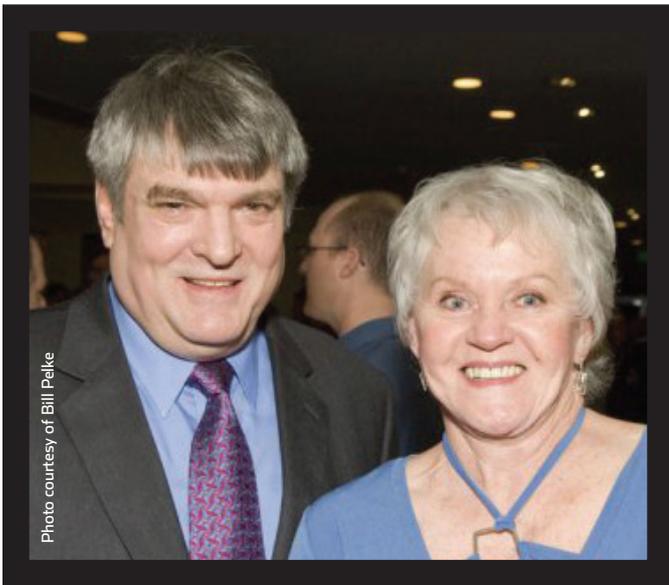


Photo courtesy of Bill Pelke

Bill Pelke and Marietta Lane founded Journey of Hope, an anti-death penalty organization, after each lost family members to murder. Pelke's grandmother (photo on opposite page), was killed in 1985.

that person took your loved one's life away. Don't let them take your life. Don't let them take control of you [or] give them any power. Don't let them kill your spirit."

Mr. Pelke expressed similar determination. Following his grandmother's death, he embarked on a yearslong journey not only to overturn the death sentence of his grandmother's killer but also to befriend and support the young woman, who had grown up in an abusive home. "While she was on death row we exchanged letters every 10 days," says Mr. Pelke. He pledged to "walk hand-in-hand with her to the death chamber" if she ended up being executed and spoke extensively here and abroad in support of anti-death penalty petitions on the perpetrator's behalf. Eventually, over two million people worldwide signed those petitions. That, together with personal interventions from Pope John Paul II, helped convince Indiana legislators to commute her sentence to 60 years in prison.

Nearly 3,000 people are currently on death row in U.S. prisons today. So far, Ohio, Texas, Alabama and Missouri all have plans to execute inmates in 2018. And so the families continue in their fight, in their faith, in their healing—and in their questioning. Perhaps the best argument of all against the death penalty comes in the form of a question frequently posed by Mr. Pelke: "Why do we kill people to show people that killing people is wrong?"

Lisa Murtha is an award-winning freelance journalist based in southwest Ohio. She is also a lifelong Catholic, wife of 21 years and the mother of three teen-age boys.

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Sister Antona Ebo's lifelong struggle against white supremacy, inside and outside the Catholic Church

By Shannen Dee Williams

On Nov. 11, the Catholic Church lost a moral titan in the long struggle for racial equality and justice in the United States. The life of Mary Antona Ebo, F.S.M., should be noted and mourned by all Catholics concerned with fighting white supremacy and building more inclusive communities.

Although her name may not be as recognizable as those of Servant of God Mary Lange, Venerable Henriette Delille, St. Katharine Drexel or the indomitable Sister Thea Bowman, Sister Ebo, during her 93 years, broke a host of seemingly insurmountable racial barriers within the church. A member of the Sisters of St. Mary (later the Franciscan Sisters of Mary) for 71 years, she was also one of the most visible links between Catholicism and the modern civil rights movement.

In 1965, Sister Ebo—then a 40-year-old nurse and the director of medical records at St. Mary's (Colored) Infirmary in St. Louis, Mo.—cemented her place in U.S. history when she traveled with an ecumenical delegation from St. Louis to Selma, Ala., to demonstrate in support of black voting rights. As the only black nun in the interracial group and the first of two black sisters who marched in Selma, Sister Ebo's presence drew a substantial amount of attention.

So, too, did her statements to the press on March 10, 1965, during a confrontation with local police forces. Surrounded by a group of black ministers, who had singled her out from the St. Louis delegation, Sister Ebo declared to reporters: "I am here because I am a Negro, a nun, a Catholic, and because I want to bear witness.... I'm here today because yesterday [in Saint Louis] I voted."

When questions arose from the crowd about her racial heritage, Sister Ebo simply smiled and stated calmly, "Yes, I am a Negro, and I am very proud of it."

While histories of the Selma protest and tributes to Sister Ebo's life have generally ignored her impromptu declaration of black pride, it said more about her journey than most have realized. For as much as Sister Ebo's statement was rooted in celebrating her family's survival of chattel slavery (Ebo's ex-slave grandfather took the surname of his known African ancestors following emancipation), it was also deeply influenced by her life under Jim Crow segregation. Indeed, long before the savage violence of "Bloody Sunday" called her to Selma, Sister Ebo endured a lifetime of hardships marked by great personal tragedies, crushing poverty and virulent antiblack racism.



Sister Mary Antona Ebo, center left, at the civil rights march in Selma, Ala., on March 10, 1965, died on Nov. 11 at the Sarah Community in Bridgeton, Mo., at age 93.



St. Louis Post-Dispatch



Sister Ebo risked her well-being to participate in the legendary 1965 civil rights protest in Selma, Ala.

Breaking Barriers

Before she was Sister Mary Antona, she was “Betty.” On April 10, 1924, Elizabeth Louise Ebo was born to Daniel and Louise (Teal) Ebo in Bloomington, Ill. When she was 4 years old, Ebo suffered her first major tragedy when her mother, then just 29 years old, died during pregnancy. The Ebo family suffered another devastating blow a few years later during the Great Depression, when Daniel lost his position as a janitor at the local public library. Unable to support his children or make mortgage payments on the family home, Daniel eventually placed Ebo and her two siblings in the city’s McLean County Home for Colored Children, where Ebo lived on and off from 1930 to 1942.

Though raised Baptist, Ebo was drawn to Catholicism during two extended hospital stays in her adolescent years, first at St. Joseph Hospital in Bloomington, Ill., administered by the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis, and later the Fairview Sanatorium in Normal, Ill. Intrigued by the spirituality of the kind lay workers at St. Joseph, Ebo requested to receive religious instruction from a visiting priest while she was hospitalized with tuberculosis at Fairview. She soon was received into the Catholic Church.

Following her recovery, Ebo became the first African-American admitted to Holy Trinity High School in Bloomington, and upon her graduation, she sought to enter a Catholic nursing school. But her applications were rejected solely on the basis of race. Distraught, Ebo eventually enrolled at St. Mary’s (Colored) Infirmary Training School in St. Louis, the nation’s first and only black Catholic nursing school. In 1944, the Sisters of St. Mary, who administered the school, received federal subsidies and began training women as nurses as a part of the war effort. That same year, Ebo entered the all-black nursing school on a full-tuition scholarship as a nurse cadet.

Called to religious life after her conversion, Ebo was first encouraged to enter the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the nation’s first successful order of black nuns, since no white sisterhoods in Illinois or Missouri accepted black candidates. But when Ebo learned that the Sisters of St. Mary were considering lifting their ban on black members, she held out. In July of 1946, Ebo became one of the first three African-American women accepted into the historically German order.

Their admission, however, did not translate into immediate or sincere acceptance.

Pioneering Sister

Like many pioneering black sisters in white orders, Ebo endured unconscionable discrimination from her white counterparts and superiors. The Sisters of St. Mary built a separate novitiate for its first black candidates to ensure segregation in the dining, training and social interactions of the community. The white superiors also initially barred their black members from entering the motherhouse. On June 9, 1947, Ebo and the four other black members of the order professed their first vows in a segregated ceremony at which the archbishop of St. Louis officiated.

But no experience of racism had a more formative impact on Ebo than an incident not long after she entered the order. During her father’s final illness, a white sister refused to admit Daniel, who had moved to St. Louis, into their all-white hospital, where Ebo was then working. Ebo later learned that the white sister callously dismissed her father’s pleas that his daughter was a member of the order and had been granted permission to care for him. For Ebo, her father’s death shortly thereafter in a different hospital proved almost too much to bear. It also forced her to face the ugly truth that race generally superseded faith in the minds and hearts of her white counterparts and superiors, who offered no rebuke to the offending white sister.

Despite such fierce resistance to her presence in the order, Ebo refused to abandon God’s call on her life or accept white supremacy as normal in the church.

In addition to fighting to halt the humiliating practices of segregation in her community in the 1950s, Ebo gained a reputation for her outspokenness about racial injustice in secular society. After watching footage of the violence on Selma’s “Bloody Sunday,” Ebo told the black women employees at St. Mary’s, “I would go to Selma if I wasn’t wearing this habit.” But when her superiors selected Ebo as one of the two sisters asked to join the St. Louis delegation, Ebo, who was fearful of

the violent repercussions that she might face as a black nun, initially hesitated. “I didn’t want to be a martyr,” Ebo later reflected. “But it was either put up or shut up.”

While Selma proved to be an important turning point in Ebo’s life, it was by no means the end of her fight against systemic racism. In 1967, Ebo became the first African-American woman to administer a hospital in the United States when she was selected to become the executive director of St. Clare Hospital in Baraboo, Wis.

Following the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, Ebo aimed to become more active in the secular fight for racial justice and applied for a position with the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice in Chicago. Although she lost out on the job to a white sister, Ebo learned during the interview about an impending gathering of the nation’s black sisters in Pittsburgh, Pa. (Although Ebo’s S.S.M. superiors had received the invitation to send their black members to the historic meeting, they chose not to inform their eight black sisters.) In addition to confronting her superiors about their actions, Ebo wrote directly to the meeting’s organizer and secured a spot on the speaker’s platform.

Like many black Catholics, Ebo knew all too well that many in the church—like those who led the anti-desegregation protests in New Orleans and those who violently protested open housing across the North and Midwest—were just as responsible for fomenting the racial hatred that killed Dr. King as anyone else.

Unholy Discrimination

In mid-August of 1968, Ebo joined 154 black sisters from across the country for a weeklong gathering at Mount Mercy College in Pittsburgh, Pa., (now Carlow University) to discuss their place in the burgeoning black revolution and to confront longstanding racism in their church, especially female religious life. During this first meeting of the National Black Sisters’ Conference, Ebo, who was elected to the organization’s first executive board, joined with the members of the nation’s historically black and white sisterhoods in recounting their often horrific experiences of racism in the church.

When scores of black sisters began defecting from religious life in protest against enduring discrimination, Ebo vowed to remain in her order and fight the racism deeply embedded in the church. She served as the N.B.S.C. president from 1980 to 1982. In 1989, Ebo won the N.B.S.C.’s Harriet Tubman Award for her outstanding service and leadership.

In her later years, Ebo, a cancer survivor and recipient of



Sister Ebo speaks with a student at a St. Louis high school in 2013.

CNS photo/Lisa Johnston, St. Louis Review

six honorary doctorates, remained a staunch advocate of racial justice and inclusion. It should come as no surprise that Ebo was among the first representatives of the church to go to the streets of Ferguson, Mo., in support of its protesting citizens following the murder of Michael Brown Jr. and the militarization of police forces against them. Speaking to a camera crew in Ferguson, Ebo reminded them: “You are not here to take a superficial picture.... You are going to raise the rug up and look at what’s under the rug.”

Ebo died at the Sarah Community in Bridgeton, Mo., on Nov. 11, 2017, which was Veteran’s Day. Like so many unsung black sisters in American history, Sister Antona Ebo’s herculean faith and sacrifices in the moral war for racial equality serve as painful but necessary reminders that the Catholic Church was never an innocent bystander in the history and practice of white supremacy. Segregation, like slavery, was also a Catholic tradition, and white Catholics were among the most violent opponents of racial equality and justice.

Ebo’s story, however, also embodies what many scholars have called the “uncommon faithfulness” of black Catholics, and black religious women specifically, in the face of unholy discrimination. As tributes to her life continue to be published, it is imperative that we remember and tell her whole story and those of the structures of antiblack racism that painfully shaped her journey. Ebo’s life and legacy are proof that remaining silent about white supremacy and the violence that it always engenders must never be an option, especially among those who call themselves Christians.

Shannen Dee Williams is an assistant professor of history at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. She is currently completing a manuscript for the first historical survey of black Catholic sisters in the United States. Sister Mary Antona Ebo’s story was the first oral testimony collected by Prof. Williams.



A Catholic Media Trinity: McLuhan, Ong and Warhol

By Nick Ripatrazone



All oracles must divine from somewhere, and Marshall McLuhan's source was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.

Also in 1967 Andy Warhol created a silkscreen portfolio of Marilyn Monroe. "The more you look at the same exact thing," Warhol said, "the more the meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel."

McLuhan, Ong and Warhol offered a profound vision of media, a Catholic vision. Their Catholicism was not incidental to their theories and their art; it was their structure, their spirit and their sustenance. Fifty years later, their simultaneous creations feel somehow both particular to their moment and prescient. We might even call them transcendent.

All oracles must divine from somewhere, and McLuhan's source was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. Teilhard had conceived of the "noösphere," an evolutionary phase in which a "thinking skin" covers the world. This "stupendous thinking machine" of a collective consciousness sounds much like a biological internet. Now imagine how Teilhard's wild theory sounded to an academic like McLuhan, a literary scholar seeking patterns and connections in the history of media and communication.

McLuhan had written the former **America** editor C. J. McNaspy, S.J., of his intellectual plan: "We must confront the secular in its most confident manifestations, and, with its own terms and postulates, to shock it into awareness of its confusion, its illiteracy, and the terrifying drift of its logic. There is no need to mention Christianity. It is enough that it be known that the operator is a Christian."

Even that, it seems, was trouble.

Although McLuhan's conception of the "global village" created from technology was clearly indebted to Teilhard's noösphere—consider lines like "the evolutionary process has shifted from biology to technology in an eminent degree since electricity"—he shied from acknowledging the French Jesuit's work. In his book *Hooking Up*, the writer Tom Wolfe offers two reasons for this. As a Catholic convert, McLuhan was "highly devout," and "the Church had declared Teilhard's work heterodox." And despite McLuhan's private aspirations in his letters, he was a member of the secular intellectual community and had to avoid overt religious references.

The Medium Is the Massage is the work of a theorist at play. The book contains mini-essays, prose poems and typographic puzzles, juxtaposed with complementary and contrasting images, photographs, drawings, clippings from media and excerpts from James Joyce (the book was a collaboration with graphic designer Quentin Fiore). Although McLuhan's particular focus was on television, he was clear that "all media work us over completely." (Hence the *massage*: We are rubbed and relaxed by media. We enter another state.)

In the electric river of television, "information pours upon us, instantaneously and continuously." As a viewer, "images are projected at you. You are the screen. The images wrap around you. You are the vanishing point." If "electric technology fosters and encourages unification and involvement," it also disallows escape.

"I make probes," wrote Marshall McLuhan. "I don't explain—I explore." In 1967 he published *The Medium Is the Massage*, an eccentric journey into how our senses experience electric media. That same year, Walter Ong, S.J.—whose graduate thesis adviser happened to be McLuhan—released *The Presence of the Word*, a dense but visionary take on our evolution from oral to electronic communication.

Image: Getty Images



The Jesuit Walter Ong's insights have proven predictive of our digital present.

The digital world is not going anywhere, and neither are we.

McLuhan's detractors are skeptical of his pithy lines. He would smirk at their condemnations. McLuhan had a particular ability to look a bit askew at the world and distill the world into sly, aphoristic lines—much like tweets. His truncated sentences are not quite lyrical enough to be poetry, but they can seem as if they are cribbed from rambling prayers.

Those prayers, probes, pleas—whatever you would like to call them—are best understood through his context as a Catholic. That identity slowly became more obvious as McLuhan responded to both praise and critiques of his work. After quipping, “I have been bitterly reproached by my

Catholic confrères for my lack of scholastic terminology and concepts,” he proceeded to offer a firm public stance: “The Christian concept of the mystical body—all men as members of the body of Christ—this becomes technologically a fact under electronic conditions.”

McLuhan's largely playful *The Medium Is the Massage* existed within a larger tension in his work: Should we fear or embrace the digital era? In one interview, he sounded hopeful: “The computer thus holds out the promise of a technologically engendered state of universal understanding and unity, a state of absorption in the logos that could knit mankind into one family and create a perpetuity of collective harmony and peace. This is the real use of the computer, not to expedite mar-

keting or solve technical problems but to speed the process of discovery and orchestrate terrestrial—and eventually galactic—environments and energies.”

Channeling Teilhard, McLuhan concluded: “Psychic communal integration, made possible at last by the electronic media, could create the universality of consciousness foreseen by Dante when he predicted that men would continue as no more than broken fragments until they were unified into an inclusive consciousness. In a Christian sense, this is merely a new interpretation of the mystical body of Christ; and Christ, after all, is the ultimate extension of man.”

Yet in private McLuhan was more cautious. In a letter to Jacques Maritain, he rewinds back to his earlier

Image: Wikimedia Commons

Birdwatching

By Michael Angel Martín

theories about Gutenberg's invention. Although the printing press led to mass reproduction, in that time the "individual thought of himself as a fragmented entity." Distance still had to be covered, and distance meant delay. Now, "the electric-oriented person thinks of himself as tribally inclusive of all mankind." That could be good. But McLuhan had other ideas: "Electric information environments being utterly ethereal fosters the illusion of the world as spiritual substance. It is now a reasonable facsimile of the mystical body, a blatant manifestation of the Anti-Christ. After all, the Prince of this World is a very great electric engineer."

McLuhan's ideas are often porous and therefore so often misunderstood. He was a disruptor. Yet his ultimate goal was not the "opaquities and obliquities" of value judgments, but rather he was "interested in understanding processes." McLuhan was inspirational, and that can be clearly seen in the work of his former student, Walter Ong. McLuhan's cryptic sayings are perfect for bumper stickers. Ong's insights in *The Presence of the Word* are far more scholarly, yet no less predictive of our digital present.

Early in the book he introduces an analogy: "It is useful to think of cultures in terms of the organization of the sensorium...the entire sensory apparatus as an operational complex." We are overwhelmed with noise, and culture teaches us how to specialize, how to organize our perception. "Given sufficient knowledge of the sensorium exploited within a specific culture, one could probably define the culture as a whole in virtually all its aspects."

Unlike McLuhan, Ong is primarily

I expect you to break through,
Across these shoddy lenses soon,
To burst into view, knowing full well
I will lose you. Why's it all waiting
And watching with you? Once,
In a cardinal's dress, you hopped
From mind's bough to heart's branch
In one second, slipped on the dark
Vestments of ravens in the next.
I sense your nearness; and it sears.
And though my eyes will slack
From the long fear of blinking
And missing you, I'll stay poised,
Steadfast, the watch-club's last.

Michael Angel Martín was born and raised in Miami, Fla. His poems can be found in or are forthcoming in *Dappled Things*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Pilgrim*, *Presence*, *St. Katherine Review* and elsewhere.

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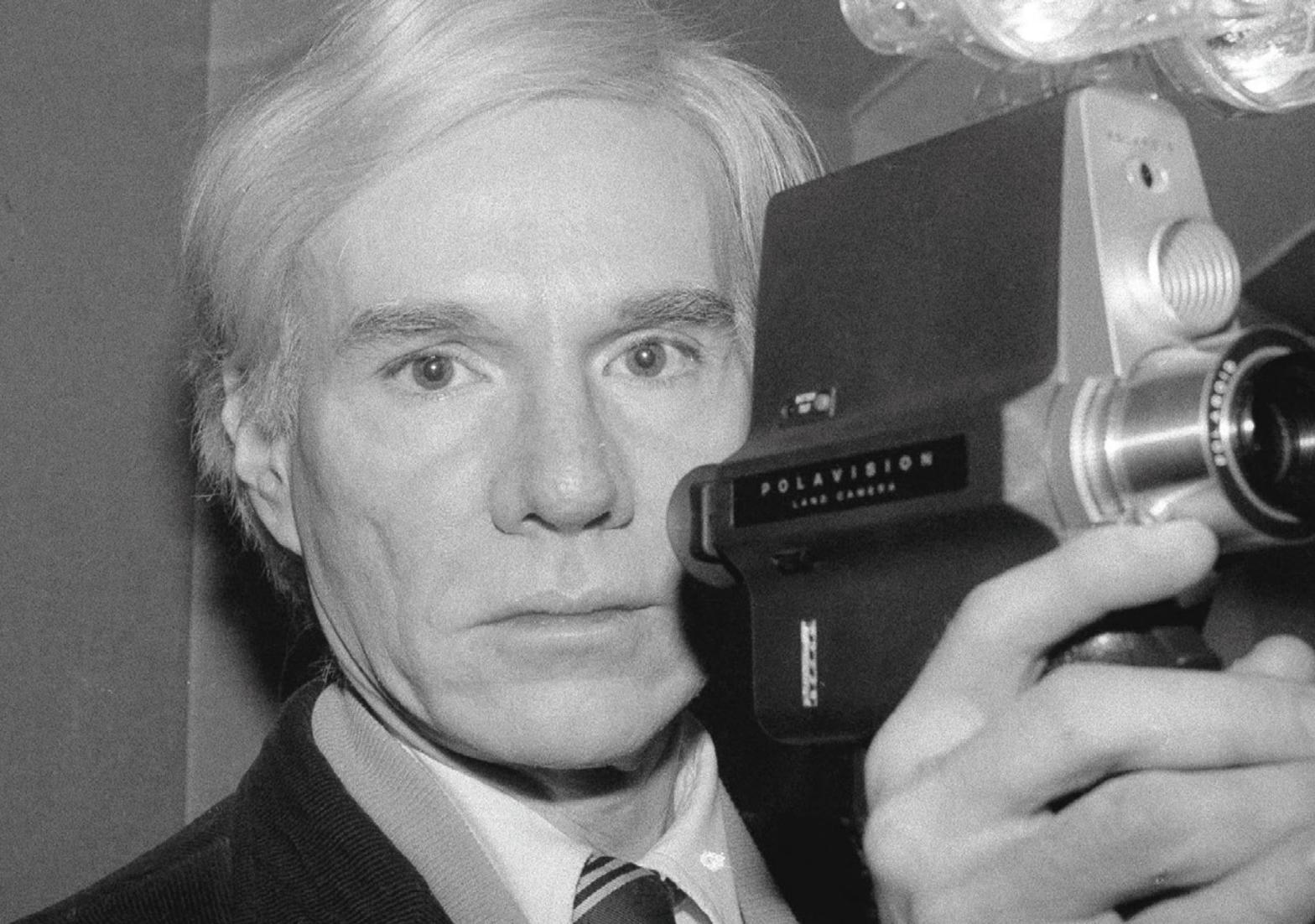
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concerned with the mode of sound: “The electronic processes typical of today’s communications world are themselves of their very nature in-fravisible—not even truly imaginable in terms of sight.” Although the electronic age awakened us to the profound differences between the “old oral culture and the culture initiated with writing and matured with alphabetic type,” he channels McLuhan to say that “simultaneity is a mark of both early oral culture and of electronic culture.... Primitive life is simultaneous in that it has no records, so that its conscious contact with its past is governed by what people talk about.”

Our digital world is simultaneous, absolute, overwhelming in possibility.

What does that mean for communion with others? “The fragmentation of consciousness initiated by the alphabet has in turn been countered by the electronic media which have made man present to himself across the globe, creating an intensity of self-possession on the part of the human race which is a new, and at times an upsetting, experience. Further transmutations lie ahead.”

We are living those transmutations now, and Ong’s questions remain: “Could the cry of Nietzsche’s madman, ‘God is dead’, derive from the fact that He cannot be readily found by the old signs in the newly organized sensorium where the word stands in such different relationship to the total complex of awareness by which man earlier

situated himself in his life world?” Ong and McLuhan were both observers; rather than attempting to stop the tide of electronic change, they wanted to understand its rise and fall.

Meanwhile, another Catholic seemed content with riding that tide. In 1967 Warhol was staging his multimedia “Exploding Plastic Inevitable” events across the country. Strobe lights pulsed. Projectors reeled Warhol’s films against the walls. Dancers and their shadows cut through the images. Loudspeakers boomed simultaneous pop songs. The Velvet Underground, the band Warhol managed and produced in his own Warholian way, played live.

Nobody would label the content of



Nobody would label the content of Warhol's provocative shows as Catholic, but that would be mistaking the media for the message.

Warhol's provocative shows as Catholic, but that would be mistaking the media for the message. Warhol's shows were sensory manipulations and experiences. He wanted to alter their states. McLuhan appreciated Warhol's experiments enough to include a collage spread from the show in *The Medium Is the Massage*. Black-and-white faces from Warhol's film panel the wall. The Velvet Underground and dancers blur above two sentences from Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: "History as she is harped. Rite words in rote order." McLuhan follows those pages with words that recall Ong: "We are enveloped by sound. It forms a seamless web around us."

High and low, sacred and mundane, immediate and eternal: Paradox

is endemic to Catholic storytelling and art. Warhol was one of its finest visual prophets. At Warhol's memorial service, the art historian John Richardson pulled back the veil: Warhol was a devout Catholic, and his faith was "the key to the artist's psyche." He went to daily Mass at the Church of St. Vincent Ferrer in New York and served meals to the homeless. "Never take Andy at face value," Richardson explained. "The callous observer was in fact a recording angel."

Warhol is certainly not the only celebrity to live a double life, but unlike most, his hidden Catholicism was never truly hidden. The Velvet Underground's Lou Reed and John Cale reunited at Warhol's memorial service and created an album about him titled "Songs for Drella." One song, "Work," perfectly captures Warhol's blue-collar origins and ethos: "Andy was a Catholic, the ethic ran through his bones/ He lived alone with his mother, collecting gossip and toys/ Every Sunday when he went to church/ He'd kneel in his pew and say, 'It's just work, all that matters is work.'"

Warhol surrounded himself with Catholic artists, photographers, poets and managers: Fred Hughes, Gerald Malanga, Paul Morrissey, Bob Colacello, Natasha Fraser-Cavassoni, Christopher Makos, Robert Mapplethorpe and Vincent Fremont. The same year he created the "Exploding Plastic Inevitable" spectacles, Warhol created a silkscreen series of Marilyn Monroe. The portfolio's varying shades and colors take an endlessly recycled face and imbue transformative life. There is something vaguely liturgical in Warhol's recursive method.

This is not to say that such pop work was devotional; Warhol saved that for his Last Supper sequence. Alexandre Iolas commissioned Warhol to create a series based on Leonardo da Vinci's famous work. For an artist who had made the mundane mystical—think soup cans and soda bottles—this was a different context. It was a print masterpiece resurrected, an artistic word made flesh: draped in camouflage, silkscreened, infused with layers of pop and piety. Warhol created over 100 takes on Leonardo's creation, his repetition suffused with the rhythm of prayer. McLuhan did not live to see it, but he would have appreciated it.

Somewhere between Warhol's public glam and his private, blue-collar Catholicism rested a spirit similar to the "inscape" of Gerard Manley Hopkins, the belief that even the most mundane and artificial objects existed in a divine world. Warhol's fascination with death was the acknowledgment of his own mortality—perfectly appropriate for someone drawn to the life of Christ.

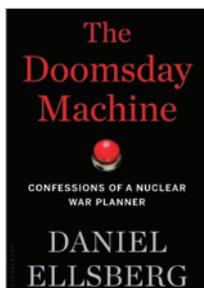
Fifty years ago, McLuhan, Ong and Warhol watched the electronic age arrive and did not blink. They found eternal patterns, moments of illumination, a new opportunity for communion, clarity and mysticism. Is God in the machine? We don't know. But if we follow the lead of those Catholic visionaries, we should allow ourselves to be surprised.

Nick Ripatrzone has written for *Rolling Stone*, *The Atlantic*, *The Paris Review* and *Esquire*. His newest book is *Ember Days*, a collection of stories.

Any significant nuclear exchange would trigger a “nuclear winter,” Daniel Ellsberg writes.

The Most Dangerous Threat

By Peter Steinfels



The Doomsday Machine
Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner
Daniel Ellsberg
Bloomsbury
432p \$30

Is it really necessary to declare that a knowledgeable, detailed and passionate book about the odds-on danger of cataclysmically destroying all human life on earth is important? Daniel Ellsberg's *The Doomsday Machine* demands to be widely read. Its claims should be examined by experts, corroborated, rebutted, taken up by Congressional committees (alas, unlikely) and generally forced into public consciousness.

To those of us who campaigned against the Vietnam War as unjust and unwinnable, Daniel Ellsberg was a hero. In 1971 he risked years in jail by secretly copying and leaking a classified Defense Department study, eventually known as the Pentagon Papers, that exposed the glaring gap between the rhetoric and the reality of what Washington had long been doing in Vietnam. Ellsberg was a Pentagon insider. That is what made his

whistleblowing possible. But few of us thought of him, to quote his subtitle, as “a nuclear war planner.”

It was not a career he chose but one that he eventually embraced. A brilliant Harvard graduate studying decision-making under conditions of uncertainty, he was invited to work at the RAND Corporation, the Air Force's independent-minded think tank. There he discovered that under President Eisenhower the military had an operational plan for waging nuclear war that had been elaborately concealed from the Secretary of Defense and other civilian officials.

At the beginning of 1961, Ellsberg alerted the newly installed Kennedy administration to the plan, which posited an indiscriminate, inflexible, all-out attack on the U.S.S.R. and China. It targeted virtually all cities as well as military sites, using weapons a thousand times more destructive than that dropped on Hiroshima. Blast, heat and fallout would kill well over half a billion people, mostly civilians. Add in the wider firestorms, and the total would double. To Ellsberg, these figures were “pure evil.” From the day he saw them, he writes, “I have had an overriding life purpose: to prevent the execution of any such plan.”

Ellsberg had already been asked to help revise the plan. In April, just turning 30, he finished drafting a document that argued for flexible responses rather than all-out initial assault; for sparing many cities; for not automatically lumping China with the U.S.S.R.; for reinforcing safeguards against war-triggering accidents; and for maintaining communication with enemy leaders instead of targeting them, so that a conflict might be limited or halted. On paper at least, these revisions shaped U.S. war plans through multiple administrations.

Not that Ellsberg takes much satisfaction in that. In practice, he believes, those restraints have been largely ignored or undermined: “The basic elements of American readiness for nuclear war remain today what they were almost sixty years ago.”

As a memoir, *The Doomsday Machine* is engrossing and frightening. In particular, Ellsberg discovered a military mentality in deep denial about the concrete realities of nuclear warfare and distrustful of civilian leadership to the point of insubordination.

Ellsberg also traces the pre-nuclear-era breakdown of moral and military strictures against directly bombing or incinerating civilian population cen-

ters. He discusses the “doomsday machine” of the book’s title, a theoretical mechanism that would automatically destroy all human life if one nuclear superpower were to get the jump on another. In 1960 Herman Kahn, the bad boy of nuclear strategy, proposed this absurd form of ultimate deterrence.

We have in fact created such a doomsday machine, says Ellsberg. Any significant nuclear exchange would trigger a “nuclear winter,” a concept widely publicized by Carl Sagan and other scientists in the 1980s. Smoke propelled into the upper atmosphere would block sunlight for years, drop the earth’s temperature and devastate vegetation. Nearly all of humanity would starve.

To dismantle this doomsday machine, Ellsberg proposes unilaterally scrapping all land-based intercontinental missiles and strategic bombers, leaving a very limited number of mostly submarine-launched nuclear weapons. Such a minimal retaliatory force would be sufficient to deter any nuclear attack but too small to make Russia (or any other nuclear power) feel it had to preserve its missiles from destruction by preemptively launching them.

It is easy to anticipate objections to Ellsberg’s account. Will fellow “war planners” have different recollections of episodes he describes or point to developments in the nearly five decades after his government service? (Ellsberg notes that the number of warheads “on both sides” has declined by over 80 percent since the 1960s.)

Are the basics of deterrence lost, especially for the uninitiated, amid his compelling stories and focus on all-out war? Does he clarify or confuse by equating nuclear “first use” with

explicit or even implicit threats? Presidents have “used” nuclear weapons multiple times, he writes, in the way that a gun to someone’s head is used to coerce behavior even if the trigger is never pulled. And what about the key place of nuclear winter in his argument? Should Ellsberg have at least acknowledged that the scientific basis of nuclear winter is disputed?

And what about allies? Commitments to allies in regions where Moscow or Beijing enjoy conventional military advantages have kept Washington from ruling out a resort to nuclear weapons. Yet this “extended deterrence” has always raised doubts about whether the United States really would risk its own cities for the defense, say, of Berlin or Brussels, Tokyo or Seoul. Ellsberg gives no more than passing attention to this puzzle.

Finally, would Ellsberg’s proposed minimal deterrent provide the stability that is the sine qua non of preventing nuclear war? How does it compare to alternatives? His sketch of it provides no specific numbers or targets or scenarios about how it would work.

With North Korea shattering our post-Cold War complacency about nuclear war, the need to engage Ellsberg’s case could not seem more obvious. What is true, what is false, what is unknown? But do we really want to undertake that inquiry? Aren’t we, especially as Catholics, confronted with a prior moral question?

It is a question to which Ellsberg himself is acutely sensitive. Throughout his “confessions,” he struggles to reconcile the scarcely imaginable monstrosity of nuclear war with the fact that those active in planning it were not monsters but in many cases driven

to keep it from ever occurring. That is what made him a “nuclear war planner” in 1961, when he revised the existing war plan for Robert McNamara; that is what makes him one now, when he proposes a unilateral, vastly downsized nuclear deterrent. To the extent that we engage seriously with the questions he raises and commit ourselves to acting as citizens on the answers, aren’t we all nuclear war planners, too?

To be sure, there is another option: not to torment ourselves about those answers; not to get entangled in devilish calculations about weaponry, targets, consequences, stability, psychology, geopolitics; to just say no. That is the stance that Pope Francis appears to be pointing the Catholic Church toward. The whole framework of deterrence, he recently suggested, is irredeemably sunk in irrationality.

The Doomsday Machine can be read simply to confirm the pope’s view. Ellsberg often uses similar language. He strives to minimize the conflict between the case for a minimal nuclear deterrent and the abolition of deterrence altogether. That may explain his cursory description of his own proposal.

Perhaps a working alliance is possible between these contrasting approaches. Nonetheless, I suspect that reactions to *The Doomsday Machine* will boil down to those two moral—and psychological—options: Engage the debate, or just say no.

Peter Steinfels, a former editor of *Commonweal*, was the senior religion correspondent at *The New York Times* from 1988 to 1997 and a religion columnist there until 2010.

Annus horribilis

Lawrence O'Donnell has written a book that political junkies everywhere will love. *Playing With Fire* has the stuff that television miniseries of yore were made of: larger-than-life figures, social mayhem, political chaos and a foreign war, with unequal parts idealism and chicanery thrown in. It is the narrative of a presidential campaign unlike any other: 1968.

O'Donnell, host of MSNBC's "The Last Word," keeps the reader in thrall through each and every page, even though we all know how it ended. He wraps it up with an epilogue on the aftermath: what happened not only to the key players in this drama, but how it affected—and still affects—the Unit-

ed States we now live in.

O'Donnell's book is a searing examination of our political system and how it operates. It is the tale of what was supposed to be Lyndon Johnson's year and ended up being Richard Nixon's. In between, the dramatis personae of U.S. politics of 1968 all take the stage. Those who possessed power, those without power and those who sought to obtain power all crowd these pages, from L.B.J. to R.F.K. to Eugene McCarthy, as well as Martin Luther King Jr., George McGovern, Abraham Ribicoff, Richard J. Daley and many more. Throw in the Yippies, the hippies, the "Clean for Gene" kids, the old pols and the new ones, as well as a befuddled electorate, and you have the year that was 1968.

Readers will come away from this book with strong impressions and many questions about the two presidential candidates. One, considered "lazy" and a dreamy poet, upended his political party as well as himself. The other, a longtime political partisan, let a lust for power and revenge get the better of him in order to obtain that prize which he had always craved—and through further pernicious actions, eventually lost.

A combination of a Shakespearean drama and Greek tragedy, this is the story of two men who played with fire and who both got burned. It is also the story of a country that got singed as a result.

—————
Joseph McAuley, *assistant editor.*

A forgotten war

Farewell Kabul is an outstanding but disturbing read. Christina Lamb "sets out to tell the story, from someone who lived through it, of how we turned success into defeat." The "we," I think, stands for nations who contributed to the foreign interventions in Afghanistan from 9/11 to the present. I should add that I do not consider Pakistan as one of these nations.

Since the Soviet invasion of 1979, Pakistan has been a persistent presence in Afghanistan. Few chapters in this book are untainted by the "odour" of Pakistan's Interservice Intelligence, a mentor and major ally of the Taliban. Voices ranging from the president of Afghanistan to a village elder in Helmand are cited by Lamb,

who sees Pakistan as a foe. American generals and soldiers are quoted to the same effect.

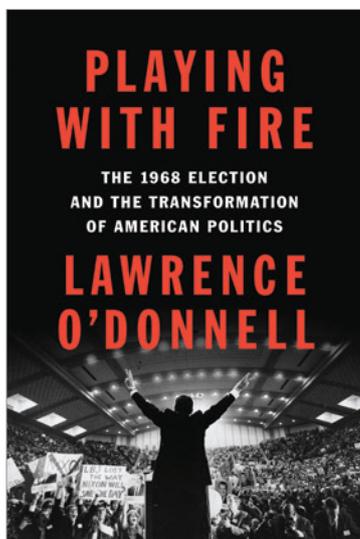
The BBC reported the fall of Sangin to the Taliban on March 23. Over 100 British soldiers died there. Major Pike, who commanded the company that Lamb found fighting there, "was so disillusioned that he left the army" upon his return to Britain. Lamb was also embedded with British troops in Helmand and with U.S. forces in places like Shkin. Sadly, she reports that President Karzai said that it would have been better if the British had never gone to Helmand. I suppose that this comment also applies to the U.S. Marines who supported the British near the end of their tour.

All four parts of this account have chapters with labels suggesting that

Pakistan was behind the range of hostile activities that made so many of those on the ground consider that country—or at least certain people in power—an "enemy." The chapter about Quetta, Pakistan, says it all: "Taliban Central."

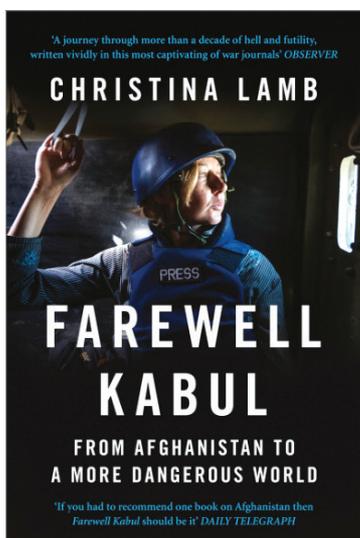
A critical query is posed by the Estonian Foreign Ministry nonresident ambassador while visiting a small Estonian contingent in Helmand. "What are we doing here?" he asks. We must all answer this question.

—————
Roy Thomas is a retired Canadian Army officer who served in seven U.N. mission areas, including Afghanistan in 1989-90.



Playing With Fire
The 1968 Election and the
Transformation of American
Politics

By Lawrence O'Donnell
Penguin Press. 464p \$16



Farewell Kabul
From Afghanistan to a More
Dangerous World

By Christina Lamb
Williams Collins. 640p \$18.99

That brutal science

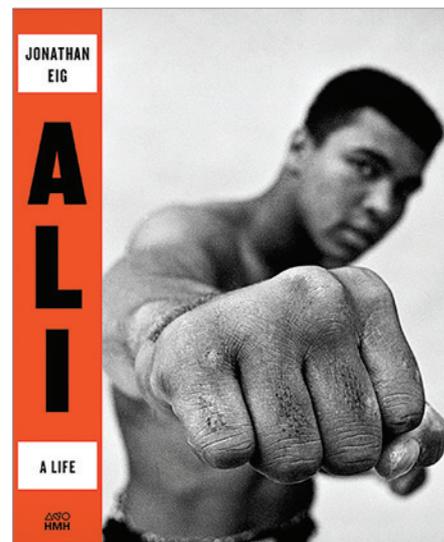
When my brother and I were young, our father, who had done some boxing in the Army during World War I, would put the gloves on us and teach us to work out on the punching bag. No one was going to push us around. In the 1940s, my heroes were Tony Zale, the middleweight champion famous for his fights with Rocky Graziano, and Ike Williams, the lightweight champion, who lived only a few blocks away.

In *Ali: A Life*, a detailed biography of one very popular athlete, Jonathan Eig achieves several goals. It is a history and critique of the boxing industry against the background of the ongoing struggle of African-Americans to assume their rightful place in American society, as well as an exploration of the influence of Islam in American culture. It is also a powerful condemnation of boxing itself, a grim parade of broken jaws, blood spurting from eyes and facial wounds, brains irreparably shattered by constant deliberate pounding, young bodies pummelled until ribs break. It asks us: How can a civilized society allow this barbarous brutality?

It is also a devastating portrait of a charming but single-minded athlete, Muhammad Ali (born Cassius Clay), who was enamored of his own image, so self-absorbed that the term “love” seemed to have lost meaning. In addition to blow-by-blow accounts of Ali’s boxing matches, Eig also bluntly guides us through Ali’s four marriages as well as a detailed list of his innumerable sexual partners, the children born out of wedlock and Ali’s frequent failure to play a fatherly role with financial support and presence.

Readers who identify with Ali will have to shut their eyes to the negatives and praise the positives: his boxing skills, his desire to improve the lives of fellow black citizens and his ability to bear his suffering as the battering on his brain and the effects of Parkinson’s disease slowly dragged him down.

Raymond A. Schroth, S.J., is an editor emeritus of *America*.



Ali: A Life
by Jonathan Eig
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
640p \$30



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A Christian funeral classic

By Colleen Dulle

While Catholics can seem to argue ceaselessly over a number of issues, we hold a few unshakable truths in common: Jesus is present in the Eucharist; Mary was conceived without sin; and when “On Eagle’s Wings” plays, we cry.

In the 38 years since its publication, “On Eagle’s Wings” has achieved global popularity, been translated into a variety of languages and become a Christian funeral classic.

The Rev. Jan Michael Joncas wrote the song after he and a friend, Doug Hall, had returned from a meal to learn that Hall’s father had died of a heart attack. “I knew this was a hard, hard experience in anybody’s life; ‘I just wanted to create something that would be both prayerful and then comforting,’” Father Joncas told **America**.

In the days preceding Hall’s father’s wake, Father Joncas returned to his parents’ house in Minnesota and composed the song on his guitar, sketching out a melody line and accompanying chords. The now-famous hymn debuted at the wake.

“On Eagle’s Wings” joined a group of compositions he held onto for several years before submitting them to the publisher of the St. Louis Jesuits’ music, North American Liturgy Resources, who then offered Father Joncas an album deal.

Father Joncas didn’t pay much attention to the hymn after that, but he became aware that the song was gaining popularity outside Catholic circles when his publisher forwarded him requests to reproduce the song. Then, following the bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, Cathy Keating, the governor’s wife, requested that “On Eagle’s Wings” be played at a memorial for those who had been killed.

Two years later, Michael Crawford, who originated the lead role in “The Phantom of the Opera” on Broadway, sang “On Eagle’s Wings” on national television. But the crowning moment came when Father Joncas tuned into a broadcast of the funeral of one of his heroes, the famed operatic tenor Luciano Pavarotti.

“Suddenly the soprano [stood] up

from the parish choir and...[sang] ‘Sulle Braccia dell’Aquila,’—‘On the Arms of the Eagle’.... It was now in Italian,” Father Joncas remembers. He recalls thinking to himself: “They’re singing ‘Eagle’s Wings’ at Pavarotti’s funeral. Wow.”

The whole experience was rather surreal for Father Joncas, who thinks of “On Eagle’s Wings” as a callow effort. “I think I’ve written deeper and better pieces, but this one, for whatever reason, touched people’s hearts, and I’m not gonna yell about that,” Father Joncas said.

The song has been popular in unexpected places: It has become a sort of signature selection at the U.S. Air Force Academy’s Cadet Chapel, as well as in Native American communities, where the eagle holds an important place in the spiritualities of several tribes.

“I am pretty much just blown away by the experience that God can still use that [song] 35 years, 40 years after its creation and still have it impact people’s lives,” Father Joncas said. “But I don’t think it’s me. I really think it’s the fact that it’s Scripture, that the

In the 38 years since its publication, "On Eagle's Wings" has been translated into a variety of languages.

Revisiting 'Boys Town'

On Dec. 12 Boys Town celebrated its 100th birthday. The organization traces its humble beginning to five boys whom a court turned over to the Rev. Edward J. Flanagan, a young Irish priest who had rented a dilapidated Victorian mansion in downtown Omaha, Neb. His mission was to give a safe home, good care and guidance to youth who desperately needed it.

Boys Town drew unexpected attention in 1937, when Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer decided to make a movie about it. At first Father Flanagan rejected the idea, but he signed on after he saw a script that he liked. Among the requirements on his list were that the film show the real Boys Town campus, which had no gates or fences, and that it show the acceptance of all races and religions among the youth there.

Upon hearing that Spencer Tracy was cast in the film, Father Flanagan sent him a letter, saying: "Your name is written in gold in the heart of every homeless boy in Boys Town because of the anticipated picture you are

going to make for us, and everybody here—and all of our alumni—are talking about you, thinking about you, and praying for you every day."

At the film's premiere, held in Omaha in 1937, Tracy, who won an Academy Award for his portrayal, said that if the movie was a success, it was because "the great goodness and sweetness and beauty of the soul of this man shines even through me to you."

The film almost was not released after it was finished. Louis B. Mayer reportedly said he did not think it would sell because there was "no sex" and "no songs." The film ultimately won two Academy Awards. Its success also almost sank the real Boys Town, as people assumed that the institution had made a huge sum of money from the movie. Donations slowed to a trickle. It was not until Tracy made a personal appeal that they began to flow once again.

Kevin Lawler is a poet, playwright and co-founder of the Blue Barn Theatre in Omaha, Neb.

melody then allows this incredibly important scriptural text to hit the heart in a way that it wouldn't, maybe, if you were just reading it."

Scripture is at the center of Father Joncas's creative process, even as his musical style ranges widely, from his popular folk-inspired "I Have Loved You" (1977) to a breathtaking "Salve Regina" canon for double choir (2008). He cites among his musical influences the Gregorian chant and polyphony he heard as an altar server, his classical background—he was trained in 20th-century piano technique—and the folk music revival of his young adult years.

"You know, one of my heroes was Joni Mitchell," Father Joncas said. "She was once quoted as saying...[that] it's really hard being a musician or composer because, like, nobody ever said to Van Gogh, 'Paint a "Starry Night" again, man!'"

Father Joncas laughed, "And I don't want to write 'Eagle's Wings' again."

Colleen Dulle, *Joseph A. O'Hare Fellow*,
Twitter: @ColleenDulle.



Spencer Tracy won an Academy Award for his portrayal of Father Flanagan.

(Wikimedia Commons)

Knowing and Being Known

Readings: 1 Sm 3:3-19, Ps 40, 1 Cor 6:13-20, Jn 1:35-42

John the Evangelist loved irony. His Gospel narrative is full of unexpected turns and incongruous situations. The blind perceive Jesus better than those with sight. Elite individuals with all their education fail to understand Jesus, but laborers and fishermen mob him wherever he goes. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, but doing so convinced the authorities that he must die.

In this week's Gospel passage, Andrew gives Jesus a name, Messiah, and Jesus gives Simon a name, Rock. As John's Gospel unfolds, it will become clear that Andrew and the other disciples did not understand the name they gave Jesus. The name Jesus gave Simon, however, will prove to be the deepest truth.

The disciples often misunderstand Jesus. In our Gospel today, for example, Andrew tells his brother, "We have found the messiah!" Andrew believes Jesus to be the descendant of David who will restore Israel's independence, its lost tribes and its Temple. He almost certainly did not expect the messiah to tell him to "eat my flesh and drink my blood" as a prerequisite for eternal life.

Later in the Gospel, when Jesus tries to wash Peter's feet, Peter is confused by the action, even though he had spent nearly three years at Jesus' side. Although the disciples rightly recognized Jesus to be the "messiah," he had to remind them often that they did not understand the real meaning of the word.

In contrast, the names Jesus gave his disciples revealed a deep truth about each of them. James and John, for example, were the Sons of Thunder (Mk 3:17). The Gospels record nicknames for other disciples that Jesus probably used as well, like Twin for Thomas and Zealot for Simon.

We know little about these apostles or the qualities Jesus identified through these names. We know comparatively more about Andrew's brother Simon, whom Jesus calls *kepha*, "rock." The name bespeaks dependability, self-confidence, an almost charismatic stability. Many of us have friends like this. When one of our "Rocks" shows up in times of trouble, we know things are going to turn out all right.

'You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Cephas.'
(Jn 1:42)



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

What do you call Jesus? Did he teach you that name?

What name does Jesus call you?

Jesus had to reveal these qualities to Simon Peter first before Simon Peter could reveal them to the world. In his first encounter with Jesus, Simon Peter was anxious: "Leave me, Lord! I am a sinful man." Later, even as Simon Peter grew in faith, he could still be overcome by self-doubt. Even with Jesus' help, he was not able to walk on water; even with his own good intent, he denied Jesus at the end. Jesus knew Simon Peter's depths, however, and knew that within him was a Rock on whom he and his followers could depend. Later events proved this to be true.

Throughout history, people have given all sorts of names to Jesus, like king, rebel, reformer, guru and poet. Similarly, many individual Christians long ago defined what Jesus' messiahship means for them. All of these attempts are probably as incorrect as those of the first disciples. Part of the struggle of discipleship is to let Jesus name himself in our lives. Only when we learn Jesus' true name can we learn our own name from him.

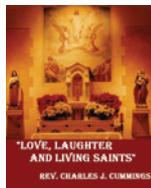
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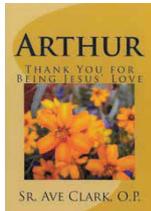
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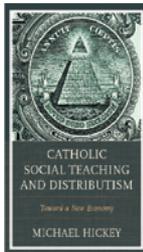
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Imitate Me

Readings: Jon 3:1-10, Ps 25, 1 Cor 7:29-31, Mk 1:14-20

Jesus has a good reason to call fishermen, as he does in this Sunday's Gospel passage. Early on, he realized the scope of his Father's plans, and he needed help. His first act was to call four fishermen. In Jesus' day fishermen were free individuals and entrepreneurs. The work was arduous and dangerous. The Sea of Galilee is subject to storms; and even in good weather, work on the sea poses risks. Fishermen had to be intelligent enough to master two crafts—sailing and fishing—just to perform their daily tasks. The work was rewarding, though. The historian Josephus mentions that the villages along the Sea of Galilee were some of the wealthiest in the province (*Wars*, III.10.8). In fishermen Jesus found motivated, hard-working, smart, self-confident and courageous partners. It is no surprise, given these qualities, that we hear later of arguments over who was the greatest or of schemes to sit at Jesus' right and left.

The qualities that brought them pride, however, were not what Jesus was after. Jesus wanted individuals who

knew how to fish, who knew how to cast a net again and again even when no success came at first. He wanted individuals who were flexible, who could shift their boat when winds and currents changed. He wanted individuals who were not afraid to set out into deep water, who knew how to trust their tools and each other.

“The world in its present form is passing away,” St. Paul tells us in this Sunday's second reading. God was ready to reveal his kingdom; when it arrived, it would render pointless all of the world's false values and goals. Mark the evangelist believed this as well. In his Gospel, Jesus' work has an urgency to it that resembles a rescue mission. Jesus needed disciples who could help gather as many people as possible before the world came to an end. He found in fishermen exactly the partners he needed to accomplish this task.

Jesus' command to the first disciples to follow him was more than a call to walk a few paces behind him, as students of his day did when walking with their teacher. The command included an instruction to imitate the way he lived. By uniting the skills of their craft with words and deeds of Jesus, the disciples' practical skills found a fulfillment that transcended any success they could have imagined. They were fishermen in God's kingdom.

Prophecies like Jonah's in this Sunday's first reading helped the early church understand that the arrival of the kingdom was delayed. The world would not end until Christ's disciples had finished their tasks. Jesus included people of many crafts among his first disciples, and so today Christ continues to call a diverse group to help build the kingdom. His call goes out every day: “Imitate me, and I will make you bricklayers of a new Jerusalem, chefs at the heavenly feast, teamsters of the divine chariot, salesmen of God's word and nurses of souls.” When we offer Christ our skills, he finds the partners he needs. When we follow his example, we find the fulfillment of our life's work.

Michael R. Simone, S.J., teaches Scripture at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

*‘This is the time
of fulfillment!’
(Mk 1:15)*



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Has Jesus called you and your skills to his service?

Which of your skills might find its fulfillment in the coming kingdom?

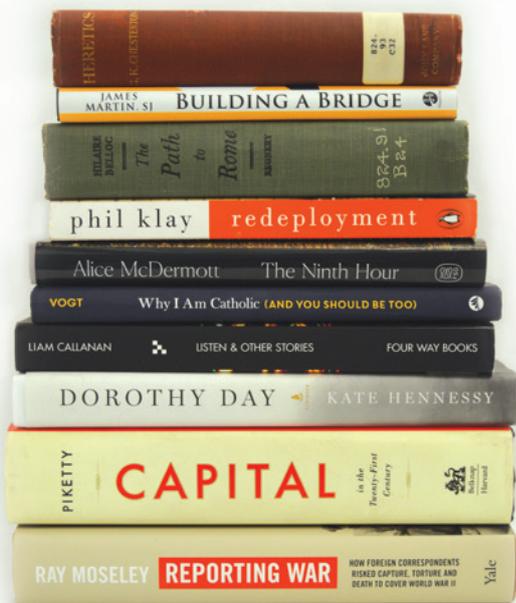
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Tend to the Wounded

Pope Francis' radical challenge

By Blase J. Cupich



Jorge Bergoglio needed just a few minutes to radically reorient the Catholic Church. In the days leading up to a conclave, cardinals deliver addresses designed to help their brothers discern where the Spirit is calling the church. Some go longer, some shorter. In his 2013 pre-conclave intervention, Cardinal Bergoglio did not waste his time.

“In Revelation,” the soon-to-be-pope explained, “Jesus says that he is at the door and knocks.” The idea, he continued, is that Jesus is knocking from outside the door. But Cardinal Bergoglio inverted the image and, according to notes he later gave to Cardinal Jaime Ortega, asked his brother cardinals and indeed the whole church to consider “the times in which Jesus knocks from within so that we will let him come out.”

When the church keeps Christ to herself and does not let him out, he continued, it becomes “self-referential—and then gets sick.” To avoid this, according to Cardinal Bergoglio, the church must go out of itself to the peripheries, to minister to the needy.

This is evangelization. This is the mission entrusted to the church by Jesus Christ—and it was precisely in this moment that he foreshadowed his program for the Catholic Church as a “field hospital” for the wounded, a profound, indeed stunning image he would deliver in a surprise interview with Antonio Spadaro, S.J.,

soon after he became pope.

By calling the church a “field hospital,” Pope Francis calls us to radically rethink ecclesial life. He is challenging all of us to give priority to the wounded. This means placing the needs of others before our own. The “field hospital church” is the antithesis of the “self-referential church.” It is a term that triggers the imagination, forcing us to rethink our identity, mission and our life together as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Medics are useless if the wounded cannot reach them. Those who have the bandages go to those with the wounds. They do not sit back in their offices waiting for the needy to come to them. The field hospital marshals all its institutional resources in order to serve those who most need help now.

When the church becomes a field hospital, it can radically change the way we view our community life. Instead of being defined as a group of people that live in the same neighborhood, have a common ethnic heritage or social status, regularly go to Mass or are the registered parishioners, we understand ourselves as those who take up the work of healing by sharing in the sufferings of others.

We are a community that taps into and shares our talents to find creative ways to help those most in need. We already know this about ourselves, as Jesus gave us this truth at the very start

of his ministry when he announced that he was sent “to bring glad tidings to the poor, sent to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord” (Lk 4:18).

That is Christ’s challenge for the church today: to be a field hospital for the needy. To bring those glad tidings, not to sit back and wait for those who need them to ask. To go out, to travel to the peripheries where the oppressed reside. To be with the wounded on the field of battle. This is what is acceptable to the Lord. It is radical. Mercy always is. And as Pope Francis continues to remind us of this truth, he takes us back to our Christian roots, helping us realize that this challenge has been with us all along.

Cardinal Blase J. Cupich is the archbishop of Chicago. This article is excerpted from *A Pope Francis Lexicon*, which will be published by Liturgical Press on Feb. 15.



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