

America

JUNE 25, 2018

THE JESUIT MONTH AND CULTURE

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So Just Enter Already

Matt Malone, S.J., is traveling. June is ordination month for the Jesuits, many other religious orders and many dioceses.

There are men out there who have been thinking for years about joining our religious order, the Jesuits, but cannot make up their minds. Earnest young men, spiritual charmers, joyful contrarians. Guys with epic beards or closets of Dri-FIT or bookshelves of Dionysius the Areopagite, circling the perimeter of the Society but refusing to apply.

If such men ever asked my advice, I would say: Sign up. Apply to be a priest, or a brother. If the Jesuits say yes, enter. Why not?

You have been brandishing for years the fetching promise of your vocation to parents and priests, to old teachers and neighborhood mothers, their hope-filled sighs floating after you like incense down the sidewalk. You have been waving for far too long the sparkler of priesthood before your girlfriends or boyfriends: Don't get too close! I could be gone, like that!

Your call is a quiet, solemn coda to evenings of seduction: By the way, I'm not just a glowing, heartfelt Chance the Rapper fan. I also might want to be a Jesuit. But I don't know. Whatever. You wanna get out of here? I just have to be up early for benediction at St. Absinthia. Not that I'm into benediction. But I'm into benediction.

Fence-hangers, doubters, join up. Novitiate is a testing ground. If the life is right for you, it is right for you. If not, after prayer and discernment, with the Society's blessing you exit before taking vows.

Maybe you have an issue with the church, and it is keeping you from diving in. We all have issues with the church. We have some major hang-up, somewhere, with what the church does and what it fails to do.

So, what is the acreage of your stance? What is the square footage of that issue that keeps you from throwing yourself into this life? Maybe it is something having to do with dogmas, scandals, bodies, wombs, genders, marriages, bishops, orientations.

As legitimate as these church complaints may be, for you such issues are not primarily matters of justice, but makeshift screens to keep you from taking on religious life. Is the geography of a nattering church issue large enough to swallow up your heart? To keep it from doing what it actually wants to do?

Maybe you have forgotten what started them considering the vocation in the first place; perhaps witnessing a priestly ordination; or maybe it was a single Jesuit who sold you on the life just by being himself. One priest for decades with loving militancy taught high school Latin wearing a thin, blue lab coat over black clerics. The fact that he also wore a perfect brown and wavy hairpiece cost him, as far as I knew, not one ounce of the respect his scores of students had for him.

Another drives madly like Steve McQueen through the hills of North-east India starting microcredit lending groups for women. He is maybe the coolest guy you ever met. He mystifies you when he says that lately he receives inspiration from tapes of "Hour of Power" with Robert Schuller. You wish it was someone else that

moved him besides tapes of "Hour of Power" with Robert Schuller. (But what do you really know about Robert Schuller anyway?)

Right before they shot him, one priest stretched out his arms—you can't make this stuff up—and shouted "Viva Cristo Rey," all but ending right then and there the regime that executed him. Another in 1987 gave a whiplash of a homily at midnight to freshmen sprawled all over a gym floor. He declared, against perhaps the theological fashion of the age, that at the end of time, in the battle of good versus evil, "Christ will win!"

One Jesuit (before he was a Jesuit) prosecuted a cannibal, later visited him in prison and reported back, "Actually, he's a pretty nice guy." Another shouted at a raging storm on his way to save half the known world, "Even more Lord, even more!" He lost his crucifix in the sea. Later a crab returned it.

Jesuits are men who, when dealing with someone else's life, by and large do not say what they think a religious person should say. They say what ought to be said. Or they don't say anything and let people speak their truth. And the truth sets them free.

That is what draws you here, these men and their way, and still your doubts are blowing you into dust. Why? Is that who you want to be, a wrung-out pile of indecision? Is that who any of us want to be? A word of encouragement to young men to shake off their fears and follow Christ in unrelenting fashion, at least for a little while—maybe this could be said to anyone.

—
Joe Hoover, S.J., poetry editor



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University students take part in a march against President Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua in Managua on May 30. The march ended in violence, and influential business leaders called for early elections to resolve the political standoff.

AP Photo/Esteban Felix

Cover image:
Balloons memorializing Alfie Evans
Peter Byrne/PA via AP

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How does your parish keep you informed?

Perhaps unsurprisingly to regular Massgoers, respondents to our poll said overwhelmingly that their parishes kept them up-to-date with paper bulletins (97 percent) and announcements at Mass (91 percent). Respondents also noted their parishes' use of social media (60 percent), email (59 percent) and their websites (58 percent) to inform parishioners. Mail updates (41 percent) were less commonly reported, and phone/text announcements (12 percent) were even more rare.

Although parishes appear to be using a range of methods of communication, some respondents called for better quality of communication. An anonymous reader from State College, Pa., wrote: "My parish uses various forms of media inconsistently. They need to decide how the parish wants to receive information, and then always provide it through that medium. For better or worse, more frequent communication from the parish in various forms will keep the parish relevant in people's daily lives."

Other respondents emphasized the importance of face-to-face communication. Sue Palmer of Lapeer, Mich., wrote that her parish could be "more welcoming and friendly when we are there in person, not just a name on email blast." Mike Hoffman of Homewood, Ill., said that "the pastor could make

himself available before and after Masses so that people can have an opportunity to ask questions or comment."

In addition to these suggestions, many respondents praised how their parish keeps them informed. A number of respondents also told **America** that parishioners could be better communication partners. Jill Johnson of Cincinnati, Ohio, said, "Our parish communicates effectively—sometimes parishioners do not pay attention." Katherine of New York, N.Y., similarly noted: "If we want more communication, we should take the initiative ourselves as parishioners. We are not consumers of a church—we are the church."

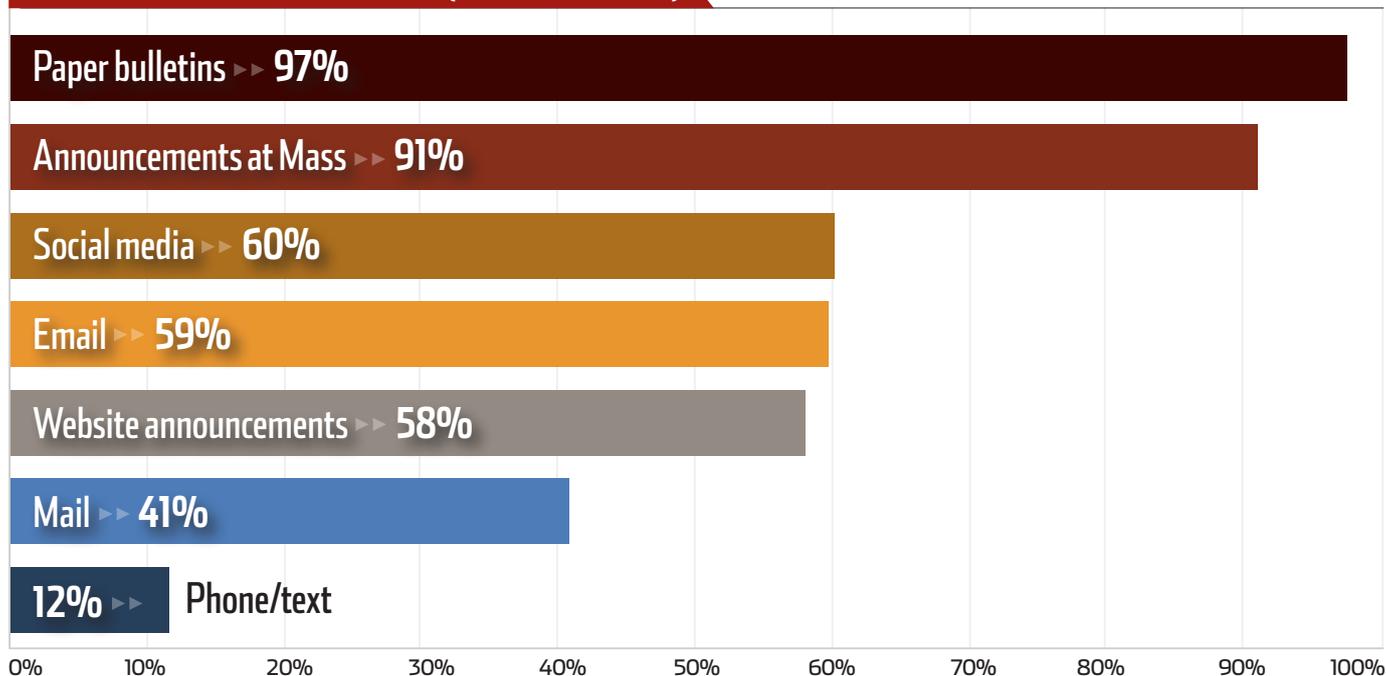
Does your parish communicate with you effectively?

Yes	65%
No	35%

Does your parish communicate with newcomers effectively?

Yes	47%
No	53%

HOW DOES YOUR PARISH KEEP YOU INFORMED? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)



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

Persuading Others

Re “The Ceremony of the Innocence is Drowned” (Editorial, 6/11): Abortion is a serious sin. But may I suggest that we Catholics—our bishops, clergy, teachers and laity—have failed miserably in teaching and persuading our own members of the sanctity of life? Instead, we seek to use the law to do it for us and for everyone else. Lacking a consistent and equally vociferous emphasis on all the other “life issues” merely undermines our abortion teaching.

Vincent Gaglione 🗨️

The Right Thing

Re “Texas Parish Issues IDs for Undocumented People,” by J.D. Long-García (6/11): The parish is doing the right thing. Would that more of us did.

Steve Magnotta 🗨️

Not in Good Conscience

Re “Is Catholic Identity Hurting Enrollment at Catholic Colleges?” by Michael J. O’Loughlin (6/11): Has anyone considered that the rapidly increased cost of Catholic higher education could be the reason schools are seeing declining enrollment, not the Catholic identity as the cause? My husband and I both graduated from a Catholic college where the tuition has more than doubled in the past decade. Scholarships notwithstanding, I don’t think we could in good conscience encourage our children to attend our alma mater, knowing the student loan debt they will accrue. And where we live, there are multiple state colleges in a four-hour radius that have robust on-campus Catholic centers that can ensure our kids have access to a Catholic faith community during their college years. While I loved my Catholic liberal arts education, I have to balance my wish for my children to have a similar college experience with one that’s fiscally sound for their respective futures.

Kara Hansen 🗨️

The Meaning of Soccer

Re “What the World Cup Can Teach Us About Everything,” by Antonio De Loera-Brust (6/11): Thanks for this article! For me, an 80-year-old white American who never saw soccer until a neighborhood game in the ’60s, I never understood its meaning to Mexican immigrants or to the world until this article.

Wilda Lynne McCarty Keough 🗨️

A Beloved Community

Re “Now, Some Good News,” by Matt Malone, S.J. (Of Many Things, 5/28): For the past two years I have lived in one of the most conservative subdivisions, in one of the most conservative cities, in one of the most conservative states in the country.

Due to institutional racism—and real though mostly unconscious bias—people of color are reluctant to move here. Only 4 percent of our population is black. However, I’ve met and become engaged with the Courageous Conversations movement, convened right after Ferguson, with the thought “What would we have to do to make sure that doesn’t happen here?”

Our vision, inspired by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., is “a beloved community of compassion characterized by cross-cultural communication, collaboration, celebration and courage.” This is a journey of several lifetimes, I think, but the difficult discussions about race are happening. We are led by people of color who set our agenda and inspire us with their courage and commitment. I’ve come to think of our journey in the words of Thomas Merton: “How far have I to go to find You in Whom I have already arrived!”

Jim Deuser
Georgetown, Tex.

The Whole Person

Re “Treating ‘Diseases of Despair,’” by Michael Rozier, S.J. (5/28): This article is right on. More and more we realize that health has many more components than the biological. Catholic health care speaks of holistic care, and the social determinants of health play a key role.

In our ministry, we are seeing an “inner homelessness” and frequent social isolation. Doing what we can to bring people together, to build community and to foster the sense of belonging of which Father Rozier speaks is hugely important if we are to care for the whole person.

Carolyn Capuano, H.M.
Vice President of Mission and Ministry
Mercy Medical Center
Canton, Ohio

🗨️ Comments drawn from our website, americamagazine.org, and America Media’s social media platforms.

Letters to the editor can be sent to letters@americamedia.org. Please include the article title, author and issue date, as well as your name and where you are writing from.

The Supreme Court Punted on the Cake Case—and Created an Opportunity

Many commentators reacted to the Supreme Court's recent decision in the Colorado "gay wedding cake" case, *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, by saying the justices had "punted" in deciding the case on narrow grounds. But the court, by avoiding the choice to prioritize religious freedom over non-discrimination or vice versa, has been both faithful to its own best traditions and prudent in limiting its intervention in the ongoing cultural adjustment to same-sex marriage. If this is punting, then the country needs more of it, not less.

Beyond the Supreme Court's caution in refraining from unnecessarily adjudicating constitutional issues, the basis on which it resolved this case is heartening. Writing for the 7-to-2 majority, Justice Anthony Kennedy quoted at length a commissioner who compared the baker's refusal with the use of religion to justify the most extreme forms of discrimination, including slavery and the Holocaust. Such hostility toward religious belief, the court ruled, tainted the proceedings sufficiently to require the com-

mission's decision against the baker to be invalidated. The court thus affirmed Colorado's right to protect its citizens from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, but it also required that Colorado undertake such protection without the hostile assumption that traditional religious beliefs about marriage are necessarily discriminatory. Catholics can and should give robust agreement to both those positions.

After the decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* in 2015, in which the court found a constitutional right to same-sex marriage, *America's* editors suggested that gearing up for a permanent culture war would work against the church's mission to evangelize. After *Obergefell*, we argued, there was "an opportunity for Catholics of every political stripe to assume an even more robust public presence, but from a different starting point: that of human encounter rather than of tactical confrontation."

This most recent decision offers Catholics—and indeed all Americans—a welcome opportunity to emerge from the trenches of the cul-

ture war and look for more fruitful and hopeful opportunities to encounter each other anew. Perhaps what the country needs is not a definitive legal ruling but a common understanding of the real fears felt by people on all sides of these cases. In more than half the states, no law protects against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment, housing and public accommodation. At the same time, as the Colorado case demonstrates, some advocates for nondiscrimination bear an animus against religious belief, as if it must be defeated in order for justice to be achieved.

It is unlikely that the deep questions of justice and tolerance—both of religious belief and of differences in sexual orientation—turn on what kind of cakes one can purchase or be compelled to bake. But they may well turn on whether we pursue the answers through legal confrontation or human encounter. The court has given the country a chance to consider these questions together rather than against each other. We ought to take advantage of the opportunity.

Fast-Track Housing Near Public Transit

City planners are increasingly alarmed by two trends: a growing shortage of affordable housing, especially in places with job growth, and a nationwide decline in public transit ridership. Local governments could respond by allowing more housing near transit lines, but there is an obstacle to this commonsense approach. Those who live in safe and walkable neighborhoods are often

resistant to giving other people the same opportunity.

This tension led to the recent defeat of a California law that would have allowed the development of housing of up to five stories near train stations, even when this violated local zoning laws. It was a tough sell in the single-family neighborhoods that make up so much even of large cities like San Francisco and Seattle, where residents seek both city convenience and suburb-like serenity.

Opponents of the California

bill included the Sierra Club (rather incredibly, considering the environmental benefits of reducing automobile travel) but also affordable-housing advocates who warned that new development would gentrify the neighborhoods with good transit and displace lower-income residents. This is a valid concern, but maintaining impediments to new housing—which, almost by definition, is more attractive and thus commands higher prices than older buildings—only worsens a housing shortage that is

harming families at all income levels. Lower-income families are already being pushed out to suburbs with poor public transit, and constricting the supply of housing (as well as forgoing property tax revenue) in transit-rich areas does nothing to help them.

Preservationists and housing activists have good reason to be wary of high-rises whose luxury units are snapped up by jet-setters looking for pads with a view, but they are not the only option for siting more housing near transit. Paris is almost twice as densely populated as New York City, but it has relatively few skyscrapers, instead housing people in human-scale blocks of six or seven stories, the same kind of housing that has engendered so much hostility in California and across the United States.

For now, an even less obtrusive way to increase housing without sprawl is accessory dwelling units, zoning jargon for “granny flats,” backyard cottages and other small homes added to existing properties. Many cities essentially prohibit such housing through parking-space requirements, limits on how many unrelated people can live on a property and other rules. At least in this area, California has made more progress. It now has a law streamlining the approval of A.D.U.s, though some municipal governments are still trying to stop them through new regulations. California, and all other states, should find ways to encourage a variety of new housing where it makes the most sense.

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The women of the Hawaiian Ku'e

Mauna Kea is now a focal point for Native Hawaiian *ku'e* (“resistance”), but this time the dispute is not over mineral extraction or tourist-oriented development. The *ku'e* has been growing since the spring of 2015, when an international consortium announced plans to build a \$1.4 billion Thirty Meter Telescope on Mauna Kea—which would have a 98-foot diameter, cover six acres in total, tower 18 stories above the summit and burrow two more below its skin.

To be sure, Mauna Kea, on Hawaii Island, offers some of the best views of the sky on the planet. But it is also one of the most sacred places in Hawaii, and there are already 13 other telescopes on the mountain. The resistance has managed to halt construction a number of times, and T.M.T. officials are now awaiting decisions on two appeals in the Hawaii Supreme Court.

Much of the energy for the *ku'e* has come from women like Hannah Reeves and Pualani Case. “Auntie Hannah” (an avowed Christian) and “Auntie Pua” (a practitioner of Native spirituality) are linked through their reverence for the land and the inspiration they draw from the gods. The influence of the Hawaiian gods (or nature spirits, as they are called) endures despite the desecration of the land here. The Christian God simply coexists among the other deities.

Auntie Hannah is a direct descendant of Queen Lili'uokalani, who was overthrown by the U.S. Marines in 1893, five years before the United States annexed Hawaii. She is also in the line of royal *kahunas*—experts in physical and spiritual caregiving. As a young woman, she was deeply

involved in the sacred dance of hula, but she says that changed one evening when the Christian God, whom she refers to as the Creator, told her to stop. Auntie Hannah became a Christian, but she says she still has a relationship with Pele, the spirit of the currently erupting Kilauea volcano, who appeared on the hood of her truck one night after she delivered blankets to the homeless. (“I said, ‘Pele, in the name of Jesus, get off my car!’”)

Now 81 years old, Auntie Hannah says she usually sleeps in her truck, mostly spending her time caring for the poor and campaigning for the recognition of Native land rights. She is unequivocal about Mauna Kea, the home of some of the most revered Hawaiian nature spirits. “You cannot cut into that mountain,” she says repeatedly in public forums.

Auntie Pua is a teacher, chanter and dancer trained in the traditional sacred arts of *oli* (chant) and hula. She says it was Mo'oinanea, the nature being who lives near the summit of Mauna Kea, who compelled her to become part of the resistance to T.M.T. She and her family were at Maunaua, a sacred place where prayers and leis are offered for rain, when her daughter, then 9 years old, suddenly said: “The lady from the lake. I see her. She's talking to me. Mom, the lady asks...‘Can you stop the telescope?’”

Despite her initial apprehension, Auntie Pua leaped into the court battles to stop T.M.T. Hawaii's Board of Land and Natural Resources first approved the project in 2011, but it has been tied up by appeals ever since; one successful lawsuit, alleging that

the board had not followed due process, was initiated by six appellants, including Auntie Pua. The indigenous people of Hawaii cannot stay apart from the political system, she says, “because if we do that they'll be building something right over our heads.”

Women like the Aunties have found common cause with other indigenous peoples protecting sacred sites. Auntie Pua and other Native Hawaiians have traveled to support the Standing Rock Sioux in their resistance against the Dakota Access pipeline. The consortium behind T.M.T. may not have the bad image of the oil industry, but its violation of indigenous land rights is equally distressing.

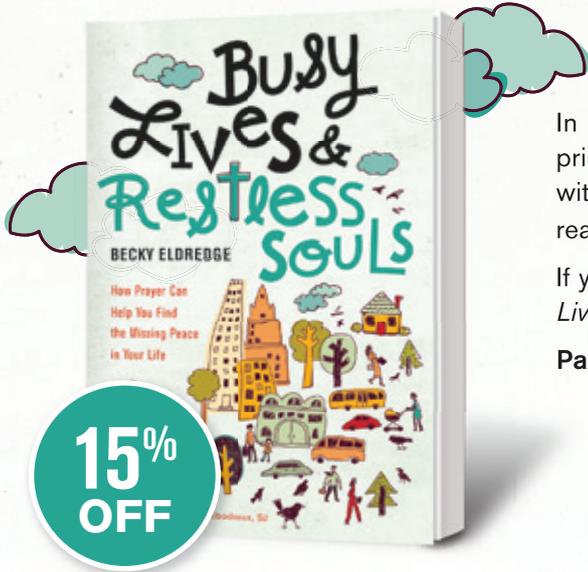
The *ku'e* is about much more than a telescope. Poverty is endemic among Native Hawaiians. They reside in the poorest areas of the state, suffer disproportionately from diabetes and cancer and are one reason Hawaii has a higher rate of homelessness than any other state. The *ku'e* comes in response to more than a century of corrupt appropriation of land and resources.

“There comes a time when you have the birthright, the obligation and the privilege to say, ‘No, enough is enough,’” says Auntie Pua.

There are two remaining appeals before the Hawaii Supreme Court. In the meantime, the consortium says it may consider an alternate site for the telescope—in the Canary Islands.

Jennifer Reid is a historian of religions, a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation fellow and professor emerita at the University of Maine, Farmington.

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The death toll in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria could be 70 times higher than official count

By Michael J. O'Loughlin

On Sept. 29, 2017, Luis Angel González Lorenzo is laid to rest by fellow police officers. He had been killed while attempting to drive across a river in Aguada as Hurricane Maria passed over Puerto Rico.



When Hurricane Maria crashed into Puerto Rico last September, it produced \$90 billion in damage and caused the worst power blackout in U.S. history, and yet just 64 people lost their lives because of the storm—at least according to an official count that has been maintained for more than eight months. But nearly a year after the storm, with hurricane season again looming and cleanup from Maria's devastation still underway, a new study suggests that the actual number of people who died as a result of the Category 4 storm may be 70 times that figure, or close to 5,000 people.

The reason, researchers reported in a study published in May in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, is that indirect “deaths resulting from worsening of chronic conditions or from delayed medical treatments may not be captured on death certificates.”

Maria caused the longest blackout in U.S. history, leaving the entire island of 3.3 million people without power, including those in hospitals and nursing homes who relied on respirators. Researchers from the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, the University of Colorado School of Medicine and Carlos Albizu University in Puerto Rico surveyed 3,299 households earlier this year and used the findings to extrapolate mortality across Puerto Rico. They found that 31 percent of island residents reported disruptions in medical services, and more than 14 percent said they were unable to access medications.

They calculated that 4,645 more people died in the three months after Hurricane Maria than in the corresponding period in the previous year, a 62 percent difference in the mortality rate. One of the researchers, Rafael Irizarry



AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa

of Harvard University, told the Associated Press that the estimate is uncertain because of its limited survey size, but that the study still provides valuable information, including how some people died.

According to the report, approximately one third of post-hurricane deaths were reported by household members as caused by delayed or prevented access to medical care, and nearly 1 in 10 were attributed directly to the hurricane. Previous studies have found that the number of direct and indirect hurricane-related deaths in Puerto Rico is higher than the official toll, including a CNN report in 2017 that there were nearly 500 more deaths than usual on the island during the 30 days following the hurricane.

Jorge J. Ferrer, S.J., a theologian and ethicist who works on the island, said in an email to **America** that he is “outraged, but not surprised” at the findings, adding: “Maria has been catastrophic for Puerto Rico. We still have many areas in which electricity has not been restored, eight months after Maria.”

Father Ferrer, the director of the Bioethics Institute at the Medical Sciences Campus of the University of Puerto Rico in San Juan, said that in addition to the devastation caused by the storm, Puerto Rico continues to suffer because of local corruption, a mass emigration of young people to the U.S. mainland and what he called “the larger problem of the present colonial status.” He said he hoped the most recent study about deaths related to Hurricane Maria will “keep the topic of Puerto Rico’s situation alive on the U.S. mainland” and “that it keeps our local government honest.”

Researchers say that on average households went 84 days without electricity, 68 days without water and 41 days without cellular telephone coverage from the hurricane’s landing to the end of 2017. In Puerto Rico’s most remote communities, 83 percent of households were without electricity for this entire time period.

Catholic Extension, a Chicago-based organization that has worked with Catholic dioceses and parishes on recovery efforts since the storm, said that they, too, are unsur-

prised by the study’s findings.

“Sadly, the new estimates seem very plausible, based on what Catholic Extension has heard and personally witnessed,” Joe Boland, the group’s vice president for mission, said. “During our visits to communities throughout the island since Hurricane Maria struck, we have seen firsthand how many people are living in partially destroyed houses and how they are struggling to provide for themselves and their families. Those who are clearly the most vulnerable are the sick, the poor, the elderly and the disabled.”

Some experts have questioned the study.

“This estimate could be off by thousands. Easily,” Donald Berry, a professor of biostatistics at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, told the Associated Press in an email.

But Puerto Rico’s government, which earlier this year said it had asked researchers from George Washington University to study the accuracy of the death count, issued a statement saying it welcomed the research and would analyze it.

“As the world knows, the magnitude of this tragic disaster caused by Hurricane Maria resulted in many fatalities. We have always expected the number to be higher than what was previously reported,” said Carlos Mercader, executive director of Puerto Rico’s Federal Affairs Administration.

Based on school enrollment data and registrations with the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, an estimated 135,592 residents left Puerto Rico for the mainland United States in a post-Maria exodus. Most of these, 56,477, relocated to Florida. With a median age of 25, the storm refugees are among the island’s youngest people.

The latest losses continue a population decline that threatens the island’s future. In 2000, before the worst effects of Puerto Rico’s economic and fiscal crisis took hold, there were roughly equal numbers of Puerto Ricans living on the island and in the rest of the United States. But from 2006 to 2016, Puerto Rico lost 525,769 residents through migration (14 percent of its total population). The Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College in New York reports that if post-Maria patterns continue, Puerto Rico could lose another 470,335 residents from 2017 to 2019.

Michael J. O’Loughlin, *national correspondent*.
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After the storm



Outside the Capitol building in San Juan on June 1, hundreds of pairs of shoes memorialize those lost to Hurricane Maria.

DEATH TOLL

- 17** | President Trump's guess of how many people had died as a result of Hurricane Maria when he visited Puerto Rico in October. Mr. Trump contrasted Maria to "a real catastrophe like Katrina," the hurricane that hit New Orleans in 2005. The official death toll from that storm is 1,833.

- 64** | The official death toll for more than eight months after the hurricane hit Puerto Rico.

- 499** | From a CNN survey of 112 funeral homes, covering Sept. 20-Oct. 19.

- 1,052** | From a New York Times analysis of daily mortality data from Puerto Rico's vital statistics bureau, covering Sept. 20-Dec. 31, 2017, compared with the same period in 2016. The Times reported that deaths from sepsis, a complication of severe infection, jumped by almost 50 percent (along with increases of more than 40 percent for deaths from pneumonia and respiratory diseases). As the Times reporters noted, "That change is notable and could be explained by delayed medical treatment or poor conditions in homes and hospitals."

- 1,397** | Estimate released by the Puerto Rico Health Department on June 1, based on the "excess deaths," or the increase in deaths in Puerto Rico from Sept.-Dec. 2017 to the same period in 2016. The Department of Health is still working with researchers to come up with an accurate count, which could be much higher.

- 4,645** | Estimate by researchers affiliated with the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, based on a survey of 3,299 households in Puerto Rico from Jan. 17-Feb. 24, 2018. The researchers "calculated a 62 percent increase in the mortality rate" from Sept. 20 through Dec. 31, resulting in a 95 percent certainty of "excess deaths" between 793 and 8,498, with 4,645 at the midpoint. They also write that their estimate "is likely to be conservative" in part because of the difficulty tracking deaths of people who lived alone.

THE EXODUS

135,592

Estimated migration from Puerto Rico to the rest of the U.S. during the six months after Maria

56,477 to Florida

15,208 to Massachusetts

13,292 to Connecticut

11,217 to New York

9,963 to Pennsylvania

5,027 to New Jersey

25 ▶ Median age of those who left Puerto Rico and did not return or are missing

50 ▶ Median age of those who stayed in Puerto Rico or died there

THE DIASPORA

3.3 million

Population of Puerto Rico before Maria (2017)

5.4 million

Hispanics of Puerto Rican origin living in the 50 states or D.C. (2016)

THE DAMAGE

\$90 billion in damages

3rd costliest tropical cyclone in the United States since 1900

70,000 homes completely destroyed
250,000 homes with major damage.

On average, households in Puerto Rico suffered:

84 days without electricity

68 days without water

41 days without cellular telephone coverage

11,000 customers were still without power on June 1

Sources: "Puerto Rico Post-Maria," February 2018, Hunter College, City University of New York; "Mortality in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria," The New England Journal of Medicine, May 29, 2018; Census Bureau via CNN. Migration figures are based on school enrollment data and registrations with FEMA. June 1 estimate of residents without power from CBS News. Statistics compiled by Allyson Escobar and Sean Kolon.

Can the church in Nigeria help end attacks on Christian farming communities?



In Lagos on May 22, Nigerians demand a stronger response to violence in Benue State.

Requiem Masses and peaceful demonstrations across Nigeria coincided with the burial of two priests and 17 parishioners in central Benue State on May 22. “As we mourn the dead, we must not mourn like people that have no hope,” Alfred Adewale Martins, the archbishop of Lagos, told thousands gathered at St. Leo’s Catholic Church in Ikeja, the state capital.

The two priests, Joseph Gor and Felix Tyolaha, were killed along with the other victims when St. Ignatius Catholic Church, in the village of Ayar-Mbalom in Benue, was attacked during morning Mass on April 24.

In a statement, President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria said the killing of priests and worshippers was “vile, evil and satanic” and promised to deal with the attackers. It is suspected that Fulani cattle herders fired on the church, razed some shops and stole money, Communion wine and other valuables.

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria condemned the killings and called on Mr. Buhari to step down if he “cannot keep our country safe.”

Ethnic and religious tensions have often led to conflict in Nigeria, a nation of 198 million people evenly divided between Muslims in the north and Christians, including about 28 million Catholics, mostly in the south. Benue State is home to a diverse set of ethnicities, cultures and religions. This region, a hotbed of sectarian unrest, has suffered particularly because of clashes between largely Muslim Fulani cattle herders and mostly Christian farming communities. Conflict with farming communities led to some 2,500 deaths in 2016.

Farmers accuse the Fulani herders of allowing their livestock to trespass onto farms and damage crops, while the pastoralists grumble over the theft of their cattle by gangs in local communities, as well as the disappearance of traditional migration routes.

Ikemesit Effiong, lead analyst at the Lagos-based geopolitical consulting firm SBM Intelligence, said grazing

areas and migration routes carved out by Nigerian authorities as far back as 1964 have been overtaken by the expansion of farmlands, human settlements and public infrastructure amid rapid population growth, “forcing the herdsmen deeper into farmland.”

These problems have been exacerbated by the Muslim insurgency group Boko Haram, which has been active in most of the northeast. Climate change has also forced herders to migrate southward in search of greener pasture and water for their cattle.

Nomads and farmers in Benue had clashed in the past, but it never resulted in “the kinds of death we see today,” said Shettima Mohammed, the Benue state secretary of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, the umbrella union for Fulani pastoralists in Nigeria. He attributes the surge in violence to a breakdown of local conflict resolution mechanisms. Just 10 or 15 years ago, he said, “misunderstandings were settled by traditional rulers.”

Mr. Mohammed is worried that the conflict is stoking religious tension. Some Christian groups accuse Fulani herders of waging a jihad—a belief fueled by the role of Fulani pastoralists in the spread of Islamic revivalism in Nigeria and some other parts of West Africa.

“This conflict transcends questions of ethnicity and religion. It is a conversation about the sanctity of economic institutions like property rights,” Mr. Effiong said. “Nigeria cannot build a proper economy if basic property rights can be so casually violated, as we have seen repeatedly.”

Mr. Effiong believes the church has a key role to play in the path to peace. “In the absence of an effective response by national authorities, an effort at reconciliation by religious leaders might be the shot in the arm everyone needs to begin to properly assess the consequences of what has been a devastating conflict,” he said.

Linus Unah contributes from Lagos, Nigeria. Twitter: @linusunah.

Political violence disrupts Mexico's elections as church seeks peace

As Mexico gears up for its general elections on July 1, the country has been gripped by an unprecedented wave of political violence. At least 102 candidates and political workers have been murdered since last September. Candidates running for state legislatures or in mayoral elections in rural communities already plagued by drug-war violence are common targets.

On May 8 Abel Montufar Mendoza was shot in Ciudad Altamirano, a city in the southern state of Guerrero. He was running for a seat in the state legislature and had taken leave as mayor of the town of Coyuca, one of the most violent in a state where criminal groups have killed thousands. Three days later, José Remedios Aguirre Sánchez was gunned down in Apaseo del Alto, a town in the central Mexican state of Guanajuato, where he was running for mayor. Another shooting, on May 17, took the life of the mayoral candidate in the town of Amacuzac, Andrés García Jaime.

The sheer scale of the violence reveals what is at stake in the upcoming elections. Most Mexicans are deeply disappointed after six years of government by President Enrique Peña Nieto of the Institutional Revolutionary Party. Under Mr. Peña Nieto's leadership, violence has spiked to levels not seen in more than two decades, corruption scandals make the front page on an almost daily basis, and economic growth has become sluggish.

The P.R.I.'s candidate, José António Meade, is trailing in every poll behind the leftist populist Andrés Manuel López Obrador. On the state and local levels, Mr. López Obrador's Morena Party is also poised to grab governorships and crucial municipalities. Dark forces appear to have noticed the impending political change. Most observers believe organized crime is the principal culprit of the violence.

"If you're a drug trafficker, an arms trafficker, a human trafficker, you need to get the local authorities to be on your side," Gerardo Priego Tapia, a former senator from the southern state of Tabasco, said. "So the gangs ask themselves: Who's on my side? Which candidate will work better for me? Violence against a candidate is a way



to impose their will."

"Criminals...want to make sure that local authorities leave them alone as they traffic drugs, guns or people," José Reveles, a veteran reporter who has covered both organized crime and politics for almost 50 years, said. "Gaining control of a municipality also provides gangs with access to property and tax records. It provides them with the information they need to know who to extort and who to kidnap."

Mexico is no stranger to political violence. Campaigns are usually marred by violent scuffles between rival parties, accusations of vote-buying and electoral fraud, and physical attacks on candidates. This year, however, the violence seems more extreme than usual, compelling even the Catholic Church, which traditionally treads very carefully in a country with a strong separation between church and state, to warn of the disrupting effects of the hundreds of attacks on candidates and campaign workers.



AP Photo/Eduardo Verdugo

Mourners pay their last respects on May 13 to José Remedios Aguirre Sánchez, a mayoral candidate shot down in broad daylight.

Guerrero is an impoverished rural state where the continuing struggle between drug trafficking gangs, law enforcement, the military and citizen militias has become akin to bloody guerrilla warfare in some communities. Bishop Salvador Rangel Mendoza of Chilpancingo even met with the leader of a criminal gang on Good Friday, seeking a pact to quell the violence in his region. He told Mexican media that he believed he had no choice: “I have always said: Guerrero is in the hands of the narcos. The official authority has been replaced by drug traffickers.”

Jan-Albert Hootsen, *Mexico City correspondent.*
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iStock photo

As the earth warms, mosquito-borne illnesses are on the move

As temperatures rise globally, previously temperate areas are more likely to experience subtropical and tropical heat. Recent studies suggest that many types of mosquitoes will move into these newly warmer zones—bringing with them diseases like Zika, dengue, yellow fever, West Nile virus and chikungunya. In many countries, that means more diseases in communities that lack the medical and mosquito-control resources to cope.

Dr. Diego Herrera is a family physician with Andean Health and Development, a Catholic nonprofit serving communities in rural Ecuador. He estimates that 60 percent to 80 percent of his patients have been infected by disease-carrying mosquitoes.

Some of these diseases can have effects that are long-term or debilitating, like birth defects, blindness or severe joint pain. Particularly among people who already live in poverty, mosquito-borne illnesses can have a huge impact on daily life because of missed days or weeks of work.

“People who are the least responsible for this problem [of climate change] are the people who are bearing the burden, whether it’s in this country or third-world countries,” said Julie Trocchio, a senior director at the U.S. Catholic Health Association. She says the C.H.A. sees mosquito-borne illnesses as one of the many ways climate change has a disproportionately harsh impact on people who lack financial resources and political power.

As warming temperatures allow mosquitoes to survive in new areas, there could be one upside, if it could be so described. Mr. Herrera believes mosquito-borne illnesses have garnered more attention—and funding—because of the increasing outbreaks in wealthier nations and cities.

Kate Stein contributes from Miami.
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THE RECKONING

Canadians, and Catholic religious orders, grapple with a history of ‘whitewashing’ indigenous children

By Eileen Markey



A 1940 photo shows indigenous students and a nun in a girls' classroom at Cross Lake Indian Residential School in Manitoba.



CNS photo/Library and Archives Canada, Reuters

The top of the *wikuom* is just visible from the retirement residence of the Sisters of Charity. Its off-white canvas approximates the birch bark the Mi'kmaq people used to construct their homes when they ranged across what are now the Maritime Provinces of eastern Canada. Pine poles hold the structure up and leave an opening to release smoke from ceremonial fires. Inside the *wikuom* (the Mi'kmaq word for what you may have known as “wigwam”), Catherine Martin, a filmmaker and Mi'kmaq activist, leads ritual prayers, burning sage and sweetgrass, cedar and tobacco, and teaching visitors about her people's way.

The *wikuom* is not a relic of the past. It is an invocation of a future in which [First Nations](#) are respected as equals in Canada.

Last spring, when the *wikuom* was erected at the University of Mount St. Vincent, Ms. Martin held a visiting chair in the women's studies department at the school, founded by the Sisters of Charity in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1873. The prayers she offered were for the victims and survivors of Canada's centuries-long drive to eradicate its native peoples—in particular, the Mi'kmaq children forcibly taken from their families on reserves and sent to the government-sponsored boarding school the Sisters of

Charity staffed for close to four decades. Former students of the Shubenacadie Residential School tell of being beaten, physically scarred for speaking their native language, forbidden from communicating with siblings, humiliated for wetting the bed and whipped with leather cat tails if they attempted to escape.

As the nation has embarked on a process of truth-seeking and reconciliation to confront the crimes of the residential school system and the racism behind it, religious orders, churches and other nonindigenous Canadians have had to face their culpability. Even after it signed the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights in response to the horrors of World War II, Canada wrenched children from their mothers and sent them to be stripped of their culture at schools administered by Christian churches. The sisters whose order staffed the Shubenacadie school and another in British Columbia are among the groups confronting this history and trying to imagine what reconciliation means. They are learning that to write a better future, they have to edit their understanding of the past. “To learn that it was racist, that it wasn’t helping—it was very hard for some of our sisters,” says Sister Donna Geernaert, president of the order when the reconciliation process began. “So part of what I’m trying to do is make sense of the past and face it.”

It is such a Christian word: reconciliation. Can a private sacrament, a movement between soul and God, be adapted to heal a division in the polis? How does a religious community embark on a spiritual endeavor with people they have harmed? These are questions Sister Joan O’Keefe, current president of the Sisters of Charity of Halifax, is puzzling over.

“My goal is to continue to build those relationships and to respond to the invitation to be part of the process,” Sister O’Keefe says. “We colluded in a racist system,” she says of her order’s role in running the residential schools. “It’s not enough to ask for forgiveness. The point is to listen to their stories.... You can’t reconcile if you don’t know the truth.”

A Long Legacy, a Long Accounting

The schools were not part of an education program, the First Nation peoples argue and the Canadian government admits. They were part of an elimination plan. In 2008, then-prime minister Stephen Harper issued an official apology for the schools and decried the racist assumptions behind them. “Two primary objectives of the residential schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and

cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal,” he said, speaking from the floor of Parliament in Ottawa.

The reckoning was sparked in the 1990s, when Phil Fontaine, then head of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, revealed that he had been physically and sexually abused while a student at a residential school run by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, an order of priests and brothers. Then came a series of books and an outpouring of allegations all over the country. In the early 2000s, leaders of several congregations of women religious met to talk about developing a coordinated response to the threats of lawsuits.

“There was a sense from the women religious: ‘Let’s get the legal issue out of the way because the real work is reconciliation and healing,’” Sister Geernaert recalls. The Sisters of Charity were never named in any litigation, but they had retained lawyers when former students leveled accusations.

Meanwhile, the federal government was moving in the same direction. In 2005 it consolidated all the lawsuits against the government and church groups and agreed to an omnibus settlement that established a restitution fund for victims of the residential schools. The government and church entities paid into the fund on the premise that they would be indemnified against future lawsuits.

By 2017 that fund had paid out \$3.1 billion to more than 37,000 victims of the residential schools: a base sum of \$10,000 each, plus more depending on how severely they were abused and how grievously their lives had been affected later on. The Sisters of Charity contributed \$250,000 to the fund and continue to give to indigenous groups. They also paid for a delegation of First Nations people to meet with Pope Benedict XVI in Rome in 2009 and contributed to a fund to build a memorial on the site of their former school.

An arguably more difficult condition of the legal settlement has nothing to do with money and everything to do with memory. It required the Canadian government to establish a truth and reconciliation commission, which published testimony from residential school survivors in 2015. Nonindigenous Canadians would have to hear what happened, rearrange their ideas about their past and commit to building a different future.

Canada is not the first society to attempt such a social reconciliation. Beginning with Chile in 1990, when a commission set out to establish a true account of human rights violations committed by the government of Augusto Pino-



Library and Archives Canada

Indigenous children pose in front of their residential school in Regina, Saskatchewan, in 1908.

chet, several nations overcoming violence or war have embarked on such processes. In South Africa, Rwanda, Uganda, El Salvador and elsewhere, truth and reconciliation commissions have met with varying degrees of success. They are charged with addressing specific harms, but they also consider larger, historical injuries. So Truth and Reconciliation Canada specifically addresses the residential school system, but it exists in the context of 500 years of dispossession and violence against indigenous Canadians.

“The work and the time that is required for healing... will take the rest of the lives of those who were abused and those who abused and the rest of the lives of the people who inherited the aftereffects,” says Catherine Martin, the Mi’kmaq woman who erected the wikwuom.

The social reconciliation process involves several steps,

explains Robert Schreiter, a professor of systematic theology at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and a member of the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood, who has worked and written extensively on the truth and reconciliation initiatives in South Africa and Rwanda. It is not linear, but it has standard elements, he explains: the healing of memory, truth-telling, restitution and forgiveness.

“What we’re trying to do in a social reconciliation is not change the past but change our relationship with the past,” he explains. “In a sense it reverses time.”

As long as the injury and injustice of the residential schools were unacknowledged by nonindigenous Canadians, Father Schreiter says, their memory and impact continued to tear at survivors and their descendants. For



The schools were not part of an education program. They were part of an elimination plan.

reconciliation to work, members of perpetrator groups need to acknowledge what happened, put in place protections to ensure it does not happen again and make amends. Truth-telling is an essential element, Father Schreiter says, even if some would rather rush toward forgiveness.

The power in reconciliation lies with the victim, says Michel Andraos, another member of the faculty at Catholic Theological Union and a Canadian citizen who has written about reconciliation rituals, but people of the perpetrator groups have an important role to play as well.

“To make reconciliation happen, they need to acknowledge the violence of the past and retribute deeply, at some cost,” he says. “It’s a long-term process,” but one pregnant with promise. In the sincere reconciliation encounters between First Nations people and nonindigenous Canadians, he says, “there is a way forward.”

But like the sacrament in the confessional, social reconciliation requires both an examination of conscience and a heartfelt repentance. Mr. Andraos suspects the hardest aspect for Christians and Catholics to accept might be the idea that their religion was not incidental to the violence but was central to it. “It was actually the theology that was violent,” Father Schreiter says. “We need to look at the theology that blinded us and prevented us from seeing.” The root sin in the case of the residential schools, he says, was the lie that European and Christian culture was superior to First Nations’ cultures.

That lie made everything else possible.

‘Kill the Indian in the Child’

Part of the challenge of reconciliation is that it requires the perpetrator to reckon with evil. It is frightening to look at the church’s role in the schools and admit nuns chose to

harm children. It is tempting to brush it away, to urge a hasty forgetting.

Sister Donna Geernaert, former chancellor of the University of Mount St. Vincent and past president of the Sisters of Charity of Halifax, knew her order taught at the Shubenacadie residential school until it closed in 1967, but it had never been part of her work. She took her final vows after it closed and worked in academia and administration, served on committees of Canadian churches engaged in justice work (including some for First Nations’ rights) and advised the conference of Canadian bishops on ecumenical dialogue. If she thought of the Shubenacadie school at all, it was as a place older sisters had offered pious service, ministering to First Nations children who were poor and in need of an education.

As the sisters followed the dictates of the Second Vatican Council to move out of institutions and into community work, Sister Geernaert thought, they left the school behind, along with their veils and black gowns. Yes, the sisters had used discipline and teaching methods no one would use today, and there was a focus on assimilating the children into white society that did not match current ideas on respect for cultural differences. But the school was a part of its time, she thought, and part of the legacy of the sisters’ charitable deeds in Canada.

That is not how First Nations people remember the Shubenacadie school, or scores of others like it. For one thing, they refer to themselves as survivors, not students or alumni. When the Canadian government convened a series of public hearings on the schools in 2011, part of the omnibus settlement that resolved hundreds of abuse lawsuits, Sister Geernaert listened for hours to the testimony of Shubenacadie survivors. She still remembers the bodily sensation of being at a hearing. It was as though the pain the people were recounting, the pain that followed them and devastated their families, was transferred to her.

Hour after hour the Shubenacadie survivors spoke. Men and women told of how they had been forced onto trains or pushed onto buses by the federal employees who oversaw indigenous reserves—or how their parents had sent them willingly, thinking they would gain advantages they could not have on impoverished reserves. The survivors testified about being beaten, starved and locked up in cabinets if they were caught sneaking into the girls’ dormitory, homesick and lonesome, to see a big sister. They recalled constant hunger and fear. Some were called only by numbers and forgot their names. Instead of receiving an education, they were forced to work in kitchens and laundries and at farm labor; if they attempted to escape, they were

Archival photos show students at the Shubenacadie Residential School, circa 1940. (Sisters of Charity Halifax Archives)



whipped until their backs were bloody and scarred. The Royal Mounted Canadian Police chased them down, but the school principal administered the beatings. Hospital records suggest two children at Shubenacadie died from injuries they sustained in beatings. The men told of being 5 or 6 years old and jeered at for wetting their beds, forced to carry their urine-soaked sheets on their heads through the dining room, their bare bottoms exposed in hospital gowns. There was sexual abuse.

These are claims that Truth and Reconciliation Canada, a government entity, has verified, determined true and paid damages for. The brutality and lovelessness of the treatment call to mind a notorious psychological experiment conducted at Stanford University in the 1970s in which college students played the role of prisoners and prison guards. The experiment had to be called off because the students playing the guards grew so brutal and sadistic.



The schools never had enough food, and the buildings were of shoddy construction, subject to mold and damp. Death rates from infection and injury at the residential schools far outpaced the rest of Canadian society, according to the journalist Chris Benjamin in his book *Indian School Road: Legacies of the Shubenacadie Residential School*. Some children died trying to find their way home to heartbroken and shamefaced parents, who must have thought, “How did I let my child into this horror?” Other times parents showed up at the schools seeking to see their children and were denied—and the homesick children were never told their parents had asked for them.



The national policy was explicit: The children needed to be taken out of their communities and away from their families to “kill the Indian in the child.” All students, whether they had family or not, were legal wards of school principals. When they were released as teenagers they returned to native communities broken, estranged from family, unable to speak their language but barely educated in English. Addiction and domestic violence roared out of them. They flooded through generations and out through families and washed back up in more ruined lives.

“To sit in the room with people telling their stories of how they were abused, you feel that in your stomach. You can’t not be affected by other people’s pain,” Sister Geernaert says, recalling the testimonies. Her order did this,



Truth-telling is an essential element, even if some would rather rush toward achieving forgiveness.

she realized—her good order of loving and brave women, the ones smiling in those pictures in the archives, those sisters who set out from the parishes of Halifax to build the church in Canada, to bring the faith to God’s people. They rent this hole in the universe that the Mi’kmaq are still falling through.

“You don’t want to think that your congregation did things that hurt other people. But it’s important to hear it, and it’s important for people who haven’t been heard to speak,” Sister Geernaert says.

Facing—and Reclaiming—a Heritage

Sitting still with open ears is no small thing. First Nations people began complaining about the residential school system as early as 1879, but they were ignored. The white Canadian government and its Christian allies thought they knew better than the indigenous parents begging for their children.

“We were co-opted into a system that was racist, but we didn’t see it at the time,” Sister Geernaert says. “We see that we have an inheritance of hurt and injury that has harmed others and for that we are sorry.” She wants to believe that individual members of the Sisters of Charity did not knowingly commit abuse, but she knows what happened at Shubenacadie is part of her inheritance. “It’s a heritage of guilt, if you like.”

Rebecca Thomas, a Mi’kmaq woman and the student services advisor to First Nations students at Nova Scotia Community College, is one of the people who inherited the damage of Shubenacadie. Her father was there for two years in the 1940s, taken with several siblings when he was 5 years old. He was not permitted to speak to his siblings and was punished when he tried. For him, Shubenacadie was a place of loneliness and fear, persistent physical abuse and a cold hunger. He recalled that when he uttered his Mi’kmaq language as a little boy, he was cut with scalpels;

his shoulders still bear the scars. When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission held hearings in Ottawa, he went and listened, but he did not speak. It took him more than a year to deposit his restitution check from the settlement fund, he told his daughter, explaining, “Taking that check seemed like I was absolving Canada of what it did to me.”

An aunt helped get him out of the school and into up-state New York, but then he was a lost child in the United States, in the foster care system and in reform school, on the street and in trouble, with demons that hounded him through adulthood. Ms. Thomas was raised by her white mother—her father lost to addiction, an intermittent and unsteady presence in her life. He stopped drinking 17 years ago and has since built a strong relationship with Ms. Thomas, rediscovering his Mi’kmaq culture and fostering the same in his daughter as he recovers.

Still, Ms. Thomas feels she inherited an absence. “They took away my language, my culture,” she says, thinking about the rupture that occurred when her father was removed from his home and community. For Ms. Thomas, who is a poet, the loss of language cuts particularly deep. She knows that a language holds within it a way of seeing the world, a bridge for understanding and making sense. As she rebuilds a Mi’kmaq sense of herself, she knows there will always be gaps: “I would be a fluent Mi’kmaq speaker if it weren’t for the [Shubenacadie] school. There are always going to be bricks missing from that bridge.”

Ms. Thomas sees reconciliation moving in several spheres at once: within families over broken relationships, such as the one she experienced with her father; within First Nations, as she is discovering when she reclaims a Mi’kmaq vocabulary; and across Canadian society, as the nonindigenous face history. But she is not rushing to forgive anyone prematurely. “I think in order to have a good and meaningful reconciliation, we need to sit with the truth for a while,” she says.

Making Amends

Ms. Thomas’s father has managed to outrun his demons, but hundreds of others have not, says Patrick Small Legs-Nagge, a social worker and member of the Piikani First Nation in Alberta.

“The thing that happened with these kids is there was no way to process what happened to them,” he says. Psychological counseling sessions for residential school survivors, another component of the joint settlement, just reached the final group of survivors last year. “For some the counseling is helpful, transformative,” he says. “Some will never



CNS photo/Michael Swan, The Catholic Register

A man breaks down during opening ceremonies as Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission prepares to hear testimony in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, in 2011.

be able to change; the damage is too great. They'll take everything with them to their death."

Mr. Small Legs-Nagge thinks the University of Mount St. Vincent, as another learning institution associated with the Sisters of Charity, is making progress. He credits university president Mary Bluechardt with taking the implications of reconciliation seriously. Last year Mr. Small Legs-Nagge assumed a new post, special advisor to the university president on aboriginal affairs.

The university has an aboriginal student center that serves more than 150 indigenous students at the university. It conducted a post-secondary education needs assessment with Mi'kmaq communities in the Maritime provinces in 2014, and it flies the Mi'kmaq flag alongside the flags of Canada and Nova Scotia. The university hired its first indigenous professor last year, Sherry Pictou, a former chief of the L'sitkuk First Nation.

Last fall the school hosted an art installation-like me-

morial—a haunting exhibit of thousands of embroidered moccasin tops, each donated by the family of a missing or murdered indigenous woman. The event brought Mi'kmaq and other First Nations people to campus, where they performed prayers and remembered their daughters. Mr. Small Leg-Nagge says there is still more work to do, particularly to convince European Canadians that building a right relationship with First Nations societies is a matter of concern for them. "This isn't just the work of indigenous or even primarily the work of indigenous. It's on the settlers," he says. But he has hope: "A lot of good can come from all the work the Mount is doing."

Gerry Lancaster, another Sister of Charity, speaks with gentleness, nearly whispering into the phone. For 25 years she has been part of Kairos, an ecumenical community working for racial justice in Canada and frequently advocating for First Nations around fishing rights and borders. The horrors at the residential schools shocked her. It was



Archbishop Fred Hiltz of the Anglican Church of Canada, Archbishop Gerard Pettipas of Grouard-McLennan in Alberta, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Chief Perry Bellegarde, Justice Murray Sinclair and Governor General David Johnston attend the closing ceremony of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Ottawa in June 2015.

destabilizing to think of her good sisters being so inhuman, she says. How did it come to that, the cooperation with evil?

When she was asked to represent the Sisters of Charity at a planning meeting for the Truth and Reconciliation hearing in Halifax in 2011, she was frightened. "I was afraid to walk in the door. But you can get through it," she says. "A question came to all the church people at the planning event: 'What are you doing in terms of reconciliation?' I stood up and said, 'I...I am a Sister of Charity. We ran the residential school. I sincerely apologize. What we are doing now is our own inner work,'" she said. The sisters need to turn their attention to their own transformation, she said.

While the government implements the long list of recommendations from Truth and Reconciliation Commission reports, and while First Nations people like Catherine Martin and Rebecca Thomas try to untangle the past from the present, the sisters need to examine themselves and track a new direction, Sister Geernaert says. "First of all, we have to get over the denial. Then acknowledge the wrong having been done and that it affects generations—and that we are all human. And the First Nations people are trying to reclaim their dignity. We have to see all of that with a large heart," she says. "The hardest thing is facing the fact that we were responsible for so many people, for robbing them of their dignity and their culture. How can we now repair the damage and do our part?"

She speaks slowly, groping through the shadowed past, struggling to look at it squarely. "To cut their hair. To put them in a uniform. To separate them from their loved ones. To have no one to love them." Her voice clouds with tears.

"We need reconciliation to gently put a salve on the wound and we need to do the heart work, helping people in terms of their recovery, to be supportive of their resilience," she says. Sister Lancaster says she wishes that everyone in her community—and European Canadians more generally—could share the encounters she has experienced in the indigenous healing rituals. United in their frailty, the victim and the perpetrator, the wounded and the inheritor of the guilt—both sides are finally human.

Sister Lancaster and another sister go to pow wows in the summer, just to be present, to be a Sister of Charity respecting Mi'kmaw culture. She participates in workshops that aim to educate European Canadians. And she takes part in healing rituals, praying as an indigenous elder burns sage and listening as young people tell their parents' stories, hoping to release them. She sits with elders, washes the smoke of sage and cedar over her as a Mi'kmaw elder burns the plants in a cleansing ceremony called smudging. The smoke rises to the sky, taking the hurt, the shame, the horror with it. At least that is the hope.

Eileen Markey is an independent reporter and the author of *A Radical Faith: The Assassination of Sr. Maura* (Nation Books). She lives in the Bronx, N.Y., and teaches journalism at the City University of New York.

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ALFIE'S LAST DAYS

A little boy's life and death stoked a furious debate that will not soon end

By Kevin Clarke

The uproar during the last unquiet month of little Alfie Evans's life included debates over state obligations and parental rights and accusations of euthanasia and judicial overreach. Alfie, who died on April 28, was a British toddler whose plight came to international attention after courts in the United Kingdom denied his parents' appeal to transfer him to the Vatican's pediatric hospital, Bambino Gesù.

The global public took sides across the internet, and on the streets of Liverpool abuse rained down on the mostly Catholic medical staff at Alder Hey Hospital, where Alfie was being treated. In his last days, members of "Alfie's army" even attempted to storm the hospital to liberate the 23-month-old from its care.

Alfie had been a profoundly sick child almost his entire life. He had been in a semi-vegetative state since he was brought into the hospital in December 2016 at 6 months, convulsing and feverish. It was soon evident he was suffering from what would remain an unidentified neurodegenerative disorder that had by February 2017 reduced much of his brain to cerebral fluid, according to court testimony.

Doctors treating Alfie or consulting on his case—even those brought in by his parents—concurred that therapeutic intervention was impossible and that palliative, noncurative "comfort" care was the only reasonable treatment they could offer. The team at Alder Hey wanted to remove the medical interventions that its members believed were delaying his death; his parents begged for the opportunity to continue his life—at least for the duration of a transfer to Bambino Gesù in Rome. As the impasse continued, mixed messages from Catholic church leaders abounded, including one from the very top.

Following an emotional meeting with Tom Evans, Alfie's young father, Pope Francis personally intervened in the controversy in April, supporting the family's desire to move the toddler to Bambino Gesù and dramatically raising the international profile of this British court dispute. But by then other Vatican officials had already expressed tentative support for the court's order to remove the ventilator that had been keeping Alfie alive, and Archbishop Malcolm McMahon of Liverpool had advised Pope Francis of his



Peter Byrne/PA via AP

When Alfie Evans died on April 28, his supporters released balloons.

confidence in the humanity and professionalism of Alder Hey’s medical staff.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the archbishop of Westminster and leader of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, told media during a visit to Poland in April that he believed everything possible had been done to help Alfie and criticized people who “sought political capital” from the tragedy “without knowing the facts.”

“It’s very hard to act in a child’s best interest when this isn’t always as the parents would wish,” Cardinal Nichols said, “and this is why a court must decide what’s best—not for the parents but for the child.”

John Paris, S.J., the Michael P. Walsh professor of bioethics emeritus at Boston College, an internationally recognized authority on Catholic teaching and end-of-life care, believes that the pope’s pastoral outreach to the Evans family was interpreted erroneously as a signal that therapeutic treatment might still be possible for Alfie—just as his previous outreach during the impasse over the fate of another British infant, Charlie Gard, had been the year before. But at Bambino Gesù, he says, though Alfie would have remained on a ventilator, the child would have had the

same palliative care he was already receiving in Liverpool—that is, comfort care as his natural death approached.

Teaching Versus Ideology

The church offers guidance on the meaning of extraordinary care, which can be individually determined, and ordinary care, which is always required, in the treatment of the critically ill and people in persistent vegetative states. But the teaching is often unable to overcome ideologically driven misconceptions and confusion, says Kevin Wildes, S.J., a leading author and lecturer on bioethics and the retiring president of Loyola University New Orleans. That is particularly true in the United States, he thinks, where end-of-life controversies have been warped by the clamor of abortion politics.

As a former street-corner activist herself, Jacqueline Abernathy knows well that sidewalk pro-life counselors “have the luxury of being an ideologue when it comes to [elective] abortion because it is an intrinsic evil.” But that is not the case in most end-of-life disputes.

They can be complicated and nuanced, she says, and require a sober understanding of the underlying medical

Cardinal Vincent Nichols: ‘It’s very hard to act in a child’s best interest when this isn’t always as the parents would wish.’

technicalities and ethical concerns. Ms. Abernathy is a bioethicist and an assistant professor of public administration at Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Tex., where she leads the Mortality Policy Project, a research initiative focused on public policy related to end-of-life decision-making.

She first became involved in end-of-life policy while advocating against plans to remove Terri Schiavo from feeding and hydration in 2005 in Florida. Though she still considers the outcome in the Schiavo case an act of euthanasia, Ms. Abernathy says over years of analysis and study she has come to more deeply appreciate the perspective from the medical side in such disputes and the role played by their often exacting ethical standards on treatment. And somewhere along the way she became a convert to Catholicism.

According to Ms. Abernathy, many of the commentators eager to condemn the staff at Alder Hey—or worse, to use the Evans family’s misfortune as the rhetorical tip of the spear in polemics against socialized medicine or a presumptive euthanasia regime in Britain—were simply uninformed about the medical and ethical complexities of the case.

In her overall assessment of the care that Alfie received at Alder Hey, she sees nothing that raises alarms. “All signs point to [hospital staff] coming to the realization that ‘we’ve done everything we can for him, and there is nothing more that can be done. And to continue to let him languish [on life support] is to invite more trouble and suffering.’”

Ms. Abernathy notes how the emerging belief in “vitalism,” that life is worth sustaining under any circumstance, often factors in to such end-of-life controversies. She finds most frustrating the partisans who deliberately spread misinformation about Alfie’s care to push their agendas.

“Unfortunately, the abortion politics in the United

States have led many Catholics to this absolutist position on protecting all life at all times,” Father Wildes says, “but that’s not our tradition.”

Catholic end-of-life criteria developed over centuries. They have been succinctly articulated by Pope Pius XII in an address to anesthesiologists in 1957 and by documents like the Declaration on Euthanasia in 1980. This tradition, with an eye on “the attainment of the higher, more important good,” encourages the acceptance of the limits of medical intervention and the acceptance of a natural death, Father Wildes says. What that means will vary from patient to patient.

“There is no magic list of what is extraordinary and ordinary.... What makes that distinction workable is the quality of life and the decisions of the patient,” he says. “What is extraordinary for one patient may only be ordinary for another.”

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* accepts “the refusal of ‘over-zealous’ treatment”: “Discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome, dangerous, extraordinary, or disproportionate to the expected outcome can be legitimate.... Here one does not will to cause death; one’s inability to impede it is merely accepted” (No. 2278).

An individual patient’s personal guidance on end of life is obviously crucial, and in its absence because of incapacity or immaturity, the guidance of the patient’s proxies—which in Alfie’s case were his parents. But even the parent’s decision-making role has limitations. In the Alfie Evans and Charlie Gard cases, a critical conflict with secular authority arose over what constituted what the catechism would call the reasonable will and legitimate interests of the infants’ parents.

It may be a hard thing to hear, say bioethicists, but parents, naturally deeply invested in the fate of their children, are often not the best judges of appropriate medical interventions during end-of-life conflicts. Involuntary physical movements by patients in vegetative states can be misinterpreted by loved ones seeking evidence of persisting consciousness.

And because of modern marvels of recovery and life-extension, some have come to see “death is an option that you can take or not take,” says Father Paris. They believe “we can have salvation through science and immortality through medicine.”

But, he adds, “there are limits to what medical treatment can do.”

And there are theological nuances about the ultimate good that Catholics should seek when experiencing serious health crises. When faced with a critical illness, “we used to have prayers for a swift recovery or a happy death,” Father Paris observes.

Whose Best Interest?

To G. Kevin Donovan, M.D., the disputes over Alfie Evans and Charlie Gard boil down to two related ethical questions: “Who should be privileged to make decisions?” and “What decisions can justifiably be made?”

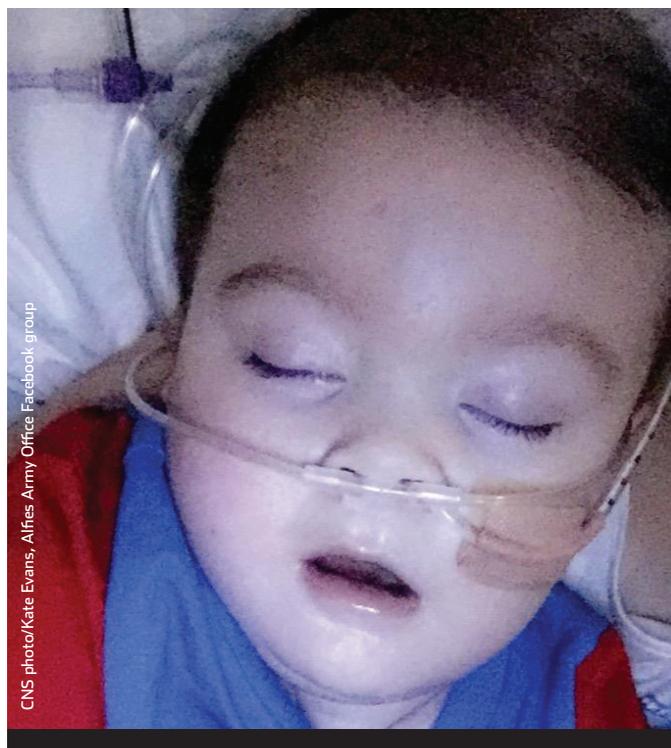
Dr. Donovan, a pediatrician, is the director of the Edmund D. Pellegrino Center for Clinical Bioethics at Georgetown University Medical Center. Unless some extraordinary circumstances disqualify them, he says, “parents are the natural decision-makers for their own children.”

“In this case, the medical team and the power of the state superimposed their values over [those] of the parents, not because the parents were acting in a morally wrong way but because their values did not coincide with the doctors or the courts.” He argues in a response delivered by email that “only when parents are acting in an unambiguous fashion to cause harm to their child should their role be usurped.”

But in the United Kingdom, it has been the accepted practice that courts are responsible for a final determination when parents and doctors disagree over the treatment of a child. Raanan Gillon, emeritus professor of medical ethics at Imperial College London, thinks that should change.

Though he admits that had Alfie Evans and Charlie Gard been his own children, he “would have allowed the two infants to die peacefully with palliative care,” he does not believe the additional care requested by parents imposed “unacceptable harm or injustice on the children” at a level “that would constitute child abuse and thus justify removing the parental right and responsibility to decide their children’s best interests.” His is an unpopular perspective among ethicists in Britain just now, so much so that he insists that it be noted that he expresses it as a private individual, not as a representative of any institution he has been associated with.

But doctors also have consciences and moral reservations about treatment that deserve to be respected, Ms. Abernathy points out. They cannot be required to provide treatment they believe violates their own ethical obligations to a patient simply because parents insist upon it.



Doctors treating Alfie concurred that therapeutic intervention was impossible.

Mr. Gillon agrees that doctors cannot be “morally or legally obliged to continue providing treatment that they considered futile or cruel.” But if willing medical staff can be located, he says, “the law should have been interpreted in a way that permitted other doctors to continue to provide treatment that the parents believed to be in their children’s best interests.”

Ms. Abernathy of the Mortality Policy Project is adamant that the treatment proposed for Charlie Gard was properly deemed burdensome by a British court. “The transfer they wanted for Charlie was really a bad idea that would have done him harm,” she says, worrying that he “would have been a human guinea pig” if he had survived his overseas transit for experimental treatment in the United States.

Despite her sympathy for the ethical misgivings of caregivers, Ms. Abernathy wonders if the team at Alder Hey should not have facilitated Alfie Evans’s transfer. Ideally, as such end-of-life moments draw near, family and staff form a partnership and jointly agree on a treatment strategy. But at Alder Hey, the collaboration with the Evans family broke down.

Perhaps this happened, she speculates, because the hospital staff knew that British jurisprudence in such cases could simply confirm the protocol they deemed most appropriate over parents’ objections. Ms. Abernathy says

Abortion politics in the United States have led many Catholics to this absolutist position on protecting all life at all times, but that's not our tradition. ●●

— Jesuit ethicist Kevin Wildes

moving Alfie to the Bambino Gesù “did not seem to me...an excessive request for parents who wanted to have the peace of mind of knowing that they had exhausted all options.”

But what Alfie's parents sought for their son was not uncomplicated. They asked that his respiratory support be continued while Alfie was transported by air ambulance to Rome (and perhaps later from there to a hospital in Munich for further treatment). For that to be accomplished and to allow them to care for Alfie in a homelike environment, their plan required that he undergo a tracheotomy to facilitate assisted breathing and a gastrostomy, a stomach incision, to allow nutrition. They told British judges that after about six months, if there remained no improvement in Alfie's condition, they would, “with whatever degree of difficulty,” then accept the withdrawal of his life support.

“I have on the parents' behalf taken very great care to evaluate the quality of Alfie's present circumstances, even though I accept entirely the conclusion of the medical evidence that treatment for Alfie is futile,” Justice Anthony Hayden wrote. “It does not follow axiomatically that the futility of Alfie's situation leads to the immediate withdrawal of ventilation. Life itself has intrinsic value, however tenuous or vestigial its hold.”

But in the end, he ruled “with obvious sadness,” as an appeals court put it, “that they would achieve nothing” through their plan to move Alfie to Rome and that the proposal for additional interventions to facilitate it were not in Alfie's best interest. In reaching that conclusion, the judge cited Pope Francis and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. He also relied partly on the testimony of physicians from Bambino Gesù, who had testified that Alfie's transport to Rome would likely produce seizures that could add to the neurological damage he had already suffered.

Spes Salutis

It is no easy thing for patients and family members, but a

question from the Catholic tradition about end-of-life pertains, says Father Wildes: “*Spes salutis*: What is the hope of health? We have to ask that all the time.

“Does anyone think that this patient is going to get better? Does anyone think that they are going to be able to leave the I.C.U.? Does anyone think that they are ever going to be able to go home? What is the hope of health?”

Based on evidence introduced after medical evaluation of Alfie's condition, provided by hospital staff and independent medical consultants, Justice Hayden had ruled in February that the “terrible reality” was that “almost the entirety of Alfie's brain [has] been eroded...the connective pathways within the white matter of the brain which facilitate rudimentary sensation—hearing, touch, taste and sight—had been obliterated. They were no longer even identifiable on the M.R.I. scan.”

In Alfie's case, doctors could not be sure that Alfie's neurological degradation was such that he could no longer suffer pain (though they suspected so). That meant the additional procedures sought by his parents to facilitate his transfer could have caused him discomfort. They surely created the opportunity for opportunistic infections that would have meant more suffering and interventions with no likelihood of a positive outcome.

The technology-laden U.S. health care system may be able to offer costly, even extravagant interventions to prolong life, says Father Wildes, and specialists can lose focus on their patient's overall health as they each assign therapies based on their skill sets. Someone, he says, has to be able to maintain a holistic perspective and ask: “What is the [beneficial] outcome here?”

In evaluating Alfie's condition, “the real issue [was] not what should be done,” says Father Paris, “but who will make the final decision.”

Of course, that is no easy thing to hear and to accept as a parent, especially when the limits on medical intervention are not uniformly agreed upon by Catholic bioethicists.

“Every possible intervention, such as continued support on the ventilator, is not morally obligatory in the eyes of the church,” Mr. Donovan agrees. “But having acknowledged this, we must not be too quick to pull the plug. There is still a range of permissible, although debatable interventions when the burden is not seen as exceeding the benefit, when there is a *spes salutis*, no matter how slim.”

It is a judgment call that should normally be the parents' right to make, he argues.

The difference of opinion between the doctors and Al-



As the controversy over Alfie Evans raged, mixed messages from Catholic church leaders abounded, including one right from the top. Pope Francis met with Alfie's father, Tom Evans, on April 18 to offer his support.

Alfie's parents "must be seen as a different valuation of Alfie's life," says Mr. Donovan. "The doctors and courts saw him as better off dead, and the parents wanted to support his wanting life until they could see that there was no longer hope of a diagnosis or therapy," he says.

"Continued ventilatory support of the disabled life is not obligatory but is permissible in the eyes of the church," he adds. "The withdrawal of nutrition and hydration, as well as the withholding of nasal oxygen, suggest not so much an intent to relieve [Alfie] of the burden of some medical interventions but rather an intent to relieve him of his burdensome life. In this case, it seems a premature attempt to designate and accelerate the outcome."

Medical staff at Alder Hey, indeed, were accused of euthanizing Alfie Evans when nutrition and hydration tubes were removed at the time his ventilator was withdrawn. The cessation of these interventions, some argued, clashed with the church's understanding of morally obligated treatment for patients in persistent vegetative states.

But Ms. Abernathy describes that step not as an act of euthanasia but as a standard medical practice meant to limit potential complications after the removal of a ventilator. Alfie was dying, Ms. Abernathy points out, unlike Terri Schiavo, whose death was directly caused by the withdrawal of artificial hydration and nutrition.

Patients who are dying, she says, do not require nutrition and hydration and potentially could endure more suf-

fering because of such interventions. In Alfie's case, after it was clear that he was continuing to breathe even without a ventilator, the other interventions were restored.

From the outside, withdrawing nutrition and hydration may seem cruel, but both Jesuit bioethicists insist that such a decision can "absolutely" fall within the Catholic tradition on accepting natural death when nutrition and hydration have been reduced, as in Alfie Evan's case, to medical procedures. Withdrawing interventions when beneficial outcomes are not possible are not acts of euthanasia.

That does not make the decision to do so easier for parents.

"The two worst things I've had to deal with as a priest and in practicing clinical ethics," Father Wildes says, "are when a parent loses a child or a suicide."

It is deeply unnatural for parents to have to deal with or even to contemplate their own child's death. It does not help, he adds, when they have to do it under an international media spotlight. "Here you have this family making these spirit-crushing decisions," he says, "and being caught up in the vortex of all this media attention makes things all the worse." End-of-life decisions are always deeply emotional, especially when they revolve around a child.

"Nobody wants a child to die," he says.

Kevin Clarke is America's chief correspondent and the author of *Oscar Romero: Love Must Win Out* (Liturgical Press).

Walking With God

What St. Francis de Sales teaches us about friendship

By Peter J. Vaghi

In his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, St. Francis de Sales writes that “among the passions of the soul, love holds first place.” And he quickly adds that “friendship is the most dangerous of all types of love” and that “friendship is mutual love, and if it is not mutual, it is not friendship.”

There could be no better person to reflect on friendship than de Sales, who was known for his many friendships, particularly his spiritual friendships.

Commenting on the correspondence between St. Francis and his friend St. Jane de Chantel, the pastoral theologian Henri Nouwen writes: “The love of God revealed in Jesus Christ pervades every line of the letters they both wrote.... Francis and Jane show us clearly that the deepest intimacy among people is an intimacy that finds its origin and goal not in the human partner, but in God who gives people to each other in friendship to be incarnate manifestations of the divine love.”

There is no better friendship than one





CNS photo/Sam Lucero, The Compass

A statue of St. Francis de Sales, patron saint of journalists, stands outside St. Francis de Sales Seminary in St. Francis, Wis.

based on our love in and for Jesus, who himself represents love, a unique and perduring and salvific kind of love, a love demonstrated one Friday on a cross that became the tree of life. It was a loving cross from which our salvation was won—all out of God’s desire for a loving friendship with us.

Jesus is forever our “companion” along the way of life. The Latin roots of the word, *cum pane*, mean “with bread,” and we know that Jesus’ companionship is ultimately revealed in the bread of life, the Eucharist. Jesus is still walking with us on that most famous road to Emmaus, where we come to know him in the breaking of the bread. He is also walking with us on the way to Calvary, our little Calvaries that daily reveal themselves to us in our sicknesses, broken relationships, our losses of loved ones and employment and daily loneliness and frustration and ultimately death. There is a Calvary in all our lives; and, happily, Jesus is there with us as we break the bread and are inserted into his loving companionship on the way to the cross and beyond to risen life.

One might ask why de Sales places friendship under the third part of the *Introduction*, entitled “Instructions on the Practice of Virtues.” He describes friendship as mutual love, and love is a virtue. He challenges the reader to “form friendships, only with those who share virtuous things with you” and who are willing to cultivate virtue. The higher the virtues shared and exchanged with others, the more perfect, according to de Sales, is the friendship. This is what he describes as “true friendship.” It is sharing and having virtues in common.

“If your mutual and reciprocal exchanges concern charity, devotion and Christian perfection,” the saint writes, “O God, how precious this friendship will be!” It is excellent because it comes from God, leads to God and will endure eternally in God. This kind of friendship is, therefore, a virtue.

•••

Come with me, then, to the Upper Room. It is there that Jesus opened his heart and spoke about friendship, about friendship with him. He told his gathered disciples the night before he died: “You are my friends.... I no longer call you slaves.... I have called you friends because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.” In fact, he



There is no better friendship than one based on our love in and for Jesus. ●●

sets forth the test of true friendship: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

Jesus wants to be our friend. But what does that mean? What does friendship mean to us in our busy and distracted world today? Are deep and lasting friendships even possible today? Some would say that friendship is a lost art or that *friend* has been reduced to a mere word used on Facebook. Is it possible to be friends with a God we do not see if we are increasingly unable to be friends with persons we do see?

In his opening remarks to young people in Poland a few years ago, Pope Francis spoke of this friendship. He said: “To say that Jesus is alive means to rekindle our enthusiasm in following him, to renew our passionate desire to be his disciples. What better opportunity to renew our friendship with Jesus than by building friendships among yourselves. What better way to build our friendship with Jesus than by sharing him with others!”

This friendship with Jesus does not happen by chance, the pope said in a homily on May 14. Rather, it is our “destiny” and vocation as Christians.

If Jesus wishes to be our friend, it would behoove us to reflect on the model human friendships we have had or continue to have. It might give us some insight into friendship with God and how that friendship could be defined and experienced and grow.

My mom once told me, correctly, I believe, that if I had one genuine and faithful friend, I should consider myself a very lucky person. Proverbs teaches: “Some friends bring ruin on us, but a true friend is more loyal than a brother.” It would seem, then, that true friends are hard to come by. I am not speaking of acquaintances, either. Those are the stuff of Rolodexes or iPhone contact lists. Genuine friendships are different.

I cannot tell you how many spouses have referred to their respective spouse as “my best friend.” That is a good place to begin. St. Thomas Aquinas has written that through conjugal love, the love between a husband and wife, they participate in the “greatest form of friendship.”

Pope Francis writes in “The Joy of Love,” speaking of married love, that it is “a union possessing all the traits of a good friendship: concern for the good of the other, reciprocity, intimacy, warmth, stability and the resemblance born of a shared life.”

Friendship is another word for companionship—a one-on-one relationship between two people marked by mutual honesty and openness without any daily fear of reprisals. Friendship requires the ability to listen from the heart to each other. It is not primarily competitive or based on a utilitarian interest. True friendship is a genuine encounter with each other wherever one might be. Friendship is, for sure, tested over time.

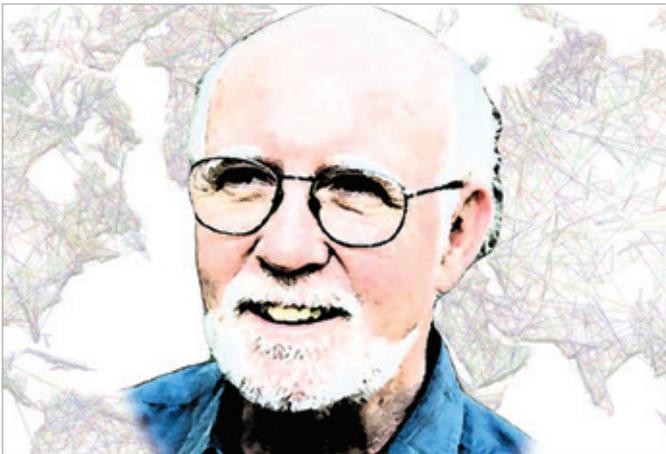
Such friendship requires keeping in touch with each other. It requires, and this is often tested, being present in times of need or in times of joy and truly caring for another. It is expressed by unconditional love. After a period of time apart, it means picking up where one left off and not missing a beat. It is true mutual love.

Francis de Sales writes that true “friendship requires close communication between friends, since otherwise it can neither come into existence nor remain in existence.” This is all the more true with respect to our friendship with God.

Friendship with God, a true model for a spiritual and virtuous human friendship, means walking with him, being in God’s presence, shutting everything else out for a time. It is wasting time with God, not unlike wasting time and just being with someone you love. Prayer is kissing God, touching him, a touching of spirits, a conscious awareness of his presence, an intimacy with him, a friendship, a daily appointment.

Our personal, daily encounter with Jesus models for each of us the true understanding of friendship, one based on genuine mutual love. For St. Francis de Sales, moreover, such mutual love, a virtuous relationship, thus describes the true human friendship to which each of us aspires.

Msgr. Peter J. Vaghi, *pastor of the Church of the Little Flower in Bethesda, Md., is chaplain of the John Carroll Society, a group of professional and business men and women in service of the Archbishop of Washington and the growth of their spiritual and faith lives.*



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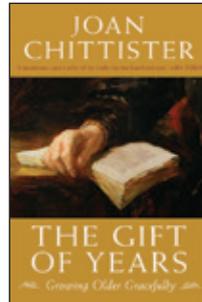
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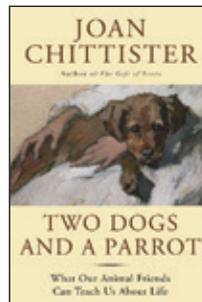
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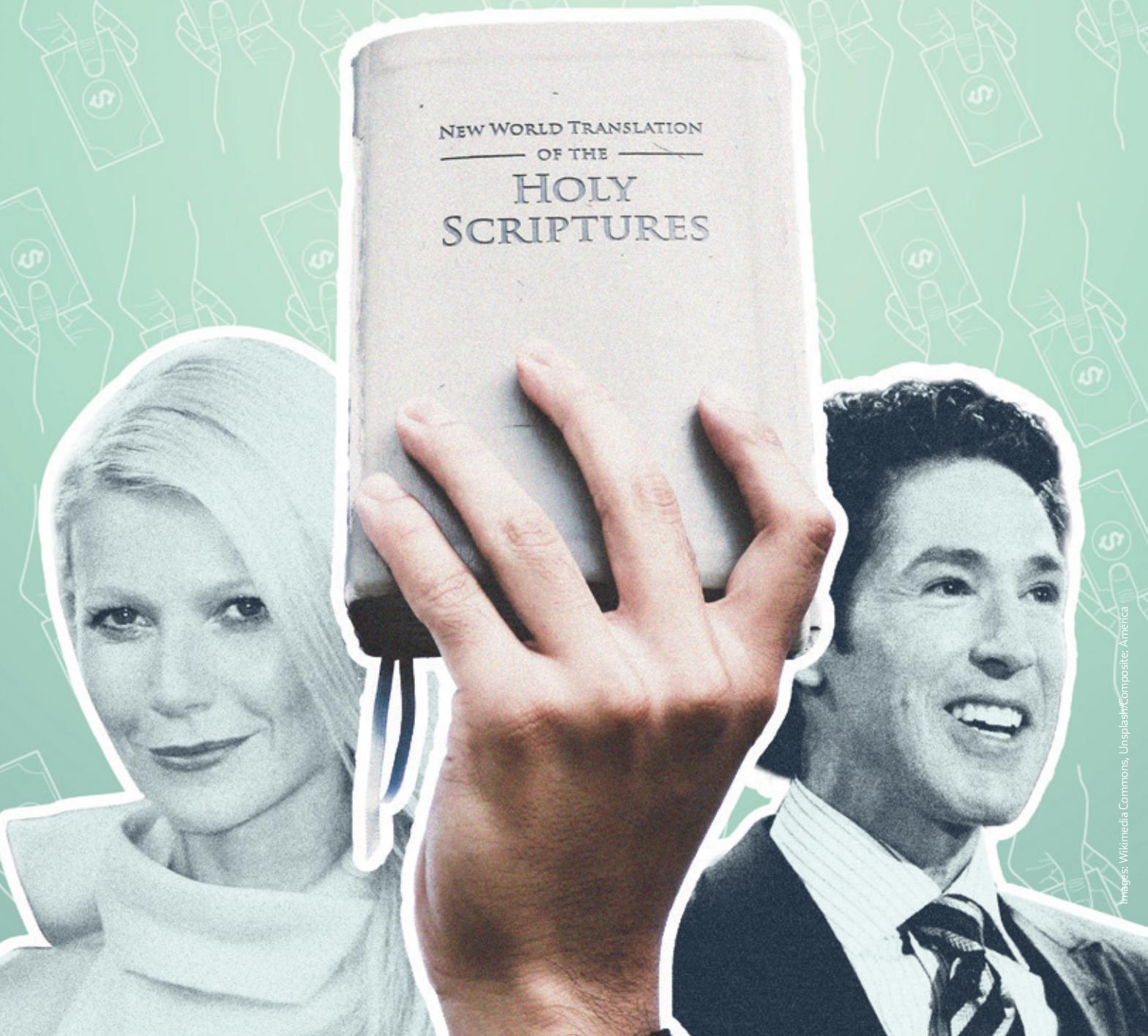
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The Gospel According to Goop

By Eloise Blondiau

► The prosperity Gospel lives as much in wellness brands like Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop as it does in the ministry of Joel Osteen.

There is no crucifix in Lakewood, Joel Osteen's church in Houston, Tex. Instead, the former basketball arena holds a monumental golden globe—appropriately sized for a church that can seat up to 16,000 people. As Osteen preaches, smiling brightly, the globe turns behind him, swiftly, as if to catch the light.

The globe is, in Osteen's words, "symbolic of what Christ said: To go forth and preach hope to the world. We believe in the cross, but we just continued with the globe."

That forward-looking theology, which appears to leave the suffering of the cross behind, is essential to Osteen's ministry. Osteen is one of the most popular evangelists in the United States for a reason: He represents hope. Osteen tells us we have the power to obtain health and wealth if we believe enough, for long enough. "God's got this!" he exclaims.

Osteen takes the idea that "nothing is impossible for God," and runs with it. Taken to its ultimate conclusion, it suggests that since nothing is impossible for God, God will give health and wealth to those with the strongest faith in him. This line of thinking constitutes the prosperity gospel.

The prosperity gospel is not limited to Osteen or the evangelical community. It pervades U.S. culture, and we are all susceptible to it. It is alive in almost any brand that promises edification. It lives as much, for instance, in wellness brands like Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop, as it does at Lakewood Church.

The sense of agency and justice that the prosperity gospel provides—whether offered by wellness advocates

or preachers—is deeply attractive; it means that everything is within our control. But the implications of the prosperity gospel are less attractive: If the faithful are rewarded with health, are the terminally ill not faithful enough?

THE POWER OF POSITIVITY

The prosperity gospel offers an enticing promise: *If you work hard enough, if you have enough faith, you'll get there. All the good things in your life, you earned.* That sense of entitlement and longing is exploited by pretty much every brand on the market: This couch will bring your family together; this Big Mac will bring you unfettered joy; this car will make you sexy.

Goop, a lifestyle website and marketplace, sells itself as a feminist brand that addresses "the acute needs of modern women," particularly in the realm of health and wellness. Goop approaches this mission with the belief that "the mind/body/spirit is inextricably linked and we have more *control over how we express our health* than we currently understand" (emphasis mine).

Tellingly, the awkward concept "how we express our health" is never clarified. But the implications are clear: We have power over our health that Goop can help us to harness.

Unlike Osteen, Paltrow does not promote a particular faith. Instead, Goop showcases thinkers who favor a vague spirituality, telling Goopies (yes, that's what her followers call themselves): It is faith in yourself, in

love and in positivity, that can cure.

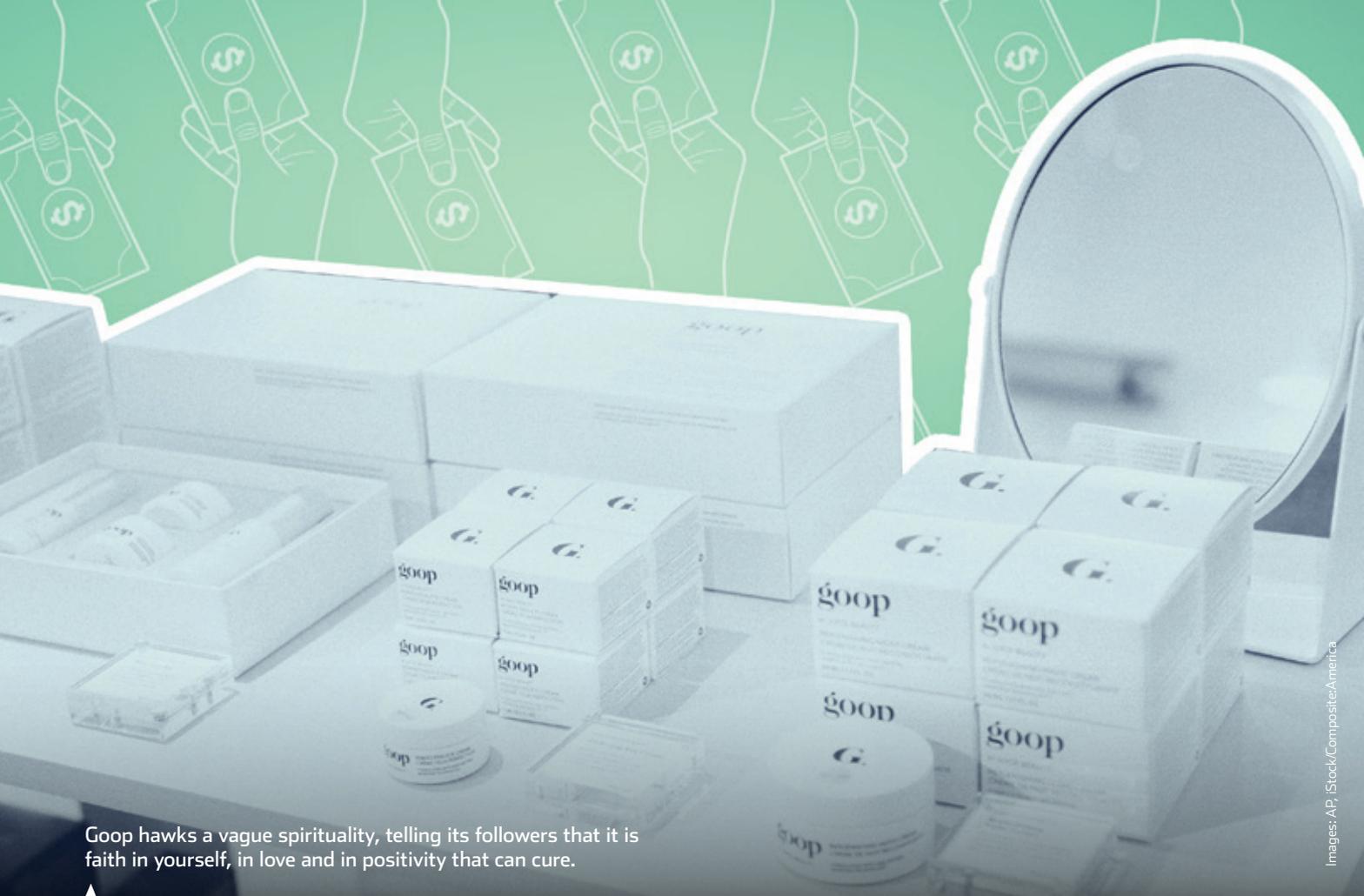
Both Osteen's and Paltrow's brands favor positive thinking as a means of achieving self-rule. Goop publishes a large number of articles along these lines, which often aim to empower women in the workplace and in their relationships. "No Name-Calling or Self-Criticism," a regular Goop contributor, Dr. Habib Sadeghi, writes. "Surround yourself with positive, uplifting words.... You have the power to change your world."

"Dwell only on positive, empowering thoughts toward yourself," Osteen writes in his book *Become a Better You*. "You will see God's blessings and favor in a greater way."

Maxims such as these can in some cases improve the lives of people who adopt them. But faith in positive thinking is taken to a frightening, dangerous extreme when it is applied to our physical health. To people experiencing illness, Osteen writes in his book *Blessed in the Darkness* (2017): "A cure may seem impossible, but God can do the impossible.... Quit worrying.... Every day that you stay in faith...you're passing the test.... Suddenly your health turns around."

EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON

Kate Bowler is a writer, professor, Christian, mother and wife living in Durham, N.C. Bowler also has, at age 35, incurable Stage 4 colon cancer. When her diagnosis came, she asked: Why? Why is this happening to me? What could I have done differently? Does everything actually



Goop hawks a vague spirituality, telling its followers that it is faith in yourself, in love and in positivity that can cure.

Images: A.P., iStock/CompositeAmerica

happen for a reason?

Bowler critiques and studies prosperity gospel theology as a historian at Duke University. It is not a creed she thought she ascribed to, but when she received her cancer diagnosis, she became aware of how aspects of the prosperity gospel were ingrained in her own outlook on life. “No matter how many times I rolled my eyes at the creed’s outrageous certainties,” she writes, “I craved them just the same.”

When she was well, Bowler held the seemingly harmless view that “in this world, I deserve what I get. I earn my keep and keep my share.” So when she got sick, she naturally felt as though there must be something in her power to help her get well.

Sickness eventually undid that

way of thinking. “I believed God would make a way.... I don’t believe that anymore,” she writes in her memoir, *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I’ve Loved*.

“Everything happens for a reason,” a well-meaning neighbor told Bowler and her husband following her diagnosis. “I would love to hear it,” her husband responded sadly, “the reason my wife is dying.”

Bowler came to believe that her suffering is tragic and unfair—and that is all.

THE PRICE OF HEALTH

Both Osteen and Paltrow profit from their versions of the prosperity gospel. Goop sells products like “Wearable Stickers That Promote Healing (Really!),” which almost parody the

prosperity gospel in their invitation to suspend disbelief, alongside conventional products like bath bombs and wildly popular healthy-eating cookbooks. (Some Goop-endorsed products, such as Yoni eggs, have also come under fire for actually endangering women’s health under the guise of improving it. I’ll let you Google that one.)

Osteen encourages hefty church donations as a means for his congregants to achieve health and wealth. “You can’t afford to *not* tithe,” he writes in *Your Best Life Now*. “If you will dare to take a step of faith and start honoring God in your finances, He’ll start increasing your supply in supernatural ways.... He’ll cause you to get the best deals in life. Sometimes, He’ll keep you from sickness, accidents, and harm that might cause other un-

Only Grain and Goats

By George Longenecker

necessary expenses.” Although Osteen doesn’t take a salary from Lakewood Church, he is said to be worth over \$40 million—a fortune amassed by selling books that promote his creed.

At In Goop Health, Goop’s most recent health conference, which took place in January in New York, B12 vitamin injections and meditation pods, along with panel discussions, were available to guests willing to pay between \$650 and \$4,500 for a ticket.

One of the panelists was Anita Moorjani, the author of *Dying to Be Me*. In her talk, she described how, in her view, her fear of cancer led her to develop the illness. Ms. Moorjani said that when she let go of that fear and believed she would get well, she experienced a miraculous recovery: “As soon as I saw myself [as] deserving and worthy of good health I started to see that transform, and in as short of a time as five weeks there was no trace of cancer in my body.”

Another panelist and frequent Goop contributor, Eben Alexander—author of *A Neurosurgeon’s Journey Into the Afterlife*—also talked about how fear inflicts illness and love cures it. On Twitter, he was forced to confront the implications of his particular form of the prosperity gospel for the deceased, sick and terminally ill.

“Can you explain how fear killed my son who died after 3 minutes of life?” wrote Dr. Jen Gunter, a gynecologist, blogger and vehement critic of Goop. “After hearing you speak at @goop I was left thinking his death was because I didn’t love him enough.”

Alexander responded: “There is absolutely NO possibility that you are responsible.... Explaining the deep truth concerning the healing power of

In Knossos there was no way to write *love*,
for written language was used only by scribes,
to keep tabs on grain and goats,
no written words for doubt or fear,
for hate, war, devotion, charity or loyalty.

There were no poems, no plays,
no epic dramas—at least not in writing—
no threatening letters, no marriage proposals,
birthday cards or tweets—
as though today only accountants could write,
and had words only for buildings,
cars, cash, coal and oil.

There were no pronouns;
only in person could you say:

I love you

or

I want to kill you—

if you could write
and send a love letter:

*Three goats, ten bushels of wheat,
five sheep, ten pomegranates,
one house, two people.*

George Longenecker’s poems and book reviews have been published in *Atlanta Review*, *Rain Taxi*, *Santa Fe Review*, *Saranac Review* and *Whale Road Review*. His book *Star Route* is forthcoming from Main Street Rag Publishing. He lives in Middlesex, Vt.

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Both Osteen's and Paltrow's brands favor positive thinking as a means of achieving self-rule.

love in your case CANNOT be handled via Twitter.”

Just as there is no cross and few reminders of suffering and sin in Osteen's church, “wellness” advocates like Moorjani and Alexander do not acknowledge fear, pain or imperfection either, unless they are offering a cure for it.

But pain and suffering exist, and sometimes they are unresolvable. No matter the circumstances, there is no certainty, no failsafe cure that can emerge from willpower alone. We are not capable of that. And although anything may well be possible for God, experience tells us that God does not reward faith with health and wealth. If that type of earthly, divine justice existed, the world would look very different.

THE HEALING POWER OF FAITH

The prosperity gospel persists so stubbornly because its core idea—that faith can heal—is true. Faith in God, as well as in humanity and in

ourselves, has real value. That faith—that leap of the imagination, that burst of courage—can often show us how we, how life, can be different, can be better, can be more profound. For this reason, aspects of both Paltrow's and Osteen's ministries are inspiring and comforting.

But the good intentions that inspire the prosperity gospel make the creed that much more insidious. Claims that “good enough” faith cures cancer hurt more than they help, inflicting unnecessary guilt and pain on the sick and their loved ones. And that people like Osteen, Moorjani and Alexander are profiting from this falsehood is troubling, to say the least.

“What would it mean for Christians to give up that little piece of the American dream that says, ‘You are limitless’? Everything is not possible,” writes Bowler. “What if *rich* did not need to mean *wealthy*, and *whole* did not have to mean *healed*? What if being people of ‘the gospel’ meant that we are simply people with good

news? God is here. We are loved. It is enough.”

The fact that our pain can be pointless and inexplicable is not easy to accept. But that sense of being loved that Bowler describes makes forbearance in the face of suffering possible. Perhaps for nonbelievers in Paltrow's audience that sense of being loved simply comes from within and from one another. But believers in Osteen's congregation and well beyond can know that they are loved, in their imperfect state, by God.

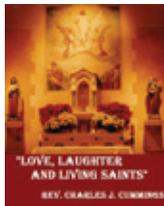
Love will not take away cancer; it will not make life predictable or fair; it will not explain suffering; it will not make us perfect. But sometimes, somehow, it helps. It is enough.

Eloise Blondiau, *producer*.
Twitter: @EloiseBlondiau.

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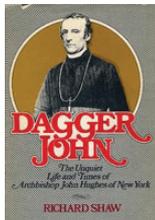
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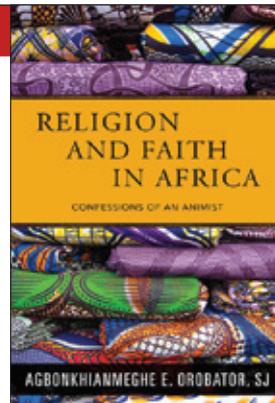
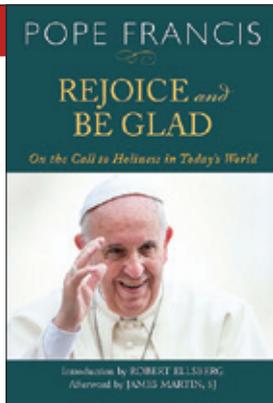
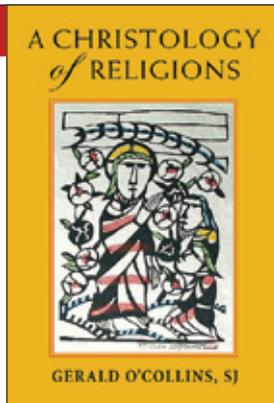
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50 years a muckraker

By William Bender



Reporter

By Seymour M. Hersh
Knopf, 368p \$27.95

Nearly 50 years have passed since Seymour Hersh was chasing what was then the biggest story of his career, the My Lai massacre in Vietnam. Much has changed. The internet was born and is continuously metastasizing. Once-thriving newspapers and magazines are gasping for clicks. The Russians, our Cold War enemies, kindly assisted us in electing our current president.

Yet something about Hersh's unvarnished account of driving a rental car around Fort Benning, Ga., in 1969, scouring an Army base the size of New York City for a murderous lieutenant, will resonate with any journalist who has been one interview away from

breaking a major story.

In his memoir, *Reporter*, the 81-year-old Hersh taps into the same slow-burning suspense of my favorite journalism flicks, from "All the President's Men" and "The Paper" to newer additions like "Spotlight" and "The Post." Hersh comes through with a reawakening of that feeling, which is the reason I got into this business and the reason I stay.

Searching for Lt. William Calley on the Georgia base, Hersh (then in his early 30s) flipped through phone books and checked gas stations that might have serviced Calley's car. He ran, "going harder with each stride," from an Army sergeant he feared would call a colonel to throw him off the base: "It was a scene out of a Marx Brothers movie." He later dodged a captain who pleaded with him to drop the story, then sneaked through the back door of a barracks and crawled on his hands and knees to the bedside of a young soldier he believed to be

Calley. "Wake up, Calley," Hersh said as he kicked the bunk. It wasn't him. But the sleeping soldier sorted mail at Fort Benning—including Calley's. "You mean the guy that killed all those people?" he asked Hersh. *Bingo*.

Hersh, of course, eventually found Calley, wrote the My Lai story and won the 1970 Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting. Calley was sentenced in 1971 to life in prison for the murder of 22 Vietnamese civilians. But President Nixon ordered him transferred to house arrest the day after his sentencing, and his sentence was later commuted.

The My Lai story was one of several Hersh blockbusters that would help shape a half-century of American history. He often worked alone, hunting large game from coast to coast with nothing but a pen and a typewriter—one of which, in the mid-1970s, he launched through the glass window of his office at The New York Times, enraged by the way the editors



Hersh learned early on that the best way to tell a story is to ‘get the hell out of the way.’

were fiddling with his series about a mobbed-up Los Angeles lawyer. (Abe Rosenthal, the Times’s executive editor, responded with a memo suggesting that Hersh throttle back. “Unlike you and me,” Rosenthal wrote, “the editors involved are polite and civilized individuals.”)

Working at The New York Times, the Associated Press, The New Yorker and elsewhere, Hersh broke stories about Watergate, U.S. chemical and biological weapons programs, military cover-ups, C.I.A. domestic spying, the Mafia, corrupt businesses and prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib. He made his living in the gap between government talking points and the truth. He was fixated, justifiably, on Henry Kissinger, the national security advisor and secretary of state, who, Hersh writes in his memoir, “lied the way most people breathed.”

The tools were often different from today’s: a paper map and a payphone instead of Google Maps and an iPhone. But Hersh’s recipe for strong investigative reporting still works. Timeless nuggets of wisdom are sprinkled throughout the book.

How do you prove the government is lying? Seek out the “moralists,” those who are loyal to their oath to uphold and defend the Constitution, not just their superiors (the president included). This goes for cracking the Pentagon, the Central Intelligence Agency or your local City Hall. But how do you get those sources to talk? Earn their trust and respect. Read before you write—or speak. Ask intelligent questions. Be straight with

them. When you have finally nailed your targets, Hersh advises, be sure to inform them that they are about to get screwed. Give them the chance to respond before you publish. A little class never hurts.

Hersh would work for months on an investigative story, but he could also chase a daily like the best of them. In 1971, an F.B.I. official met Hersh for lunch and asked Hersh to let him leave first. The official had been sitting on a manila envelope he wanted to share. It included White House requests, signed by Kissinger, for F.B.I. wiretaps on senior government officials and newsmen. Within hours, Hersh had tracked down, at their homes, the F.B.I. technicians who ran the wiretaps. “They confirmed, with some asperity, that yes, they had done the deed,” Hersh writes. The next morning, he told the Times national desk that he had a story. He was fast.

I would be lying if I said I wasn’t jealous of how Hersh struck fear in the hearts of lying government officials (the journalist Leslie Gelb once compared him to Dracula) and poked holes in the “official” version of events. He had burrowed so deeply into the agencies he covered, he was practically an off-the-books ombudsman. “The S.O.B. has sources that are absolutely beyond comparison,” a deputy attorney general told C.I.A. director Bill Colby in a taped phone conversation in December 1974. Colby’s response: “He knows more about this place than I do.”

While reading *Reporter*, I empathized with Hersh during his

bare-knuckle brawls with his bosses, including the then-head of the New York Times business section and his “ass-kissing coterie of moronic editors.” And there are the lawyers, the damn libel lawyers, who have a knack for taking their red pens to your favorite parts of the story, all the colorful language, all the controversial stuff, and reducing it to a technical manual. Anything to avoid a lawsuit. At one meeting, Hersh writes, the New Yorker’s general counsel remarked that he found it “difficult to believe that a major corporation such as Mobil could operate as far outside the law as I was alleging. I, in despair about such comments, walked over to him, patted him on the cheek, and said, ‘You’re such a nice boy.’”

I would like to have read more about Hersh himself, about how the ornery iconoclast balanced his family life with his globetrotting career and more about those tennis matches with legends like Bob Woodward and Ben Bradlee. He writes about how growing up in a racially diverse part of Chicago helped him connect with a wide range of people. But once he enters journalism, he’s off to the races and the years roll by, with few personal details added. This book isn’t a tell-all. Which perhaps should not be surprising: Hersh learned early on that the best way to tell a story is to “get the hell out of the way.”

*William Bender is an investigative reporter for The Philadelphia Inquirer and The Philadelphia Daily News.
Twitter: @wbender99.*

Magnificent gifts

When the celebrated Irish-born writer William Trevor died in November 2016, he was described in *The New York Times* as a writer who “evoked the struggles of ordinary life.” Despite Trevor’s expansive oeuvre—1993’s landmark *Collected Stories* alone ran to over 1,200 pages, with nearly 100 stories—this thumbnail sketch of Trevor was not exactly inaccurate.

Still, readers of Trevor’s final book may overlook some of the downright extraordinary characters who populate the appropriately titled *Last Stories*: a stalking parent, a prodigy who dabbles in thievery, a suicidal recluse, a possible murderer.

In “The Crippled Man,” the title character, confined to a wheelchair in the Irish countryside, has a mundane encounter with two itinerant

laborers. The workers then have a much more fateful encounter with the crippled man’s cousin. “Taking Mr. Ravenswood,” meanwhile, opens at a swank restaurant called Plume d’Or in the middle of London. Here a young man has convinced his on-again, off-again girlfriend to “take advantage” of the title character’s “weakness for girls.”

For all of their differences, both stories are about mercenary depths lingering underneath veneers of love, companionship and civility.

With Trevor’s body of work now more or less complete, readers can confront the lingering question of how, precisely, to classify this author, beyond calling him a mere chronicler of “ordinary life.” It has become commonplace for young Irish authors to write about far-flung lands while maintaining their Irish identi-

ty. Trevor, though, has shed light on the many distinct worlds existing in the relatively small, highly contested patch of land he occupied for eight decades.

“She had sought too much in trying to understand how human frailty connected with love or with the beauty the gifted brought,” declares the narrator of “The Piano Teacher’s Pupil.” “There was a balance struck: it was enough.”

This narrator is struggling to understand her pupils’ artistic genius. But this is also a fitting starting point for appreciating the immense beauty of William Trevor’s own magnificent gifts.

Tom Deignan, a columnist for *The Irish Voice*, contributed to the recent book *Nine Irish Lives: The Thinkers, Fighters and Artists Who Helped Build America*.

Far from paradise

Eat the Apple is a catchy title, but what does it mean? According to a Jesuit colleague of mine who is a former U.S. Marine, “eat the apple” means to take advantage of a situation. I thought it referred to the Garden of Eden. Actually, it is from war novels, where “Eat the apple, f— the Corps!” is an expression used by an angry Marine who is fed up with the Marine Corps.

Matt Young’s *Eat the Apple*, the true story of a young recruit who takes on three deployments in Iraq over five years, has won a favorable critical reception. His structure is unusual: short three-to-five-page chapters in different formats. He poisons the prose with endless uses of “f—,” often four or five per page.

In one chapter, a suicide bomber strikes a group of Humvees near Amariya. No one is killed except the bomber, but a number of Marines are injured. “What are the odds?” one soldier asks. “We know we are going to die here too. We can hear the voices of the dead beckoning us.”

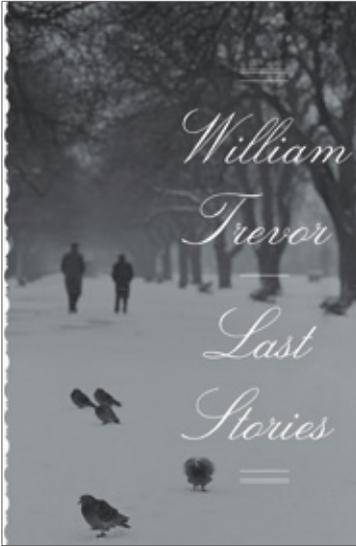
Young falls into a military subculture that overwhelms the virtue that would support his love for his fiancée waiting at home. At one point he speaks in the voice of another soldier, a corporal who wishes he had been grievously wounded but encounters no firefights, no ambushes. Like Young, this corporal has many worries. Will he never have killed another human being, only dogs? Is his fiancée having sex with someone else? And he is bothered by memories: He will remember

the photograph of contractors burned and hung like meat from the green girders of Blackwater Bridge.

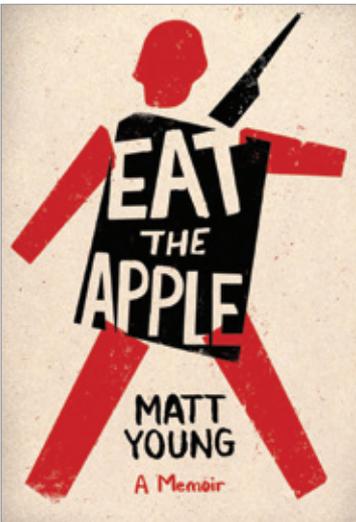
Young stumbles into self-knowledge. He smokes and drinks too much; with the help of porn and street women, he indulges in varieties of sex. Toward the end, he phones his own fiancée and calls off their wedding. He dreams that he was court-martialed for not doing enough to rescue a gunner when their truck was hit by a culvert bomb. He and his inner self agree that the Iraq War was wrong.

Today, Matt Young teaches writing in Olympia, Wash. I hope he will not hesitate to tell his students what he tells himself, that America’s wars can be wrong.

Raymond A. Schroth, S.J., emeritus editor of *America*, has taught writing for 40 years.



Last Stories
By William Trevor
Viking, 213p \$26



Eat the Apple
A Memoir
By Matt Young
Bloomsbury, 251p \$24.99

A saint for our time

It is getting close to 40 years since an assassin hired by the Salvadoran government fired the fatal shot from the back seat of a car outside a chapel in the early evening as Óscar Romero, archbishop of San Salvador, was saying Mass. In this theological analysis of Romero's life, especially his years as bishop, Michael E. Lee, a theologian at Fordham University, shows convincingly why he is a saint for our time.

Lee organizes his book around three major issues that loosely organize Romero's contributions: conversion, faith and politics, and martyrdom. Lee patiently dissects the meaning of conversion relative to Romero, who described his development as an "evolution," to emphasize its continuity with his past. Here the reader can "see" how a man with a pre-Vatican II formation and a colonial mind-set regarding the alignment of the church with government gradually learns that the rule of God preached by Jesus has critical and prophetic dimensions.

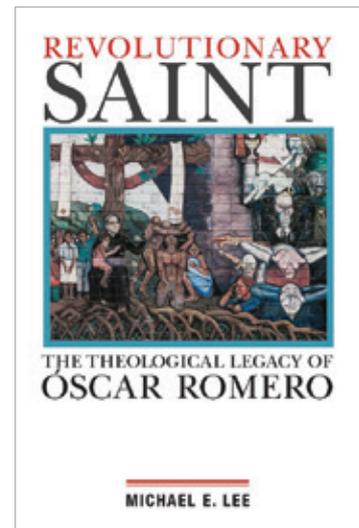
Faith and politics includes "liberation theology" and Romero's relation to it. Here Lee turns to the directly applicable pastoral letters that Romero published as archbishop. He shows how Romero's language cuts through doctrinaire slogans to the existential responsibility of a pastor for the vast majority of people held in virtual slavery to an oligarchic system. What is a pastor to say to his people in that situation if not pronounce a preferential option for the poor? Romero's language constantly strikes analogies with Jesus' concern for the poor.

The third issue addressed by Lee

deals with the meaning of martyrdom, a title traditionalist and vested interests could not let Romero have. But the argument to isolate the "martyr" by canonical definition to a witness who dies for doctrinal truths pales when compared with a full life lived in witness to the values of the rule of God that Jesus preached in the face of opposition.

The power of this book, for students who are asking critical questions and for reading groups looking for deeper meaning, lies in Lee's slow, careful presentation that allows the person of Romero in his context to take hold in one's imagination. Through his spiritual commitment to his people Romero gradually learned in a new way the deep meanings of Christian faith, and he acted them out in our turbulent world.

Roger Haight, S.J. is a scholar in residence at Union Theological Seminary in New York.



Revolutionary Saint
The Theological Legacy of Óscar Romero
By Michael E. Lee
Orbis Books, 240p \$27

A Flannery O'Connor story for the world today

By Jim McDermott



Childish Gambino's new music video "This Is America" begins as though it is an early entry for Best Song of the Summer for 2018. Unseen people sing at what sounds like some kind of beach party, while a guitar sits alone onscreen, waiting to join the fun.

As the guitarist arrives and starts playing, stronger voices crystallize the vibe with a sweetly mellow sound and message: "We just wanna party, party just for you."

Meanwhile onscreen we pan to the still form of Gambino (a.k.a. the actor and writer Donald Glover). Seemingly awoken by the bass beat, he slowly turns toward us and begins dancing.

Then he shoots the guitarist in the head, looks us in the eye and begins: "This Is America."

How to talk about this extraordinary piece of work? In just four minutes, "This Is America" shuttles through an astonishing number of references to both current affairs and black culture, including gun violence, school shootings, rap video thug posing, urban riots, the church shooting in Charleston, S.C., in 2015, gospel choirs, the gospel of prosperity, Jim Crow imagery, the film "Get Out," lynchings, Michael Jackson and viral dance videos. Every ges-

ture and spoken line by Glover as he dances with school children through a largely abandoned warehouse seems to offer another pose black performers are forced to take in order to, as the gospel choir sings, "Get your money, black man." Rolling Stone calls it "an upsettingly vivid illustration of the Faustian bargain that black America makes on a regular basis, trading our bodies for our expression and freedom."

In a way, the video is the apotheosis of viral culture and its incessant reappropriation of images, events and ideas for ironic purposes. Yet here the irony is leveled against that culture itself, the way it flattens everything to a punchline. Empathy and self-reflection have no place in the land of the animated GIF. The entertainment they offer is just another kind of self-delusion.

"The shortest definition of religion," the German theologian Johann Baptist Metz famously wrote, is "interruption." The French philosopher René Girard conceived of the crucifixion similarly, as an act that reveals once and for all the scapegoating violence at the foundation of civilization. "There is no culture without a tomb," Girard argues. In the revelation of that violence, Girard posits, lies the

possibility of our freedom from it.

Yet our awakening seems constantly to require violence of its own—a paradox the great American Catholic writer Flannery O'Connor also knew well. Much of her short story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" is a portrait of casual callousness, an old woman on a car trip with her son's family commenting on the plight of others with cool disinterest. "Oh look at the cute little pickaninny," she says of a naked black boy who waves at them as they drive past. "If I could paint, I'd paint that picture."

When a roadside accident brings the woman face to face with The Misfit, an almost mythical criminal figure who has been haunting the countryside, the woman refuses to accept what is going on, even as his henchmen lead her family away to a nearby wood.

Finally all alone, with The Misfit now wearing her son's shirt, the woman suddenly sees this strange and tormented figure with compassion. "Why you're one of my babies," she blurts out. "You're one of my own children!"

After killing her, The Misfit gives her an epitaph, and us as well: "She would of been a good woman, if it had been somebody there to shoot her ev-

In just four minutes, “This Is America” shuttles through an astonishing number of references to both current affairs and black culture.

ery minute of her life.”

No matter the revelation of Christ or the witness of journalists, activists and artists, the impulse to drown out the cries of society’s victims remains as seductive as a great meme. For Glover and O’Connor both, it is only through an experience of radical interruption—when the floor drops out on us and the rules by which we believe the world works are revealed to be convenient fictions—that conversion to a life of discipleship, the path of goodness, is even remotely possible.

Since “This Is America” dropped, people have pulled endless GIFs from it, many of Glover dancing happily, as though this really is a dance video; others are remixing the video into upbeat summer songs. Don’t bother us with truth or suffering. We just want to party.

O’Connor, too, was well aware of the persistence of our resistance to conversion. “Some fun!” says one of The Misfit’s henchmen after the woman’s brutal murder.

“Shut up, Bobby Lee,” The Misfit says. “It’s no real pleasure in life.”

Jim McDermott, S.J., contributing writer;
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‘The Incredibles’ and the myth of the ideal family

The brilliance of the film “The Incredibles” is that it comically exaggerates the roles of an “ideal” 1960s American family. The father must be a pillar of strength, the mother flexible to the needs of her family, the daughter quiet and guarded, the son athletic and the baby full of possibility. Throughout the film, they take up their roles and subvert them.

Christians sometimes say that men should be the head of the household and that wives must submit to their husbands. The truth is that both men and women were made in God’s image. When men are seen only as strong and women as flexible to their desires, it can lead to a toxic imbalance of power. Women will not be truly equal until men take up equal responsibility in parenting and family duties.

“The Incredibles” channels this truth of equality. It is a rare film where we see women learning to be confident and men learning to humble themselves and compromise. The movie opens with interviews with the parents of the superhero family in their younger years. Mr. Incredible (Bob) is the classic hero, strong

and brave, but he admits he wants to settle down and start a family. Elastagirl (Helen) feels quite the opposite, “Leave the saving the world to the men? I don’t think so.”

Throughout the film, all the members of the family realize they are more than their superhero abilities might suggest. The speedy Dash learns to let go of his ego in order to come in second at his school’s race. Violet, whose superpower is to make herself invisible, allows herself to be seen, and she fearlessly asks out the cute guy she had been crushing on.

“The Incredibles 2,” due out on June 15, promises to continue this theme, subverting gender roles as Bob starts to take up his full role as a parent and Elastagirl is finally given her chance to save the world. In “The Incredibles” we see how no single character is easily categorizable. Being a part of a family means leaving any personal ego behind and becoming the person you need to be.

Amanda Haas is a graduate of Loyola Marymount University’s School of Film and Television.



In “The Incredibles,” no single character is easily categorizable.

(Image courtesy of Twitter.com/Disney)

Arise!

Readings: Wis 1:13-15, 2:23-24; Ps 30, 2 Cor 8:7-15, Mk 5:21-43

People of Jesus' day felt an existential dread. Something was wrong with their society, their economy, and their religious and civic culture, but no one could agree on what it was or where things had gone awry. Many demanded political or social solutions, but the right course of action was unclear. The continuing crisis led many to look for deeper spiritual causes, and the Hebrew Bible provided significant insights on their condition. The Book of Deuteronomy records a list of curses (Dt 28:15-69) that threatened those who violate the covenant. These include natural disasters, social and economic impoverishment, and illness and death. The similarity of these curses to the upheavals of the first century led many to wonder whether God was behind the miseries of the day. Moses' warning must have rung in the ears of many, "Your life will hang in suspense, and you will stand in dread both day and night, never sure of your life" (Dt 28:66).

Some, like the Pharisees, believed this dread would be overcome when all Israel committed itself to a rigorous observance of the covenant. Other groups, like the Zealots, drawing inspiration from the Maccabees two centuries before, took it upon themselves to free Israel from foreign oppression. Still others believed that the troubles came from illegitimate leadership in the Temple. These groups, like the Essenes, attempted to re-create authentic priestly worship out in the desert. Meanwhile, the leaders of Israel—the priests and laymen who sat on the Sanhedrin—endorsed a kind of realpolitik that failed to address any of the causes of this existential dread. In this context, many awaited a messiah who, they hoped, would have the knowledge and power to set things right.

Whether Deuteronomy's curses were explicitly on Mark's mind is not clear, but they certainly lay in the background. At the end of the first phase of Jesus' ministry, Mark presents four miracles—the stilling of the sea, the healing of the Gerasene demoniac, the restoration of the woman impoverished by her illness and the raising of Jairus's daughter—that show Jesus' knowledge and ability to set right what had gone awry. Faith in Jesus freed the apos-

'Little girl, I say to you, arise!' (Mk 5:41)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How has Christ lifted you from dread?

Who in your life needs to hear Christ say, "Arise"?

ties, the demoniac, the woman and Jairus's family from all that caused them dread.

Faith in Jesus also revealed that God never intended the world to be a place of anxiety. As this week's first reading demonstrates, a belief that death was an anomaly was already growing among Jews of Jesus' day. In Mark's Gospel, faith in Jesus does not just reveal God's dream for the world; it also confers the power to overcome anything contrary to God's will, including death itself. Faith led Jairus and the suffering woman to Jesus, whose power overcame their suffering. When Jesus commanded, "Arise!" he woke her entire family from an illusory curse and a nightmare of dread. His command revealed an alternative vision, that God created life to be eternal and all things to be good.

The world is no less anxious a place today. Many feel dread over the world's natural or moral environment. Personal innocence provides no protection when others choose to do evil. Filled with Christ's Spirit, our mission today is to seek out those enslaved by dread and let them hear his voice say, "Arise!"

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

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Mark 5:21-43

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15th Sunday Ordinary Time
Mark 6:7-13

Commissioning of the Twelve

SEPTEMBER 9

23rd Sunday Ordinary Time
Mark 7:31-37

Cure of the Deaf Man

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Mark 10:46-52

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Subversive Whispers

Readings: Ez 2:2-5, Ps 123, 2 Cor 12:7-10, Mk 6:1-6

It is easy to talk oneself out of faith. A lifetime of experience can present abundant evidence that Christ is not at work in our lives, at least not in the ways we would like him to be. The process is subtle but malicious. The memories of fiascos and failures line up at the very edge of our consciousness, and the narratives they produce conceal whispers that Christ is not interested in the problems we face, not powerful enough to overcome the obstacles in our way.

These quiet voices can be alluring. For some, their appeal comes from brief but enjoyable illusions of control. There is a pleasure in thinking oneself the cause of one's own success, even when God and neighbor have obviously had a hand. For others, gratification comes from the belief that they stand alone against life's challenges. Imagining oneself marching in solitude against a host of opposing forces can confer drama and purpose on even the dullest existence.

Knowledge of Christ gives no protection from these quiet voices, for knowing about Christ is not the same as knowing Christ. This was the trap that Jesus' neighbors

fell into in this Sunday's Gospel reading. They had seen him at home and at work; they knew his family and they thought they knew him. Although they had heard of his mighty deeds and witnessed his preaching, this encounter could not dispel the quiet whispers that echoed through their minds.

A similar encounter with the God of Israel likewise failed to stir Ezekiel's audience. His message, addressed to the political and religious leadership of Jerusalem just before the city's destruction, met with indifference or outright hostility. These leaders knew a great deal about God, but they did not know God in the visceral way Ezekiel did. When their faulty knowledge led to catastrophe, they found in Ezekiel's writings the path back to faith. Through Ezekiel, all Israel found the strength to survive the Babylonian exile and, generations later, rebuild a broken nation.

Paul famously avoided the trap of these subtle whispers, as this Sunday's second reading demonstrates. His lack of deliverance from his "thorn in the flesh" only led him to deeper faith. Although we will probably never know what this "angel of Satan" might have been, Paul makes it clear that it was some problem that Jesus could have overcome. When he did not, Paul took this not as a sign that he was on his own, but rather as a call to deeper reliance on God. The struggle was itself an opportunity to cooperate with Christ, and through it, Paul found a path to deeper faith and richer grace.

Paul's vigorous faith helped him avoid this trap. Just so, we have to remain vigilant if we are to avoid talking ourselves out of faith in Christ. The Lord's power is not magical but relational. He might speak a liberating word, but we need to believe and act on it before we experience our freedom. Christ will not be able to perform any mighty deed in our lives until we place our faith in him and see in our struggles a call to greater cooperation with grace.

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

'He was amazed at their lack of faith.' (Mk 6:6)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

What subtle messages do you use to talk yourself out of faith?

How can the long-term struggles of your life be a call to deeper faith?

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A Good Call

The pope and a cardinal show the right way to call someone out

By Simcha Fisher

“We become human at the point of many spears,” stated Richard Wrangham, a professor of biological anthropology, describing the pitiless justice that communities inflict on those who threaten the safety of the group.

In a recent interview about call-out culture on NPR’s “Invisibilia,” Mr. Wrangham said that we like to think we become better people through self-reflection and wisdom, but it really happens mainly through the threat of punishment by the community.

This interview took on special poignancy as events unfolded around Pope Francis, Cardinal Seán O’Malley and the sexual abuse scandal in Chile. More on that in a moment.

Call-out culture is well established—so much so that we are now seeing calls to make it productive rather than simply reactive. As Catholics, we have a special responsibility to examine how we wield our spears. It is not only the safety of the community that we must consider but the souls of the people involved, including our own.

Let us look at what this culture yields when those spears are carelessly wielded. The “Invisibilia” interview centered on “Emily,” a punk rocker, who made a name for herself as a fearless vigilante feminist, naming names, calling out abusers and misogynists in the punk rock world.

Her past caught up with her when a mutual friend from high school revealed that Emily, in high school and before she was famous, tormented and bullied other

women. She shared nude photos of them online, cruelly hounding them for years.

Before long, her career was over, her identity was destroyed and she became afraid even to leave the house. Reluctant to speak of herself at all, she identified herself as inhuman, a monster.

The interviewer notes that many punk rockers who did worse things than Emily were never called out and that most of Emily’s victims never even got an apology.

Now let us return to Cardinal O’Malley, the president of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, who in January called out Pope Francis for his rebuff of the Chilean victims of sexual clergy abuse. I was shocked when Francis, who has presented himself as the voice for the voiceless, repudiated these victims so publicly, saying their accusations were “calumny.”

And I was thrilled beyond measure when Cardinal O’Malley held him to account. “It is understandable that Pope Francis’ statements yesterday in Santiago, Chile, were a source of great pain for survivors of sexual abuse by clergy or any other perpetrator,” the cardinal said in a statement to the press on Jan. 20.

This call-out and the respectful, persistent push-back from the victims themselves seem to have actually moved the wheels of justice forward. Francis has acknowledged his wrongdoing, both publicly and personally, to the victims; and he seems poised to make concrete changes so that such things do not happen in the future.

Let us contrast this with what happened

to the disgraced punk rocker. What made Cardinal O’Malley’s call-out effective?

It came from an insider. A rebuke from someone who sympathizes with your goals and understands your world is much harder to discount than a reprimand from someone already presumed to be your enemy. Our first goal should always be to root out injustice in our own communities—in our own selves—before we can hope to correct the errors of people we do not know or understand.

It was more concerned with defending the victims than with crushing the aggressors. Cardinal O’Malley did not seek to humiliate or damage Francis. He spoke out specifically and earnestly in defense of the victims, knowing how Francis’ careless words added to their suffering.

It allowed for conversion by those who had done wrong. Repentance and conversion are the heart of our faith, and any call-out that does not seek or want conversion of sinners is not truly about justice; it is about revenge. Revenge destroys not only those who suffer it but those who deal it out.

This is our model. To correct an injustice, Catholics can do better than wielding spears. Fraternal correction must sometimes be public and painful, but publicity and pain must not be our goal.

Simcha Fisher is a speaker, freelance writer and author of The Sinner’s Guide to Natural Family Planning. She lives in New Hampshire with her husband and 10 children.

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