

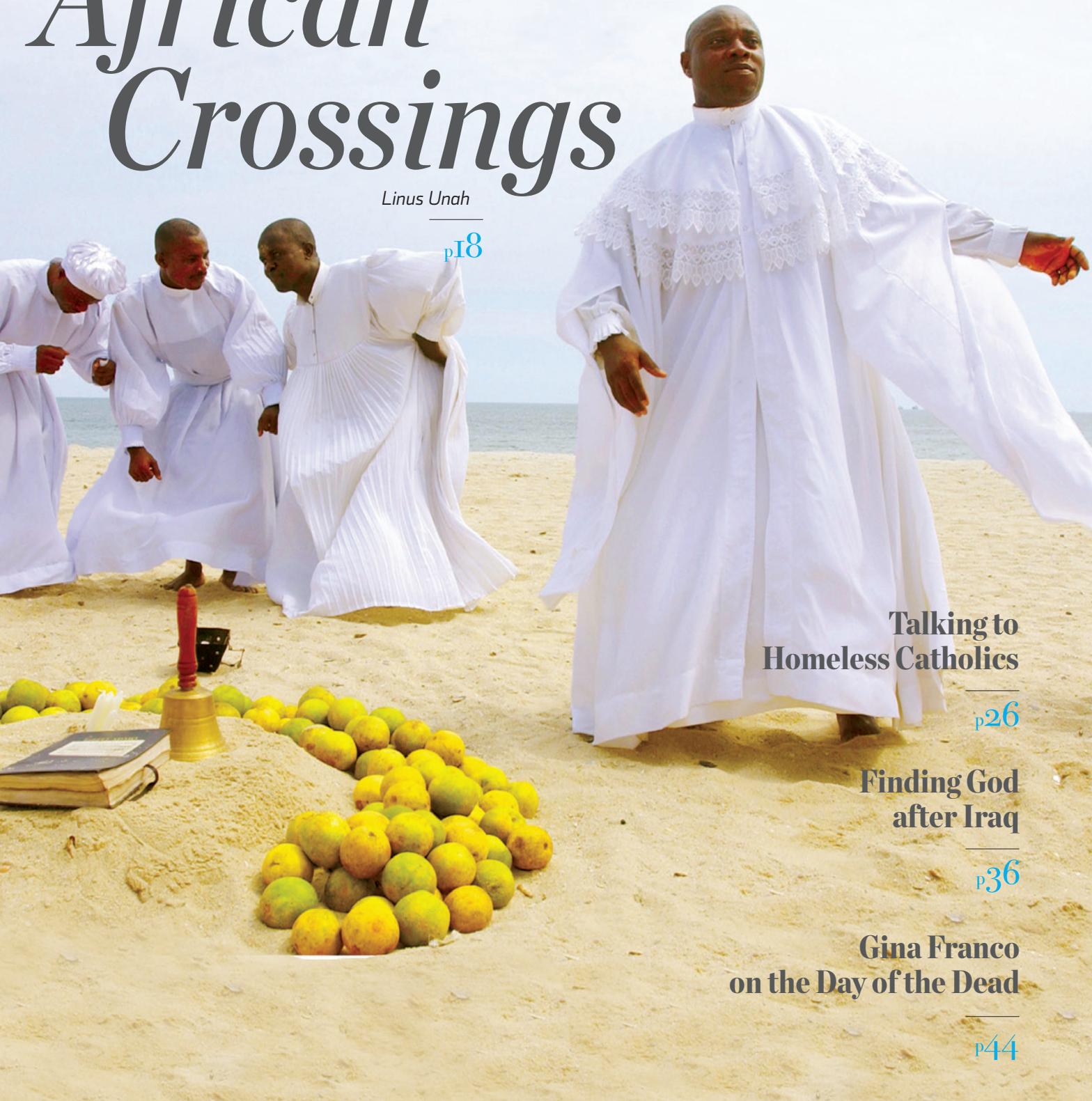
America

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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Gina Franco on the Day of the Dead

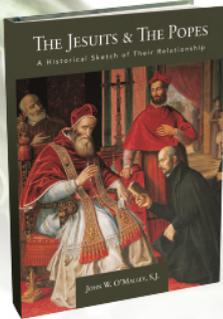
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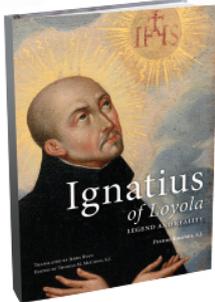
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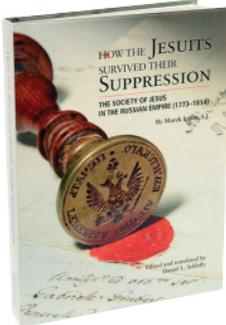
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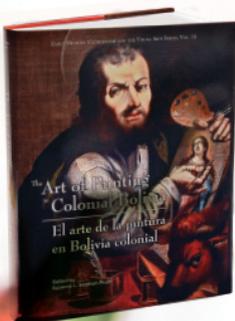
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Past, Present, Future

“In Flanders the British have captured 800 yards of German trenches south of Ypres, only to lose them subsequently,” **America** reported in the issue of March 11, 1916. “In Asia Minor, the Russians are making progress.... The only other theater where there has been fighting of an important character is Verdun.”

That last sentence contains the first reference in our archives to one of the longest, deadliest battles in human history. It began the previous month, when the German Fifth Army attacked the troops of the French Second Army in the hills north of Verdun-sur-Meuse, in northeastern France. When **America** went to press with that first report, nearly 70,000 men had already fallen. Nearly one million more men from both sides would be killed or wounded before it was over, a number greater than the population of present-day San Francisco.

On a bright, windswept day last October, I climbed the stairs of the 151-foot tower that marks the highest point of the battlefield. From the observation deck at the top, I had a panoramic view of the battlefield, where row upon row of alabaster headstones stand mute on a vast countryside still pockmarked by the artillery fire. The tower itself caps an enormous ossuary containing the remains of more than 100,000 unknown soldiers. Through the small windows in the tower’s base, you can see countless piles of human bones, some 12 or 15 feet high. “The windows,” I thought. “The people who designed this place wanted us to see this in all its grotesque magnitude. They wanted us to recoil at the sight of it. They wanted us to remember.”

As my stomach churned and my eyes swelled with tears, I reached for the handkerchief in my pocket. There I also found my iPhone, vibrating with the latest news. I looked down and reviewed the last couple of dozen posts in my Twitter feed: some war talk in Washington, serious charges of sexual harassment, political maneuverings hither and yon. Interesting stuff, some of it serious. But none of it seemed important, at least not in relation to where I was standing.

And that’s the point. What we see and how we see it largely depends on where we are standing. A shared sense of history, of what was, or might’ve been, or could be again, is the indispensable touchstone of our collective judgment, for memory is the soul of conscience. “History, despite its wrenching pain,” Maya Angelou once wrote, “cannot be un-lived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.”

Remembering the past also relativizes the present, reminds us of what is ultimately important and enduring. The church, for example, is one of only two institutions, along with the synagogue, that survived the fall of the Roman Empire. It is probably not going to be brought down by our contemporary ecclesiastical politicking. We’re just not that powerful. And the church will likely survive the United States. Long after the United States has joined Rome and Austria-Hungary and Britain on the ash heap of imperial history, the people of God will still gather to participate in the one true history of humanity, to worship the true Creator and Redeemer of us all. I find hope in that, at least as much as I find despair in the ossuary in Verdun.

The thing about history, though, is that one must know it for it to be instructive. For the first time in human existence, the sum of human knowledge is literally in the palms of our hands. Yet we are painfully ignorant of our own history, like trees without deep roots, easily tumbled by the slightest gale. We often say when talking about dementia that one of the greatest tragedies that can befall an individual is to lose his or her memory. But it’s just as tragic when a people loses its collective memory. It is also far more dangerous. “The beginning of the end of war,” Herman Wouk once wrote, “lies in remembrance.” Without a sense of history, we risk becoming the myopic, jingoistic mob that the poet-soldier Siegfried Sassoon spoke of in his poem, “A Suicide in the Trenches”:

*You smug-faced crowds with
kindling eye
Who cheer when soldier lads
march by,
Sneak home and pray you’ll
never know
The hell where youth and
laughter go.*

Ten months after its first report, **America** was still covering the cataclysm at Verdun: “Additional battles have been reported from the Verdun district at Mort Homme Hill and Hill 304,” one dispatch read. “But no decisive results were obtained.”

For their sake, as well as ours and that of future generations, that last part especially is worth remembering.

Matt Malone, S.J.
Twitter: @americaeditor



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Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visits the mausoleum of the nation's founding father, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, during a ceremony marking the 79th anniversary of his death, Ankara, Turkey, Nov. 10 (AP Photo/Ali Unal)
Cover: GettyImages

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What do you do for loved ones who have died?

America asked readers through our email newsletter and social media platforms what they do for their loved ones who have died. Seventy-eight percent of readers described how they memorialize loved ones with photos and other objects. “I remember the people I love with pictures,” wrote Sister Ginger Downey of Huntington, Ind. “[Pictures] of my grandmother are very important to me and she has been gone almost 40 years. So when people ask, I say that is my Grandma and tell them a little bit about her.”

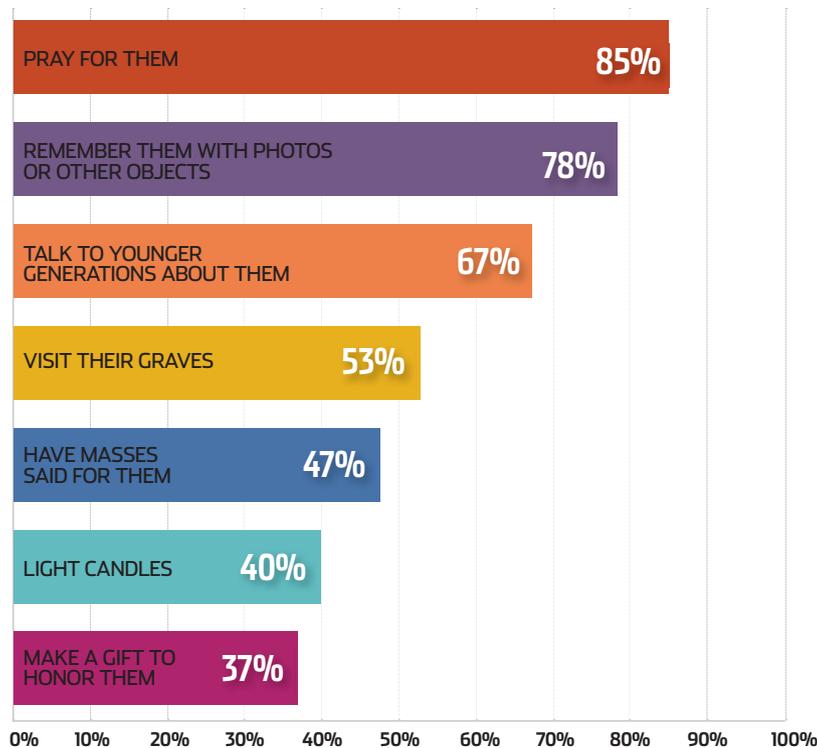
Rachel Guzman of St. Louis, Mo., explained that the way that she uses objects and photos to remember her loved ones is informed by the Day of the Dead celebrations. “*Día de los Muertos*...is a very important tradition for me,” said Ms. Guzman. “I create an altar and place pictures, favorite foods, and decorate it with flowers and bright colors. I sit and pray for their souls and ask God to love them. I cry because they are gone but I laugh because I remember the good times; I feel their presence with me. I close with a

prayer to God and la Virgen de Guadalupe.”

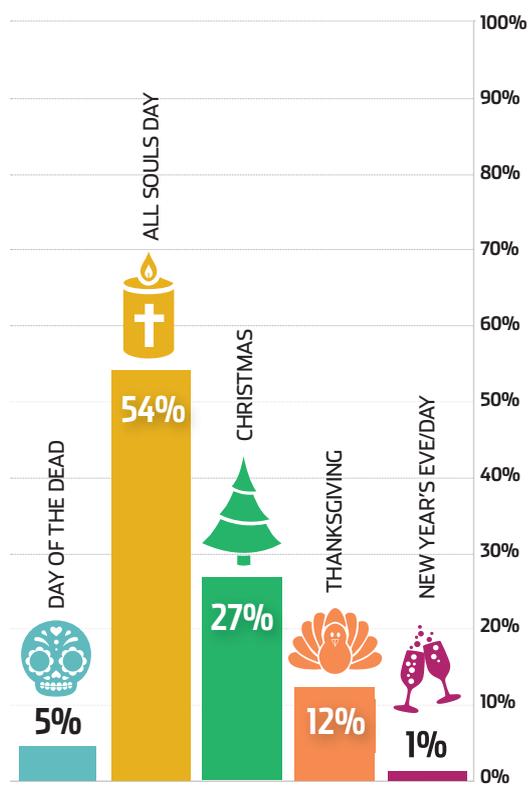
Conversation was also a popular means of remembering those who have passed away; 67 percent said they talk to younger generations about people they have lost. “The best way for me to honor those who have passed away is by talking about the memories that I’ve shared with them,” said Marisa Carlucci of Edison, N.J. “But praying for those who have passed away has become more important to me as I’ve grown in my faith.”

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of readers (85 percent) told **America** that they pray for those who have passed in addition to remembering them in other ways. “Sometimes remembering my dad is done with my sisters and mother. But other times it is a very solitary act,” wrote Lori Boccuzzi of North Wales, Pa. “Ultimately my relationship with him was uniquely mine and it feels good to reflect alone on his life and his legacy. I also stopped by his grave to say thank you for all the gifts he shared during his life.”

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR LOVED ONES WHO HAVE DIED?



DO YOU REMEMBER THESE LOVED ONES ON ONE PARTICULAR HOLIDAY?



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.

Deep Resentment

Re “The Perversion of Patriotism” (Editorial, 11/13): The true patriot is the one who is willing to put his or her life on the line for the principles upon which this country claims to stand. As a veteran who has done that, I deeply resent being used by worthless politicians whose only loyalty is to their own best interests.

Jack Chase

Online Comment

Too Much Idolatry

Thank you for publishing this timely and thoughtful piece. There has been too much idolatry and, one might add, self-serving nationalism, connected with these issues. The abuses to which the protests sought to draw attention never mustered as much passion as those who rail against the protests themselves.

Michael Pare

Online Comment

Up to the Bishops

Re “Family Counseling,” by Thomas Reese, S.J. (11/13): It is up to the bishops to implement “Amoris Laetitia” and educate the laity about this pastoral teaching. It is up to moral theologians to “develop” moral theology in light of the teaching of “Amoris Laetitia.”

Michael Barberi

Online Comment

Missing the Point

Re “Path of Duty,” by Catherine Addington (11/13): The online title of this article (“The Life of Catholic Foundress Cornelia Connelly Was Ruled by Men. Was Her Obedience to Them Holy?”) misses the point of Cornelia Connelly’s life. Her primary obedience was to God. If “ruled” by anyone, it was by the God she so dearly loved.

Ms. Connelly’s submission to men was by no means total. She defied her family to marry Pierce Connelly. She did conform to 19th-century ideals during the early years of her marriage; but after her conversion, her independent spirit gradually reasserted itself. As the founder of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, she was often in conflict with clerics over her vision of religious life and of education. Cardinal Wiseman called her “bold” and “ungovernable.”

An eminently practical woman, she submitted when she believed that obedience was the best option to fulfill her mission or when she had no other choice. The context of her life is important. She had no legal rights over her children or her

money; as a founder of a new religious order, she was under the authority of the local bishop and dependent on his sponsorship to finance and staff her fledgling ministry.

Her life would indeed be “pitiful” if blind obedience were the only hallmark. Instead, she worked tirelessly for what she saw as her mission from God with zeal, imagination and love—despite the many obstacles she faced.

Judith A. Talvacchia

Associate, Society of the Holy Child Jesus

Rosemont, Pa.

Complexity and Sophistication

Re “Voting for Trump, Loving Pope Francis,” by Jim McDermott, S.J. (11/13): Father McDermott’s article avoided the clichés and caricatures produced by the left and the right. His profile of Trump supporters adds a much needed layer of complexity and sophistication to the portrait of Catholics who voted for him. We need more journalism like this from the mainstream media. Good work.

Gene Roman

Online Comment

My Neighbor

Re “Ten Ways Hispanics Are Redefining American Catholicism,” by Hosffiman Ospino (11/13): This is so true. I am a white Catholic who began to be exposed to Guadalupe several years ago and have developed a special devotion since. I have also become terribly concerned about immigration issues and have begun to become active on this front, because these are the very people sitting next to me. My “neighbor” indeed!

Jennifer Rebecca Tomshack

Online Comment

Unfortunate Tone

Thanks for the continued coverage on immigrants and the Latino population with this interesting article. I agree that dialogue is a critical step in building a relationship. Unfortunately, the tone Mr. Ospino uses makes it seem as if the best way to make “us” feel less apprehensive about “them” (meaning foreign folks) is to engage in dialogue—yet he does not clearly lay out factors that contribute to the situation, such as class and race. Using words like *invade* doesn’t help. I hope Mr. Ospino would come to realize that this type of language reinforces negative attitudes about immigrants as invading hordes who must now be tolerated to be better understood.

Rudy Lopez

Online Comment

Two Good Things Trapped in a Bad Tax Bill

We do not yet know if a major tax bill will even make it to a vote in Congress, let alone reach President Trump's desk, but there are at least two good ideas in the House Republicans' proposal. The question is whether they would be used in service of something better for society than another massive tax cut for high-income households.

A centerpiece of that plan is the reduction of the U.S. corporate tax rate to 20 percent from 35 percent. As *America's* editors have stated in the past, a corporate tax cut may be a good trade-off for other reforms that minimize tax avoidance and remove incentives to park profits in countries with lower tax rates—though the Obama administration's proposal to cut the rate to 28 percent may still be more prudent than the drastic cut being proposed by House Republicans. President Trump has been incorrect in asserting that the United States is “one of the highest-taxed nations in the world,” but that claim is true when limited to corporate rather than individual taxation. (Only Chad and the United Arab Emirates have higher taxes on corporate profits.) But a corporate tax cut should be accompanied by other provisions in the bill to discourage U.S. companies from shifting assets overseas. These include a global minimum tax of 10 percent on the subsidiaries of U.S. companies anywhere in the world and a one-time, low repatriation tax of 12 percent on liquid assets brought back to the United States. A lower corporate tax rate makes sense only if it leads U.S. corporations to invest more in their home country.

Another good idea is to cap deductions for home mortgage payments. Under the House tax plan, new homeowners would be able to deduct

interest payments made only on their first \$500,000 worth of loans rather than the current \$1 million. This is a reasonable fix. There are good reasons to encourage home ownership in the interest of family stability and healthy communities, but the tax code should not inadvertently encourage the construction and purchasing of ever-bigger and ever-more-expensive homes. And the 37 percent of U.S. households who rent rather than own (the highest level since 1965 and climbing), and are unable or unwilling to take on mortgage debt, should not be expected to subsidize affluent homeowners. The fact that a lower cap on the deduction would affect high-income (and more heavily Democratic) states more than others is not a reason to preserve this inequity.

However, any revenue gains from these two changes should not simply finance changes to the tax code included in the House plan that mostly benefit top earners—including the phase-out of the estate tax and lower taxes on income from “pass-through” entities like real estate partnerships and hedge funds. Fairness demands that at least some of any new revenue from capping the deduction for home mortgages go to rental assistance programs and incentives for the construction of affordable housing, given that the number of apartments deemed affordable for very low-income families dropped by more than 60 percent across the United States between 2010 and 2016. A boost in the Earned Income Tax Credit would be another appropriate use of any revenue gained from capping the mortgage deduction.

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, as it is called by House Republicans, could dramatically reshape the U.S. economy and the way we fund government. We

applaud the willingness of Republicans to make long-needed adjustments to the tax code. We also fear that their good ideas will only rouse intractable and justified opposition if they are seen as financing a windfall for the wealthiest.

Mercy for Rosa María

An undocumented 10-year-old girl with cerebral palsy is not a threat to U.S. national security. Nonetheless, under President Trump's immigration guidelines, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol agents were emboldened to detain Rosa María Hernández for 10 days, beginning on Oct. 25, until after her surgery in a Texas hospital. Agents had identified Rosa María as undocumented when she passed through a border security checkpoint on her way to the hospital. The child's mother did not accompany her to the hospital for fear of being detained herself.

While former President Barack Obama's directives for deporting unauthorized immigrants placed the highest priority on those who posed security threats, President Trump's guidelines “no longer...exempt classes or categories of removable aliens from potential enforcement.” In Houston, Tex., some families with undocumented immigrants live in so much fear of these new guidelines that they declined assistance in the wake of Hurricane Harvey.

The detention of Rosa María illustrates a key problem with current U.S. immigration policy: The various guidelines drawn up by different administrations are nonbinding and un-

codified. A more humane policy that prioritizes the deportation of undocumented people who have committed crimes should be enacted into law. A ban on ICE activity in spaces like courtrooms, churches, schools, hospitals and ambulances, as well as during crises like natural disasters, should also be formalized.

Trump administration policy seems designed to harass undocumented immigrants indiscriminately, perhaps with the expectation that they will retreat to their countries of origin.

But one cannot scare people out of the United States and back to the violence that now besets so many Central American countries. Rather than address the root causes of the U.S. immigration crisis, an enforcement-only approach simply torments our brothers and sisters who have come to the United States seeking a better life. Far from decreasing crime, overzealous enforcement can worsen it. Chief Charlie Beck of the Los Angeles Police Department has commented that this culture of fear is dangerous for everyone living in the United States.

“When you create a shadow population...that fears any interaction [with law enforcement]...you create a whole population of victims,” Mr. Beck said, “because they become prey for human predators who extort them or abuse them because they know they won’t contact the police.”

U.S. immigration enforcement policy must be merciful, seeking to protect the entire human family that lives within our borders. Detaining and threatening deportation for Rosa María does nothing to make our nation more secure.

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The fight against human trafficking is not just a numbers game

It was a humid, electric evening, like any other in Manila. Our little team huddled in the back of a battered old van, headed to a part of the city known for its upmarket hotels and its brothels. It is a destination for many desperate young women (and some men) seeking to sell their bodies in the hope of building a better life for themselves and their families.

We were with three Redemptorist sisters, who had allowed us to shadow them as they carried out their ministry to prostituted women. For at least 20 years they had been going to red light districts to offer what help they could. We followed as the sisters in their simple blue habits walked past two bouncers guarding a brothel. As we entered, a group of beautiful Filipino women in brightly colored dresses ran toward the sisters, embracing them like long-lost siblings. We were ushered to a room where the sisters would be less likely to distract from the business of the brothel, and we watched as fellowship was shared.

After about an hour we were informed that we could return to the main part of the building, since no “johns” were present. Soon a karaoke machine was playing Abba’s “Dancing Queen,” and one of the sisters took to the stage to begin a barely recognizable version of the tune. She was quickly joined by the youngest woman in the brothel. Everyone fell about laughing. It was a profound moment: A stage normally reserved for the exhibition of human flesh had become the platform for a celebration of solidarity and human dignity.

Later that evening the sisters, who have never received a cent’s worth of support for their work, shared success stories, telling us how they had

managed to help many women. They also told us about women who had regained their freedom only to be trafficked once again. The stories have the potential to generate salacious headlines, but they also explain how anti-slavery work is carried out and how we can better support it.

There is a tension between accompaniment and impact in the field of international development. The tail has increasingly wagged the dog. Funders want to see evidence of impact, and this results in a focus on numbers: tallies of the women rescued, the people sheltered. I recently heard about a shelter that ejected human-trafficking survivors after a certain period to provide evidence that it had “rehabilitated” enough people to justify further investment.

This contrasts starkly with much of the frontline work we have been privileged to witness, and especially with the global work of Talitha Kum—the International Network of Consecrated Life Against Human Trafficking—which links religious in over 70 countries as they confront modern slavery. The work of Talitha Kum is more focused on accompaniment, which requires patience, the sensitivity to move at someone else’s speed and constant adaptability to the unique needs of each victim of trafficking. Sadly, this is why our Manila Redemptorists were never going to attract significant funding. And it is why last year we launched the Arise Foundation, which has a specific mandate to support efforts in frontline accompaniment.

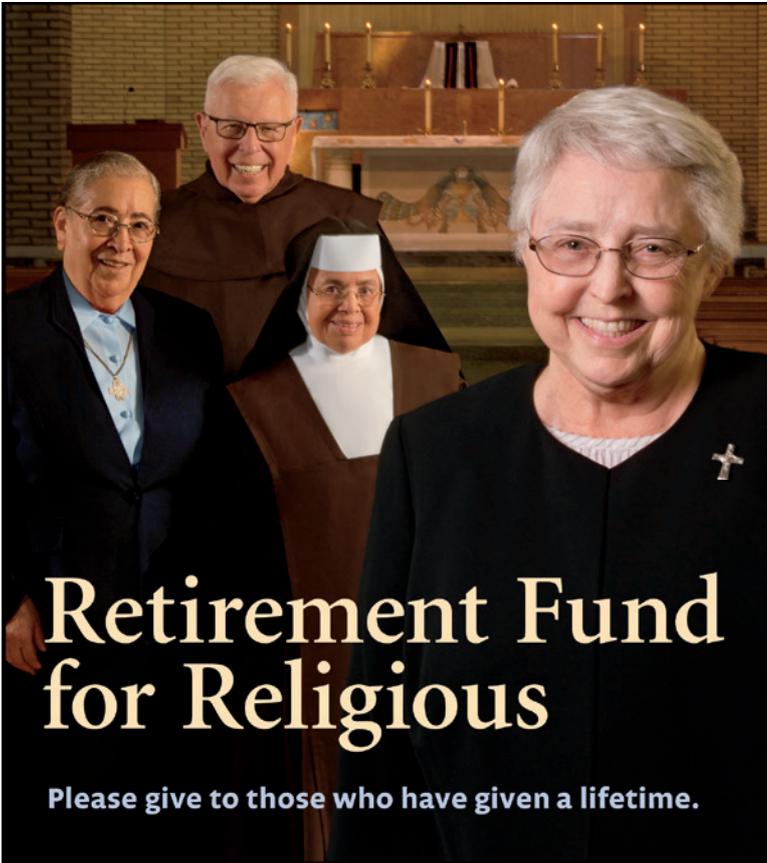
The skeptical reader might question the value of spending time with exploited women in a brothel. But every frontline abolitionist I know insists on

the value of building a trusting relationship with victims and survivors. These gateway initiatives pave the way for an array of other services offered by the church, including shelters, rehabilitation programs, awareness-raising, advocacy and other preventive work. Many of these projects are underdeveloped, and most do not receive funding beyond their congregations, where resources are scarce. The church’s full potential as a force against exploitation is far from being realized.

It is too often assumed that women religious will just keep doing this work, against the odds and with little support. They get a paternal pat on the head but are rarely seen as an important voice at the table or worthy of serious resources. We constantly hear from sisters and others who are keen to expand the scope of their invaluable projects but who need their work to be further enabled.

We have an opportunity to put matters to rights: by taking it upon ourselves to raise the profile of the courageous members of our own Catholic community who undertake frontline accompaniment and by helping the international community to appreciate work that prioritizes the needs of the individual over the demands of the funding community. Let us seize these opportunities so that we can realize our church’s phenomenal potential to make slavery history.

John J. Studzinski is the vice chairman of investor relations and business development at The Blackstone Group LP. He is also a director emeritus of Human Rights Watch and a co-founder of the Arise Foundation, which partners with local networks to stop human trafficking.



Retirement Fund for Religious

Please give to those who have given a lifetime.

“My sister was to be a nun, and I was to be a mother,” says Notre Dame Sister Mary Ann Hanson (*foreground*), 79, “but God had other plans.” During 61 years of religious life, she has joyfully followed those plans. Along with the senior religious shown here—and 32,000 more across the United States—Sister Mary Ann benefits from the Retirement Fund for Religious. Your gift helps provide nursing care, medications, and other necessities. Please be generous.

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Photo (from left): Sister Gloria Rodríguez, MGSps, 80; Father Albert Bunsic, OCD, 81; Sister Alfonsina Sanchez, OCD, 96; Sister Mary Ann Hanson, SND, 79.
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AFTER CARNAGE IN TEXAS, U.S. BISHOPS RENEW CALL FOR GUN CONTROL

By Michael O'Loughlin

Like the episodes of violence themselves—three of the nation's five worst shootings in modern history have taken place over the last 24 months—responses to mass shooting events seem to have adopted a routine. Those with an absolutist interpretation of the Second Amendment offer thoughts and prayers but insist that the immediate aftermath of a shooting is not the right time to discuss gun control.

Those who wish to end easy access to high-capacity, military-style weapons say thoughts and prayers are insufficient without action and demand that legislators stand up to national gun lobbyists. Days after the nation's deadliest church shooting on Nov. 5, in which 26 people, ranging in age from 17 months to 72 years, were killed by a lone gunman with an AR-15 semiautomatic rifle, the response followed this well-worn path.

But there are signs that at least among some U.S. Catholic bishops, statements of grief and sorrow are being backed up with pledges to push for legislative action on guns.

The head of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice issued a statement the day after the Texas shooting expressing support for a "total ban on assault weapons" and calling for a "real debate about needed measures to save lives and make our communities safer."

"For many years, the Catholic bishops of the United States have been urging our leaders to explore and adopt reasonable policies to help curb gun violence," Bishop Frank Dewane, of the Diocese of Venice, Fla., said. "The recent and shocking events in Las Vegas [and Sutherland Springs] remind us of how much damage can be caused when weapons—particularly weapons designed to inflict extreme levels of bloodshed—too easily find their way into the hands of those who would wish to use them to harm others."

The statement also noted that the bishops continue to support universal background checks, restrictions on the possession of high-capacity weapons and increased access to mental health care.

Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago, interviewed at the University of Chicago by the Washington Post writer and Commonweal contributor E. J. Dionne on Nov. 6, renewed his call for a ban on high-powered weapons, employing a grisly image about hunting to make his point.

"Reasonable" gun control, he said, is "not against hunting. When I was [a bishop] in South Dakota, we hunted."

But, he continued, "When the hunting sport is human prey, we have to take action.

"Both state and federal law need to change to make these guns not available. We don't need military weap-



ons in our society. We're not supposed to be at war with one another," he said.

Other bishops also appear to be fed up with the lack of progress of gun control. In rural Vermont, where hunting is a common part of life, Bishop Christopher Coyne of Burlington released a statement that seemed to suggest prayer should stir believers to take action on guns.

"I find my horror at these murders to be mixed with frustration and guilt—frustration that we as a country cannot seem to come together to do anything about this evil plague and guilt that I bear for being part of a culture that fosters such violence," wrote the bishop, who heads the Communications Committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

He called for prayers for the victims of violence in Texas but also for penance for a collective guilt that allows such carnage to continue, asking for "prayers for ourselves that we may as a country somehow find a way to have a meaningful dialogue about what is to be done to stop these mass shootings, with an openness to hear each other and to seriously consider new policies and laws to protect people from this horror."

Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller of San Antonio responded to the shooting with a straightforward message posted on Twitter: "No war, no violence, no guns." Speaking to **America**, Archbishop García-Siller said he is "hopeful" that a debate about gun regulations could begin following the shooting. "We have been pushed not to have a debate about this matter," he said. But now "we need to take actions in little ways and in stronger ways on

how to promote a culture of peace, compassion, kindness, tenderness."

Catholic bishops in the United States have long supported restrictions on gun ownership. The U.S.C.C.B. released a pastoral statement addressing gun violence in 1994 titled "Confronting a Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action," and it supported an assault-weapons ban enacted that year that was allowed to expire in 2004. In 2000, it called for "sensible regulation of handguns."

It is unclear what effect a push for gun control by bishops could have.

Fred Kammer, S.J., who heads the Jesuit Social Research Institute at Loyola University New Orleans, said bishops already have the foundations for a gun-control campaign, pointing to the U.S.C.C.B. voters' guide, "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," which calls for "supporting reasonable restrictions on access to assault weapons and handguns."

Father Kammer said bishops should consider partnering "with other faith communities across the board." He said the "corrupting power of money in our politics," especially "the corrupting power of the National Rifle Association and its influence on Congress," should be of particular concern.

"If they do it, the bishops really need to commit serious resources to do it," he said.

Michael O'Loughlin, *national correspondent*.
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When churches are targets ...

Experts in church security say Catholics have been noticeably absent from seminars promoting active measures against potential acts of violence. But on Nov. 5, the same day as the Texas church shooting when 26 people were killed and more than 20 were wounded, another shooting already had taken place in the parking lot of a Catholic church in Fresno, Calif.

After a 7:30 a.m. Mass at St. Alphonsus Church, a man shot his estranged wife and her boyfriend in a car. The woman died from the gunshot wound and the man died from his wounds later at the hospital. The shooter fled the scene before taking his own life.

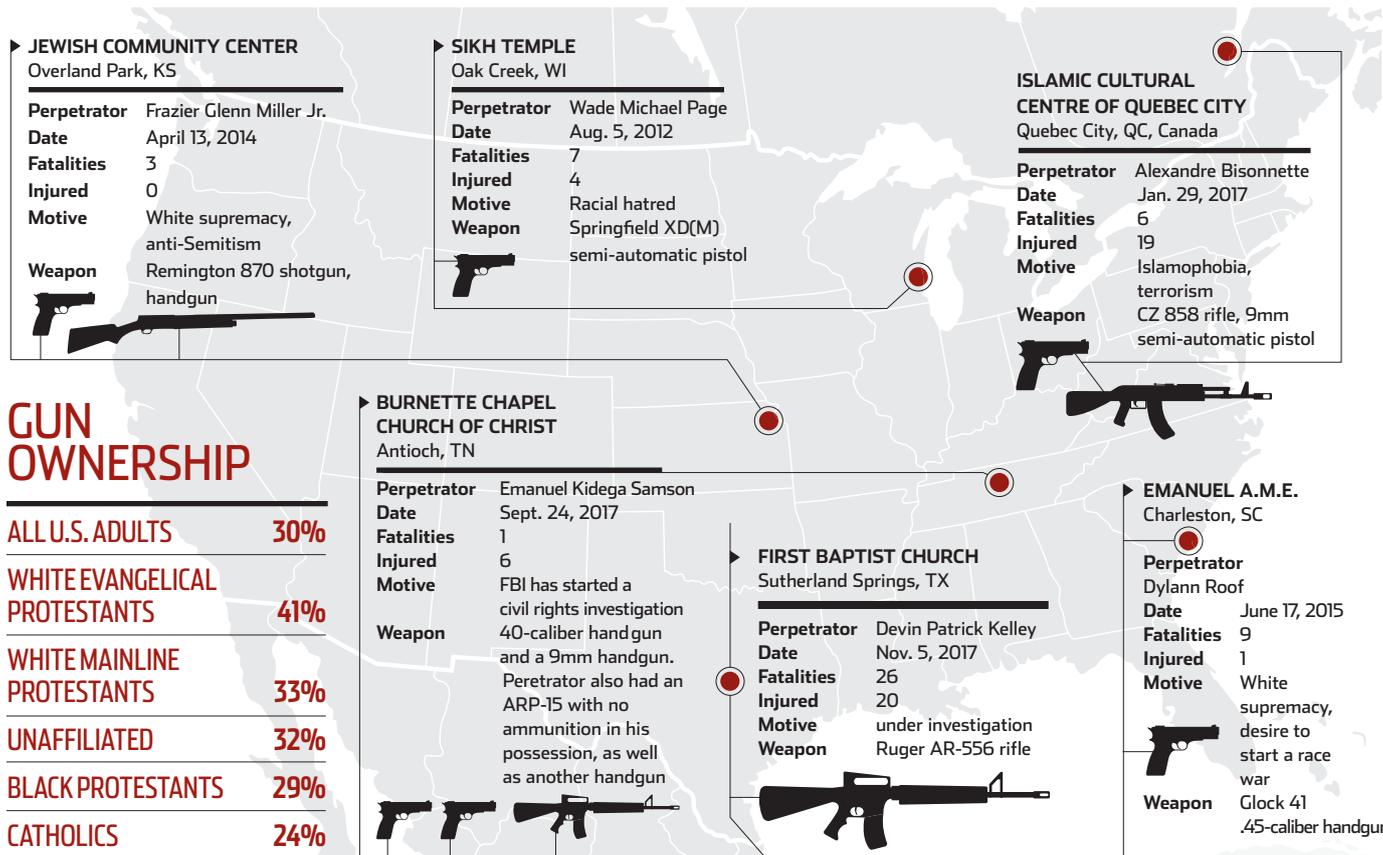
Carl Chinn, a church security consultant in Colorado Springs, Colo., keeps tabs on attacks at places of worship and says incidents of violence have increased on religious

properties in recent years. He said the idea of implementing church security measures seems to be the decision of individual church leadership. More often than not, he said, “they have not grasped the need for it or made it a priority.”

He advises churches to put together volunteer security teams to focus, on keeping an eye out for anything unusual, or anything “dlg,” which is security lingo for “don’t look good.”

He also urges churches to keep their security plan simple—“not something that would fill up a three-ring binder.” The security team can be the “eye and ears” of the church—armed if they can be—and properly trained.

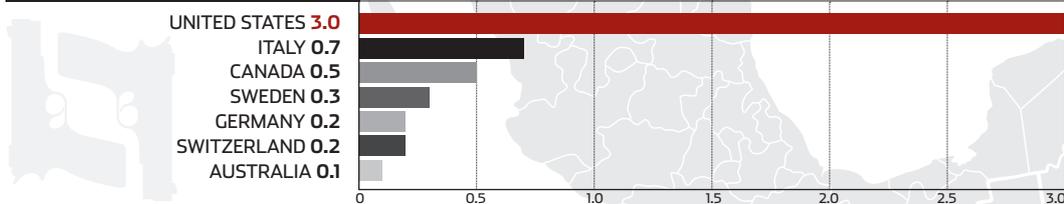
Catholic News Service



GUN OWNERSHIP

ALL U.S. ADULTS	30%
WHITE EVANGELICAL PROTESTANTS	41%
WHITE MAINLINE PROTESTANTS	33%
UNAFFILIATED	32%
BLACK PROTESTANTS	29%
CATHOLICS	24%

GUN MURDERS PER 100,000 PEOPLE



378 U.S. MASS SHOOTINGS

SO FAR IN 2017, DEFINED AS A SINGLE OUTBURST OF VIOLENCE IN WHICH FOUR OR MORE PEOPLE ARE SHOT.

Sources: The Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research; Pew Research Center, including data provided directly to America Media; The New York Times, citing the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; massshootingtracker.org.

Independent candidates shake up 2018 elections in Mexico



María de Jesús Patricio campaigns with an escort of masked indigenous women in the Zapatista stronghold of Oventic in the southern state of Chiapas in October.

AP Photo/Eduardo Verdugo

Next year's elections in Mexico will host a broader and more diverse group of presidential hopefuls than ever before. For the first time in Mexico's recent history, independent candidates without a party affiliation will be allowed to participate.

It is an innovation some observers say is badly needed; Mexico's traditional political parties have been deeply discredited by corruption scandals and cronyism. "I believe it's a significant development, something that may force the political establishment into a new direction," Fernando Dworak, a political scientist and commentator for the website Politico Mexico (politico.mx), told **America**. "But it's also dangerous to expect too much of them."

Much will be at stake when Mexicans go to the polls on July 1, 2018. The elections are expected to be among the most hotly contested since the country's transition to democracy in 2000.

Early polling suggests that the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (P.R.I.) of President Enrique Peña Nieto, who is constitutionally barred from re-election, faces an uphill battle to retain power. The nation has been riven by a seemingly endless series of corruption scandals and has endured continuing drug-trade violence and sluggish economic growth.

The P.R.I. faces a strong challenge from the leftist populist Andrés Manuel López Obrador, a former mayor of Mexico City and runner-up in the previous two elections in 2012 and 2006. His Morena Party is a new player, but he is a former member of both the P.R.I. and the Party of the Democratic Revolution.

Next year's elections offer alternatives for the first time—at least on paper. The possibility of citizens running on platforms not affiliated with any party first gained traction in the run-up to the elections of 2006, when former foreign secretary Jorge Castañeda lost a legal challenge to be allowed to run as an independent. A series of reforms in 2009 and 2014 legalized the possibility of citizen candidacies under relatively strict conditions.

The most eye-catching independent candidacy so far has been that of María de Jesús Patricio Martínez. An ethnic Nahuatl from the central state of Jalisco and a traditional medical healer by trade, she

is the first indigenous woman ever to run for the Mexican presidency.

Marichuy, as she is more widely known, leads a grassroots campaign focused on indigenous rights and economic equality. In recent weeks, her candidacy had been greeted with enthusiasm among leftist urban youth, antiglobalists and indigenous activists from across the country. With no previous ties to any of the traditional political parties—one of the major criticisms of other independents—Marichuy may represent the only true independent candidate in the 2018 race.

A major stumbling block for independent candidates so far has been a smartphone app they are required to use to collect the 866,000 signatures they need to get on the ballot. Mexico's cellular coverage is spotty and only a minority can afford smartphones. Independents from all ends of the political spectrum are calling the app faulty at best and downright racist at worst.

Few believe the introduction of these citizen candidates will provide Mexicans with a real alternative in 2018. Instead of changing the system outright, independents may simply disrupt traditional elections.

"Our democracy must allow them to compete, allow them space," Mr. Dworak said. "I think it's a great development, but I don't think they'll make much of a dent when it comes to the presidency. It's more likely that they'll be successful on a local and state level."

Jan-Albert Hootsen, *Mexico City correspondent*.
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Cardinal Wuerl begins spiritual campaign against 'persistent evil of racism'

Cardinal Donald Wuerl has issued a pastoral letter condemning “the persistent evil of racism,” which he called an obstacle to “the harmony to which we are called as a human family.”

“The mission of reconciliation takes on fresh emphasis today as racism continues to manifest itself in our country, requiring us to strengthen our efforts,” the archbishop of Washington, D.C., wrote, citing “incidents both national and closer to home that call attention to the continuing racial tensions in our society.”

The letter, released on Nov. 1 and titled “The Challenge of Racism Today,” is among the most high-profile responses from a Catholic leader to the nation’s continued racial unrest.

In August, a group of right-wing protesters and white supremacists marched in Charlottesville, Va., clashing with police and counterprotesters. One person died in the violence. That was just the latest example of race-related violence, which has included a number of recent deaths of unarmed African-American men at the hands of police officers.

In response to some of those events, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is drafting a new pastoral letter on racism. In August, bishops launched an ad hoc committee that will consider issues of race, headed by George V. Murry, S.J., the bishop of Youngstown, Ohio, one of a handful of African-American bishops in the United States.

In an interview with **America**, Cardinal Wuerl said he wrote the letter in part as a response to concerns he heard from some Catholics in the archdiocese, including African-Americans and Hispanics, that there still exists “subtle racism” and sometimes a “not so subtle” racism in the nation.

He said that he expects “something far more significant” when the U.S. bishops publish their pastoral letter on race sometime next year, but he said the point of his letter is that everybody must do something to combat the sin of racism.

“We’re asking everybody in this archdiocese to take some responsibility for any marginalization that you see of anybody,” he said. In his letter, Cardinal Wuerl writes that



© NEA photo / Jim Lo Scalzo, EPA

Catholics must first admit that racism exists “in a variety of forms” and then agree that there are steps everyone can take to help stop it.

“The divisions we face today that are based on the color of one’s skin or ethnic background are obviously not a part of God’s plan,” he wrote.

He added, “Intolerance of other people because of their race, religion or national origin is ultimately a denial of human dignity. No one is better than another person because of the color of their skin or the place of their birth.”

The cardinal said that racism has affected many groups in the United States, but, he wrote, African-Americans have especially been hurt by the lingering effects of “the sin of centuries of human trafficking, enslavement [and] segregation.”

Racism offends God, he wrote, and it is a “sin against



Demonstrators protest police shootings outside the White House in July 2016.

our neighbor, particularly when it is manifested in support of systemic social, economic and political structures of sin.”

Sunday Masses, he said, present an opportunity to challenge racism. “The prayers of the faithful can promote social justice and urge the elimination of racism,” he wrote. “Homilies can deal with the implications of the Christian faith for prejudice and racist behavior. Parishes can provide opportunities and catechetical material for adults to begin a dialogue about how to address the issues raised here. Parish efforts at evangelization ought to welcome and reach out to people of every race, culture and nationality.”

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Sharp spike in anti-Semitic acts so far in 2017



CNS photo/Alejandro Alvarez
NewsShare via Reuters

A torchlight demonstration by white nationalists on the grounds of the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Va., on Aug. 11.

A new report shows a continued rise in anti-Semitic incidents across the United States in the first nine months of 2017, partly attributable to the Charlottesville, Va., rally in August during which white nationalists marched through the city shouting, “Jews will not replace us.”

The report from the Anti-Defamation League shows a 67 percent increase in physical assaults, vandalism and attacks on Jewish institutions over the same period last year. Specifically, the report cites 1,299 anti-Semitic incidents across the United States between Jan. 1 and Sept. 30 of this year, up from 779 in the same period in 2016.

“While the tragedy in Charlottesville highlighted this trend, it was not an aberration,” Jonathan Greenblatt, A.D.L.’s chief executive officer, said in a written statement. “Every single day, white supremacists target members of the Jewish community—holding rallies in public, recruiting on college campuses, attacking journalists on social media, and even targeting young children.”

The report shows that anti-Semitic incidents spiked during and immediately after the Charlottesville protests that left one woman dead. President Trump ignited a political firestorm in the wake of the violence when he attributed “blame on both sides”—white supremacists as well as those who marched against them.

The report found a sharp rise in anti-Semitic harassment and vandalism on college campuses and in grade schools. Incidents in K-12 schools in 2017 more than doubled over the same period in 2016 to 269, up from 130.

Religion News Service

CHURCH CROSSINGS

In Nigeria, Pentecostal movements are winning over young Catholics

By Linus Unah

When Johnbosco Ugwu was growing up in Ede-Oballa, a tiny village in Enugu State in southeastern Nigeria, he enjoyed going to Mass with his parents and siblings. In 2015 he decided he would like to become a priest.

Mr. Ugwu applied to several Catholic seminaries and was thrilled when he was finally accepted to one in southern Nigeria. But he quickly learned that the church has not been spared by the dysfunction and corruption that plague most institutions in the country. The local bishop warned Mr. Ugwu that the seminary was not “trustworthy.” It is not uncommon, the bishop said, for schools to operate without the proper license, leaving students unable to graduate or serve as a priest after they have completed the required coursework.

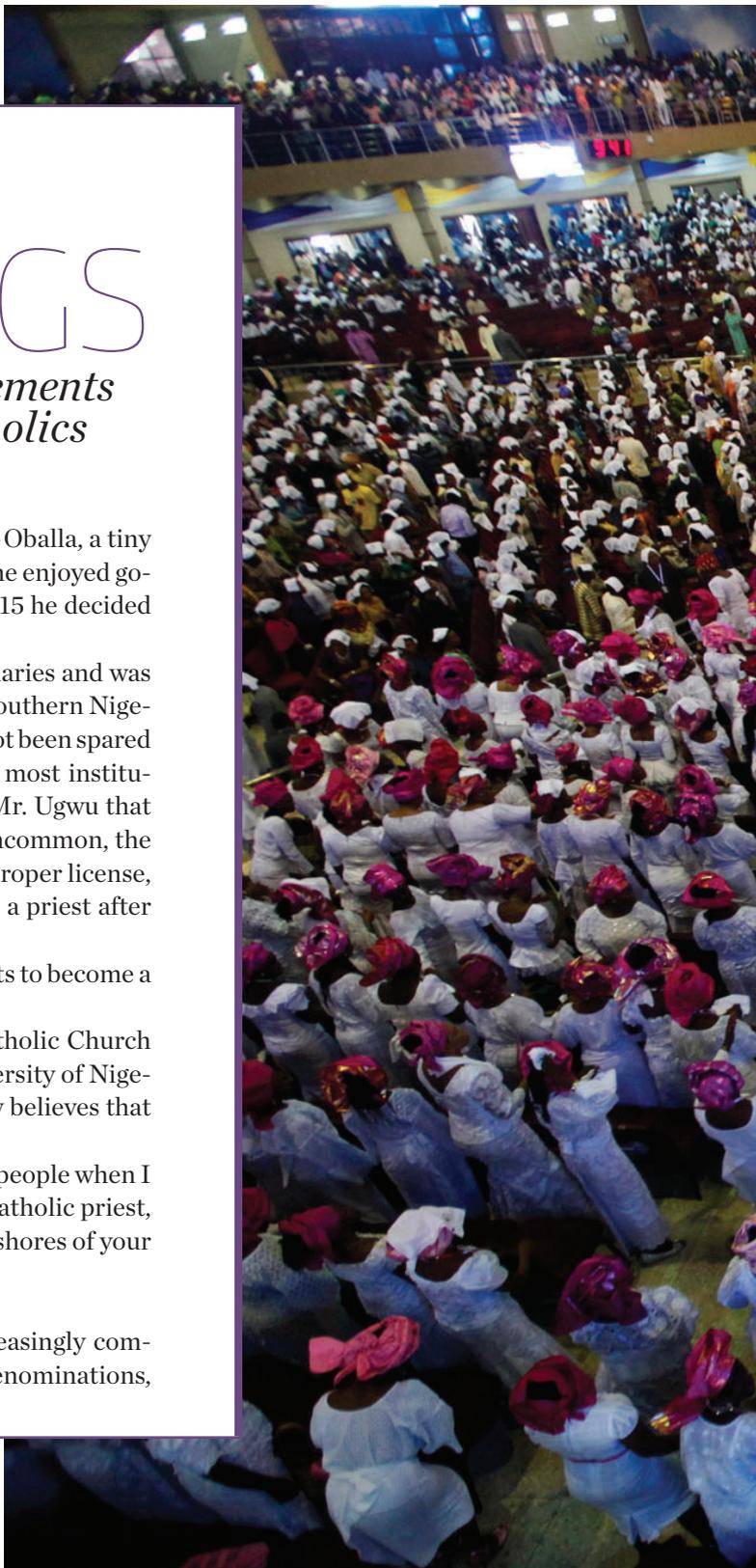
Today, 22-year-old Mr. Ugwu no longer wants to become a priest, and he has stopped attending Mass.

Mr. Ugwu chose to walk away from the Catholic Church after he left home last year to study at the University of Nigeria in the southeastern town of Nsukka. He now believes that becoming a Catholic priest would “limit” him.

“I want to be able to reach out to millions of people when I become a Pentecostal pastor or minister; as a Catholic priest, it would be difficult to reach people beyond the shores of your parish.”

His path is not uncommon.

Across Nigeria, Catholic churches are increasingly competing for membership with other Christian denominations,





Nigeria's religious landscape was once dominated by the Catholic and Anglican churches, but today there is a rising wave of evangelical and Pentecostal movements, including megachurches like Living Faith Church, pictured here, in Ota District, Ogun State.

Reuters/Akintunde Akinleye



Today Africa is home to some 158 million Catholics.

particularly large charismatic Pentecostal churches. And a growing number of students in Nigeria choose to straddle Catholicism and Pentecostalism: They attend Mass while at home with their parents but are involved with Pentecostal movements on campus.

Catholics in the global North frequently point to Africa and other developing regions as “the future of the church.” It is true that there are great growth and vitality here. But if the future of Nigeria is Catholic, it is also increasingly Pentecostal.

GROWTH AND DIVERSITY

Today, Africa is home to some 158 million Catholics. The continent is expected to be home to one-sixth of the world’s Catholics (about 230 million people) by 2025. Nigeria is Africa’s most populous country, with a population evenly divided between Muslims and Christians. It also boasts the continent’s largest Christian population, with as many as 80 million Christians, 20 million of whom are Catholic. The southeastern region, home mainly to Christians from the large Igbo ethnic group, has a significant Catholic population.

Nigeria’s religious landscape was once dominated by the Catholic and Anglican churches, but today there is a rising wave of evangelical and Pentecostal movements, many

of which are “African Initiated Churches,” independently started in Africa by Africans: Christ Apostolic Church, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Living Faith Church Worldwide, Christ Embassy, Deeper Christian Life Ministry, Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, Lord’s Chosen Charismatic Revival Movement, The Synagogue, Church of All Nations, Celestial Church of Christ, and Dominion City—to name a few.

This diversity has given rise to disagreement, confusion and division within Nigeria’s Christian community. It is not uncommon to meet Christians who refuse to marry outside their denominations. And on university campuses, where many students are untethered from their childhood faith for the first time, the competition for souls can be fierce.

WHY THEY LEAVE

Several factors lead young Nigerian Catholics to explore Pentecostal churches. First, misconceptions about the teachings of the Catholic Church are widespread. It is common to hear non-Catholics say the church engages in idolatry and Mariolatry. Some claim that the church does not believe in the Holy Spirit or use the Bible for its teachings. Catholic students often cannot withstand the challenges thrown at them by student leaders from other churches.

Jesinta Okorie, a recent graduate of the University of

Nigeria, grew up in a Catholic family but joined a Pentecostal movement known as Dominion City.

“When I came to campus in 2014, I was told that Catholics worship Mary and idols,” Ms. Okorie, 23, said. “I just had to join Dominion City here on campus, though I went for Mass anytime I left college to stay with my uncle.”

The Rev. Ernest Makata, a priest with the Catholic Diocese of Nsukka, is often confronted with these “misconceptions.” The church “respects or honors” Mary but does not “worship” her, he tells students. “Mary is a mediator or intercessor. What does a pastor do when he prays for you?” But for young Catholics, the negative views of the church held by their peers can be difficult to ignore or contest.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

There are also aspects of Pentecostalism that Catholic students find more appealing than the faith they grew up with. Pentecostals believe strongly in the work of the Holy Spirit and that the direct experience of the presence of God lies in spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing. Its members believe that the Bible is the infallible word of God, and many of its practices come from a literal reading of the Scriptures. Against this backdrop, they constantly question what they see as non-scriptural practices in the Catholic Church, such as the use of missals.

Mr. Ugwu took those criticisms to heart. He noted that the Catholic Church could not help him grasp the Bible as much as he had wanted.

“I needed a church that would train me on evangelism and imbue me with biblical knowledge. I wanted to dissect [the] Scriptures and teach young people. I only got that when I joined another church, and today I lead prayer sessions in my department,” he said.

Ms. Okorie had a similar experience when she joined Dominion City. “Their lessons were purely based on the Bible,” she said. “And we were taken through trainings in the Bible and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.”

But more than anything, what tends to draw young people toward Pentecostal movements is its dual emphasis on welcome and a personal relationship with God.

“I found that [Dominion City’s] service was entirely different from the Mass,” Ms. Okorie said. “I enjoyed every bit of the razzmatazz and their mode of worship was uplifting. There was a lot of music and dancing, and they gave the youth a sense of participation and belonging.”

Mr. Ugwu said he dislikes the exclusivity of Catholic worship. “When I was in the Catholic Church, if we get tracks or leaflets from other denominations, they will consider it as a sin,” he explained. “Or whenever you leave [the] Catholic [Church] to attend another church you will be required to go for confession.”

Another student, 22-year-old Faith Godfrey, was a Catholic until November 2015, when she crossed over to a Pentecostal movement on campus. Though she misses the hymns of her childhood church, Ms. Godfrey said she feels she is “better equipped and trained in the new church to feel closer to God and form a stronger relationship with him.”

FAITH-SHARING

On campus, the student fellowships of other Christian churches often adopt a more personal approach to catering to the needs of their members. They assign mentors to students to guide them through their spirituality and academic struggles. To ensure these students come for church activities, the mentors will often call or text reminders to them.

This hands-on approach appears to be working. “In the Catholic Church, nobody cares about you,” Ms. Okorie said. “The church is way too big, and everybody seems to be too busy. But that’s not the same with Dominion City. If I don’t come for service, someone would definitely call or send [a text message] to check in and know if everything was O.K.”

Father Makata, who has worked with students at the local chaplaincy in the University of Nigeria, admits that this more personal approach is a challenge for Catholics. “I must confess that because of the amorphous nature of the Catholic Church, it becomes very difficult for the church to reach out to all its members,” he said.

But, he added, the church is working hard to tend to young members. He pointed to the creation of what are known as Small Christian Communities, a movement encouraged by Pope John Paul II in “Ecclesia in Africa,” his 1995 post-synodal exhortation on evangelization on the continent. The document states that these communities “should be places engaged in evangelizing themselves, so that subsequently they can bring the Good News to others; they should moreover be communities which pray and listen to God’s Word,

A growing number of students in Nigeria attend Mass—like the one pictured here at Holy Rosary Church in Abuja—while at home with their parents but are involved with Pentecostal movements on their college campus.



encourage the members themselves to take on responsibility, learn to live an ecclesial life, and reflect on different human problems in the light of the Gospel.”

Today, an S.C.C. is usually a small, inclusive community that comprises anywhere from eight to over 40 parishioners who gather weekly in homes or on church grounds to discuss the Sunday readings, to help each other to make connections between everyday life and faith, and to reach out to brothers and sisters who are most in need. The hope among church leaders is that these ecclesial units will provide new avenues for lay Catholics to explore spirituality, encounter Scripture and share their faith, even in the absence of a priest.

But many young Catholics do not belong to these units, Father Makata said. “Unfortunately, they are not effective because people feel it is where fathers and mothers gather to discuss.”

In an attempt to meet the unique needs and challenges of young Catholics, the Nigerian church has endorsed the establishment of units like the National Association of Catholic Corps Members, the Nigeria Federation of Catholic Students, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Nigeria and the Catholic Biblical Movement of Nigeria, among other devotions and adoration ministries.

These movements and units within the church, particularly the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Nigeria, incorporate aspects of both Catholic and charismatic practice, including an emphasis on having a personal relationship with Jesus and professing spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues, performing miracles, healing, interpretation of tongues and utterance of wisdom.

Father Makata said these groups were introduced after the Second Vatican Council to respond to a desire for “dancing and singing and loud worship, which most



CNS photo/Atolabi Sotunde, Reuters

young people need...but they simply don't seek it."

The Nigeria Federation of Catholic Students aims to promote spirituality at universities across the country. It is coordinated and run by students under the guidance of a chaplain, who acts as a spiritual counselor.

Sixtus Ejike, the former secretary of N.F.C.S. at the University of Nigeria, says most Catholic students who leave for other churches do not, in most cases, have a "strong Catholic background."

"Some of these students attend [a] Catholic church because their parents do so. But once they are on campus, there is another level of freedom they experience, and they have nobody watching them and pushing them to go for Mass," said Mr. Ejike, who graduated from the University of Nigeria in August.

"In the early days of their freshman year, they get to

receive help from other student fellowships around campus and these people call them and send constant reminders, so they feel it is an obligation to return the favor they received when they started here. We also try to provide services like accommodation and help freshman students during registration, but due to the huge number of Catholic students, we cannot reach everybody."

BEHIND THE NUMBERS

In the weeks before Pope Benedict XVI's first trip to Africa in 2009, the veteran Italian Vatican journalist Sandro Magister told *The New York Times* that though the Catholic Church was rapidly expanding in Africa, the expansion was "very fragile" because it "shows the typical characteristics of youth and adolescence: great waves of feeling and emotion with rather weak roots."

Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, S.J., the president of the Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar, believes focus only on the rapid growth of the church on the continent is misguided. What is needed is to look inward in order to understand the essence of Christianity.

"The perception of the 'Church in Africa' as a success story is neither false nor exaggerated from the perspective of numerical growth and statistical tabulation," he said. "But therein lies the problem: Growth or progress is not to be measured only in numbers. Christianity represents something more than masses of people milling in and around churches. The test of the quality and depth of faith are to be sought outside of the present obsession with numbers."

Behind those numbers he sees worrying trends. In the face of poverty and failed governance, religion is often instrumentalized to deal with problems, "but only at a superficial level," Father Orobator said. Many pastors and priests spiritualize issues like unemployment, poverty and the disintegration of families instead of addressing the root causes of people's suffering—corruption and poor governance, inside the church and out.

"The fact that much emphasis is placed on prophecy, healing and deliverance is evidence of how churches presently instrumentalize religion by preying on the gullibility and vulnerability of adherents," he said. "This is certainly not what I am prepared to celebrate as the future of the church."

Father Makata sees ignorance as the primary explanation for the Catholic Church's "weak roots."

“I think of the biggest problems we have in the Catholic Church right now with our young people is lack of knowledge,” he said. He blames poor catechesis that relies on rote learning and oral instructions for failing to prepare young Catholics to cherish and defend their faith.

“It’s a very bad way to start,” he argued. “The focus is on reciting the catechism and not understanding the catechism. That’s just not enough. We need to work on the catechesis to manufacture a new set of ways of helping young people understand the church thoroughly.”

PROCLAMATION AND MANIFESTATION

Father Makata urges Catholic ministers to write more books and articles on issues affecting young people and to forcefully proclaim the church’s true teaching on the Virgin Mary, sacred images and the Mass.

“This would help young members to be able to stand up to defend the faith when they encounter people from other churches who question their belief,” he said. He also hopes to deepen young people’s appreciation for the Catholic Church’s unique theology and spirituality. “We have what we call proclamation and manifestation. Proclamation is an attitude which came after the Reformation, which is consistent with Protestant theology: The church is all about what you say and how you proclaim it,” Father Makata said.

“Manifestation holds that God manifests himself in all creation and emphasizes introspection of the mysteries of God. The Catholic Church is more of a manifestation church, but young people don’t just get it.”

Father Orobator, however, sees reasons to be hopeful about the next generation of African Christians. For decades, relations between Catholics and Pentecostals in Nigeria have been marked by competition and distrust: Pentecostals struggle to recognize the saving value of the Catholic Church and the sacraments, while some Catholics view Pentecostal spirituality and missiology with suspicion. He thinks the fluidity of religious affiliation on campuses could be an opportunity to overcome some of these divisions.

According to Father Orobator, who was born in Nigeria and today serves as the principal of Hekima University College Jesuit School of Theology and Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations in Nairobi, Kenya, regular churchgoers are less “hung up on doctrinal niceties and ideological differences between churches.”



African Catholicism has borrowed the songs and styles of worship of Pentecostalism, while Pentecostals have incorporated some of the more formalized celebrations and services of Catholics. In doing so, worshipers like those at the Church of the Holy Trinity in Onitsha, Nigeria, have become more welcoming to Christians of every stripe.

He said what is happening today does not necessarily represent a major shift; rather it is a form of “denominational carpet crossing.” (In Nigeria, the term “carpet crossing” refers to the switching of party allegiance by a politician ahead of an election.)

“I wouldn’t see any reason to be worried and to declare this a crisis of faith or of religious affiliation,” Father Orobator said. “If anything, such ecumenical trends could contain lessons for a more ecumenically hospitable and tolerant attitude between denominations.”

When Christians move between churches, they often carry with them the practices they have found to be meaningful, he said. African Catholicism, for example, has borrowed the songs and styles of worship of Pentecostalism, while Pentecostals have incorporated some of



Reuters/Finbarr O'Reilly

the more formalized celebrations and services of Catholics. In doing so, both churches have become more welcoming to Christians of every stripe.

“In Africa, religion works,” Father Orobator said. “It is a means of addressing real issues, pressing concerns and challenging situations. People will gravitate to wherever they believe these needs are better met, and such ‘crossings’ are not necessarily permanent.”

TO RETURN OR NOT TO RETURN

Last November Jesinta Okorie returned to the Catholic Church. She has started taking catechism classes at the local chaplaincy on the campus, but she still struggles with the Catholic meditative style of celebrating Mass and adds that she does not pray the rosary because she

believes “Mary is given a lot of honor, which is not right.”

As for Johnbosco Ugwu, he does not regret his decision to leave the church.

“I always wanted to become a minister, but I had problems with whether to be a priest or a pastor,” he said. “Every man has a calling, and once you discover it you will begin to walk on the right path.”

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Nowhere to Rest Your Head



ead

The experience of churchgoing while homeless

By Eve Tushnet

AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster



People walk by me every day, and they see me and don't see me. ●●

Several years ago I was attending Mass at a downtown church. That day, if memory serves, the last weekday Mass was not crowded, so it stood out when a middle-aged man went up to receive Communion, then hurried out through the front doors of the church.

When I left Mass myself I found him at the foot of the church steps, asking the better-off churchgoers for change. We all had received Communion together, but he had to hurry away so as not to lose the chance to get help from anyone else leaving Mass early.

The bulletin announced the parish's ministry to people experiencing homelessness—and also warned us not to give money to people who begged around the church since some of them, the note said, had intimidated people. Although not everybody who slept or sheltered in the church during the day was a communicant and not all were Catholic, even those who were devout were not treated like other parishioners.

Some churches know they have members without homes. Many do not. One of the striking facts about the experience of homelessness is how widely it can vary, from living on the streets to “couch-surfing,” staying with whichever friend or relative is willing to take you in for a little while. People can spend decades cycling in and out of shelters and programs, or they can spend several months living out of their car. The Department of Housing and Urban Development collects statistics on how many Americans are homeless on a given night (over 500,000 in 2016), but this vastly underestimates how many Americans have experienced some period of homelessness. Even shorter-term and relatively safer periods of homelessness often leave serious claw marks on people's souls, on their idea of who they are and how others see them.

In attempting to give a few homeless and formerly homeless Christians a chance to share their experiences of church, I spoke to eight people, whom I found through social media, personal connections and walking around Washington, D.C., where I live. This tiny group does not include anyone who was homeless while caring for children (in 2016 HUD found that 35 percent of homeless people

were in families with children) or anyone who became homeless before age 18. I tried to interview other people who were unwilling to talk or unable to speak coherently at that time. By necessity this is an article about the church experiences of relatively trusting, relatively stable people. Nonetheless, their voices often echoed the surprisingly slender research literature on homeless people's experiences of church—and they expressed hard-won truths about Christian life.

Exposed, yet Invisible

Some of the people I spoke to were homeless only briefly, some for decades; they come from wildly different backgrounds, they have different interests, different personalities, and yet their experiences of homelessness were intense enough to mark most of them in starkly similar ways. A sense of both exposure and invisibility came up repeatedly in our conversations.

John William Brandkamp, 52, is an ebullient seminary employee who bounced around many different churches before settling in with what he calls “a moderately progressive African-American church in the urban heart of Boston.” He is outgoing and funny. During his experience of homelessness, Mr. Brandkamp volunteered with a homeless ministry. He is full of stories of the people he has loved and lost. And he summarized one of the hardest aspects of his experience of homelessness in words echoed by many of my interviewees: “I desperately want to be seen, and I desperately do not want to be seen.”

Charles Purcell, 54, a forthright man with a ready smile who spoke with me while he was asking for money near a Metro station in Washington, noted, “People walk by me every day, and they see me and don't see me.” As we talked, a man walked by and said: “You look healthy. Why can't you work?”

Being treated as if you do not exist—or, when your presence is acknowledged, as if you are a problem—in a place that has promised to be a haven can feel like a crushing betrayal. Reggie, 59, (who did not want to give his last name) has close-cropped hair and a short beard threaded

with silver. He has been homeless in Washington, for about seven years. We spoke near the Catholic church where he attends Mass, though he is not Catholic.

He recalled: “One time I was laying out here, and I was throwing up green bile. Out of all those people, droves of people [leaving church], only one lady came over and asked if I was all right and called the ambulance. She said, ‘Jesus! You’re in bad shape!’”

For the most part, the churchgoers are “clean, respectful people,” he said. “I can’t say anything bad about the church.”

But that moment stuck with him.

Closed Doors

Although many people I spoke to found respite at church, others described how even finding a church that would let them in was a struggle while they were homeless.

Anna Harrover, 37, was homeless with her late husband for about 15 years, and she told me that she was turned away from churches repeatedly during that time. “I tried going to church, calling a church to find out about services,” she said. “And yeah, I did try getting a little help because I did want to get on my feet. And I got pushed away. A lot of different times.” Multiple churches (both Catholic and non-Catholic) told Ms. Harrover that they wouldn’t be able to help her unless she belonged to the church. But Ms. Harrover didn’t feel comfortable attending services because of the way she looked, and because in her experience other churchgoers “look[ed] down on the homeless.”

Eventually, Ms. Harrover did find one church that welcomed her and her husband.

“I was wary,” she told me. “Are they gonna see us and call the cops on us? [But] they took all that doubt away. They would come out and just talk to us. Not like, ‘You can’t be here; you got to get off the property.’ They wanted to know why we were homeless, what happened in our life, stuff like that. They would bring us food out, invite us to church services.”

The church accepted her as she was, Ms. Harrover said, even when her clothes were “ragged and stained.” It was there that she received her first Communion and was confirmed in the Catholic faith.

She said the church “made me feel like I think God wants us all to feel: a part of a home.... We ended up getting married in the Catholic Church, too. That was the first time we had a church that welcomed us being homeless.”

She has seriously struggled with faith since her husband’s death. “When I lost my husband, I lost who I was,”

Ms. Harrover said. “I kept thinking, ‘Why be with him so long, and then we finally get legally married, why did you take him from me?’ So I lost who I was. I went crazy.... I do want to practice my Catholic religion again, but I want to find the right place.”

But even a church that feels like home is no certain protection against shame or anxiety. Being known by people at church can even feel like a burden when things get really rough. When I spoke with Tony Hansel, a 35-year-old living in St. Paul, Minn., he was going through an especially hard time. The month before, he had found out that his stepfather, “the one who has raised me my whole life,” was diagnosed with cancer; and Mr. Hansel, who has lost a hand, stopped receiving disability benefits. Mr. Hansel had stopped going to church in the wake of these crises.

When I talked to Mr. Hansel on the phone, I could hear other people calling out to him; he stopped to chat with acquaintances as we talked. He is clearly part of a community of people who know and care about him. He noted: “Some homeless people in the church looked up to me. They were wondering where I was.” Their concern kept him connected, but, he said, “I need some alone time.”

We often talk about the church as a family. But our families can fail to accept us, to recognize us, to let us in, as Ms. Harrover experienced over and over while she was homeless. When they do welcome us, families can put expectations on us; even their love and care can feel like high-pressure scrutiny.

Church as Home

Perhaps one solace of Mass is its direct intimacy with Jesus. His silent presence offers reassurance that he is with us, without the awkward questions and intrusions which we may face from other churchgoers.

For many of the people I spoke with, church was a place where they were seen as real people and not just “homeless.” Greg C., 27, is that rare person who can speak both quickly and thoughtfully. We met at a literary festival we both happened to attend and our conversation turned to the three-and-a-half months he spent homeless. Greg’s stint of homelessness came as a result of a combination of untreated depression and anxiety, family strife and a romantic breakup. He recalled: “During confession, I often mentioned the fact that I was homeless because I wanted not just to be affirmed...but to really receive the compassion of a priest. Even if I was there to be forgiven, to have someone who was willing to listen was just.... That was incredible—that merciful gaze.”



If I came to a new town, the library and the church were the first two places I would find. You could always hang out in a library during the day and you could always get help at a church if you needed it. It just felt like home. ●●

The desperate need for that Christlike gaze, which sees us and does not shame us, is one obvious aspect of many people's experience of homelessness that I wish we heard about in church. Another aspect is the way the church itself can become a home—which makes it especially painful when people feel that they cannot be at home there.

J. B. Toner, 39, was homeless off and on for about 15 years while traveling cross-country. He slept in his car, couch-surfed at friends' places and slept in woods, under bridges or in abandoned houses. He has a thoughtful, quiet way of speaking, frequently punctuated with laughter. "I got to hang out with a lot of other homeless people. It was edifying," he recalled with his quick laugh.

"Usually when I was wandering, I would at least try to get to Mass," Mr. Toner said. "I was in Seattle at Mass once and I was all scruffy, and at the kiss of peace, the lady next to me turned and took my hand and said, 'Are you O.K., do you need help or anything?' Obviously she had been meaning to ask me that. It was nice!"

He did not need help that day, but church remained a place where he could be seen and still be safe.

"If I came to a new town, the library and the church were the first two places that I would find," he told me. "You could always hang out in a library during the day and you could always get help at a church if you needed it. It just felt like home."

In spite of the differences among Catholic churches, he said, "it was kind of comforting to know that it was the same Mass wherever I went." At church, Mr. Toner said, he could "put down whatever [he] was carrying"—it was a place of physical, spiritual and psychological rest for him.

Toner is now married. He told me that today, home is where his wife is. But Toner continues to attend Mass and to find comfort there, albeit in a different ways; being a

member of a parish and a choir are new experiences for him.

"It's nice to belong to something," he told me.

Greg had a briefer experience of homelessness than Mr. Toner, but he also expressed gratitude for the sense of home that church provided him while he was homeless.

"At Mass...I was much more grateful to have somewhere to go and to be able to sit next to people [than I was before I was homeless]." He blinked, as if holding back tears, and continued: "Before it was like, 'I have to go to Mass and be around people, I have to hold hands.' It was like a forced thing.... As a homeless person it was like, oh my gosh, I can't believe there's a place I can go to be around people and not be judged. When it's time to kneel, to get on my knees, I feel so much more dependent upon God.... When I was at church, I was grateful to be there, just to be let in."

Beyond the relief Greg felt to be part of a community and in God's presence, when he was living in his car churches also provided a place to stay. "The places where I would stay most, where I would park my car, were churches. Places that had 24-hour adoration, so it wouldn't be suspicious that I had my car there," he said. "Being able to go to adoration every night, not that I went every night—but being able to go—was such a comfort.... Going to adoration felt like coming home, even though it's not where I slept."

The circumstances that had led to Greg living in his car left him with deep bitterness, which dissolved in the presence of God, but he still felt he had to confess to this bitterness almost every time he went to confession. "Gosh, all day long I'm just ruminating about how bitter and poor I am, how unfair all this is, but then I come to adoration and I'm like, 'Oh God, I'm such a sinner and so unworthy, I can't believe you let me sit here before you!'"

Suffering

As we sip coffee on a park bench under a spreading canopy of leaves on a breezy Midwestern summer day, Greg recalled his first night sleeping in his storage space: “I feel less than humble when I talk about how hard it was, but that is definitely a big part of the story. It was in January of 2014 in San Antonio. The day that I moved out was the beginning of the great polar vortex. I went to Walmart that night and bought a sleeping bag—still freezing. I bought two of those camping warmer things, where you crack them. Still freezing cold. Still very much exposed, having just a garage door to keep me [warm].”

In the storage space, he had to hit the 24-hour Whataburger across the street if he wanted to use the bathroom. He said: “You’re not supposed to stay in [storage spaces]. I was super afraid of getting caught and kicked out. So a lot of times I slept in my car, which was also pretty cold. Two sleeping bags and a blanket, I would cover myself as much as possible while still trying to be able to breathe. Still being very much afraid, just deathly afraid of people who were even walking toward my car at 7 in the morning, very tired because it was never a great sleep, in the cold, in my residence where I can see my own breath, and just watching around, looking at the people hoping they wouldn’t notice me. Parking under trees so the streetlights wouldn’t shine so much into the car.”

Mr. Brandkamp described the similar vulnerability and fear he experienced on the day in 1986 when, at age 21, he lost his first job, developed bronchitis and was evicted along with his mother: “We spent three days and three nights on the streets [of New York] wandering from donut shops to doorways to park benches. Our stuff was stolen while we were on a park bench trying to get some sleep. In my grandparents’ neighborhood, of all places—a very safe neighborhood—but no place is safe when you’re homeless.”

And yet, he said, “What I thought was the worst day of my life ended up being the hand of God.” Life had been brutally hard for a long time: “We knew we were chronically poor. I ate three out of four weeks of the month, was chronically malnourished through my teen years. My mom dealt with a lot of mental health issues from my father’s abuse.” The shock of ending up on the streets made them cast around for help, and they found a Dutch Reformed church on Staten Island with an overflowing ministry to homeless people. Their shelter was so full that Mr. Brandkamp and his mother slept for several nights on chairs. But the people there saw him and his mother and didn’t judge them. “They saved our lives,” Mr. Brandkamp says. He became a Christian while homeless.

A Friend in Need

Many churches create ministries and services specifically for people who are experiencing homelessness. These ministries can serve those who otherwise might not come to church: services that take place in a homeless shelter, for example, or that pick up worshipers and take them to a church, can reach people who don’t have reliable transportation. These services also offer lifelines to people like John, who with his mother was in dire need of a place to stay.

A bronze statue depicting Jesus as a homeless man by sculptor Timothy Schmalz in front of Trinity Lutheran Church in Detroit.



Kimberly P. Mitchell/Detroit Free Press via AP

Nonetheless, many people keep going to their previous church once they become homeless. People may prefer a specific church, community or Mass; they may not know where to find Masses that are especially welcoming to homeless people; they may be hiding their painful financial circumstances; or they may just wind up at a church by chance.

Because people without stable housing are as varied as any other subgroup of Christians, they are as likely to turn up in the choir or R.C.I.A. or the gay and lesbian ministry as in the homeless ministry. If church leaders try to evade the work of welcoming homeless people by delegating it to specific services and ministries alone, they will be unable to nurture these people's faith and receive the gifts they bring.

I have not heard any homilies in which people who were homeless appeared as anything other than the object of others' aid, or that noted that Jesus himself, who gives us every good thing, experienced homelessness. Remember not only the makeshift shelter of the manger, but Jesus' family's flight into Egypt as refugees fleeing Herod, and his reliance on others' aid as a wandering preacher. Jesus and the disciples looked to others for their shelter, and had to hope that somewhere in the cities where they preached, a door would open for them.

Many of my interviewees described the acts of charity they performed for others. Even those who had nothing found ways to aid and protect their neighbor, ways to offer a Christlike gaze.

One of the most striking examples was a story I heard from Reggie. Reggie was just chatting after our interview, telling me stories from his life. In former years he often spent weekend nights on a street corner near both his church and a local nightclub. He would see men taking women into the alley behind the club, with the women so drunk they were nearly incapacitated. Fearing for the women's safety, Reggie would get up and go to the alley himself, making sure to be seen—and would watch until the couple went elsewhere or the man, under the stern eye of his witness, placed the woman in a cab.

Mr. Purcell came up with a more formal way to help. He started HomelessUnited.org, which gives away crowd-funded T-shirts saying, "Homeless Lives Matter." He has worked in the homeless ministry at Emory United Methodist Church. Even when he is soliciting money on the street, he makes encouraging signs: "The Spirit said, 'Start doing signs of encouragement. Give back as much as you can.'" He's had passersby comment that his signs were the reminder they needed to hope and persevere.

Other people gave in more material ways. Mr. Hansel used to buy cigarettes and water and give them away or sell them at half-price at shelters. He would buy food, cook it at the shelter and give it away. As Mr. Toner notes, "It makes a difference to be given something small if you don't have anything. I've always tried hard when I had money to give it to anyone who asked me for it."

Homelessness can also make people re-evaluate their own previous understandings of charity and generosity. Greg said: "It made me aware of people who were much more homeless. Before, I always had that weird debate in my head, when I was thinking of giving to the poor, for example. I would only give to people who looked like they weren't scamming. And when I was homeless, even though I was still better off—I called it 'homeless lite'—I was thrown into the same lot with people that I had never considered to be really my community. I realized that was not the case anymore.... It was during that time that I decided that I would always give no matter what. That commandment in the Gospels to give to whoever asks of you became clear to me."

God in Chaos

For some, becoming homeless was an experience (sometimes one of many) that forced them to confront themselves. Mr. Purcell finds solace and guidance in the Book of Jonah. He went through a period of greater stability, including working at the homeless ministry. But then "my carnal nature got in the way and I stopped going" to church. "I wasn't putting him first, and things started to unravel. I ended up back on the streets." Mr. Purcell also looks to David as "a big hero of mine. He loved God, he knew he was flawed. He never blamed God for anything that happened to him; he was always [repentant]."

Not everybody seeking a deeper relationship with God will be as upbeat and community-minded as Mr. Purcell. Not all of them will be sane or sober. Hansel, in Minnesota, noted, "There are some people here who go to church and they believe in God, but they want that next bottle and they want that next shot of drugs." And that's true of a lot of people who have stable housing, too, which serves as a reminder: A church that can welcome homeless people only at their best will be a church where everybody fears to show their weaknesses.

My final interviewee, Eleanor (who chose not to give her real name), learned to offer that Christlike gaze of love and acceptance precisely because of her own experience of needing it. In bitterness and suffering, in injustices done

by others and in our own self-harm, God still offers peace. And people who have experienced that peace in the midst of what seems like total chaos can offer it to others with a conviction and fearlessness few witnesses can match.

Eleanor, who lives in a large East Coast city, became homeless after divorce and subsequent financial and emotional upheaval. She is now 38.

In the wake of the divorce, she said, “I kind of lost my mind. My [siblings] and my big, giant, loving evangelical church of 10 years—plus the evangelical church of my childhood—all rejected me, citing the fact that I was mentally ill. Well, honestly, when you lose everything, your mind goes too for awhile.”

Nowadays she can talk about her struggles with self-deprecation and amusement. “I no longer scream like a possessed woman every time I talk to my dad (although we did recently have an awesome Christmastime public fight at an IHOP).”

Despite her humor, Eleanor’s experience of hopelessness and despair while homeless affected her deeply. “I mourned and detested Christians at this time in my life. I bore a baffled hatred for friends who were having marital problems perhaps deeper and more difficult than what had led my husband to choose another life—but who yet

remained coupled, homed, insured, stable, while they literally gaped at me and stepped aside. I was a sideshow. It was horrific! I didn’t do a good job of maintaining any personal dignity.”

She said, “While I was homeless, I went to church with whoever was letting me live with them. It was kind of what they expected, and I didn’t deviate.” She ended up Catholic: “Having been so totally and utterly failed, misunderstood and maligned by 99 percent of the people I loved—evangelical Protestants and Catholics alike—I really just wanted Jesus. The Eucharist was suddenly that much more necessary and beautiful. I’d previously dropped out of two rounds of R.C.I.A. I slouched toward R.C.I.A. No. 3 as enthusiastically as a paranoid, heartbroken, half-mad, wholly rejected person can.”

Now, she said, “I’m less afraid of other people’s despair and chaos because I know God can use it and is working within it.”

That might not be a bad start to a homily.

Eve Tushnet is a contributing writer for America. She is the author of Gay and Catholic: Accepting My Sexuality, Finding Community, Living My Faith and Amends: A Novel.

CNS photo/Jonathan Ernst, Reuters



A man sleeps on a sculpture titled “Homeless Jesus” in front of the offices of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington.

‘The Effects of Another Year’s Delay’: The Editors on Gun Control

The gun control debate has gone on for decades—along with mass shootings.

Recent mass shootings in Las Vegas and Sutherland Springs, Tex., have again focused attention on the question of legislative responses to gun violence.

These shootings recur with terrifying regularity. Sadly, the lack of progress on gun control, no matter how terrible the events that reignite the conversation, is equally regular and predictable.

The two editorials presented here, from 50 and 45 years ago, are representative of America’s long history of engagement with the moral question of gun ownership and regulation. More recently, however, the editors have become convinced that more is needed than incremental change in gun legislation. In early 2013, two months after the Newtown massacre, the editors, recognizing that the Second Amendment’s protections against firearms limitations led to a situation in which the government was powerless to reduce the incidence of gun deaths, called for its repeal.

The editorial calling for repeal of the Second Amendment can be found at <https://www.americamagazine.org/repeal-second-amendment>. America’s extensive archives on the question of gun violence and gun control are at <https://www.americamagazine.org/topic/guns>.

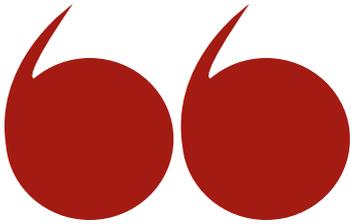
The utter absurdity of our present gun-control legislation is becoming increasingly apparent. In a recent three-day period the following items made front page news: An arsenal was uncovered in the Bronx, N.Y., that included an antitank gun, a sub-machine gun, rifles, shotguns, hand grenades, dynamite and 250,000 rounds of ammunition. George Lincoln Rockwell, founder and leader of the American Nazi party, was shot down by a sniper in Arlington, Va. A grinning motorist raced through Miami, Fla., shooting four truck drivers and narrowly missing another driver and an off-duty policeman. H. Rapp Brown repeated his message to the soul brothers to get themselves some guns and learn how to use them. One truck driver wounded in Florida is apparently paralyzed for life. What legitimate sportsman would not gladly go through even a lengthy registration procedure to prevent such tragedies? Proper legislation would inconvenience but not stop sportsmen, and it would help keep firearms out of the hands of irresponsible persons. Local laws have proved ineffective. What is still needed is a national gun-control law. Now that the summer riots are over, we fear the pressure on Congress to pass such a law will die down. Certainly the powerful National Rifle Association lobby will not relax its efforts to defeat any effective gun-control law. Responsible citizens cannot afford to relax their efforts to pass one.

Editorial, Sept. 9, 1967

Within less than a month Americans have seen one political candidate shot in Maryland, three bystanders mowed down in North Carolina and a 17-year-old boy murdered by a roving killer in New Jersey. And these are only the most visible cases. A survey made by the Wall Street Journal on May 15, the day of the attack on George Wallace, revealed that an average of 57 people are killed daily by gunfire in the United States. The number of wounded, of course, is higher still.

After every outburst of political assassination since 1963, supporters of stringent gun control regulations have attempted to rally support for their measures. Senator Robert F. Kennedy, before his own death at the hands of a gunman, spoke passionately for federal legislation. His younger brother, Edward, has had a bill pending in the Senate for several months that would require the licensing of owners and the registration of all guns. But the agitation is not restricted to these clear victims of deranged gun owners. Senators Philip A. Hart, Birch Bayh and Adlai E. Stevenson III all have introduced various pieces of legislation to curtail the easy sale of firearms across the land. Likewise in the House, Representatives John M. Murphy, Abner J. Mikva and Emmanuel Celler have offered similar proposals.

One might think that the combination of legislative initiative and public support (three to one, according to the Christian Science Monitor)



The peculiarly American passion for firearms, and its apologists in the gun lobby, must no longer determine our policy in this area. ●●

would be sufficient to pass one or the other of these bills. But that is to reckon without the powerful gun lobby on Capitol Hill. If the traumatic experience of President Kennedy's assassination could not move Congress to act, it is not likely that the latest spree of shootings will have much effect. And yet the evidence for the close connection between gun control and lowered crime rates goes far beyond these headline events.

In countries with strict regulation of firearms possession, there is a corresponding paucity of gun-related homicides. Compared to England, France, Italy and Japan, the United States is the clear front runner in violent crime. In 1970, our homicide-by-gun totals outstripped Great Britain's tally by over 300 to 1; France's by 20 to 1; and Italy's by 12 to 1. And in Tokyo, with a population of over nine million, only 16 cases of violent crime involving guns were reported.

Even if one were to divide the first three sets of figures by four in order to balance out the population difference, the results would still be staggering. Moreover, in the United States itself,

the statistics speak loudly and clearly: between 1964 and 1970 the use of firearms in the committing of murder doubled and armed robberies increased 198 per cent.

It is almost a year now since we recommended implementation of the 1966 Katzenbach Commission proposal (Am. 9/11/71, pp. 135-36) regarding federal control of firearms. If the states had not acted to "require the registration of all handguns, rifles and shotguns" within five years, the crime panel urged Congress to do so. The peculiarly American passion for firearms, and its apologists in the gun lobby, must no longer determine our policy in this area. The past few weeks have shown us the effects of another year's delay.

Editorial, June 17, 1972

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AFTER THE SURGE

*How fighting in Iraq led me
to the Catholic Church*

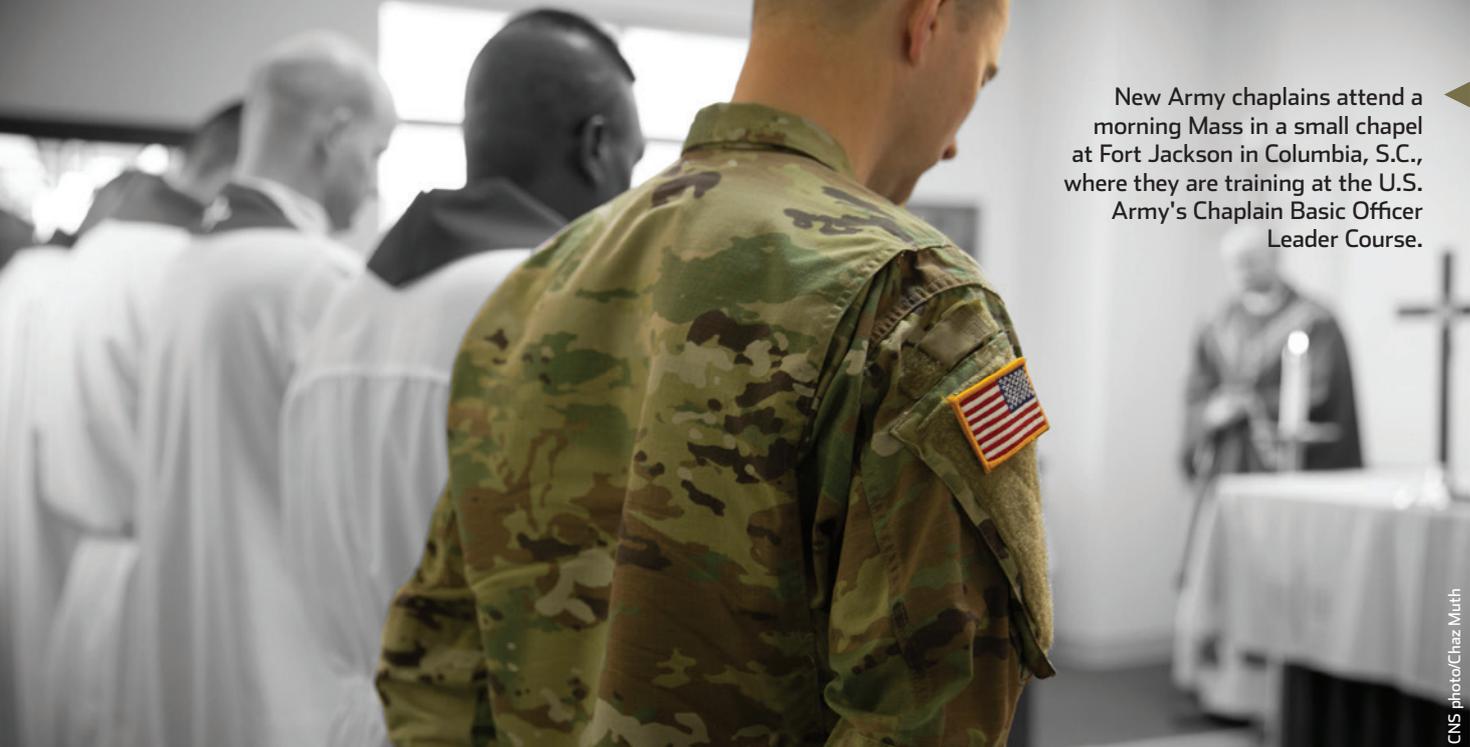
By Jesse Bowman

I still remember the red glow inside the Chinook helicopter that illuminated the soldiers around me. Our collective silence was pierced by the tremendous pulsating sound of the blades and the occasional burst of gunfire from the sprawling city below. I looked out past the machine gunner at the rear of the helicopter and saw the lights and fires of Baghdad. I was a 23-year-old platoon leader on my way to the battlefield.



Reuters/Shannon Stapleton

Army soldiers from Charlie Company 2-5 Cavalry Regiment watch illumination rounds during a night patrol near Camp Kalsu in Tunis, Iraq, Dec. 5, 2011.



New Army chaplains attend a morning Mass in a small chapel at Fort Jackson in Columbia, S.C., where they are training at the U.S. Army's Chaplain Basic Officer Leader Course.

CNS photo/Chaz Muth

It was 2007, and Iraq was spiraling toward a civil war. It had been four years since the invasion of Iraq, and the United States was struggling to advance the war and struggling to hand over control of the country to the Iraqi government. The military response at the time was a “surge” of 20,000 soldiers. I was a paratrooper in the lead brigade with the Second Brigade Combat Team of the 82nd Airborne Division.

Just a few months before, I was finishing my senior year at the University of Dayton and completing the last steps to become a commissioned officer through the school’s Army R.O.T.C. program. I had entered the program a year after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, when the United States was already fighting in Afghanistan and on our way toward Iraq. I knew little about the history of either country but did know the talking points for why we were fighting a “global war on terrorism.” I did not spend a lot of time thinking through the overall justifications for either conflict. It did not matter. If my country called me, I would go.

The aim of the troop surge was to quell the sectarian violence that wracked Baghdad by working with Iraqi forces to regain control of the city. This meant that instead of operating out of massive bases far removed from the areas we patrolled, U.S. soldiers were now stationed in the heart of the city. We lived and worked directly alongside Iraqi forces in the same neighborhood we were charged with bringing order to and protecting. Our base was an active Iraqi police station, with an Iraqi army unit next door. Inside the police station, we would meet in a room with peeling blue paint, stained, dirty tile floors and an ever-present smell of burnt fuel and trash courtesy of our makeshift burn pit near the room’s window.

In this room we would plan patrols and keep each other apprised of what was happening outside. The reports I heard were often horrific; I had trouble believing that God could be working in this chaos. Eventually, I stopped thinking about God altogether.

In addition to patrolling and conducting raids in our assigned area of operations, our focus was training our partnered Iraqi forces. Their ranks included many resolute, good-hearted, decent men. Operationally and tactically, however, they were a mess. Our training always seemed to take one step forward and then two giant leaps back. Take, for example, vehicle checkpoints, where we would stop and search vehicles for weapons and contraband. These stops needed to be set up quickly and without warning on a road or highway to keep vehicles from fleeing. One day the Iraqi forces would perform this flawlessly, and the next they would cause a traffic jam that extended for miles. If we were there to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people, making innocent people sit for hours in a car with no air conditioning in 100-degree-plus temperatures undoubtedly did the opposite.

I remember the day I realized we were fighting an unwinnable war. Shortly after arriving, our brigade conducted a massive operation to capture or kill a known bomb maker in the city. This operation involved hundreds of soldiers, with the most technologically advanced equipment available, coupled with air support and drones. Our brigade fanned out across different parts of Baghdad to find this person. Despite our impressive manpower, despite our superior equipment and despite our tactical advantages, the mission was a failure. That day I saw first-hand the absurdity of the

very notion of a “global war on terrorism.” We did not have the ability to find this single bomb maker, let alone capture or kill all people in the world who use terror to impose their ideology and will upon others.

In the days and months that followed, I came face-to-face with war. The reality of war is not something to be celebrated or romanticized. There are no adequate words to describe it; *cruel, brutal, evil*—they all fall short. Descriptions of the human cost are the only way to begin to articulate and understand its horror. War is a young girl scarred physically and emotionally after the vehicle she is standing next to explodes; war is the remains of a young man collected in a trash bag after he trips a roadside bomb; war is mothers, fathers, daughters, sons and friends who are shot, burned, stabbed and decapitated; war is the mother of a murdered child screaming out that there is no hope.

•••

Hope. Where did I find hope in all this? My faith at the time did not seem up to the task. I was raised Methodist, but I rarely attended church. In Iraq, God was a being on the periphery of my consciousness, distant and cold, not a factor in my daily life. I witnessed death and tragedy, and without faith, I had no way to process it. I had to bury it within me knowing full well that such sights, sounds and memories would not stay hidden. No matter how much I wanted to, I could not dig a hole in the sand and leave all of this pain in Iraq.

After a deployment of 15 months, I returned home—and brought the battlefield back with me. Everyday sights and sounds would trigger memories that would send me back to Iraq. Sometimes at night when the memories were especially vivid, I would lie in bed and cry uncontrollably. Though I would not admit it, I was depressed and suffering from post-traumatic stress. Instead of turning toward God, my solution was to turn inward and try to make sense of everything for myself.

Three years after the surge, I left the military. With the passage of time, I was able to face the pain I had buried. I realized I needed a power beyond my own to heal me. My wife is Catholic, and when our first son was born, we knew we wanted to raise him in a single faith. We started with the Methodist Church, sought middle ground in the Lutheran Church and finally found our home in the Catholic Church. Within the Catholic Church, my heart was drawn to the traditions, to the beauty of the sacraments and to the voice of moral authority in a world of relativism and indifference toward life-and-death decisions like going to war. I will be confirmed at next year’s Easter

liturgy, and already Catholicism has led me to a closer relationship with God and has helped heal my brokenness from the war.

•••

In tribute to his brother, John Paul, reported missing in action and later confirmed killed in the Second World War, Thomas Merton penned the poem “For My Brother Reported Missing in Action, 1943.” The poem includes this striking and haunting stanza:

*When all the men of war are shot
And flags have fallen into dust,
Your cross and mine shall tell men still
Christ died on each, for both of us.*

Why did we wreck a country with no clear plan to fix it? What did my fellow soldiers, both Americans and Iraqis, die for? I still do not know. The surge was initially viewed as a success. The level of violence and killing in Baghdad decreased, and the country moved toward stability. But the longer the war dragged on with no satisfactory end in sight, the more public opinion turned against it. Now the war itself is either forgotten or dismissed as a “mistake.” The flag-draped coffins of 4,424 U.S. service members and the lost lives of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis are simply a “mistake.”

I played my part in this mistake. Ten years ago, I placed country over God and blind patriotism over truth. Today, I have discovered two truths that sustain my hope in the face of my own and my country’s brokenness. The first is that the world that Jesus walked is the same world we live in today. Both were and are violent, sinful and fallen. But God loved us enough to send his Son for our redemption so that we may live a life in full communion with him. We are not so fallen that we are out of reach.

The second truth is that we participate in the body of Christ. I have always been awestruck that God became man, but before I committed to Catholicism I thought God’s physical presence ended with Jesus’ ascension into heaven. In the church, I discovered a living, breathing presence in the people around me and within myself. With Jesus as the head, infused and energized with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the church is a force for good and love in the world that will not be extinguished by any military, bullet or bomb.

Jesse Bowman is an attorney who lives in Ohio with his wife and two children. This is his first true public profession of faith.



IN PRISON, WRITING IS AN ACT OF REDEMPTION

By Valerie Schultz

The poet is gone, transferred to another institution. This was not his choice: When one is incarcerated, one goes where one is sent. His name appeared on a transfer list, his property was packed up, and he was on a bus by week's end. It is like he was never here.

“Here” is where I work: a state prison library. This particular library is an anomaly in prison: a large room with a high ceiling, lined with shelves and windows, full of light, redolent of the bookish smell that readers love. It is an oasis, a little patch of serenity within the strictures of the institution.

I got to know the poet when he asked me to proof-read some of his poems before he sent them out to various editors. He spent part of every day at one of the library typewriters, so he was a familiar face. He had already received a few rejection slips, and as a fellow freelance writer, I shared with him my own high number of rejections.

Writing is a solitary act, but I know that my writing has matured over the years with the help of writing groups and workshops and feedback from other writers. I asked the poet if he thought a writers group might interest him. He agreed immediately. I asked some of the other library writers: the guy writing the fantasy novel, volume one of a projected 10 volumes; the guy writing a children's story to help children cope with death; the guy with the M.F.A. in creative writing, whose essays on life in prison read as if Tim O'Brien had gone to prison instead of Vietnam. They signed up. Another young guy asked me if he could come to the group. He had never written anything, but he might start. He asked if he could bring a friend. With the poet, that meant there were six writers at our first meeting.

We started with introductions. I gave each of them several sheets of loose paper since the standard writing-group spiral notebooks are contraband. We followed with a writing exercise: five minutes on our earliest memory. The veteran authors jumped in. The two new guys looked around nervously and then began to write.

That was four years ago. As we continue to meet for an hour every Tuesday afternoon in the library, I get to listen to an astonishingly high level of writing. "Like my father, I fathered a fatherless son," wrote one young man, 12 poetic syllables containing a world of trouble and hurt, as well as a diagnosis of one of society's major maladies. "We are the black sheep, shorn of reality," wrote an older gentleman, in another flash of insight, self-deprecating yet astute. I find myself humbled to sit among a group of writers discovering the salvation inherent in the act of writing.

These are not writers pecking at a laptop or reading their verse from an iPhone: Aside from the standalone computers for legal research and the staff computer in my office, the library exists in a technologically forgotten time. These writers use pencils and pens and odd assortments of paper; they scratch their way through pages and pages of words, thereby discovering what they truly think, away from the clang and posturing of prison life.

"Never again in my life will I have this kind of time to work on me," wrote an inmate who will go home soon and who intuits the therapeutic aspect of the well-filled journal. The subject matter for these writers is grit and rage, longing and injustice, and yet they will spend a long and gentle time thinking about a single word, a semicolon, a verb tense.

"I was gonna go after him. Thought I might have to put him on the ground. But then I thought: Maybe he's just having a bad day," wrote one writer, in an inkling of the concept of empathy after 30-odd years in prison.

The group's attendance has swelled and shrunk and swelled again as inmates come and go. Each week, three writers volunteer to read their work and accept suggestions and ponder praise. They laugh and sometimes cry. I encourage them to submit their work, to publish, so that the circuit from writer to reader can be complete, so that the satisfaction of seeing one's work in print can fill their hearts, so that they can take pride in something they have done while incarcerated.

Three years ago, we started putting together a quarterly newsletter for the yard, which includes creative writing and artwork, recipes for hot pots and informational pieces, opinions and advice. Called "The Caged Bird," it is the first place some of the writers have gone public with their talent. Our first issue was two pages; the most recent one was 16.

Before the poet left, he shared his news of three separate pending publications of his work. Another writer's work appeared in a small magazine, unpaid but priceless, his first published clip under his imaginary belt. One day we may see one of their bylines in *The New Yorker*. One day these men will be released from prison. They will go back to whatever pieces of their prior lives remain, but they will go back as seasoned, thoughtful writers. They possess the power of the written word, and I know they will continue to write, as testimony to the act of writing as rehabilitation, as redemption, as rebirth.

"My life is on the write track," wrote one budding author, and I am not certain if the choice of the wrong homonym was unintentional. Either way, it works.

Valerie Schultz is a freelance writer, a columnist for *The Bakersfield Californian* and the author of *Closer: Musings on Intimacy, Marriage, and God*. She and her husband Randy have four daughters.

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Día de los Muertos: A Day to Celebrate Life by Reclaiming Death

By Gina Franco and Christopher Poore



Aaron Lavinsky/Star Tribune via AP

The dead who are celebrated in Day of the Dead are not abstractions. They are departed loved ones, real people in real graves.

inventoried as “salvageable” among the pages of a giant white book in a process designed to be practically omniscient. The rest, all “non-salvageable,” was massed together, photographed randomly and trashed at our curb where the restorers parked their abysmal dumpster.

It was strange and terrible to see this abundance of possessions in our lives revealed as such a burden. We were safe, we reminded each other; let it all go. At night I talked to God about getting my heart in a pinch over stuff we did not need, but most days I stole away from the dumpster with another of our small valuables: our wedding photographs, my husband’s cologne, a perfectly good broom, the *molcajete* my mother had given me. These were ordinary sacramentals from the life we had offered one another in marriage. I was ashamed of how little I retrieved, ashamed of wanting to retrieve it.

In the end, the sheer waste of things was appalling to me because it felt as though something incarnational was at stake. In speaking of spiritual realities, it is perhaps too often said that material things are pernicious or unimportant, even as matter is all around us, within us—beyond us—shimmering with signs, meaning, intent and design. “We must use or abstain from created things according as they lead us to, or take us away from, God,” writes St. Ignatius Loyola. Matter points beyond itself, toward the secrecy of existence; and if we pay attention to creaturely things in that way, we may

transcend ourselves, too. We are materialists, of necessity.

The wrecked parts of the house were gutted. The dumpster, at last filled, was carted away for good. Water and power were shut off so that the builders could make repairs safely while the house was allowed to dry out. That autumn was unusually warm. The leaves had hardly changed color before dropping to the ground, and the yard withered, unwatered for months, though the builders worked overtime to get us back home.

A miracle, then, when we moved back in and found in our flower bed a handful of blooming marigolds. We thought of the floating gardens of Xochimilco, the Place of the Flowers, in Mexico City, where marigolds are grown on the *chinampas* built by the Aztecs and are harvested at this time of year to decorate the graves and altars of the faithful. We brought the blossoms inside. We made a simple altar with the nearly discarded photographs of our deceased loved ones. We thought of Día de los Muertos, Day of the Dead, not long past. We decided to have a feast.

FROM THE ALTAR TO THE GRAVE

The first thing people notice at Día de los Muertos celebrations? The altars. Heavy-laden with *ofrendas* of bread and fruit and Coca-Cola, flowers and candles and photographs, saints and crucifixes and sugar skulls, the altar almost collapses into itself from the pure extravagance of color and scent. On the feast of All Souls, it is to these altars that the departed ones return,

Last fall we had a house fire. September, October, November—day after day we went through the burned house to see what could be done while the salvage crews sorted our belongings. Suddenly my husband and I owned a houseful of things that were damaged by water and smoke. One pile grew astonishing in magnitude, everything named, numbered, tagged, packed to be cleaned and



On the Day of the Dead, a graveyard can become another home, worthy of the gathering of family and friends, worthy of restoration.

caught almost as if by lures, by the florid colors, the smells and the flavors, of foods they cherished on earth. And mirroring that movement from the afterlife to this life, the family moves from the altar to the grave, where weeds are pulled and headstones are mended—accompanied by more flowers, more food, more music.

On this feast, a graveyard—more often a place of decay and of forgetting—can become another home, worthy of the gathering of family and friends, worthy of restoration. And the otherwise terrifying aspects of death and decomposition are reframed in the narrative of Day of the Dead emblems to emphasize the eternal, immaterial life wedded to and hidden in this material world. The corpse

becomes living bone—skeletons dancing, singing, drinking, eating—while basic staples such as sugar and bread are shaped into skulls and bones, so that the corpse might be eaten—delightfully, sensuously—and defeated, as it is in the transcendent reality of spirit.

The idea has its parallel in the Catholic ritual of eating the risen body of God, who is present in the Eucharist. Unlike the cult of Santa Muerte, Saint Death, which allegorizes and personifies the idea of death and uses a skeletal iconography that may seem related to the iconography of Día de los Muertos, the dead who are celebrated in Day of the Dead familial gatherings are not abstractions. They are departed loved ones, actual people

in actual graves, all of whom are recognized as part of the mystical body of the communion of saints.

THE AMBIGUITY OF IDENTITY

Debates about the source of Día de los Muertos traditions take predictable turns. As with all histories of the Americas, there is never one version, and the controversies depend on who is telling the story. Some scholarship values the idea of European roots: rosary beads and novenas for the souls in purgatory, Masses for the dead—practices that are specifically Catholic at the source and that resonate with the customs associated with the feast of All Souls. Other scholarship suggests that the role of ancestors in Día de los Muertos celebrations—the idea that

the living must attend to the dead so that the dead will protect the living—is more likely to be indigenous in origin than Catholic.

Whether by force or by attraction or by a mixture of both, a syncretic culture emerged that in some ways sits at the very heart, symbolically, of Latin American and Latinx identity, which has itself long been destabilized through conquest, commodity and cultural appropriation. To celebrate Día de los Muertos is to live in the ambiguities of these identities, as well as to be buried in unknowing.

And these questions, never mere anthropology, come home to me. Who am I, here, in Galesburg, Ill., far from family and home? And what right do I have to celebrate the Day of the Dead as if I were with my family, on the border of Mexico, drinking beer, eating too much food and asking my cousins to play one more song? Here in Galesburg, I do not have a grave to return to, to tend. Even in Del Rio, Tex., where my grandmother is buried, there is no headstone to mark her grave—we could not afford one. Would I still be able to find her grave now?

HOMEcoming

Maybe part of what marks me as Mexican-American is that I have migrated; I am scattered; I have become over time too diffuse to carry tradition forward. But if something of that first, lost indigenous world survived inculturation, assimilation and massacre, and is given to me as my inheritance, might it also establish itself defiantly in rural Illinois, where everywhere in stores, Halloween and the Day of the Dead have become interchangeably, strangely the

Grassy Branch Pentecostal Church, Hunting Jacket

By William Woolfitt

on Sam Edes when he's backslided
all he can stand, blaze orange and camo,
unwashed, sour breath, headed for
the pines, the power cut, the deer blind
before he brakes, yanks the wheel hard,
takes the turn-off he had chosen against,
he'll still brag about the eight-point rack,
the tenderloin, but now the Holy Ghost
pulls him, at the altar rail your uncle
pumps his hand, bear-hugs him, he goes
down fast, spine of jelly, rags for bones,
brightest orange, shaking on his knees

William Woolfitt is the author of three poetry collections: Beauty Strip (Texas Review Press, 2014), Charles of the Desert (Paraclete Press, 2016) and Spring Up Everlasting (Paraclete Press, forthcoming). His poems, short stories and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in Blackbird, Image, Tin House, The Threepenny Review, AGNI and other journals.

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AP Photo/Eduardo Verdugo

The Day of the Dead emblems emphasizes the eternal, immaterial life wedded to this material world.

same? The generic identical skulls on the shelves, brightly painted, beautiful in their way, entice me, too. But perhaps I am lured by what I know they signify, by their far remove from spiritual content, by the way in which I understand bone as a kind of metonym for the soul.

My husband and I will be first in line when Disney/Pixar releases “Coco” on Nov. 22. The film promises a good story, one that overlays a quintessentially American dream—one boy’s individualist quest for self-realization—onto landscapes and themes associated with the Day of the Dead. I know this is commercial tourism. I know tradition is a language, and that the tourists do not speak the language. But they can learn. A good film, artfully written and made, might do much to illuminate the meaning of the Día de los Muertos tradition.

And something else: this tradition is a form of prayer. And prayer carries

forward where tradition dies out. In fact, prayer is its very home.

My husband, a baker by trade, is learning the language of the feast. The night of our gathering, I watch him knead bread scented with orange blossoms. He shapes the dough into small bones, bones that together make a body, a body that is for me. Then comes a towering chocolate cake topped with candied oranges and chocolate flowers. The smell of cinnamon and hot chocolate and Kahlúa fill our kitchen. We put the food on the altar, on the dining room table, on the kitchen counters—anywhere—so that everywhere people look they will find food. We put a photograph of my grandmother in the center of the altar. She is young. She stands beside her mother. Before the guests arrive, we invite whoever is listening: Come home.

Gina Franco is the author of *The Keepsake Storm*. Her writing is anthologized in *Camino del Sol: Fifteen Years of Latina and Latino Writing* and *The Other Latin@: Writing Against a Singular Identity*. She lives in Galesburg, Ill., with her husband Christopher Poore.

Christopher Poore serves as an assistant poetry editor at *Narrative Magazine*. His writing has been featured at *Image Journal's Good Letters*, and his short story “Brief Life” is forthcoming in the *Saint Katherine Review*.



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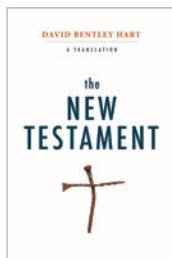
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David Bentley Hart sets forth to be “scrupulously faithful” in his new translation of the New Testament.

A new translation highlights the Gospel of love

By Jennifer Kurdyla



The New Testament:
A Translation
By David Bentley Hart
Yale University
Press. 616p, \$35

Vladimir Nabokov once famously said of the task of translation:

Reflected words can only shiver/
Like elongated lights that twist/
In the black mirror of a river/
Between the city and the mist...
I find another man's mistake,
I analyze alliterations...
This is my task—a poet's patience/
And scholastic passion blent:
Dove-droppings on your monument.

With such a picture of this ancient craft, one can only question why translation would be taken up today, particularly with a text as ancient and formidable as the Bible. And yet David Bentley Hart has done just that with his *The New Testament: A Translation*. While the endeavor may seem “foolish” (Hart’s word, not mine), if not excessive, the intention could not

be farther from it. For here, Hart sets forth to be “scrupulously faithful” and “pitilessly literal” in his translation of the original Greek of the New Testament, not stopping even to correct the Gospel writers’ grammar or fill in religious terms and connotations, as his predecessors had done. He even sticks to the literal name of Jesus—“the Anointed”—instead of “Christ” or “Messiah”; likewise Satan or the Devil is “the Slanderer,” and world becomes “cosmos” (a rather eloquent choice, I believe).

To read these disclaimers in the volume’s introduction is a bit unnerving for the practicing Christian: Is God’s Son perhaps not all we thought him cracked up to be, the fluid word-smith whose preachings won over the masses and have transfixed us for millennia? Did Jesus and the apostles actually predict a different world and heavenly redemption from what we have always thought?

Not at all. Hart’s translation is neither reductionist nor revisionist. In his hands, the words of Jesus and his followers produce not shivers of mere approximation, but rather shivers of awe at the clarity, poignancy and simplicity of this complex treatise. Hart, an East-

ern Orthodox scholar of religion, maintains a splendid rhythm and frankness throughout his translation. So although he claims to resist poetic renderings of the text, he indeed “mak[es] the familiar strange, novel, and perhaps newly compelling” in the way that Nabokov’s poet might call a “passion.”

Presenting the words of the first Christians as “problems to be solved,” Hart approaches the text anew with contemporary urgency—as prompts for action, rather than mere obligation or dogma. Indeed, the notion of action stands out in radical simplicity and clarity in his text, specifically as it pertains to one key concept, “the great commandment,” which undergirds the entire belief system: the concept of love.

These interpretations aside, it is impossible to resist a traditional “literary” readings of this translation. Reading the Gospels, Acts and Letters in sequence brings to the fore obvious points of comparison in tone, diction and even the facts themselves. For one, the chronology of Jesus’ life and works among the Gospels differs, and details (like the number of loaves and fishes) do not coincide with others. The writers even depict Jesus himself in differ-

ent lights depending on the poetry of their verses. In Acts and Letters, Paul's voice has a self-effacing, entreating quality compared with John's, which closes the volume, and the epistolary quality of Paul's writing differs significantly from John's letters.

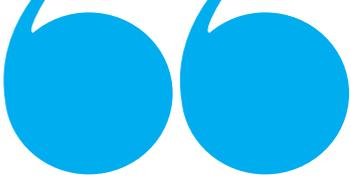
To make such noticings more significant, one could draw points of similarity among all these disparate, fragmentary parts. In doing so, we see how simple the fundamental teachings of Jesus in fact are. For example, one can readily hear a refrain throughout of "change your heart," which speaks to the prominent tension Hart points out in his introduction: between money and material goods and things of true value. In that phrase of "change your heart" alone, we can see how the essence of an "exchange" or trade is transposed into a more emotional, spiritual language that is more in line with Jesus' message of how we should measure worth and value—namely, by the capacity of our hearts, not our pockets.

Hart's translation addresses this question head-on with its unmediated language, correcting past metaphorical interpretations of what Jesus means when he says to cast off all one's possessions to follow him. According to Hart, rejecting worldly possessions and wealth is not a gray area at all, and those who thought so originally were making accommodations for their own discomfort. In Hart's rendering of Jesus' words, money and material possessions are inherently bad, not to be valued, and part of what can make humanity "impure," "idolatrous" and "faithless and perverted" (Mt 33). Jesus, too, came "to serve and to give his soul as the *price* of liberation for many" (emphasis mine). The curren-

cy to be valued is his life as a vessel for a message of love: "store these words," as he says in Luke. And it is a spiritual currency that exists outside of a specific language or context, not the coins of Caesar but of Jesus.

We see proof of this again and again in the literal words that echo throughout the volume. As suggested by the refrain "change your hearts," Jesus is constantly asking us to turn inward to see the truth of ourselves and our souls. He himself is said to be "moved *inwardly* with compassion" upon seeing the first throngs of followers seeking his healing. In Luke, the poetry of these notions shines most brightly when Jesus speaks of the treasure of the heart "illuminating within" the body's lamp, positing the kingdom of Heaven as within us all, and even asking his listeners, "Why do you *reason* over these things in your *hearts*?" (emphasis mine). Pitting the mind against the heart, Jesus undeniably lets the heart win.

Given this text's direct imperatives about how to live our lives as good Christians and as good citizens of the world, we should rejoice in the blessing of its arrival. Nor does it seem a coincidence that the church is now led by a pope with a similar project, whose simple, humble words about the equality of all and the preciousness of our planet have struck people of all nations and creeds with renewed vigor. Reading these words at the core of our faith, we are immediately brought back to the core of our society: intimacy and love, both of which are eroding as quickly as our natural resources. Contemporary studies on "eco-anxiety" are revealing the relationship between climate change and worsening



In Hart's rendering of Jesus' words, money and material possessions are inherently bad. 

mental health, which prevents deeper relationships with others. According to the New Testament, however, when we value our inner lives over our outer lives, then peace naturally follows. "Keep salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another," Jesus says in this translation.

In a world where so many deeds are fueled by revenge, hate and prejudice, we can find a most simple solution to the chaos by acting out of the place where our true treasures lie: "God loves a happy giver," and so we act from our hearts. To hear the answer to our most desperate concerns, we merely need to turn down the noise around us and tune in to our inner voice. We are the light in our own darkness.

Jennifer Kurdyla is a freelance editor, writer and yoga instructor based in New York City. She was an editor at Alfred A. Knopf, an imprint of Penguin Random House.

Rice's recipe for democracy

Condoleezza Rice has written a highly accessible book that identifies the essential building blocks of democracy, examines the ways they have interacted to produce that system in various countries and shows how their absence has impeded democratic development. Rice is unapologetically an institutionalist, emphasizing the importance of creating appropriate governmental and territorial arrangements while rejecting the notion that only certain cultures (religious or civilizational) foster democracy. As her analysis proceeds, Rice includes civil society as a key factor in democratic success and emphasizes the societal values of tolerance, participation and civic-mindedness. Finally, she stresses founding leaders.

Throughout her analysis of six countries and one region (the Middle

East), Rice credits the quality of governmental institutions (e.g., executives, parliaments and political parties), civil society organizations and broader values and political leaders with creating democracy. Among successful transformations, she includes the United States, Poland and Colombia; failures are Russia and Egypt (one of her Middle East cases); and those somewhere in between include Ukraine, Kenya and Iraq.

While she begins by emphasizing political institutions, Rice places additional stress on civil society organizations, the civic culture and leadership. Certain leaders are praised (Washington, Poland's Walesa and Colombia's Santos) and others are criticized (Yeltsin and Mubarak, as well as various Ukrainian and Kenyan politicians) for their qualities and manner. In fact, this emphasis on values (within the broader society as well as among elites)

becomes increasingly important as the narrative proceeds.

Although this work has a global outlook, Rice is clearly calling for Americans to respect and promote the integrity of their governing and societal institutions, citizen engagement and responsible leadership. Moreover, Rice believes that commitments to equality and inclusion at home and abroad will be in the national interest. Thus, Rice ends with a powerful, though implicit, statement against "America first." Even if they disagree with her conclusion, readers will enjoy this insightful work from a former high-ranking U.S. official and respected political scientist.

Lisa A. Baglione is a professor of political science at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, Pa.

The twitch upon the thread

As a father, I look for resources to help my teenage and young adult children. I found a gem in Brandon Vogt's book *Why I Am Catholic (and You Should Be Too)*.

Before his conversion to Catholicism during college, Vogt was one of the "nones," a spiritual but not religious person. In this book, part autobiography and part explanation of his Catholic faith, Vogt proposes the truth (Part I), the goodness (Part II) and the beauty (Part III) of Catholicism. He marshals the empirical evidence of science, the inspiring example of the saints and the artistic beauty of Dante, Da Vinci and Michelangelo.

But among the virtues of *Why I Am Catholic* is also Vogt's interweaving of the personal story. He speaks of his own questions, his own journey and his own discoveries.

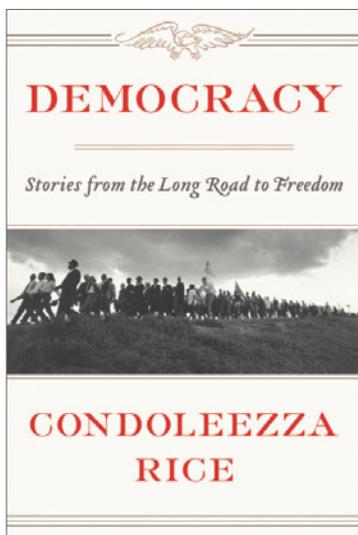
Vogt directly faces the most important questions about religious faith posed by young people today, beginning with the most basic question of all: Does God exist? Vogt provides clues from scientific evidence, our moral experience and our reason that point to the same conclusion: A supreme being exists. Vogt also considers questions about the identity of Jesus—for example, was he merely an important moral teacher like Gandhi? Or something much more?

G. K. Chesterton once claimed that it is impossible to be neutral to-

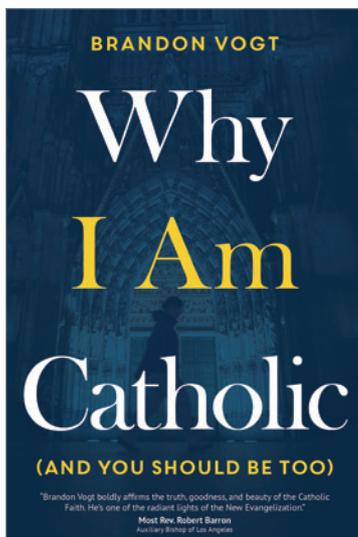
ward the Catholic Church. "The moment a man ceases to pull against it he feels a tug toward it. The moment he ceases to shout it down he begins to listen to it with pleasure. The moment he tries to be fair to it he begins to be fond of it."

So, too, does *Why I Am Catholic* propose a most winning account, one that will tug most any reader toward fondness for the faith.

Christopher Kaczor is a professor of philosophy at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, Calif.



Democracy
 Stories from the Long Road
 to Freedom
 By Condoleezza Rice
 Twelve. 486p \$35



**Why I Am a Catholic
 (and You Should Be Too)**
 By Brandon Vogt
 Ave Maria Press. 192p \$20

Restoring the middle class

This sweeping treatment of economic, political and constitutional developments across three centuries of the American experience draws its chief inspiration from the 17th-century English political theorist James Harrington, who argued that political power goes hand in hand with economic power. Harrington stressed that democracy needs relative economic equality with a majority in the middle—not too rich, not too poor—to sustain itself and to share prosperity. That, says Ganesh Sitaraman in *The Crisis of the Middle-Class Constitution*, is the origin of the U.S. constitution.

Sitaraman cites three moments of crisis for the Constitution’s middle-class foundation: the Civil War, the Gilded Age and the Great Depression. Responding to each, the postwar civil rights amendments, Progressive Era legislation and New Deal reforms pulled the country back from impending oligarchy toward a restored middle-class constitutional foundation.

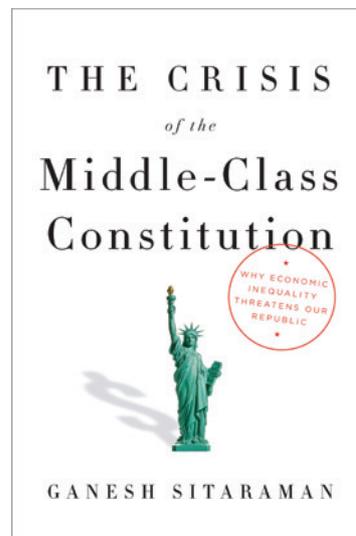
Economic and political developments in recent decades again threaten that middle-class constitution. In line with Harrington’s thesis, intensified inequality has pushed political power to the top of the American economic divide. Rich and powerful companies and individuals increasingly control the levers of political power to serve their own interests, in particular by keeping taxes low and by blocking reform measures to rectify economic and political inequality.

The author surely worked on the book throughout the Obama years and largely completed it before the 2016 elections. In a short passage near the

end, he calls Donald Trump’s win a reaction to the very economic inequality, anti-elite sentiment and “rigged” political system that he documents in *The Crisis of the Middle-Class Constitution*—though it was clearly not an outcome the author preferred.

Sitaraman’s recommendations include tax reform, universal health insurance, minimum wage hikes, strengthening labor’s hand in union organizing, and “structural” moves to break up big banks and big companies. It remains to be seen whether a progressive champion will emerge who can change America’s political course in years ahead.

Lance Compa teaches labor law at Cornell University’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations in Ithaca, New York.



The Crisis of the Middle-Class Constitution

By Ganesh Sitaraman
 Alfred A. Knopf. 423p \$28



Full book reviews at
americamagazine.org/books

In search of forgiveness in a town beset by violence and grief

By John Anderson

The three ratty structures that get star billing in Martin McDonagh's inky-black comedy "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri" still display faded fragments of the ad copy that used to greet drivers entering Ebbing. The accidental poetry left behind has no real meaning anymore. Yet our urge is to try to make sense of them 1) because you cannot let down your guard with the cunning McDonagh and 2) because human beings reflexively and instinctively try to make sense of the inexplicable. And the unspeakable. And if they can't, they at least try to find someone to blame.

Mildred Hayes (Frances McDormand in a career-defining role) has surveyed the pitiable billboards, her wallet and her conscience and hires out the ad space for a year. What residents and visitors to humble Ebbing will soon read as they drive into town is as follows:

"RAPED WHILE DYING"
 "AND STILL NO ARRESTS"
 "HOW COME, CHIEF WILLOUGHBY?"

Mildred's teenage daughter died

less than a year before, raped and then set on fire; the scorched place where her body burned is still visible; Mildred is seething at the lack of progress in the case and is laying the blame squarely at the feet of the local police chief, Bill Willoughby (Woody Harrelson), who is not unsympathetic to Mildred's pain.

Nor has Willoughby been derelict in his duty. He has done the investigative work; the DNA available has not been matched to anyone on record. Mildred is unmovable. Maybe you should take blood from every man around, she says, every man in the country; babies should have their DNA registered at birth and kept on record...at which point the viewer starts to feel his/her sympathies shift from Mildred to Willoughby, who is charged not only with keeping order, but meting out that elusive thing called justice.

McDonagh has set us up, of course (as is his wont). The much-honored, London-born Irish playwright and filmmaker creates a setting and a people who could be anywhere, certainly Ireland. And where he is steering things all along is toward the question

of forgiveness—not for the perpetrator of the central crime in "Three Billboards," but for the many principals touched by that outrage. He is also on a jag about justice and why, in a civilized society, the victims or survivors of violent crime cannot be the administrators of the law.

"Still no arrests," laments Mildred. "How come, I wonder. 'Cause there ain't no God and the whole world's empty and it doesn't matter what we do to each other?" She doesn't believe it, though her grief is such that she might. When a local priest urges Mildred to take down the billboards, she launches into an eviscerating diatribe about "culpability," asking, since laws have been tailored to indict black gang members for the crimes of their cohort, why shouldn't all law enforcement be held "culpable" in unsolved crimes? Or for that matter, all priests be held "culpable" for the sexual outrages of their fellow clergy?

It is a ferocious moment but, like many in "Three Billboards," one quilted with subtle, nuanced meaning, not just about guilt and innocence but about the bestial nature of unresolvable, raging grief.

“Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri” contains enough guilt to keep the town’s confessionals busy for months.

Mildred may be fierce, but she is not Wonder Woman. She is very afraid of her ex-husband and slightly terrified when an Iraq war veteran enters her gift shop and makes threatening noises about Mildred’s scandalous billboards. What is significant about that character is how he conforms to McDonagh’s skepticism, bordering on revulsion, regarding figures of authority, all of whom he sees as rendered less human by the tasks we give them, and who in turn reduce our humanity by the crimes they commit.

For all that, there is a great deal of comedy here, and a lot of great acting. “Three Billboards” also contains enough guilt to keep Ebbing’s confessionals busy for months. Thankfully, McDonagh’s theme of forgiveness is as big as a billboard.

John Anderson is a TV critic for *The Wall Street Journal* and a contributor to *The New York Times*.

Woody Guthrie sang the Gospel

In his 2011 article, “Woody Guthrie’s Social Gospel Roots,” Larry Guthrie (no relation) writes that “Christianity and Catholicism played significant roles in the entire tapestry of the life of Woody Guthrie.” The article points to the legendary American folk singer and songwriter’s first marriage in 1933 to Mary Esta Lee Jennings, a Roman Catholic native of Pampa, Tex. There were nuns in Jennings’s family, and her brother, Matt, may have introduced Guthrie to the Catholic periodical *Our Sunday Visitor* and its focus on social justice.

“Woody’s words were a social gospel,” Larry Guthrie writes. “Although Woody did not seem to like participating regularly in an organized religion, he did develop a great concern for social justice.”

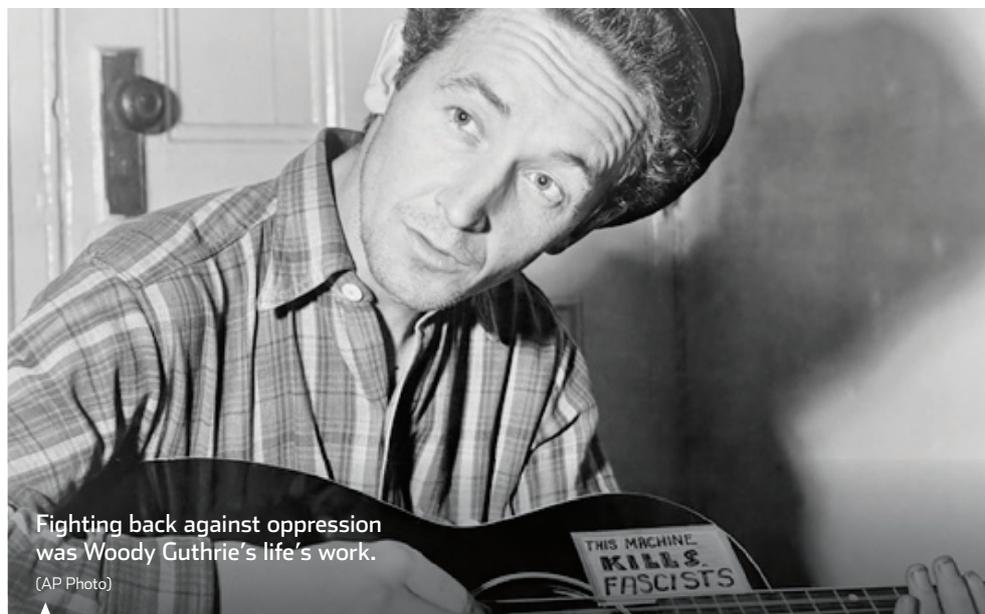
While Catholicism may have played a role in Guthrie’s focus on social justice, it is likely that his support of workers and unions, empathy for migrant workers, fight against usury and all-out-war on Fascism—“This Machine Kills Fascists” was written on his guitar—came from a number of influences, including his own experience. To the original handwritten lyrics for

the iconic Guthrie song, “This Land Is Your Land” (originally and ironically titled “God Blessed America for Me”), Guthrie added a notation: “You can only write what you see.”

Oct. 3 marked the 50th Anniversary of Guthrie’s death, and for the occasion Bear Family Records released “Woody Guthrie: The Tribute Concerts.” It includes for the first time the entire tribute concerts performed in Guthrie’s honor at Carnegie Hall in New York on Jan. 20, 1968, and the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles on Sept. 12, 1970.

In the liner notes, Steve Rosenthal, who co-produced the boxed set, notes that Guthrie’s music remains timely. “As America turns inward and towards intolerance, these shows remind us that there have been times like this before,” he writes. “Woody and his family learned the hard lessons in the Dust Bowl years, about oppression and scapegoating. Fighting back, using the power of words, music and community became his life’s work.”

Joe Pagetta is an essayist and arts writer in Nashville, Tenn.



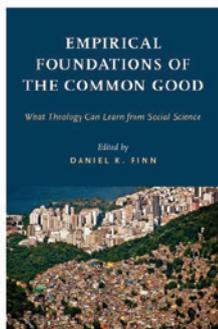
Fighting back against oppression was Woody Guthrie’s life’s work.

(AP Photo)



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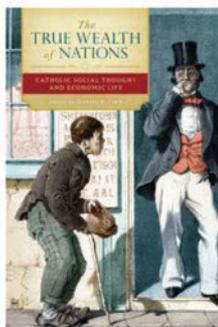
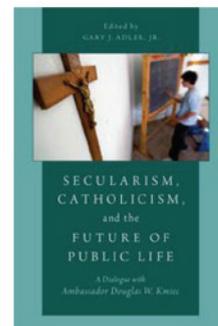
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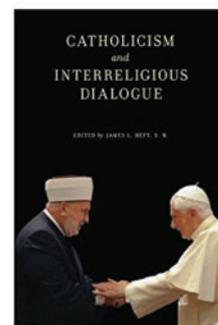
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He Is Coming!

Readings: Is 63:16-64:7, Ps 80, 1 Cor 1:3-9, Mk 13:33-37

Jesus is on a rescue mission. That is the major theme of Mark's entire Gospel, which we will be reading on most Sundays in the new liturgical year that begins on this First Sunday of Advent. The end of the age was near, and God sent the Son to save Israel from the coming calamity. Mark has none of Matthew's ruminative, "what-does-it-all-mean" discourses. Instead, Mark packs his narrative with action. Blind beggars, sick children, grieving parents and demon-haunted madmen take center stage. As Jesus delivered each one, he progressively revealed himself to be the savior of anyone who believed in his power.

This message suited Mark's times. He wrote around the year A.D. 70, in a period of chaos in the Roman world. Assassins had killed the emperor Nero two years before. Three feckless emperors followed in quick succession. Subject peoples everywhere rose up against Rome. Each insurrection failed. In Judea, the Roman general Vespasian fought the Jews ferociously before hurrying back to Rome to be acclaimed emperor. He left his son, Titus, to clean up the last of the resistance. On Aug. 30, A.D. 70, Titus broke through the walls of Jerusalem, sacked the city and destroyed the temple, which has never been rebuilt. (The arch of Titus in Rome commemorates this destruction. The Jewish people felt the loss so keenly that until the late 20th century, rabbinic law forbade any Jew from walking through the arch under penalty of permanent excommunication.)

Christians living in these times felt an acute need for rescue. They knew Jesus had come and they believed God was at work to save them, but they did not know what form their rescue would take. To this community, Mark relays Jesus' message: "Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come." Throughout his Gospel, Mark shows how hard it was for people to recognize Jesus' true nature, even when they witnessed the great deeds he performed. Jesus ordered his disciples to remain vigilant for his second coming, lest they too miss his presence. Forty-odd years later, Mark passed this command on to his community, who must have felt, as the world they knew crumbled around them, that they were living in the time Christ foretold.

'May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping.'

(Mk 13:36)



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Do you long for Christ's rescue, or for him to transform some part of your life?

What distractions can you overcome this Advent?

How can you come to believe more deeply in Christ as the one who saves us from calamity?

The church teaches that, although Mark's historical expectations may have proved incorrect, the message he provides for our salvation is forever true. In today's Gospel passage, that message is clear: "Watch! May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping!" We wait, like Mark's community, for the coming of the Son of Man. We know to be alert for Christ at the end of our natural lives. As we begin another Advent, it is also important to remember that Christ appears suddenly in our life every day. Like the characters of Mark's Gospel, we can easily miss his arrival. If Mark were writing today, he would perhaps use other symbols for that spirit of distraction. "Be watchful! Be alert! May he not find you obsessing over trivia, lusting after images on the internet, preoccupied with your phone or indulging in hate, fear or greed." May we use these weeks before Christmas to put away our distractions and put our faith in Christ anew.

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

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Thy Kingdom Come

Readings: Is 40:1-11, Ps 85, 2 Pt 3:8-14, Mk 1:1-8

Our readings today provide the outlines of Jesus' rescue mission. In the apocalyptic mindset of Jesus' day, God was all-powerful but not all-controlling. The danger always existed that forces of chaos and death could briefly slip from God's oversight and stir up trouble. This metaphysical reality found confirmation in the foreign occupation of Jerusalem and the Greco-Roman corrosion of Israel's culture. In popular religion, this belief manifested itself in the fear of demons, illness and death. But God had taken action in unseen ways to set things right. God sent the Son to defeat the forces of chaos and re-establish divine kingship. Before this final battle commenced, however, the Son had come to earth to gather any who remained faithful to God during these calamitous times. Mark understood that these faithful included poor Jews and Gentiles of every sort, but not many of Israel's elite.

This brief sketch explains several features of today's Gospel. Mark emphasizes throughout his Gospel that Jesus is God's Son. Aside from the reference in Mk 1:1 (possibly a later addition), the title appears in 1:11, 9:7 and 15:39. With this title, he affirms that Jesus Christ is God's agent who will restore divine kingship.

'One mightier than I is coming after me.' (Mk 1:7)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Where has chaos gained a foothold in your life? How can Christ's power help you overcome it?

How can you heal others or the wider world with the power of Christ that you bear?

Mark emphasizes Jesus' power. John the Baptist proclaims, "One mightier than I is coming after me!" Throughout his Gospel, Mark reminds his audience that, no matter how chaotic the world had become, Jesus bore the power of God and could defeat even the fiercest opponents. To Mark, Jesus' miracles testify to his power over death and death's agents—physical and mental illness, hunger, poverty and despair.

John's baptism was an act of resistance. Those who received it left death and chaos behind and publicly identified themselves as subjects of God's authority. God's response to these declarations, John promises, will be a second baptism "with the Holy Spirit," in which believers will receive a share of the Son's power to defeat the forces of disruption.

This message must have resonated strongly with Mark's audience, who lived in a time of civil war and sociopolitical instability. Many early copies of Mark's Gospel end with the haunting words of Mk 16:8, "They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." This almost certainly describes the state of Mark's audience, fearful of the turmoil around them but full of faith that God was working to set things aright.

Mark reminds us that we bear the power of Christ. We who have received the Holy Spirit in our baptism carry on Christ's struggle against chaos and death. God's kingdom is not yet fully restored. John began the work; we continue it today in the power of the Spirit. We bear Christ's power to unlock centuries-old chains of fear, hate, alienation and mistrust. We bear Christ's power to forgive those who wrong us and beg forgiveness for ourselves. We bear Christ's power to heal scars of mind and soul, to dismiss demons of loneliness, despair and self-loathing and to restore those dead in spirit to life. To prepare for Christ's arrival, let us recommit ourselves to Christ's mission and challenge chaos and death wherever we find them.

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

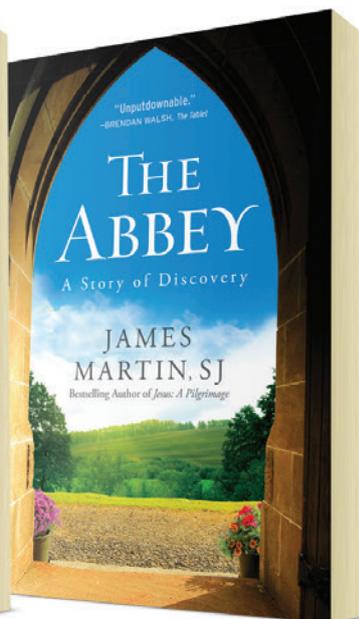
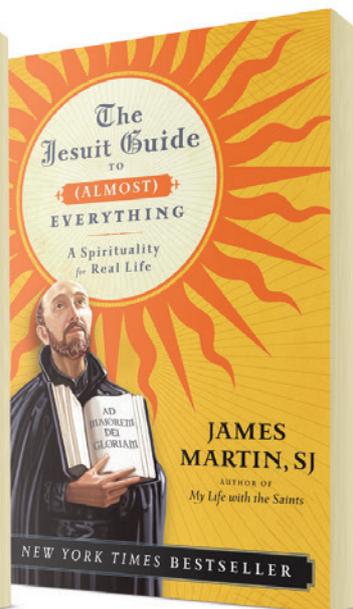
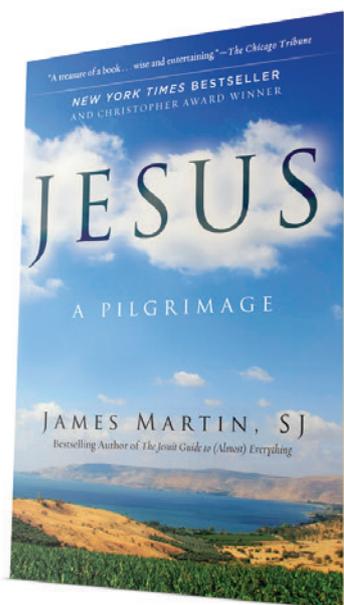
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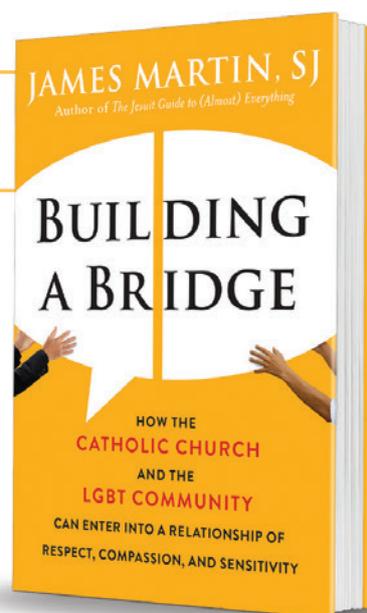
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Reparative Justice

What does it mean to be a black Catholic in 2017?

By Anthony Carter



I grew up in the South Bronx in New York during the civil rights era. I am a product of the Catholic school system, and I had to reconcile my belief in God amid the atrocities I saw being committed against black Americans.

I watched Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., deliver powerful speeches and stage peaceful protests. Police with dogs and firemen with hoses greeted him and his cohorts. I witnessed the mass exodus of white neighbors from my community. I was bused to a predominantly white Catholic high school across town. My guidance counselor advised me to continue my education in a trade school rather than pursuing college.

Then there was the experience of attending Mass in the Little Italy section of the Bronx and watching the priest walk down the aisle and refuse to shake my outreached hand during the offering of peace. Ironically, these experiences did not fill me with hate—they made me curious.

My curiosity led me to Fordham University, where I sank deeply into Catholic theology and culture. I studied journalism and proudly spoke truth to power as a reporter for the school's newspaper and radio station. My Jesuit education prepared me for life and for my role as the chief diversity officer at Johnson & Johnson. As a diversity officer, I learned that once you declare personal accountability, you can address issues of racial injus-

justice in a thoughtful and decisive way.

Black friends find it hard to believe I am Catholic and a member of the Knights of Columbus. For them, being black and Catholic feels like an oxymoron. This is because African-Americans have a deep and troubling history with the Catholic Church. There was a time when we were not allowed to even take part in Catholic rituals, like serving at the altar or receiving Communion. Many of us still feel the pains of these indignities.

My faith, however, helps me to fortify the belief that God does not categorize his love for us based upon race, color, sexual orientation or gender. Our differences are our strengths, an adhesive that unites us.

The leadership of Pope Francis has started to help mend the indignities many black Catholics feel. Following in Pope Francis' leadership, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has created an anti-racism committee. Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo, president of the U.S.C.C.B., introduced the committee this past summer. "Recent events have exposed the extent to which the sin of racism continues to afflict our nation," Cardinal DiNardo stated. "The establishment of this new ad hoc committee will be wholly dedicated to engaging the Church and our society to work together in unity to challenge the sin of racism, to listen to persons who are

suffering under this sin, and to come together in the love of Christ to know one another as brothers and sisters."

While this is a courageous and welcome step forward by the church, there remains more to be done. I encourage church leaders at the local level to explicitly denounce racism and the actions of white supremacist groups like those seen in Charlottesville, Va., this past summer. As a black Catholic, hearing priests at the pulpit discuss racism in the same manner as issues like homelessness would be a great sign of solidarity.

We must encourage anti-racism committees like the U.S.C.C.B.'s at the local level as well. We must encourage congregations across the country to engage in discussions on issues like police brutality and the mass incarceration of black and brown bodies. By highlighting experiences faced by black Catholics as well as celebrating the richness of their culture, parishes can create concrete signs of solidarity. If we are to foster an inclusive Catholic community, one that truly reflects all of God's goodness, then no one should ever feel unwelcome.

Anthony Carter is the former chief diversity officer for Johnson & Johnson. Following his retirement, he has written and lectured on diversity, inclusion and social justice.

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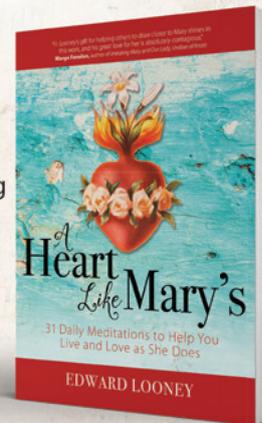


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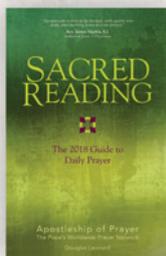
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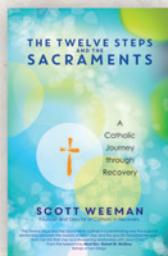
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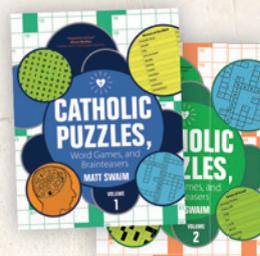
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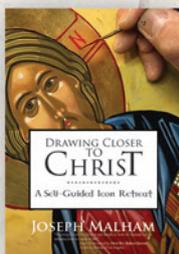
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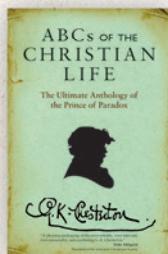
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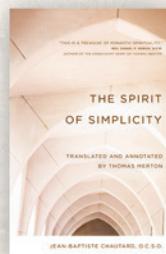
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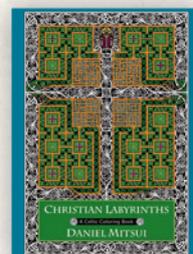


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