

America

JANUARY 7, 2019

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE



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Protecting the Least Among Us

The March for Life, the annual gathering of pro-life activists, clergy and civic leaders, will take place in Washington, D.C., on Friday, Jan. 18, 2019. In our pro-life commitment, **America** is allied with the sentiments expressed in the statements by the Society of Jesus of the United States, “Standing for the Unborn,” which was published in **America** on May 26, 2003, and “Protecting the Least Among Us,” published on Jan. 18, 2018. As is our annual custom, we republish excerpts from these texts here as an expression of our solidarity with the women and men who will march this month in the nation’s capital.

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

As we Jesuits survey our culture, we cannot help but see abortion as part of the massive injustices in our society.... Since the January 22, 1973, Supreme Court decisions in *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*, more than 55 million American lives have been ended by abortion. Among all the justice issues we as a society should view with grave concern, abortion is a key social evil. We approach this topic as pastors, scholars, social activists, and educators. There is no part of our ministry that is untouched by the devastating consequences of abortion and there is, therefore, no environment in which we find ourselves that does not have some role to play in addressing this complex issue.

Pope Francis writes, “No one must say they cannot be close to

the poor because their own lifestyle demands more attention to other areas.... None of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and social justice” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 201). In the same way, the Society of Jesus today asks its members and collaborators to find ever new and creative ways to bring the protection of the unborn and solidarity with mothers in difficult situations into whatever mission they serve.

As we continue to engage on the topic of abortion, we wish to proceed in a way that rests on the following insights:

First, the foundation of the Catholic moral tradition is the dignity of the human person. The second key insight of Catholic moral life is that we are social beings and that solidarity matters. The social acceptance of abortion is a profound moral failure on both counts. It undermines the claim that every life is infused with God-given dignity, and it often pretends such decisions can be relegated to individual choice without having negative consequences on society as a whole. Sacred Scripture, the witness of early Christianity, Catholic social teaching, and the magisterium consistently teach that we cannot in good conscience ignore this tragedy.

Second, Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit history offer unique lenses through which to view the topic of abortion that should deepen our resolve to work in this area. The Spiritual Exercis-

es of St. Ignatius of Loyola are motivated from beginning to end by the laboring presence of God in creation and redemption. We are invited to co-labor, not because we are perfect, but because we are loved, and in recognizing God’s love for us we cannot but act on it. Jesuits throughout history have lived out this insight to transform the world, and we are asked to do the same today.

Third, beyond the actual content of “what” we say in making a case against abortion, it is critical to pay attention to “how” our defense of the unborn takes place. As St. Paul reminds us, we must “speak the truth with love” (Ephesians 4:15). Success will not come through force of will; it will only come by changing hearts. Therefore, we must always keep watch over our own hearts and ensure they are filled with the love and hope needed for this holy work.

Our Jesuit brother and our Holy Father, Pope Francis, highlights our concern: “Among the vulnerable for whom the Church wishes to care with particular love and concern are unborn children, the most defenseless and innocent among us. Nowadays efforts are made to deny them their human dignity and to do with them whatever one pleases, taking their lives and passing laws preventing anyone from standing in the way of this” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 213). May we always listen to the lives of the most vulnerable in our society and use our voice on their behalf.



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Alain Pitton/NurPhoto/Sipa USA

The Yellow Jackets movement in France began on Nov. 17 as a protest against the rise of taxes on oil products. Protesters are pictured here in Toulouse on Dec 15.

Cover image: A woman prays at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Beijing on Oct. 1.
CNS photo/Isaac Brekken, EPA

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How does your parish welcome people with disabilities?

Respondents reported a variety of accommodations for people with disabilities in their parishes, while also calling on their communities to do more to support parishioners with special needs.

Most readers said their parishes offered face-to-face confession and comprehensive wheelchair access. About a quarter of respondents said their parishes had special religious education classes. Less common were support groups, telecoil systems and Braille missalettes.

Kris Blackwell of Lisle, Ill., said her parish works to welcome as many people as they can. “The only disability we can’t accommodate at the moment is signing for the deaf,” she wrote.

Likewise, Patricia McGann of Bethesda, Md., said her parish welcomed people with disabilities. “Our parish school is fully inclusive, welcoming children with Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorder and many other learning differences,” she said. “The church is wheelchair accessible, but only two floors of the school are accessible.”

Other readers noted that people with different disabilities are often treated the same way. “Since *disabilities* covers a wide range of issues, a parish cannot lump them

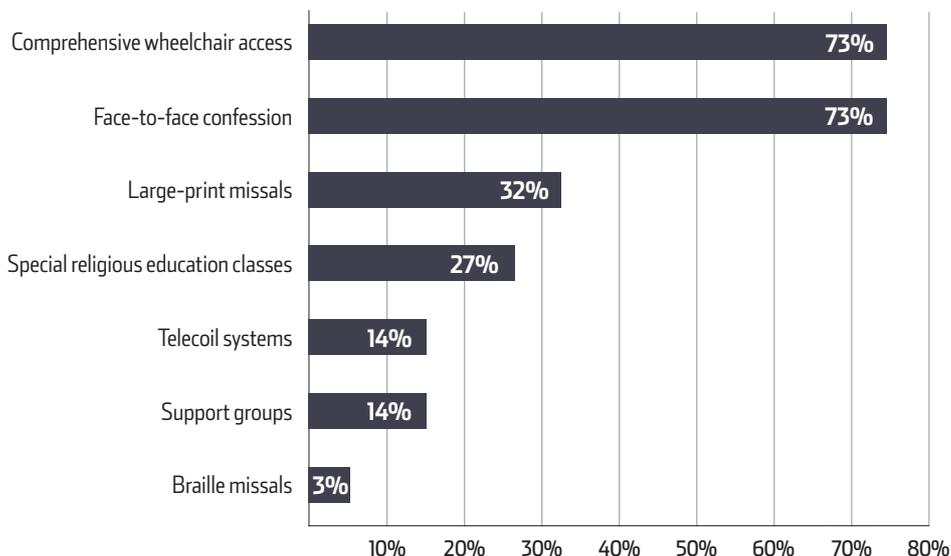
all together and congratulate themselves. Persons with disabilities want to be accommodated and integrated into the life and ministry of the church,” said Holly Clark of Middleboro, Mass.

For many, parish accessibility remains a challenge. “Our church is barely accessible,” said Jane Shigley of Hamilton, Mont. “It was built in 1896. It has stairs everywhere, and a teeny weeny bathroom. We are raising money so that we can replace it.”

Asked what they would like their parishes to do differently, respondents emphasized that more comprehensive training and policies are necessary. “Few catechists are trained to catechize children with learning disabilities or physical limitations. This is an issue that should be addressed at a level higher than the parish,” said Judith Maten in Royal Oak, Mich.

Diane Smith, in Philadelphia, Pa., agrees that there should be more accountability. “Accessibility is finally being addressed after our 25 years of being members of our parish,” she wrote. “My 23-year-old son uses a wheelchair, and accommodations throughout his life have been taken on by friends, not leadership.”

WHICH OF THESE ACCOMMODATIONS DOES YOUR PARISH OFFER?



‘I have a physical disability and mobility impairment. We went to a Mass for the disabled that turned out to be geared for persons with cognitive disabilities. It was beautiful, inclusive and life affirming.’

Alina Sedlander, Metairie, La.

These results are based on reader responses to a poll promoted on Facebook, Twitter and in our email newsletter.

Meet in the Middle

Re “The 2018 America Profile,” by Matt Malone, S.J. (12/24): Candidates in the mold of Governor John Bel Edwards of Louisiana are definitely the smart path for Democrats. And more moderation would benefit Republicans as well. Meeting in the middle is the only logical way forward.

Bryan Craig ●

At the Cinema

Re “Return to Lourdes,” by Eve Tushnet (12/24): This is an interesting and thought-provoking article. As a young, bedridden girl, I was fascinated by “The Song of Bernadette.” I was too young to dissect the meaning of the film except on the most visceral level. It prompted me, eight years later, to investigate the Catholic faith. Forty-four years later, I have not looked back.

Kristi Emery ●

Where to Begin

Re “The Promise of Restorative Justice,” by Stephen Pope (12/24): The Catholic Church needs to deal with its overbearing attachment to secrecy. I am not referring to the seal of confession; I am referring to the everyday workings of the parish—and that will not be easy to change.

Peter Schwimer ●

Christmas Lullaby

Christmas carols are the most beautiful songs ever written, in my opinion. “Silent Night” is also a beautiful lullaby. I just recently read that it was sung to George H. W. Bush as he lay dying. I love them all.

Rose-Ellen Camier ●

Another Dimension?

Re “The Lure of Brideshead, Then and Now,” by Rob Weinert-Kendt (12/24): An important dimension of Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* is aestheticism. Beauty and love are presented as shadows of something otherwise and elsewhere. Catholicism offers aesthetics, and those aesthetics hint at more. But it is the aesthetics of upper-class Catholics that wins the heart of the novel’s artist protagonist. As a child of Irish parents who fought (or helped fighters) in the Irish War of

Independence, I was impressed but not taken in.

Those aesthetics mask much social and economic darkness as well as the presumed transcendent.

John Mack ●

A Necessary Reminder

Re “The Faces of Christ,” by Leo O’Donovan, S.J. (12/24): Thanks to Father O’Donovan for a wonderful article. He reminds all of us why this country began. All are welcome, especially the children. People have the basic right to live without fear. All children have the right to be safe and secure. May all Americans remember this.

Cathe Shoulberg ●

A Powerful Article

Phil Klay’s “Man of War” (12/10) was the most thought-provoking and powerful article I have read in some time. I want to read his collection of stories, *Redeployment*.

Art Kane

Plantation, Fla.

Greatly Moved

I was greatly moved by Mr. Klay’s account of his deployment in Iraq. It mirrored in many ways my own year in Vietnam (1967-68). His loss of faith rang bells. I do not recall seeing or seeking a chaplain the whole time I was there. Ironically, my return to faith came on the weekend that the Vietnam War peace accords went into effect, in January 1972. Catholicism would be decades in my future.

Bruce P. Schoch

Williamsburg, Va.

Considering Prevention

Re “Five Ways to Safeguard Children Everywhere,” by Msgr. Stephen Rossetti (10/29): I find a sixth way is needed. As a public health nurse for almost 17 years, I think prevention is the first consideration in approaching a risk situation. Children need to be informed about what sexual abuse is so they can alert authorities when it happens. They need to know that no one has the right to touch them in inappropriate ways no matter who they are. This gives power to potential victims.

Eileen Callan

Silver Spring, Md.

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

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

Paying Tribute to Amazon

Last year, the retail giant Amazon publicly considered sites for a secondary “headquarters” outside Seattle. It received development proposals from 238 areas in the United States and Canada but ultimately divided 50,000 planned jobs equally between New York City and suburban Washington, D.C., dashing any hope that it might revitalize a city left behind by the digital revolution.

Geographic inequality in the United States is widening as high-paying jobs flow to a few “superstar cities,” making it all the more disappointing that Amazon opted for two places that could pay it lavish tribute. In New York City (specifically the Long Island City section of the borough of Queens), that means more than \$1.5 billion in tax incentives from the state, assuming Amazon meets its hiring target. In Arlington County, Va., it means \$573 million in direct subsidies from the state (mostly in the form of a cash grant for each job created), plus \$223 million in transit improvements to deal with the flow of new workers.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a newly elected Democratic U.S. representative whose district abuts the Amazon site in Queens, questioned the decision to award the company “hundreds of millions of dollars in tax breaks at a time when our subway is crumbling and our communities need more investment.” The sociologist Richard Florida lamented that bidding wars for companies like Amazon make cities and states “willing participants in a competition that ultimately handed over billions of taxpayer dollars to one of the world’s most successful companies.”

But state and local governments

must deal with the reality that larger companies are controlling an increasing share of the workforce, and some public incentives for employers like Amazon make sense. Improvements in transit and other infrastructure are overdue in many cities, whether their purpose is to attract giant companies like Amazon or to encourage the creation of small businesses. Streamlining permitting processes—as New York has promised to do for Amazon’s new campus—can also be beneficial and should extend to smaller companies as well.

Still, tax breaks and direct subsidies to well-established companies are a more questionable economic strategy. We must ask whether such tax incentives ultimately benefit the common good, either at the local level or for the nation as a whole.

Amazon, like Sears with its mail-order catalogues more than a century ago, has provided jobs and great convenience to U.S. consumers. In other respects, its growth has been worrisome. It has gained near-monopoly status, controlling 49 percent of all internet retail business, according to the Open Markets Institute (eBay is a distant second at 7 percent), and its purchase of Whole Foods is giving it a significant foothold in the supermarket sector.

Only a quarter century old, it is already the second-largest private employer in the United States, behind Walmart, but it has fought against the unionization of its workforce; and working conditions in its rapidly proliferating warehouses have come under scrutiny. Practices like its close surveillance of employees also do not respect the human dignity of each

worker, especially when compared with jobs at independently owned stores—and their direct human interactions—that have vanished as Amazon has grown.

Yet the forces that are threatening the economic and spiritual well-being of workers are larger even than Amazon. The answer is not to single out one company for moral condemnation. Neither should local governments be prevented from determining economic development policies that best suit their unique conditions.

But the principle of subsidiarity is poorly served in these cases—when U.S. cities and states act as if they are in an economic Cold War with one another and the “arms race” of tax incentives helps only a handful of already successful private companies.

Insuring Children

In November the Georgetown Center for Children and Families announced that the number of uninsured children in the United States went up for the first time in nearly a decade. While 7.6 million children were uninsured in 2008, by 2016 that figure had dropped to 3.6 million. But in 2017, 300,000 children lost coverage. The authors of the study cannot say with certainty why this happened, but their research suggests a few possibilities.

Joan Alker, one of the authors of the report, writes that about 75 percent of children who lost coverage in 2017 live in states where Medicaid coverage was not expanded through the Affordable Care Act, like Texas, Florida and Georgia.

Founded in 1909

Moreover, funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program, created in 1997, expired on Sept. 30, 2017, and was not renewed until late January 2018. And the Trump administration has continued its crack-down on immigration, which can lead families with mixed immigration statuses to avoid interacting with the government.

The authors of the report fear that the rate of uninsured children will continue to grow, particularly because the administration has proposed changes to green card eligibility that may further deter immigrants from seeking public assistance for their families.

Though the Trump administration has touted record-low unemployment numbers and steady job growth, the Georgetown report chips away at this rosy picture of the economy. In June, after the United Nations released a report critical of poverty in the United States, Nikki Haley, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, said it was "patently ridiculous for the United Nations to examine poverty in America." Her rhetoric, like President Trump's, flaunted the United States' status as one of the wealthiest countries in the world as a reason not to examine the living conditions of poor Americans.

But a rising gross domestic product does not change the facts on the ground. Insuring children is about short-term need as much as long-term consequences.

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How children can benefit from a more ‘conversational’ catechesis

“If God loved us, why would he give my mom cancer?” asked a 12-year-old girl when prompted to write down one major question she had about God. Other students asked: Why does God so easily send us to hell? Will God still accept me if I’m gay? Why do only some people receive miracles? Why do we need God? As teachers at a coeducational Catholic prep school in Minnesota, we often encounter such questions as we talk about faith with our students.

Teachers, parents and catechists in parish faith formation programs always hope that we can answer questions about God appropriately. But the questions can reveal a deep sense of doubt among adolescents. People often reflect on questions of existence—suffering, purpose and the presence of a divine reality—but they are rarely part of deep conversations with others. Ineffective catechesis programs may be one reason for this absence.

At Benilde-St. Margaret’s School, we are taking a radical approach and throwing out the traditional theology curriculum for junior high in favor of “conversational catechesis.” Seminar-style theology classes allow teachers and students to talk openly about difficult and complex questions of faith. This method should not be new to teachers. Young adults no longer need to memorize historical facts or quotes from lofty literature—they have Google for that. Rather, we need to help our students exercise an ethical conscience, apply creativity and cultivate innovation.

Unfortunately, the muscles of learning have long been neglected in the study of theology, as seen in the high-school curriculum provided by the U.S. Conference of Catholic

Bishops. The core curriculum, “Who Is Jesus Christ?,” dives into the two natures of Jesus and floods students with the complex teachings of Nestorianism and monophysitism. But the curriculum does little to promote critical thinking and moral development. How can we foster faith in students with merely rote memorization and inaccessible vocabulary?

Like all teachers, catechists must help students strengthen the muscles of learning. This gets more complicated when we begin to talk about faith formation in a parish setting. With classes that meet only once a week and often include unwilling participants, transmitting the faith is already an uphill battle. Conversational catechesis offers the opportunity to build authentic relationships and to teach the faith through moments of encounter rather than the dissemination of theory.

For example, this fall we asked students, “Can you think of a person or time in history that emulates the actions and figure of Moses?”

Immediately, a hand went up and a girl said, “I think that Malala is like Moses,” referring to Malala Yousafzai, the Nobel Peace Prize winner and advocate for the education of girls in her native Pakistan. “Because she was willing to endure violence and guns in order to free girls who were being oppressed and not allowed to go to school.”

In response, we asked, “And how old was Malala when this happened?”

“She was our age!”

That’s right, we said. She was 15 years old when she listened to God’s word and changed the world.

Conversational catechesis is much like a conversation that bends and turns as young minds think their way through the abstract landscape of

faith. By creating a space where students can ask questions without being judged, teachers in schools and parishes become spiritual companions, walking with young people as they become aware of moments of consolation and desolation in their lives. Adult companions need to lean into those experiences of students, rather than shying away from them because they are “uncomfortable” or too difficult to deal with, all the while keeping in mind appropriate boundaries for subject matter.

Last year, Saint Mary’s Press released a study titled “Going, Going, Gone” that assesses the disaffiliation of young Catholics from the church and explores the reasons they have chosen to step away from their church community. The research indicates that those who have “drifted” away from the church have done so because they perceive a lack of “real world relevance.” A survey of Benilde-St. Margaret’s students in 2017 produced similar data. Only 26 percent of junior high students said that their religious faith is extremely important or very important to their daily lives.

In order to appeal to young minds, we must employ conversational catechesis in our classrooms, parishes and homes as we teach kids about faith. Understanding God will always be complex, but talking about God should always be easy. We adults need to model this behavior as we raise a future generation of Catholics.

Becca Meagher is a campus minister and theology teacher, and Claire Shea is a junior high principal; both are at Benilde-St. Margaret’s School, a Catholic college preparatory school in St. Louis Park, Minn. Ms. Meagher also serves on the board of directors of Saint Mary’s Press.



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3rd Sunday Ordinary Time
Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21

*Jesus Begins His Ministry
in Nazareth*

FEBRUARY 17

6th Sunday Ordinary Time
Luke 6:17, 20-26

The Beatitudes

JULY 7

14th Sunday Ordinary Time
Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

Sending of the Seventy-Two

JULY 14

15th Sunday Ordinary Time
Luke 10:25-37

The Good Samaritan

SEPTEMBER 29

26th Sunday Ordinary Time
Luke 16:19-31

Lazarus and the Rich Man

OCTOBER 13

28th Sunday Ordinary Time
Luke 17:11-19

Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers

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Backlog at the border

New policies mean fewer options for asylum seekers

By J.D. Long-García

Whether they cross illegally or through a port of entry, asylum seekers are facing tough odds, according to a report from Syracuse University released in November. U.S. immigration judges denied a record number of asylum claims in fiscal year 2018.

Last year, judges decided 42,224 cases, which exceeds 2017's tally by 40 percent. Judges denied asylum in 65 percent of the cases, marking the sixth year in a row that denial rates have increased. It can take years for an asylum case to be heard in court.

The Syracuse report was issued weeks after a caravan of thousands of Central Americans arrived in Tijuana, Baja California. Many from the caravan joined more than 3,000 who were already waiting to have their asylum cases heard at the San Ysidro Port of Entry.

"Overall, asylum denial rates have skyrocketed," said Victoria Neilson, a senior attorney at the Catholic Legal Immigration Network Inc.

It already takes months to file an asylum claim with U.S. officials at ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border. With the new influx of immigrants, and potentially thousands more on the way, the wait will only get longer. In the

end, a majority of the applications will be filed in vain.

"Over the last two years, all of the revisions to policy have been designed to make it harder to get asylum," Ms. Neilson said. As attorney general, Jeff Sessions had encouraged immigration judges to decide cases more quickly, she said. The recent Syracuse University report signals that this has happened.

"The only way for a judge to speed things up is to give defendants less time to argue their cases," Ms. Neilson said. "There was a complete evisceration of due process under Jeff Sessions."

Mr. Sessions implemented a "zero tolerance" immigration enforcement policy in May, which led to the separation of thousands of immigrant families at the border. Under the policy, the U.S. government would prosecute everyone who crossed the border illegally, including asylum seekers. In June, the former attorney general narrowed the grounds on which immigration judges could grant asylum, a move that led to an increase in denial rates, according to the Syracuse study.

"Everything on asylum is meant to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, but that's not happening," Ms. Neil-



CNS photo/David Maung

At the U.S.-Mexico border crossing in Tijuana in April 2018, waiting to apply for asylum

son said. Asylum seekers should not be detained simply for seeking asylum, according to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention. The United Nations also recognizes that seeking asylum may require individuals to “breach immigration rules.”

Matt Suissis of the Center for Immigration Studies, a group that favors policies that admit fewer immigrants, has been a supporter of the administration’s moves. “We need more staffing and more immigration judges,” said Mr. Suissis. “We have a serious asylum backlog and we’re not ready for the thousands who are waiting at the border right now.”

What he referred to as “legitimate asylum claims” need to be prioritized over others, he said. Part of the problem, Mr. Suissis said, is that the definition of “asylum seeker” has been expanded beyond the original intent.

Individuals can seek asylum in the United States when they have suffered persecution or fear that they will suffer persecution due to race, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group or because of their political opinion, according to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Mr. Suissis does not believe “membership in a particular social group” should apply to those fleeing from gang violence. He also believes migrants are coached by legal experts to apply for asylum instead of using other means to obtain legal immigration, like a work visa, that might better reflect their actual circumstances.

“We can’t take people because of their economic situation,” Mr. Suissis said.

But Ms. Neilson said such cases have nothing to do with asylum. “If someone is an economic migrant, they’re not going to get past the credible fear interview,” she said.

Establishing “credible fear” is the first step in the asylum process. Syracuse University reported in June that fewer than 15 percent of asylum seekers passed credible fear reviews during the first six months of 2018.

If migrants fail their credible fear interview, they are placed on “expedited removal” and deported to their home countries. If they do pass their credible fear screening, migrants will have their case heard by an immigration judge.

Mr. Suissis argues that migrants seeking asylum are exploiting immigration “loopholes.” He described the ability to claim asylum as a “pull” factor that is bringing thousands to the U.S. border. But Ms. Neilson’s experience is different.

“From my work with people, migrants have a general idea that the United States is a land of freedom, and they believe they will be safe here,” she said. “But my experience is that they don’t know asylum law. They are just trying to get away from danger and go to a place they think is better for themselves and their families.”

Since 2014, the United States has been facing an influx of immigrants from Central America, particularly women and children. They have been coming from an area known as the Northern Triangle—Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador—which is beset by gang violence and homicides.

“If requesting asylum is a loophole, well, that’s a disturbing way to look at it,” said Donald M. Kerwin Jr., director of the Center for Migration Studies in New York. “It’s not like anyone has been soft on immigration, but this administration has been the toughest,” Mr. Kerwin said. “They’re trying to dismantle the whole humanitarian infrastructure of our immigration law.”

Last year, the Trump administration changed the threshold that establishes a “credible fear” that could justify asylum status. According to the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, asylum seekers now have to present a “preponderance of evidence” rather than simply a “significant possibility” to establish credible fear. The administration has also taken issue with the Flores settlement, which limits the time children can be kept in immigration detention.

Like other recent administrations, the Trump administration wants “to detain people and they want to deter people from coming, but they don’t do anything to address root causes,” Mr. Kerwin said. The U.S. government currently spends around \$4 billion annually on border security, compared to an estimated \$180 million in foreign aid that is budgeted to be sent to Northern Triangle countries in 2019. “Some significant amount to help people stay at home seems to me to be the obvious solution,” Mr. Kerwin said.

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

A world in need forecast for 2019

AP Photo/Hani Mohammed, File

A feeding center in Hodeida, Yemen, in September 2018.

Humanitarian crises are becoming more frequent and are lasting longer, according to a report in December from the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. As a result, more than 1 percent of the worldwide population are caught up in major crises, write the authors of the Global Humanitarian Overview 2019. Between 2005 and 2017, according to OCHA, the number of crises receiving an internationally led response almost doubled, from 16 to 30, and the average length of U.N.-coordinated response plans increased from 5.2 years in 2014 to 9.3 years in 2018.

Ten percent of the world's people are still living in extreme poverty, and this year nearly 132 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection, mostly because of the effects of armed conflict. The international humanitarian system is more effective than ever at meeting their needs, but global trends, including continued population growth and climate change, are leaving more people than ever vulnerable to the devastating impacts of conflicts and natural disasters. Here are some of the challenges highlighted by OCHA.

BUDGET SHORTFALLS

Funding required by humanitarian response plans	\$25 Billion
Funding received from governments and other donors	\$14 Billion
Unmet need	\$11 Billion

40% the persistent annual gap in funding for U.N.-led humanitarian response efforts.

9 Yrs length of the average humanitarian crisis; nearly three quarters of people targeted to receive assistance in 2018 are in countries affected by humanitarian crisis for seven years or more.

TROUBLE SPOTS

In 2019, some **24 million people** will need humanitarian assistance and protection in Yemen, making Yemen once again the worst humanitarian crisis in the world.

Humanitarian needs will remain at exceptionally high levels in **Syria**, the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, **Ethiopia**, **Nigeria** and **South Sudan**.

Large, protracted crises command the majority of resources. Between 2014 and 2018, just four crises—in **Somalia**, **South Sudan**, **Sudan** and **Syria**—accounted for **55 percent** of all funding requested and received.

RISING NUMBERS

NUMBER OF FORCIBLY DISPLACED PEOPLE



Food insecurity rising: Between 2015 and 2017, the number of people experiencing crisis-level food insecurity increased from **80 million** to **124 million** people.

2.5X Crises exacerbate gender inequalities. Girls in conflict settings are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys.



NATURAL DISASTERS

Between 2014 and 2017, disasters caused by natural hazards affected more than **870 million people** per year in more than 160 countries and territories around the world, causing loss of life and livelihoods and forcing about 20 million people from their homes each year.



the chance of an El Niño event developing at the end of 2018.

25

the number of countries considered at high risk from related droughts, tropical cyclones and floods.

Source: Global Humanitarian Overview 2019, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.



CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

What will happen to Dorothy Day's former church?

Hurrying past the padlocked Church of the Nativity in New York City on Dec. 4.

Dorothy Day's parish, the Church of the Nativity, endured on the Lower East Side of Manhattan for nearly 50 years before its deconsecration by the Archdiocese of New York in 2016 after its merger with Most Holy Redeemer Church in 2015. Now the future of the church site has become the subject of contentious debate. The parish of Most Holy Redeemer stands to net \$50 million from a luxury housing deal, but former Nativity parishioners hope to purchase the decommissioned church for \$18 million to develop low-income, senior and homeless family housing.

The church, once administered by the Jesuits, was offered as a case study by Rebecca Amato, a professor at New York University and associate director of N.Y.U.'s Urban Democracy Lab, at a conference in Rome last November on the reuse of church landholdings after they are decommissioned. According to her research, the archdiocese "has sold at least 19 sacred properties for luxury development since 1996." Ms. Amato said that the trend emerged within the wider economic context of New York City in the roaring 1990s.

As property values shot up, the potential to score financial jackpots became harder to resist. "Selling off low-earning property as values started to go up was just good economic sense for any profit-seeking investor with a real estate portfolio," said Ms. Amato. (America Media sold its headquarters in Manhattan and relocated in 2016.)

Members of the Catholic Worker, founded by Ms. Day, an advocate for the poor, in the East Village in the 1930s, are disheartened by the trend. "Church closings are made more painful when the property sales are so injurious to the community," said Joanne Kennedy, who has been part of the movement since 1991. "We have been making a concerted effort to offer good alternatives for the Nativity site for a little more than a year. But we have been lamenting

this destruction of communities in many neighborhoods for decades.... The unnatural inflation of property values in Manhattan is a near occasion of sin. It is hard to resist, no doubt," Ms. Kennedy said.

"The decision to sell properties for the highest possible profit to fund other efforts of the archdiocese and surviving parishes may seem logical," Ms. Kennedy conceded. "But it fails to consider the social harm it may be causing."

Joseph Zwilling, spokesperson for the Archdiocese of New York, said in an email to **America** that a number of proposals are being considered, adding that the Archdiocese of New York has "a historic, extensive, and ongoing commitment to providing high quality affordable housing." He reports that through Catholic Charities, "the archdiocese already manages nearly 2,300 units of affordable housing in New York City."

He said the parish is in charge of the sale and is expected to pay back outstanding debts to the diocese. "In order to be good stewards of their resources," he wrote, "the parish needs to receive fair market value for the property, so that the parish and the archdiocese can continue to meet the pastoral, charitable, educational—and housing—needs of the people we serve."

Skeptical of any deal that would make a lot of money but further change the face of the neighborhood, the Catholic Worker has been proposing alternative uses. "We just keep on doing what we do," said Ms. Kennedy. "Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. The act of welcoming the poor in spite of our changing neighborhood is our most important resistance."

Brandon Sanchez, *Joseph A. O'Hare* fellow.
Twitter: @offbrandsanchez. With CNS reporting.



Making a stand against femicide in Brazil

Thousands are lost to gender-based violence

Tauane Morais, 23 years old, was stabbed to death last June, murdered in Samambaia, a town in Brazil's Federal District, about 18 miles away from the national capital of Brasília, by an ex-husband who said he was "unhappy" with the couple's breakup.

It was an act of violence that could have been avoided.

Only three days before her death, Ms. Morais had been assaulted by her ex-husband, Vinícius Rodrigues de Sousa, 24 years old. Neighbors heard the assault and called the police, and Mr. Rodrigues was arrested. But only for one day.

A judge did not think it was necessary to keep him locked up, imposing only "protective measures" that proved insufficient. Ms. Morais's death is a notorious example of an everyday horror in Brazil and other Latin American states: the crime of femicide.

In 2017 at least 2,795 women were victims of femicide in 23 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, according to a survey conducted by the Gender Equality Observatory, an office of a United Nations economic commission that tracks homicides of women ages 15 and over.

The U.N. commission calls for public policies in Latin America aimed at "preventing, sanctioning and eradicating" all forms of violence against women. Brazil leads the list in absolute terms, with 1,133 victims confirmed in 2017. El Salvador, however, has a higher incidence per capita,

reaching 10.2 femicides for every 100,000 women. (These statistics do not count abortions that may have been performed because the child is female, a common practice in some countries.)

Many of these crimes can be described as "intimate femicides." They are committed by people who are family members or very close to the victims. A Catholic journalist and expert in gender issues in Brazil, Karla Maria, told **America** that, sadly, the numbers do not surprise her.

"It is terrifying and disturbing that women are hurt by people they love, whether they are their companions, parents or uncles," she says.

Ms. Maria is the author of the book *Mulheres Extraordinárias* (*Extraordinary Women*). Ms. Maria traveled Brazil to find stories of a variety of women, including many victims of violence.

As a Catholic, Ms. Maria says she believes that religion can play a role in protecting women. Any attack against the human body is an attack against Christ himself, she says.

"Understanding how sacred we are, because Christ lives in each one of us, can free women from this cycle of violence. My faith is one of the elements of my behavior; now, a secular state must at least ensure physical safety and create consciousness among women [to help them speak up]."

But it was also because of her religion that Amanda



AP Photo/Andre Penner

A banner in Portuguese reads “Black women against racism, genocide and femicide” during an International Women’s Day march in São Paulo, Brazil, on March 8, 2017.

Barbosa Loiola says she tolerated being beaten by her husband for five years. “I came from a very Catholic family, so for me there were only two permanent choices: becoming a nun or getting married,” she says.

She explains that she “never had the courage” to reveal the violence in her marriage and denounce her husband’s behavior “because religion was still too strong for me. Just as the great female saints held out, I felt that had to endure and fight for my marriage. I had to put up with all this.

“I went to talk to a priest and he told me that, too,” she says. “He said, ‘My daughter, pray for your marriage.’ So I nurtured these feelings.”

Ms. Loiola believes that many women who are trapped in abusive relationships may not know they are victims of a crime because they have not acquired the social tools they need to recognize the problem. “Although many women may even identify that they are suffering from an abusive relationship, they may not understand that such violence should be reported. They think that it’s part of a relationship, that every relationship is like this.”

Filipe Domingues contributes from Brazil.
Twitter: @filipedomingues.



A protest in Lahore, Pakistan, follows the acquittal of Asia Bibi on Oct. 31, 2018.

CNS photo/Rahat Dar, EPA

Who will grant Asia Bibi asylum? A blasphemy verdict in Pakistan creates a diplomatic crisis

In 2010 Asia Bibi, a Catholic mother of five, was convicted of blasphemy against Islam in the Punjab Province of Pakistan and sentenced to death. But in a landmark decision at the end of October, she was, to the surprise of some and fury of others, acquitted by a three-member bench of Pakistan’s Supreme Court after eight years in prison.

Within hours, riots broke out across the country. Although Ms. Bibi was moved to a safe place by order of the court, she and her family remain in grave danger. Prime Minister Imran Khan has, for now, prohibited Ms. Bibi from leaving Pakistan. Australian, Canadian and Dutch diplomats are reportedly negotiating for her release so she might travel to one of those countries for asylum.

Concerns have also been raised for the family of Joseph Nadeem, who have taken care of Ms. Bibi’s family since she was sent to death row. Mr. Nadeem now fears for his own children. Islamists have fired at the gate of his home and “we are constantly receiving threats,” he told Aid to the Church in Need. In the United States, evangelical groups have urged U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to offer asylum to the families, so far to no avail.

Ms. Bibi and her family are believed to have asked several countries for safe transit and sanctuary, including Britain. But the Home Office concluded that it would not grant asylum.

This has led to accusations in British media that Britain’s asylum policy is effectively being directed by mobs in Pakistan. Is the decision to refuse asylum mainly predicated on fear of retaliation? If so, the state’s moral principles have surely been watered down, if not abandoned.

David Stewart, S.J., London correspondent.
Twitter: @DavidStewartSJ.

A young altar boy in a white and red vestment is shown from the chest up, holding a large white candle. He is looking towards the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a bright window with a view of a landscape. The title text is overlaid on the window area.

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

The peril and promise of the China-Vatican deal

Paul P. Mariani

An altar boy holds a candle in preparation for the Palm Sunday procession at a Catholic church in China's Youtong village.

CNS photo/Damir Sagolj, Reuters



A new era for the Catholic Church in China began this past fall when Pope Francis signed off on a historic “provisional agreement” with the People’s Republic of China over the appointment of bishops in that nation. The accord broke a nearly 70-year impasse between Beijing and the Vatican. At the end of September the pope also gave an in-flight interview on the agreement and issued a message to the Catholics of China and the universal church explaining his reasons for making this bold step.

The exact contents of the “provisional agreement” will be kept secret. But **America** and other publications have reported that it was signed in Beijing on Sept. 22 by representatives of both the Vatican and the Chinese government. It appears that the Chinese government will have a voice in the selection of bishops, but Pope Francis insists he will have the final say. (The exact process for naming and vetting candidates is not clear.) As part of the agreement, the Vatican will reconcile seven “illegitimate” Chinese bishops (bishops ordained without the papal mandate). It is the first such public agreement between the Vatican and China since the Communist Party came to power in October 1949.

The agreement was hailed in some quarters as an important step toward rapprochement and denounced in others as a betrayal. In order to understand better why this agreement has incited such strong opinions, I will give some needed historical background and then outline some hopes, risks and unanswered questions about the current state of Sino-Vatican relations.

A Century-Old Issue

The situation of the church in China has come full circle. The key issue in the agreement is the appointment of bishops, the same issue that preoccupied the church in China 100 years ago. At that time all the bishops in China were foreign-born. Most held the office of apostolic vicar or apostolic prefect, because the diocesan hierarchy was not fully set up until 1946. They were almost always selected by the religious order or missionary society to which they belonged and were ratified through the French protectorate, a role France had arrogated to itself in the 1840s as the guardian of Catholic interests in China. Forward-thinking missionaries, and even the Vatican, were essentially locked out of the decision-making process. So were Chinese Catholics, who continually petitioned Rome. (These petitions are still on file in the archives of the former Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.)

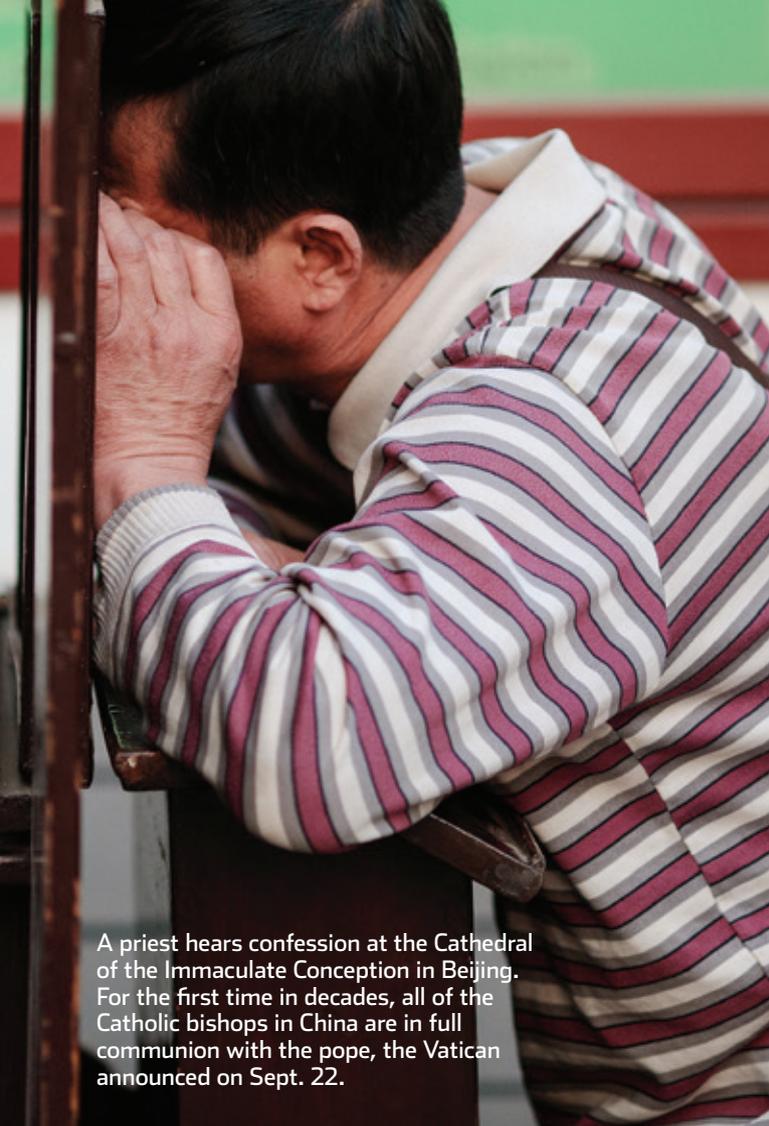
Finally, after World War I, the Vatican began to take the indigenization of local churches more seriously. In 1919 it sent a papal visitor directly to China. His key tasks were to give the Vatican a better sense of what was happening on the ground in China, and, ultimately, to find local candidates for the episcopacy. After years of careful diplomacy, these efforts bore fruit, and in 1926 Pope Pius XI, the “pope of the missions,” consecrated the first six Chinese bishops of modern times. (In 1685 Gregory Luo Wenzao had become the first Chinese bishop, but there had been none since then.) By consecrating these bishops in St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, Pius XI sent a strong signal: The indigenization of the Chinese episcopacy had begun. It would continue in fits and starts for the next 25 years, by which point perhaps half the bishops in China were Chinese.

Global events soon intervened. World War II began for China in 1937, when the Japanese mounted a full-scale invasion. This was followed by a brutal civil war, in which the Chinese Communist Party emerged victorious. On Oct. 1, 1949, Mao Zedong faced the crowds from the rostrum of Tiananmen Gate in Beijing and announced the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. China had “stood up.”



Mao had long promised to reverse the legacy of “colonialism.” Even before the C.C.P. came to power, soldiers killed and tortured priests, most notoriously during the Trappist “death march” of 1947. When the party came to power two years later, the Christian churches, along with other “enemies without guns,” were soon in Mao’s crosshairs. The C.C.P. soon nationalized church property and expelled both Catholic and Protestant missionaries. These developments only accelerated with the outbreak of the Korean War and the ramping up of the Cold War. Most unfortunately for Catholics, the government insisted that the church break its ties with the “imperialist” Vatican. It wanted the church to be firmly under party control. Prescient Catholics saw this as the beginning of an effort to create an independent “Catholic” church. The papal representative at the time, Archbishop Anthony Riberi, strongly protested. He felt strongly that obedience to the pope was not simply a political matter but a doctrinal one. He was expelled from China in 1951. Sino-Vatican relations were locked in mutual recriminations.

Beyond broken diplomatic ties, the situation for the



A priest hears confession at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Beijing. For the first time in decades, all of the Catholic bishops in China are in full communion with the pope, the Vatican announced on Sept. 22.

church continued to worsen. By 1955 many bishops had been exiled. Others were brought to trial and imprisoned, a fate shared by thousands of faithful Catholics. But the Chinese government continued to insist on establishing a Catholic Church independent of Rome. By 1957 branches of the government-controlled Patriotic Association were established throughout the country, and in the following year, the government staged the consecration of some bishops without papal approval. It continued to do so in the years that followed. Pope John XXIII even briefly asked if the church in China was now in schism. Life for Catholics only got worse throughout the Cultural Revolution, when church buildings were ransacked and believers were viciously attacked. The Maoist years were not kind to the church. Chinese Catholics refer to these years as *a jiaonan*, a persecution without precedent. China was closing itself off—culturally, economically and politically—from much of the rest of the world.

By late 1978 the political winds shifted again. Mao had been dead two years and the new leader, Deng Xiaoping, initiated an era of reform. China embarked on a modern-

ization program and opened itself once again to the outside world. Religion was also rehabilitated. The policy was ratified by a Communist Party document in 1982 and still provides the basic framework today. Property was restored, religious leaders were released from prison, and the government professed contrition for its past treatment of believers. The government recognized that the past draconian policies had only backfired and led to great resentment, and now called on officials not to antagonize believers but to unite with them under the standard of modernization. The churches soon emerged from the shadows—as did the vicious divisions between the “underground” and “patriotic” churches.

Pope John Paul II saw some signs of hope. Almost from the beginning of his pontificate he took a keen interest in the church in China. In 1983 he wrote a personal letter to Deng asking for “a direct contact between the Holy See and the authorities of the Chinese people.” His overtures were not reciprocated. He never was able to visit China.

Pope Benedict XVI encountered the same hopes and frustrations. In 2007 he wrote a letter to the church in China expressing a desire for direct state-to-state dialogue with China, thus bypassing the Patriotic Association—an organization obliquely referenced in the letter as “incompatible with Catholic doctrine.” After an initial period of some openness, the Chinese government grew lukewarm about the letter. The situation soon returned to business as usual.

But such public frustrations belie the fact that, during the 2000s, the Vatican and China had back-channel contacts, especially over the appointment of bishops. In reality, many of the bishops who had been consecrated without the papal mandate in past decades sought reconciliation with Rome. In most cases it was granted. This policy made such headway that Pope Benedict XVI, in his 2007 letter, acknowledged that the great majority of Chinese bishops had been reconciled to Rome.

Some have questioned this generous policy of reconciling illegitimate bishops. This is because the government still demanded its pound of flesh. It wanted pliable tools of the state. Under fear, pressure or opportunism, these bishops were consecrated but without the papal mandate. (Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kium, a strong critic of Chinese religious policy, called the 2007 illicit consecrations “acts of war.”) But later they would seek papal approbation and pledge loyalty to the pope. Then they would tell the government that they were committed to the principle of the

A Catholic priest celebrates Sunday Mass in Beijing. In a special message addressed "to the Catholics of China and to the universal church," released by the Vatican on Sept. 26, Pope Francis said he hoped a recent Sino-Vatican agreement would help "restore full communion among all Chinese Catholics."



independence of the Chinese church from Rome. The process of asking forgiveness, then permission, was showing its fragility.

Indeed, Sino-Vatican relations have seen many ups and downs in the 40 years since China began reforms under Deng, shifting in what sometimes looked like a 10-year cycle. Progress was made and then would rapidly deteriorate. Thus, this 70-year impasse seems to have been broken with the signing of the provisional agreement.

The end result of this was that until just before the recent provisional agreement there were about 100 bishops in China, 30 of them still not recognized by the government. Some are under house arrest or "disappeared" while others function with some freedom. The remaining 70 were recognized by both the Vatican and the Chinese government. But this left the thorny issue that there were still seven illegitimate bishops in China. They had neither sought nor were given papal reconciliation. Needless to say, this is a highly irregular state for the church. No other bishops' conference in the world had both legitimate and ille-

gitimate bishops in the same body. The wheat and the chaff were mixed together. In February **America** reported that the seven bishops asked the pope for pardon and requested reconciliation with him and the universal church. And now, after reviewing their files, the pope has legitimized them all. This was the main public fruit of the provisional accord. In the view of others, the chaff has been renamed as wheat.

What Are the Hopes?

By the pope's recognition of these seven bishops, the Chinese government seems to be gaining a lot. What is the church getting? At first glance, it seems not much. Even sympathetic church leaders call it an imperfect agreement.

But there are hopes. One hope is that this agreement is simply the first step. Future agreements could clarify a whole set of secondary issues for the church in China. The fact is that normal church governance has been difficult in China for the past 70 years. There are issues with diocesan boundaries, for example. The Vatican still officially counts a total of 144 dioceses (and other ecclesiastical



CNS photo/Hwee Young, EPA

The Chinese government recognized that past draconian policies had only backfired and led to great resentment. 🕯️

different dioceses and competing bishops, it is no longer one church, but two. A greater hope is that by regularizing these structures, the Vatican can help bring further reconciliation. The Holy See probably hopes that the status of the 30 bishops not recognized by the Chinese government can be normalized. Perhaps they would be allowed to function more openly and receive some kind of recognition by the government. This would be a major step forward. The Vatican has already shown good will. Perhaps the Chinese government will follow.

Another hope is for full diplomatic links between the Vatican and Beijing. Perhaps a papal ambassador can be posted in China much like one was some 70 years ago. Frank discussions could then continue on a state-to-state basis between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China. Such an arrangement would help the Chinese side as well. It must be a source of embarrassment for China that it is one of the few countries in the world that does not have diplomatic relations with the Vatican. This is a dubious distinction shared with Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and North Korea. Even Iran has an apostolic nunciature.

Finally, direct links between the Catholic Church and China might benefit Pope Francis as well. Perhaps the pope will be allowed to visit China. Indeed, this would be a major accomplishment, even though it would be open to much misunderstanding, as it would come in a time of increasing restrictions on religious expression in China.

Finally, as the Vatican has made clear, all of these efforts are designed to assist in the evangelization of the Chinese people. Despite the legacy of persecution, Catholics have grown from about three million in 1949 to about 10 to 12 million today. However, in the last few years some commentators have noted that there seems to be a leveling of Catholic growth in China. This is

divisions), while the Chinese government counts 98. One reason for this discrepancy is that the boundaries and even the names of some provinces and regions in China have changed since 1949.

Beyond the issue of episcopal legitimacy, discrepancies in diocesan boundaries have led to a number of irregular situations. Sometimes the faithful did not know who the legitimate bishop was—or there were competing bishops in the same region. The situation was often compounded because even government-approved bishops would not publicly state if they had been reconciled with the Vatican. All of this was a major blow to the visibility of the church. A key principle in church law is that the faithful have a right to know who their bishop is. Yet the *Annuario Pontificio*, the Vatican yearbook, continues to reiterate the statistics for bishops and diocesan boundaries from the early 1950s.

However, there are far greater hopes than simply rationalizing diocesan boundaries or updating the church's annual yearbook. (This, after all, can be so much insider baseball.) The uncomfortable truth is that if a church has

Chinese Catholics refer to the Maoist years as a *jiaonan*, a persecution without precedent. ●●

something that I have also been told by Catholics in China. Contrast this with the robust growth of Protestantism in China from under a million in 1949 to perhaps 60 or more million today.

What Are the Risks?

The provisional agreement is not without its risks. It would be naïve in the extreme to think that the Chinese government wants any positive outcomes for the church. The Chinese government has seen the underground church as a thorn in its side for decades, and for decades it has tried to bring that church to heel. Beijing probably sees the accord as a way of further controlling the underground community. If the Vatican is willing to be co-opted into this project, then all the better.

So, is the pope selling out the underground church? This is a question that comes up all the time, even asked of the pope himself. The underground faithful will be hurt. They have suffered greatly at the hands of the Chinese government in the past. They will now suffer at the hands of the Vatican. These are some of the sentiments I heard during my recent summer trip to China. Cardinal Zen, with whom I had the opportunity to talk, has been vociferous in his attacks on the deal. Some Catholics are afraid they will be abandoned to the wolves.

For the pope's part, it seems that he is counting on the continuing fidelity of the underground church. They have faced the wolves in the past, and they certainly can survive a painful agreement.

Another risk is the coherence of the Vatican's policy. In short, if the Vatican did not recognize these seven bishops in the past, why are they suddenly acceptable now? Was there something in their past conduct that the Vatican was aware of? The Boston Pilot reports rumors that two of them were long known to have families. Then there is the case of Bishop Joseph Ma Yinglin of Kunming. He is the president of the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference (an entity not recognized by the Vatican) and spends much

time in Beijing or on the road and not with his flock. All of this raises the question: After centuries of trying to get out from under the thumb of state power, why would the Vatican return to this state of affairs? Are these the "authentic shepherds" Pope Francis calls for?

In his letter to the Chinese faithful the pope is at pains to mention several times that he does not want "bureaucrats" or "functionaries" for the church in China. Yet there is a danger that this is precisely why many of these men were chosen by the government. They have caught the eye of the government, but have they won the hearts and minds of the people? While the Vatican has been reading their files, it is the Chinese government that has the much larger files on these men. It knows who will do its bidding and who is easily blackmailed. One is forced to ask: If these bishops did the government's bidding in the past, why would they not continue to do so in the future?

What Remains to Be Answered

Finally, the new agreement is not without its unresolved questions. A major one is finding a proper understanding of the church. In short, is the church the church of the diplomats and functionaries, or is it the church of the martyrs and prophets? Does it stand up to the government or does it acquiesce to it. In sum, is it the church of the comfortable or of the catacombs?

Pope Francis recently canonized Archbishop Oscar Romero, a bishop known for prophetically standing up for his flock against a murderous regime. St. Romero once said: "A church that suffers no persecution but enjoys the privileges and support of the things of the earth—beware!—is not the true church of Jesus Christ."

An earlier generation of Chinese was told by church leaders to resist the Communist government and its intrusive religious policies designed to break ties with the pope. Many went to prison and others to their deaths. Now another generation of Chinese Catholics is told that the clandestine, unregistered church is not a normal way of proceeding. They are told to engage in encounter and not in confrontation. Where is the coherence here? By calling for engagement in China but then canonizing Óscar Romero, is the Vatican sending mixed signals? Or is it simply acknowledging a perennial issue in the church? And this is all happening in a time of increasing government restriction over religion in China. Are the prophets being sold out by the diplomats?



A man decorates a Catholic church for Easter in China's Youtong village. Catholics in Macau, Taiwan and Hong Kong are divided over the provisional agreement between China and the Vatican.

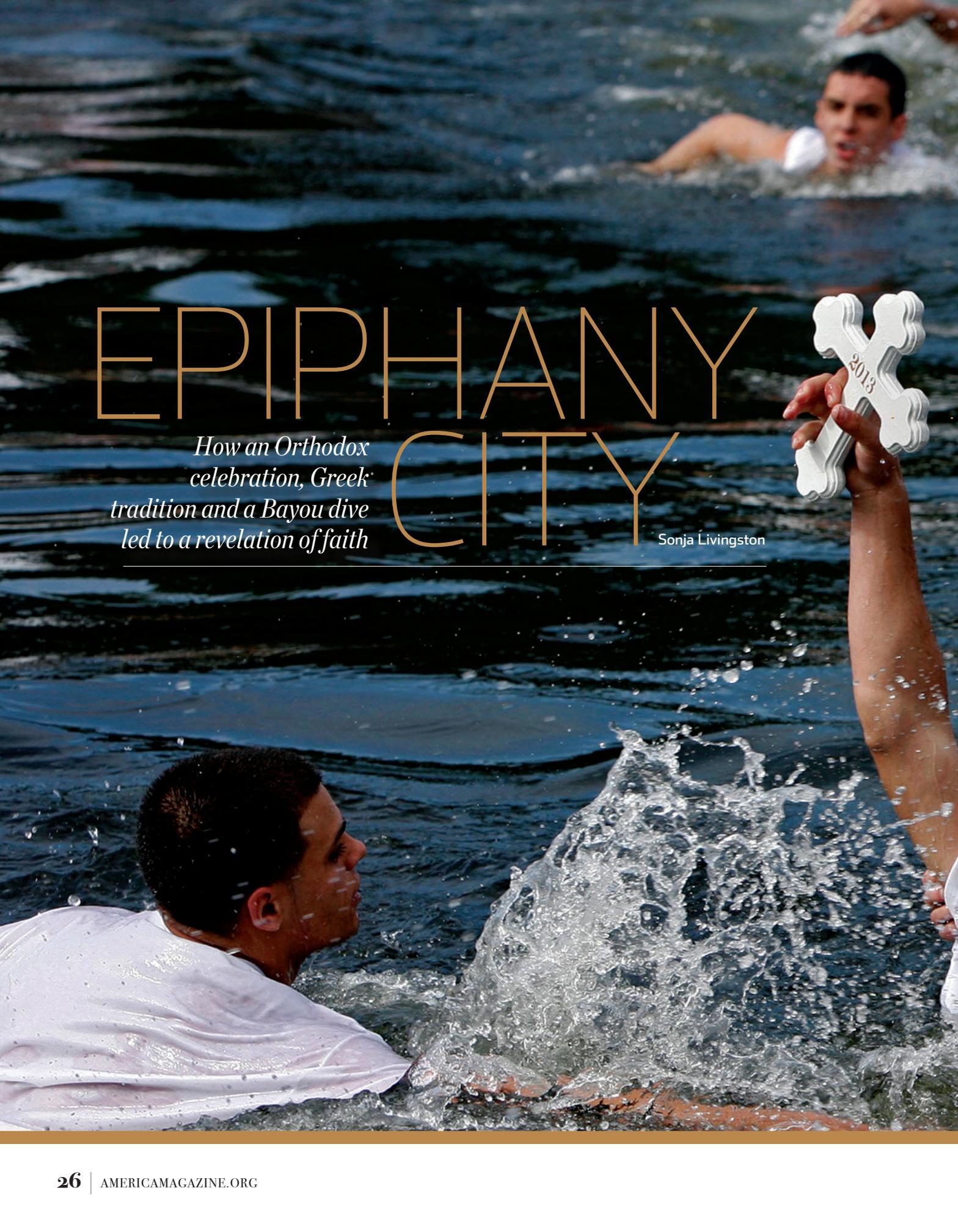
It is well known that for centuries European governments named bishops in territories under their control or influence. This was acknowledged by Pope Francis in an in-flight interview after the accord was announced. But the Second Vatican Council insisted that the church now had the “exclusive power to appoint and install bishops.” It further decreed that “for the future no rights or privileges be conceded to civil authorities in regard to the election, nomination or presentation to bishoprics.” This understanding was written into Canon 377 §5 of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*.

Is the Vatican turning its back on this policy for the sake of a greater good? Perhaps the Vatican has determined that there are strong pragmatic reasons for this decision and that it will help the faithful. If that is true, it comes at the high cost of going against the clear intent of Vatican II for the independence of the church from temporal powers.

Announcing the agreement, Greg Burke, the director of the Holy See Press Office, stated that “the objective of the accord is not political but pastoral, allowing the faithful to have bishops that are in communion with Rome but at the same time recognized by the Chinese authorities.”

If that is the case, then the decision to sign the “provisional agreement” might very well be a pastoral one. But it is a political one as well.

Paul P. Mariani, S.J., is the author of *Church Militant: Bishop Kung and Catholic Resistance in Communist Shanghai* (Harvard University Press) and holder of the Edmund Campion, S.J., Endowed Chair in the Department of History at Santa Clara University.



EPIPHANY CITY

*How an Orthodox
celebration, Greek
tradition and a Bayou dive
led to a revelation of faith*

Sonja Livingston



The girl strokes the dove with one of her thumbs. The bird may have tussled against her hands initially but has become acclimated to its perch and surveys the crowd with a beady pink eye. Each year a different girl is chosen to carry the dove in the procession from St. Nicholas Cathedral to Spring Bayou in Tarpon Springs, Fla. The teenager wears a white lace-trimmed robe over her dress and a simple Greek cross around her neck. Ribbons tied to a ring on one of her fingers cascade from her cupped hands, making a waterfall tail for the bird. Inside the cathedral, everyone is dressed to the nines—everyone except for the rows of high school boys in the front of the church wearing “Epiphany 2018” T-shirts and swim trunks.

A few blocks away, at the bayou, Craig Park is already packed. Lawn chairs have been unfolded onto the sloped lawns and paved walkway circling the water. Blankets and coolers are spread under live oaks, whose branches drip

Spanish moss. A manatee appears in the water every few minutes, its tremendous backside surfacing as it turns. Fourteen thousand people have come to Tarpon Springs this year—fewer than expected because of the severe blizzard that canceled flights up and down the East Coast. The day began hours ago for Greek Orthodox Christians, with 8 a.m. prayers and Divine Liturgy, followed by the Great Blessing of the Waters at noon. Those in Craig Park missed all this. Epiphany may be a religious feast, but most have come to this small Florida city, said to be home to America’s largest Epiphany celebration, to see the boys dive into the bayou. As is customary in the Greek Orthodox tradition, the bishop will bless the water with a holy cross, which he throws into the water. The swimmers will compete to retrieve the cross, and for the blessings that the winner is thought to receive for finding it. But before that happens, the procession must take place.

Vassilios Harding, 16, retrieves the cross during the annual Epiphany celebration in 2013 in Tarpon Springs, Fla.

AP Photo/The Tampa Bay Times, Jim Damaske

As I wait for the procession to begin outside the church, I listen as chanting unfurls from a loudspeaker near the cathedral. The Greek Orthodox liturgy sounds exotic and faraway—like the soaring human voice in the Islamic call to prayer braided with strands of the Roman Mass and incense smoke. I sip coffee and stand in a patch of sun, waiting for the procession to begin.

“Happy Epiphany!” calls out the man on a street corner who holds a sign proclaiming the need to repent and be saved. The radio beside him blares evangelical hymns. His music is outmatched by the cathedral loudspeaker but, coupled with the sign, seems an act of minor aggression. “Happy Epiphany,” I say back.

The street preacher is one of the few shouting greetings in English. Greek is the language of choice in Tarpon Springs today. *Chrónia Pollá!* (*Happy Returns!*) says a father with two young children as he passes. *Chrónia Pollá!* A clutch of women returns the holiday greeting. In their mid-60s or so, they link arms and laugh as they push down Pinellas Avenue. Two men sipping coffee at an outside table could have been lifted from a street scene in Athens. At the hotel coffee stand this morning, greetings of “*Kaliméra*” (“Good Day!”) outranked “Good Morning” two to one.

Tarpon Springs is home to a larger percentage of Greeks than any other city in the United States, and locals stand out because they wear hats and winter coats. Those from more northerly locations wear spring jackets. A few tourists brave sandals and shorts. Welcome to Florida in early January, where the region you have flown in from dictates how cold or warm you will feel. This January is chillier than most, with deep freezes as far south as Tallahassee. There are reports of iguanas so cold they have fallen from trees. Leave them be, newspaper articles advise; they can be unpredictable when they thaw.

Sometime after noon, the procession begins. Children parade by in Greek *fustanellas* (a traditional skirt) and shoes adorned with pom-poms, followed by dancers in folk dresses and veils. The dove-bearer walks beside last year’s winning diver. The Epiphany divers march by, all new muscle and bare feet. An icon of the Baptism of Jesus is surrounded by flowers and displayed in a carved box hoisted onto seminarians’ shoulders. Girls in white dresses are tethered to the box by ribbons and circle it like a maypole. Altar boys carry censers and candles, lanterns and ornate liturgical fans. Next come the clerics: priests, deacons and subdeacons—all in gold cloaks—followed by the Metropolitan of Atlanta. Layered in richly embroi-

dered vestments, the bishop’s brocade crown is studded with gemstones and a series of small icons. With his full white beard and gold crozier, he looks like a solemn, gilded Santa Claus.

Once they reach Craig Park, the bishop stands on a raised platform overlooking the water as the boys—57 of them this year—swim out to a semicircle of boats. The rounded end of Spring Bayou is the size of a small lake. The boys climb onto the gunwales as the bishop blesses the bayou with a clump of fresh basil dipped in water consecrated earlier in the church, and a priest chants the story of Christ’s baptism. Those who had been inside the church for five hours must have to summon their patience, but the sound of prayer is new to the people in the park, who look up from their lawn chairs and do not seem to mind how long it goes on. Eventually, the sign is given. The girl opens her hands and the dove flies away.

The bishop tosses a scalloped white cross into the bayou. The boys plunge in. Everyone cheers as the great ruckus and foam gives way to the sight of heads bobbing in the water. The boys go under, again and again, in search of the cross, since tradition says whoever finds it will receive blessings for an entire year. After a few minutes, a boy shouts out, victorious, and looks like a young Marlon Brando as he is first blessed by the Metropolitan Bishop, then lifted onto shoulders and taken up by the crowd.

The sight of young men leaping into the bayou is strangely moving. I did not expect my breath to catch as I stood under a live oak watching. Even more impressive was the way they had perched before they jumped, four or five to a boat. They shivered in wet trunks for the duration of the prayers. They must have been at least as tired as the rest of us, but every last boy bent forward the whole time, poised and waiting, everything in him wound up and ready to leap. Spring Bayou is not deep, but as they waited for the bishop to toss the cross, all 57 boys looked ready to jump off the edge of the earth.

Zack Wittman/The Tampa Bay Times via AP



Anderson Combs, 17, of Hudson, Fla., is blessed by Archbishop Demetrios of America with the blessed cross retrieved from the bottom of the bayou during the Tarpon Springs' Epiphany celebration in 2016.

Feast of the Epiphany

Also called Theophany, Epiphany is one of the great feasts of the Orthodox Church and celebrates the visible manifestation of God. The central image is of John the Baptist pouring water over Jesus on the banks of the Jordan while the Holy Spirit descends and God calls out his pleasure from above. By contrast, the Roman Catholic observance of Epiphany celebrates the arrival of the Magi to the infant Jesus, and their recognition and adoration of his divinity has become our iconic image. In the early days of the church, the Roman observance of Epiphany also commemorated the Baptism of Jesus, but Rome eventually assigned the Gospel events to separate feast days. Perhaps that is why, in much of the United States, Epiphany can seem like a liturgical footnote.

Of course, there are homilies inspired by the journey of the wise men, their faith in heading toward a mysterious light and the precious gifts they bore. Occasionally local customs mark the day. My parish priest up in Rochester,

N.Y., for instance, invites three parishioners to don robes and crowns and stand with him during Mass—the trio of kingly shadows representing Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar following Father Werth's every move. Later, he uses chalk to bless the church with an inscription of the Magi's initials (20+C+M+B+18). The crosses are thought to symbolize Christ, and the final number denotes the year, hovering like an ecclesiastical math problem over the lintel.

Certain cultural groups also embrace the day. When I was a child, my Puerto Rican friends left out grass for the Magi's camels on El Día de los Reyes (Three Kings Day) and were rewarded with small gifts. Along parts of the Gulf Coast, people eat King Cake on Epiphany to mark the start of Mardi Gras season; and around the country, Epiphany is often used as a marker to take down holiday lights, garlands and trees. But, apart from the Magi in their nativity sets or a homily at church, most American Catholics do not appear to consider the kings much at all, and Epiphany is a quiet day. Perhaps that is why I love it.

It has taken a trip to Florida, a Greek Orthodox celebration and witnessing a bunch of boys plunging into a bayou to make me fully grasp that when it comes to faith, I have barely gotten my feet wet. 🍷🍷

I like the word itself, and the way that, in a literary sense, it has come to stand for culminations of sound and image—bursts of revelation conveyed by what seems, at first glance, a sort of beautiful gibberish. I also enjoy the way the word refers, in a larger sense, to those unexpected flashes of meaning and light most of us have experienced, and the way that, whether it celebrates Jesus' baptism or a group of seers following a faraway star, Epiphany celebrates a manifestation of the divine and is a sort of hushed Christmas. The pomp and bang of the winter holidays with all the glitter and expectation is gone. The air is still. Northern fields are covered with snow. Just as the world gathers itself back into the grind, resuming its steady forward chug, here comes a day to remind us of the openheartedness, leaps of faith and little awakenings awaiting us all.

Maybe that is why I decided to travel to Tarpon Springs, the small Florida city that calls itself Epiphany City. I had returned to church a few years before, but even as I had relearned my prayers, it was a shock to my system and I still struggled to understand what propelled me there. Why head back to the same church most everyone I knew had abandoned, especially when there seemed valid reasons for leaving? Why swim against the stream? Such lingering questions must be why, when I heard about the massive Epiphany celebration in Tarpon Springs, I made plans to head south. What might happen, I wondered, in such a place?

Moment of Manifestation

In Tarpon Springs, the crowd splits up after the Epiphany dive. The boys dry off in special-edition Epiphany towels, and after a series of blessings and photographs, return with their families to St. Nicholas's courtyard for food and dancing. The more secular crowd bypasses church and

heads out for meals of *dolmades* and crab-stuffed grouper at one of the *tavernas*, followed by *baklava* and Greek coffee. Later they will stroll the sponge docks, traipsing past palm trees strung with lights, walking into souvenir shops laden with baskets of sand dollars and dried alligator heads, conch and lightning whelk shells and all manner of sea sponges.

Once the city's bread and butter, sponge diving is what originally brought Greeks to the city back in 1905. They dived to find natural sponges they could cut and sell. Within a few years, 2,000 Greek divers had arrived, fishing so successfully along the Anclote River and the Florida Gulf that long before it was known as Epiphany City, Tarpon Springs was called the Sponge Capital of the World.

The industry came to a halt when sponge beds died out and the synthetic sponge was developed, but the Greek influence continues to shape the town. A plywood warrior towers over the Hellas Bakery, complete with Corinthian helmet, *hoplon* and spear. A mural on the corner of Hope Street and Dodecanese features a diver in a portaled metal helmet—like something out of Jules Verne, an underwater spaceman with a mermaid floating over his right shoulder. A boat laden with sponges looks like those I have seen in the Aegean—which makes sense, since most local Greek families immigrated from islands whose economies depended for centuries on sponge-fishing.

Said to be the best in the world, Greek divers started their efforts before the advent of modern diving equipment. The divers leapt into the ocean with only rope and a 30-pound marble slab. Known as a *skandalopetra*, the stone propelled the diver into the depths, where he cut away sponges, deposited them into a net, then yanked the rope to be pulled back to the surface by its tender—all while holding his breath.

The boys who jumped into the bayou are descended from this tradition. They have heard stories told and re-told of great-grandfathers and uncles who held smooth flat stones to their chests, said a silent prayer, then tumbled into the sea.

I am tempted by the prospect of bakeries but decide against the sponge docks and trail the crowd heading back to the cathedral. I walk up the steps, make a donation and take a bundle of white tapers. The church is all light and arches and Byzantine murals. Icons strung with votive offerings and vigil lanterns decorate one side of the sanctuary. Chandeliers of Czech crystal hang from the ceiling and the altar is fashioned of Greek marble, but even with its stained glass and gilded trimmings, the domed cathe-

dral seems elegant and spare. I follow the line of people shuffling past the icon of St. Nicholas, who is said to weep, into and through the church, and eventually end up back where I started in the narthex near the candle stand. An older Greek woman watches as people light their tapers, bow their heads and move on. Most hand the tiny woman their candles to place in the sand-filled stand. Hundreds of candles burn, with a nonstop line of people waiting to add more. The woman is needed, I see, to manage the limited plot of space.

I light the tapers and hand a few to her but keep two to place on my own. I can feel the line shifting behind me and do not like to hold it up, but when will I ever stand in this place again? I look into the lit candles and think of the boys in swimming trunks and the legions of divers who came before them. I think of my unexpected return to church, which I had accepted and come to see as a gift, even as I struggled to understand. I place a candle in the stand and imagine a cool, flat stone fitting itself to my chest. A *skandalopetra*, like the ones divers used to propel themselves to the depths. I can almost feel myself tethered to a rope—one I had not noticed before but perhaps have been weaving over the past few years. It is suddenly clear to me—after all the worrying and weighing and wondering—how cautiously I have proceeded on this journey back to church.

I have once again fallen in love with the Mass, yes, and re-explored tradition with newly appreciative eyes, but I have been tentative all the while. Though I had delighted in the subtlety of the Catholic observance of Epiphany and admired the bravery of the wise men for as long as I can remember, I had not truly taken their example to heart. It has taken a trip to Florida, a Greek Orthodox celebration and witnessing a bunch of boys plunging into a bayou to make me fully grasp that when it comes to faith, I have barely gotten my feet wet.

True faith—like jumping into a bayou or hopping on a camel and following a faraway star—cannot be done half-way. It is not only what you believe but what you do with those beliefs, and it is called faith precisely because it doesn't entirely make sense. It requires letting go. You must be daring and a little reckless and occasionally abandon the overused helmet of your head. And just as there is no perfect time to tumble into the ocean or leave the comfort of home to set out toward a mysterious source of light, there is also no perfect church. There is no perfect anything, of course, which is why devotion cannot depend on circumstance. I understand this, at least in theory—but how often do I scru-



The icon of the Theophany from St. Nicholas Cathedral in Tarpon Springs is shown special reverence during the city's Epiphany celebrations.

tinize others, find myself disappointed, and use this as an excuse to succumb to the waxy spell of indifference and my finely honed capacity for walking away? Standing here in Tarpon Springs I finally understand that while I had physically returned to church, my fear and longing for rational explanation had kept me from fully immersing myself into the spiritual life.

The line behind me once again tenses and shifts. The candle lady narrows her eyes, as if trying to fathom how a person can be so slow in the lighting and placement of tapers. But on this holy feast of Epiphany in the city of Epiphany, this is my moment of epiphany. I am standing among the flickering candles of St. Nicholas, yes, but as I place my last taper into the sand and get ready to move on, I feel as if I am perched on the edge of a boat. I can nearly make out the scent of basil and the flutter of wings as I imagine the bishop tossing a cross into Spring Bayou. I see the water open wide before me, and, after all this time, I feel everything in me pushing forward, finally ready to dive in.

Sonja Livingston is an award-winning essayist and author of several books. Her latest, *The Virgin of Prince Street*, chronicles various expeditions undertaken on her way back to Catholicism and is due out next fall.
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Mobilizing Love

People thinking about suicide
need more than our prayers

By Anne Marie Drew

I was pretty sure the metal rafters in the basement would hold me, especially if I used the terrycloth belt from my bathrobe. I threw a load of diapers in the washer, washed my hands in the utility tub and dried them on my skirt. I looked up at the rafters and formed my plan. I was 27 years old.

My husband would gladly be rid of me, I thought. Many women adored my three small children and would be happy to step into my shoes as wife and mother. I had become a waste of space. God would understand.

All those years ago, I was more weary than wise. The memory of that desolation lives with me still. While I did not follow through on my rafter plan nor with the other suicidal ideations that came in the years to follow, I know how quickly the mind turns in on itself, making annihilation beckon with appealing immediacy. I know how one becomes convinced that God won't mind.

It was not until my sister dragged me to a psychiatrist that I became educated about depression and suicidal ideation. Until then, I had thought of suicidal thoughts as a bad headache. Something to tough out. A routine part of being human. Something to get over with determination and fortitude and prayer. Continual prayer.

I was wrong. Most people, I learned from that psychiatrist, go through their entire existence without once think-

ing of taking their own life. Even with suicide rates on the rise, most people never study the sturdiness of rafters.

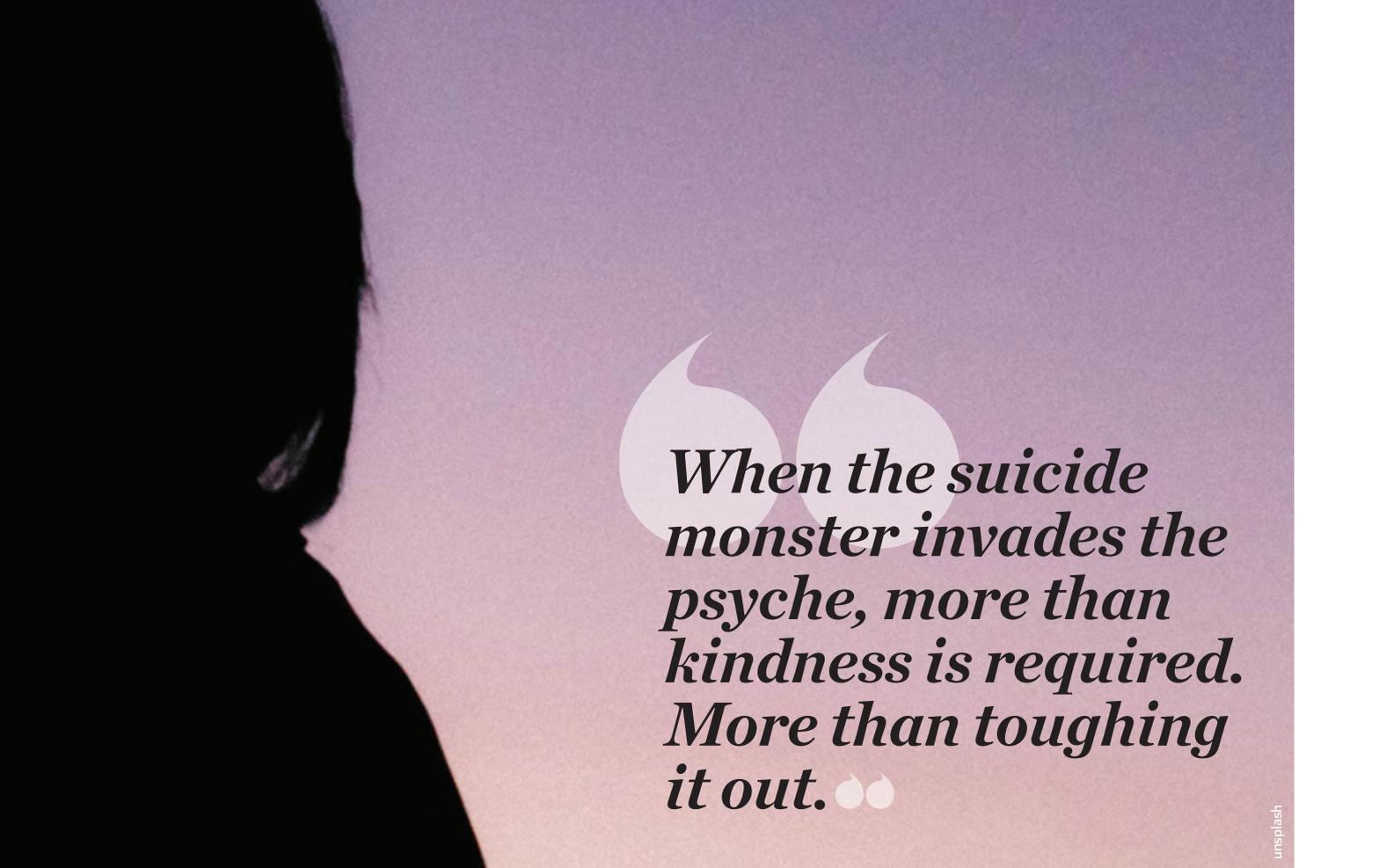
If you are part of the majority who has never considered driving your car into a Jersey wall or swallowing a bottle of pills, perhaps you cannot imagine the derangement that convinces people they are worthless. Perhaps you are fortunate enough not to wrestle with the psychic demon of suicide, a demon every bit as real as the ones Jesus drove into a herd of swine.

I well remember people who lost the wrestling match.

I knew the large family of a mom who ended her own life. Faced with the onset of a crippling disease, she became convinced her family needed someone who was not in a wheelchair. She swallowed an entire bottle of pills—leaving behind a family riven and torn and tortured. I read her suicide note. It was clear and lucid and determined.

At my Catholic high school one of our classmates shot herself, we were told, with her father's rifle. When word came of her death, the student body gathered in the auditorium where the principal told us if we had been kinder to the girl, she would still be alive. We prayed for our dead classmate, and our tears were mixed with the guilt that we might have saved her.

Maybe.



When the suicide monster invades the psyche, more than kindness is required. More than toughing it out. 🔥

unplash

But when the suicide monster invades the psyche, more than kindness is required. More than toughing it out. More than prayer. The writer and psychologist Andrew Solomon suggests at such times we need “to mobilize love.” He is right. A counselor once had me write down on an index card the names and phone numbers of people to call when I got caught in a suicidal whirlwind. The idea seemed so pedestrian and pointless, but those names on a card in my purse became a source of strength and comfort. I have learned we need to employ whatever it takes: counseling, medication, exercise, meditation, nutrition, prayer. What we cannot do, must not do, is assume thoughts of suicide will go away on their own.

When one of my students at the U.S. Naval Academy commits suicide, as happened this past winter, I call on Galway Kinnell’s poem, “Wait.”

*Wait, for now.
Distrust everything, if you have to.
But trust the hours. Haven’t they
carried you everywhere, up to now?*

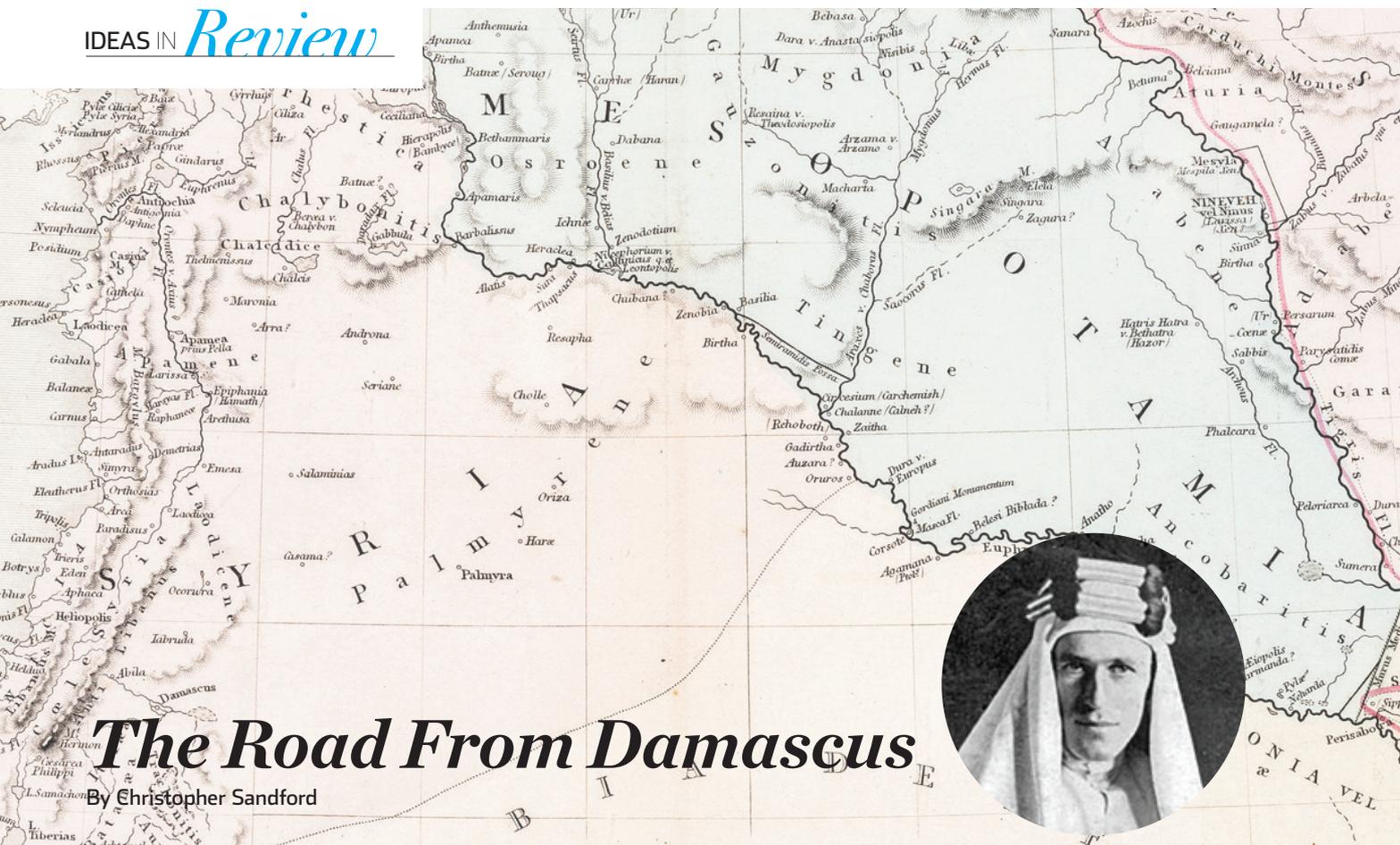
The lines are a gentle encouragement to hold on for one more hour, then another, trusting the time to bring you back around again. When a young, vibrant midshipman

chooses to leave life too early, we always pause in my classes. We pause in honor and in grief. Since the institution is a military one, I recount a line former Secretary of State Colin Powell purportedly used with his troops in Vietnam: “Everything almost always looks better in the morning.”

I never forget suicide’s piercing menace. I understand how readily a desolate, distraught person, alone and weary and unendingly sad, can choose to abandon life. There is no easy answer to suicide itself, but there are so many ways to address the sorrow, the depression that precedes any thought of taking one’s own life. The adage is a cliché but nonetheless true: Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

Sometimes in the middle of the night, when I am awake, I pray for anyone who at that very moment is considering suicide. I pray that he or she pauses. Just long enough. I pray for an extra band of angels to surround the person until help arrives and the molecules shift. I pray for anyone who, at that very moment, might be staring at a basement ceiling, gauging the sturdiness of rafters.

Anne Marie Drew is an English professor at the U.S. Naval Academy, where she has served as department chair.



The Road From Damascus

By Christopher Sandford

“Arab horsemen from distant Hejaz today galloped in triumph through the streets of Damascus,” The London Guardian reported on Oct. 1, 1918. “As the sun was setting over the mosques and spires, Major T. E. Lawrence, the young British officer whose tactical guidance has ensured the success of the Arab revolt, drove through the lines in an armoured car. One Arab rider waved his head-dress and shouted, ‘Damascus salutes you.’”

It is a stirring account, although The Guardian also issued a salutary warning about the future administrative control of the region liberated as part of the Arab uprising against the Turks during the closing days of World War I.

“There is a serious danger that law and order may break down,” the paper noted. “Notables who until the last minute worked with the Turks now

proclaim their loyalty to the Allies. Already there are reports that some have been shot. General Allenby’s first task will be to install a military government to keep order, and restore the city’s public services.

“Conforming to arrangements agreed with Britain, the French will take control of Syria. Allenby’s army is preparing to move east, to link up with French forces whose task is now to take the port of Beirut in Lebanon.”

Connoisseurs of 20th-century history will surely recognize the template for one of those largely improvised and increasingly fractious multistate partitions of a conquered land that found its full expression in Berlin from 1945 to 1961. Indeed, Lawrence’s triumphant arrival in Damascus that Tuesday morning in 1918 might be said to have been the spark

that ultimately ignited the powder keg of factional rivalries and distrust into the ruinous civil war that continues to torment the region a century later.

The territorial fission of Syria in the years immediately following the Great War would have presented a stern administrative challenge at the best of times, let alone in a period that also saw the wholesale collapse of Europe’s four continental empires. Here was chaotic tribalism, violent and pitiless.

But it would take more than mere postcolonial dislocation to trigger the seemingly permanent cycle of sectarian insurrection and state-sponsored genocide that since 2011 has caused an estimated 500,000 civilian deaths and prompted a further six million citizens to flee their ruined country. Something more material was needed. As so often in that schizophrenic re-



► T. E. Lawrence’s triumphant arrival in Damascus in 1918 might have been the spark that ultimately ignited a powder keg of factional rivalries.

gion, at once so richly endowed and so riven by factional rivalries, the fate of the geographic entity now known as Syria was determined by oil.

New Frontiers, New Boundaries

It took the French occupying forces from 1918 until 1923 to gain full control over Syria and to quell the successive attempts by Bedouin militias to remove them. Meanwhile, an Anglo-French pact had been concluded in April 1920 that delineated new desert frontiers and communal boundaries. The treaty included a secret protocol that led Britain to withdraw its army from Syria while retaining the rights to 75 percent of the crude oil recently discovered in the supposedly barren wasteland around the present-day Syrian-Iraqi border. The French agreed to this arrangement not out of magnanimity but in order to remove the troublesome King Faisal without having to worry about British intervention. Deposed in July 1920, Faisal went on to live in comfortable exile in London before being installed as king of Iraq, where he ruled until his sudden death (possibly a victim of poison) at the age of 48 in 1933.

Renewed nationalist agitation against the French led to a revolt that broke out in the Druze mountains in 1925 and soon spread across the whole of Syria. The ferment was finally suppressed by way of ferocious aerial bombardment of civilian areas, including Damascus. In 1930, the

French agreed notionally to Syrian independence, although they reserved the right to intervene in “matters of primary commercial interest.”

The question of oil ran like a fault line through all successive arrangements in the region until 1940, at which point the French state temporarily ceased to exist. Syria notionally became a sovereign nation on April 17, 1946, but without a recognized head of state or even a coherent form of government strong enough to unite the country. The worse the divisions became, the less able were the men at the center of the system to fix them. Between 1946 and 1956 there were 20 different cabinets—two a year—and four separate constitutions.

The Suez Crisis of October 1956 provided another plot twist in the unfolding 20th-century narrative of a fractured Syrian nation. Although the Soviet Union was unable to take full advantage of the bitter Anglo-American feud that followed the botched attempt to restore the recently nationalized Suez Canal to Western control (its tanks being too busy at the time with the suppression of a popular uprising in Hungary), the crisis drove Syria into the Soviet camp. In a foreshadowing of events six years later in Cuba, Nikita Khrushchev said that he would launch missiles at the pro-NATO Turkey if Turkey attacked Syria, while the United States, in turn, announced that it would retaliate. The crisis eventually died down as quickly as it had flared up, and in 1958 the sovereignty of Syria was itself submerged in the ocean of Egyptian

president Gamal Nasser’s so-called United Arab Republic.

‘A Vivid Mosaic’

Forty years earlier, T. E. Lawrence had reflected on his liberation of Damascus in his book *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*: “The [people] were discontented always with what government they had; such being their intellectual pride; but few of them honestly thought out a working alternative, and fewer still agreed upon one.”

These were prescient words. Lawrence would add: “A central government in Syria, though buttressed on Arabic prejudices, would be as much ‘imposed’ as the late Turkish government, or a foreign protectorate, or the historic Caliphate.... Syria remained a vividly coloured racial and religious mosaic.” He was not optimistic about the prospect of consolidating the region’s competing sectarian groups into a coherent nation-state: “Time seemed to have proclaimed the impossibility of autonomous union for such a land.... It was by habit a country of tireless agitation and incessant revolt.”

This state of affairs continued with the bitter estrangement between the principals of the United Arab Republic and the imposition of a government under the former Syrian army officer Abd al-Karim al-Nahawi, which itself fell victim to a coup. In time, al-Karim returned from exile and attempted to seize power in an unsuccessful military putsch. After a lengthy period spent overseas, the same figure emerged in the 1960s to launch a third coup attempt before relocating abroad once more.

As so often in that schizophrenic region, the fate of the geographic entity now known as Syria was determined by oil. 💧💧

The next step along the downhill continuum Lawrence identified in 1918 came with Syria's inglorious defeat in the 1967 Six Day War, when Israel destroyed much of its northern neighbor's air force and captured the Golan Heights. An attempt to reverse this setback in 1973 was met by an Israel counterattack. The ensuing Syrian political discord ended in a military takeover—the so-called Corrective Movement of the former defense minister Hafez al-Assad in November 1970. (His son, Bashar al-Assad, of course, now reigns over Syria's ongoing bloody civil war.)

Assad père's coup perhaps marks the moment when the wholesale Syrian administrative breakdown so feared by Lawrence subsided to one of merely seething tribal and religious dissatisfaction with the central regime, coupled with regular overseas adventuring. In 1976, the Damascus government embarked on what proved to be a 29-year occupation of Lebanon. In general terms, this was not an era distinguished by what Assad termed "a league of Arab brotherhood" so much as by a cycle of political killings, purge trials and indiscriminate armed attacks on noncompliant citizens that might have raised eyebrows in the Kremlin of the mid-1930s. In keeping with Lawrence's dictum, the final withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon in April 2005 brought with it a new wave of econom-

ic, moral and ideological unrest.

If the test of the latest Syrian state constitution of 2012 is its treatment of minorities, it has failed. In May of that year, Bashar al-Assad's forces executed 108 civilians, including 49 children, in the dissident enclave of Taldou. In the measured words of the United Nations report into the affair (8/15/12): "On the basis of available evidence, the commission has a reasonable basis to believe that the perpetrators of the deliberate killing of civilians...were aligned to the Government.... This conclusion is bolstered by the lack of credible information supporting other possibilities."

We need not linger over the catalog of human rights abuses in Syria that continue to this day, except to note the conclusions of the independent inquiry of October 2014 that found evidence of the "systematic killings" of about 11,000 political detainees, many of whose corpses were "emaciated, blood-stained, and bore signs of torture—some had no eyes, others showed signs of strangulation or electrocution."

While Syrian rebels are targeted by government troops who bomb their towns and murder their children, so, too, are the Christians of the area. In the midst of the so-called Arab Spring, some 40,000 Roman Catholics fled the battleground province of Homs following an ultimatum that they either choose sides in the civil war or leave. In a reign of terror that includes land theft, kidnappings, rape and torture,

the ethnic cleansing of Syria's Christians remains curiously ignored by the West's political and media classes.

An Ally Thrown to the Wolves

The liberation of enemy-occupied towns in wartime is rarely a pretty sight. But the events of a century ago in Damascus had special qualities of administrative disarray and naked brutality that arguably go much of the way to explain the bloody turbulence the area is experiencing today. The fragile peace that followed the occupation of Oct. 1, 1918, lasted just 48 hours, when the British convened an all-faction conference at the city's Hotel Victoria in order to "settle institutional control founded on the recognition of the belligerent status of the inestimable Arab forces as allies against Germany, and the right to governmental self-determination."

King Faisal later insisted that Lawrence had assured him at this meeting that Arabs would administer the whole of Syria, including the all-important trade routes to the Mediterranean through Lebanon. He claimed to know nothing of any plans for a postwar Anglo-French occupying force and that even the "meanest-spirited colonial power" would have known that their continued presence would only inflame simmering religious and ethnic tensions.

When Faisal later protested to the British about these arrangements, the

British urged him to talk to the French. Faisal left the Paris peace conference in 1919 a dejected figure. He later remarked that he had been “abandoned [by the] British and delivered bound feet and hands to the French.”

Back home in England, Lawrence watched impotently as his government threw their “inestimable” ally to the wolves. He obsessively read and re-read a poem about the expulsion from the Garden of Eden and often sat, his mother recalled, “the entire morning between breakfast and lunch in the same position, without moving, and with the same expression on his face.”

Perhaps Lawrence had glimpsed the future even at the moment he triumphantly entered Damascus in 1918, because he later remembered the joyful scenes on the streets that night when the muezzin had called the faithful to prayer, adding an extra line that Allah had been good to the people and delivered them from captivity that day. “Only for me,” Lawrence wrote, “of all the hearers, was the event sorrowful and the phrase meaningless.”

Christopher Sandford is the author of many books, including most recently Zeebrugge: The Greatest Raid of All (*Casemate*).

When It Rains

By Scott Hubbart

Because I am deaf,
my love
wakes me when it rains

Scott Hubbart was born in Hawaii and grew up in Rhode Island and Northern California. He is a decorated combat veteran.

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Poems are being accepted for the 2019 Foley Poetry Award.

Each entrant is asked to submit only one unpublished poem on any topic. The poem should be 40 lines or fewer and not under consideration elsewhere.

Include contact information on the same page as the poem.

Poems must be postmarked or sent in by Submittable between Jan. 1 and March 31, 2019. The winning poem will be published in the June 10, 2019, issue of *America*.

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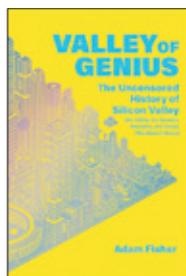
For more information contact
Br. Joe Hoover, S.J.
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Valley guys

By John W. Miller

AP Photo/Sal Veder



Valley of Genius
The Uncensored History of Silicon Valley
(As Told by the Hackers, Founders, and Freaks Who Made It Boom)
By Adam Fisher
Twelve Books
512p \$30

In the 1960s, Silicon Valley was Stanford University surrounded by rolling orchards and factories making military technology, with some exceptions: Around Del Monte's cannery, the air smelled like fruit cocktail. Then, in 1971, a computer scientist named Nolan Bushnell, inspired by the "video games" scientists were toying around with in labs, decided to compose one for the masses. He called it Computer Space.

"We had to take the TV apart," he says in Adam Fisher's oral history, *Valley of Genius*. "I built a little circuit that would bring up the stars, I built a little circuit that would put the score up." When it worked, "the first time we had a little rocket ship going,

flying on the screen, it was just one of those wow-we-thought-we-could-do-this-and-now-we-did-it moments," he says.

Those remarkable mechanical epiphanies set the pace of Mr. Fisher's fascinating, fun and witty 494-page account of the greatest revolution since the industrial, compiled from over 200 interviews. The author, a veteran tech journalist, said in an interview with **America** that he set out to tell the "cultural and technical story" of the tech revolution as it happened on the peninsula south of San Francisco. "The mainstream media likes to tell the money story."

His tale focuses instead on the engineering and cultural roots of the Silicon Valley story, and it is a dive into this strange fact about modern life: We have, en masse, adopted the dreams, tools and reading habits of California tech hippies shaped by Buddhism, marijuana, LSD and anarchist and libertarian beliefs, colored by hedonism and incarnated in an annual desert

bacchanal called Burning Man. In fact, Mr. Fisher, who grew up in Silicon Valley playing video games in the 1980s, says he knows "more Buddhists than Catholics, and I'm talking about middle-aged white men."

The question of how Silicon Valley has shaped us is a subject for another book. Or, as Ezra Callahan, an early Facebook employee, puts it in this one: "How much was the direction of the internet influenced by the perspective of nineteen-, twenty-, twenty-one-year-old well-off white boys? That's a real question that sociologists will be studying forever."

Valley of Genius chronicles the genesis and sometimes fall of every Silicon Valley giant, including Apple, Pixar, eBay, Netscape, Facebook and Twitter; the invention of key technologies, like virtual reality, the smartphone, virtual maps and social networks; and the development of cultural institutions around the industry, like magazines, networks and festivals. Non-Silicon Valley com-

panies like IBM and Microsoft have small roles as villains. Along the way, a region boomed, transformed into an office park dripping with venture capital money and became a symbol of a culture that has consumed the world.

There are surprises. Spun out from Apple, a company called General Magic developed the first smartphone in the early 1990s but failed to commercialize it. “One of the great Silicon Valley failure modes is ‘right idea—way too early,’” says John Giannandrea, an engineer who now works at Apple.

In Fisher’s telling, none of this would have happened without the video game craze. In the early 1970s, Bushnell took the \$3.5 million he earned on Computer Space and started Atari, named after a term from the game Go, which he liked to play at the San Francisco Go Club. One of the company’s first inventions was Pong. The bare-bones version of Ping-Pong became a sensation, turning the game console into a household staple. “If you were a geeky teenaged guy in that period of time, you were blowing your lawn-mowing money on Atari,” says the writer David Kushner.

Atari “joined the computer and the video game at the hip,” says Fisher. He speculates that the primacy of video games in the industry’s beginnings might be a reason that the industry is still so male-dominated. Atari became the tech monster of its day, gobbling up top engineers, launching hit games and grossing billions. Bushnell led a clique of rebelliously minded entrepreneurs who mixed tinkering with machines with smoking pot and dropping acid. He “was the Merry Prankster of Silicon Valley, so he attracted all the other Merry Pranksters who

had nowhere else to go,” says Kushner.

It wasn’t all hippies. Xerox built a lab and developed arguably the world’s first personal computer. “It was almost a free ride, because so many things were just ready to be invented,” says Dan Ingalls, who worked at Xerox and later Google. “Ready or not, computers are coming to the people,” wrote Stewart Brand in *Rolling Stone* in 1972. “That’s good news, maybe the best since psychedelics.”

A college dropout and committed Buddhist spiritual seeker named Steve Jobs was Atari employee number 40. One of his first tasks was to teach everybody how to solder. From the beginning, Jobs was an oddball. “He had this weird diet,” says Al Alcorn, Atari’s first engineer. “He would pass out occasionally. And he said, ‘Don’t call 911 if I pass out. Just push me under the table.’ Oh, Okay.”

Atari crashed in 1984, after making an ill-timed bet on making a video game version of the movie “E.T.” It paid Steven Spielberg over \$20 million for the licensing rights and then rushed out a game to have it ready for Christmas. The game flopped. Atari had made almost five million cartridges, and sold only a couple of million. It buried many of the rest in a landfill.

By then, Jobs had already left Atari to start a new company. “It was apple harvest time,” says Don Kottke, an early colleague. “We were fasting on apples. It was our fruitarian experiment. And that’s why the name Apple was in the air.” The Apple I was a primitive device, made from Atari parts, but the Apple II, which had a spreadsheet app and a word processor, sold 10 million units.

“The Apple II was the first time

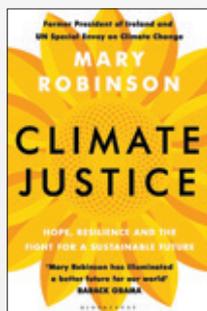
that computers went really mass market,” says the writer Clive Thompson. “That’s what happened to the car in the fifties and sixties; it was the computer in the late seventies and eighties—and the Apple II was the vanguard machine.”

Silicon Valley had made the machines. Now it needed to connect them. In the early 1990s, the internet was still mostly the province of San Francisco tech geeks. The internet became accessible to the rest of us when Netscape invented the first workable browser. Its lucrative initial public offering in 1995 launched the tech boom, attracting waves of new entrepreneurs and investors and people Fisher calls “sociopaths with M.B.A.s.”

What followed, including the rise of Google, Facebook and Twitter, and the coming of the pocket phone-TV-radio super machine that can look up your high school crush, order a pizza and shoot movies, is a better-known story.

The power and influence of Silicon Valley and its machines have raised questions about their dominion over us. They haven’t made us happier, after all. But in Fisher’s view, big tech is just a maker of modern tools, sparked by those video game dreams and now craved by billions. “Nobody blamed Marconi because Hitler used radio,” he says.

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Climate Justice
Hope, Resilience,
and the Fight for a
Sustainable Future
By Mary Robinson
Bloomsbury
176p \$26

Hope for our blue planet

In the United States, entrenched partisan anti-science rhetoric on climate change tends to obfuscate thoughtful work on how environmental change disproportionately burdens the poor. And the mind-boggling scale of climate change—a “planetary” problem, with massive distributed effects—means that tomes on this topic can be draining, rarely what one might choose to put on a bedside table.

In *Climate Justice*, Mary Robinson admirably succeeds in avoiding both of those perils. Born of years of leadership and listening, this slim volume communicates stories of “climate witnesses” in their own words—alongside moral insights and viable policy recommendations. A former president of Ireland with substantial experience in development policy, Robinson is uniquely situated to amplify the stories of people responding to the vagaries of climate change in ways that might support actions elsewhere or provide hope.

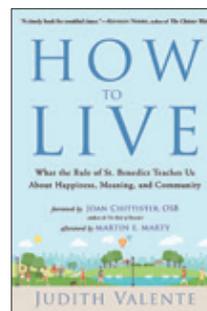
Each chapter tells the story of distinct issues facing climate witnesses in specific locations around the world, while also evoking key moral textures and possible ways

forward. There are stories about families working to maintain livelihoods after the collapse of mining communities in Alberta, Canada; women advocating for indigenous land rights from Africa to Europe; and Pacific Island political leaders and native Alaskans strategizing about community relocation.

The conclusion narrates Robinson’s initial dismay at the Trump administration’s withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement—and how that quickly became delight and hope when international leaders and U.S. governors and mayors redoubled their commitments to action, “with or without the government of the United States.” Here and throughout the volume, I could not help but ponder the alignment with another morally attuned advocate, Pope Francis. Like the pope in “*Laudato Si*,” Robinson suggests that “to deal with climate change we must simultaneously address the underlying injustice in our world and work to eradicate poverty, exclusion, and inequality.”

Climate Justice is diversely, refreshingly human. The data is accurate, the diagnoses far from naïve, and yet it manages to generate pragmatic hope: Responses are possible, and efficacy is not limited to elite corridors of power. This gem of a book can be read in quick bursts or one fell swoop and is well suited for both bedside table and academic syllabi.

Christiana Zenner is an associate professor of theology, science and ethics at Fordham University in New York.



How to Live
What the Rule of
St. Benedict
Teaches Us
About Happiness,
Meaning, and
Community
By Judith Valente
Hampton Roads
Publishing Company
224p \$16.95

Living outside the cloister

A few years ago, I told a Trappist monk of the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky that I envied him: He, a monk in a contemplative order, had the time and the opportunity to devote himself to long periods of prayer and silence. I did not expect his response. “I may have silence,” he said, “but you have the possibility of daily giving yourself to the members of your family and so to learn truly how to love.”

While I deeply value my family and my familial life, I have to admit that I, like so many Catholics, still tend subconsciously to define spirituality primarily in terms of spiritual disciplines. My Trappist friend can cultivate them in ways that my situation in life prevents because his monastery follows the Rule of St. Benedict.

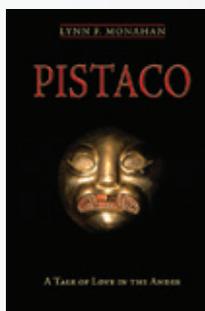
Composed in the early sixth century, St. Benedict’s Rule was written as a guide for how to live the monastic life communally. It became the set of precepts governing monastic life, and continues to be followed in monasteries around the world today. In *How to Live: What the Rule of St. Benedict Teaches Us About Happiness, Meaning, and Community*, Judith Valente explores how the text offers wisdom

for those of us outside the cloister.

A senior correspondent for an NPR affiliate in Illinois and a former correspondent for **America**, Valente describes herself as a recovering workaholic who suffers from a compulsion to overachieve. But Valente understands the logic undergirding the wisdom of Benedict's Rule as well, and argues that the Rule has wisdom for all of us trying to attain some measure of balance and peace.

We can learn from the Rule how to live a balanced, meaningful and fully attentive life. Benedict constructs a vision of life in common that consciously grinds against the prevailing logic of a world dominated too often by instability and selfishness. As Valente puts it, the Rule calls all of us in the world to forge a "parallel society" in which "the ability to listen, to communicate, and ultimately to understand delivers us from self-destruction."

Gregory Hillis is an associate professor of theology at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Ky.



Pistaco

A Tale of Love in the Andes

By Lynn F. Monaghan

ACTA Publications

304p \$16.95

Echoes of Graham Greene

My father was a diplomat, and one of his first posts was to Bolivia in the mid-1980s. I was 5 or 6 years old when we visited a rural village in the mountains. I vividly recall coming across a small hole in the middle of a cobblestone street in which the skeleton of a baby llama was nestled in a kind of ghostly nap. It is this kind of experience—the intrusion of a centuries-old tradition into the sensibilities of a modern American—that sits at the heart of Lynn Monaghan's gripping, unsettling novel, *Pistaco*.

The Rev. Steven McMahon has asked for an assignment in rural Peru. He discovers that the people in what is ostensibly a Catholic country adhere to what he delicately calls "syncretistic heresies." Not least among these is the eponymous legend of the Pistaco, a shapeshifter spirit who sucks the fat from his victims, causing them to waste away slowly.

Pistaco follows the interlocking stories of Father Steven and Cori, a teacher, both caught somewhere between running from and running to. Father Steven is running from an infatuation back home in Connecticut, but he longs to serve where there is real need, real poverty. Cori is run-

ning from a doomed relationship, hoping to find her place in the world. They meet when their bus to the rural farming village of Urpimarca is held up by corrupt local police moonlighting as highway robbers, and their connection as outsiders leads them to lean on one another as they adjust to their new circumstances.

Monahan has done a superb job of capturing the feel of Andean Latin America—the shabby metropolis of middle-class Lima, the precariousness of a bus ride up the ragged side of a mountain, the poverty and rich culture of the rural Quechua people. The astute reader will find echoes of Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*.

From its first pages, *Pistaco* is also suffused with a sense of dread. Set in the late 1980s, the novel shows us Peru beset by the Shining Path guerrillas, nativist ideologues waging an increasingly bloody terror war on the Peruvian people—a war creeping irrevocably closer to the tenuous peace of Urpimarca, the village where Father Steven and Cori are maybe, just maybe.... The rest as they say, is spoilers.

Thomas Jacobs, a graduate of St. John's College in Annapolis, Md., is a novelist.



Full book reviews at americamagazine.org/books



Purgatory is other people

By Jonathan Malesic

The new year is a time to pledge yourself to self-improvement: Eat better, exercise more, spend less time on Twitter. Of course, it is hard to stick to these virtuous programs. You are trying to change while most of your life stays the same. You have the same work schedule. The same home. The same kids. The same spouse. The same propensity to take long naps. Self-improvement is too hard, and too much bother. It is no wonder you return to your old ways and find yourself vowing once again, at the end of the year, to do better.

But what if you didn't have to worry about your job? Or your kids? What if you didn't have that pesky body, with its limitations and cravings? And what if you had all the time in the world? Indeed, what if you had more time than the world? What if you had all eternity? Surely, then you could quit smoking or start volunteering. In short, what if you could improve yourself after you are dead?

This appealing prospect drives two current TV comedies, both set in the afterlife: NBC's "**The Good Place**" and Amazon's "Forever." Both shows exploit the gap between the universal desire to be better and the equally universal desire not to be better now. It is Augustine's "grant me chastity, but not yet," the best joke in all of Christian theology, pushed to the extreme. In exploring the ethical challenges of the afterlife, the two series tell us a lot about how and why we strive to be better in our earthly lives.

"The Good Place," now in its third season, follows four people who died in their 20s and 30s: cynical Eleanor (Kristen Bell), indecisive Chidi (William Jackson Harper), vain Tahani (Jameela Jamil) and dim-witted Jason (Manny Jacinto). They get to a not-very-sweet hereafter and soon discover that it is actually a version of hell, in which they have been set up to torture each other psychologically forever. Once they realize the truth,

they become committed to moral improvement, believing that they can get into "the good place" if they earn more merit points (literally) by performing good actions.

But they encounter many barriers to entry. At first, the chief obstacle is Michael (Ted Danson), the avuncular demon who set up their torment but whose sympathy for the humans grows as he sees their repeated efforts at moral development. Later, the infernal bureaucracy gets in their way. In the current season of the show, the characters have returned to earth. Michael reboots their timelines and helps them escape death so they can turn around their lives, and the lives of others.

Belief in postmortem moral progress is a staple of several religious and philosophical systems. Dante saw Purgatory as a "second kingdom...where the soul of man is cleansed, made worthy to ascend to Heaven." The kingdom has a regimen: Carry this boulder, walk through that firewall, contemplate a



Photo by Colleen Hayes/NBC - © 2017 NBCUniversal Media, LLC

In “The Good Place,” Ted Danson plays an avuncular demon.

sequence of moral exemplars. In Hindu and Buddhist doctrines of reincarnation, creatures are reborn into positions determined by their previous actions, and each successive life is an opportunity for better karma.

Immanuel Kant—whose books *Chidi*, a philosophy professor, reads constantly—argued that we could justifiably believe in an afterlife, based on comparing the shortness of human life with the great need for continuous moral improvement. For Kant, ought implies can; if we should fulfill the moral law, then it must be possible to do so. But the moral law is so rigid, and human beings learn so slowly, that we would need an eternity to attain perfection. So, Kant argued, we can safely assume we do have that much time.

Michael informs Eleanor in an orientation meeting that each of the world’s religions got the afterlife about 5 percent right. It is a blessing that people on earth don’t know more. After the characters’ lives are rebooted

on earth, they find out about that point system for getting into the good place. Once they do, Michael tells them they can never get there. Their knowledge taints the purity of their motive; they couldn’t be good for its own sake.

One episode suggests—through a brilliant guest appearance by Michael McKean—that knowing how the afterlife works is a curse. If you know what you have to do to secure eternal bliss, you become scrupulous and obsessive about maximizing your points. Being perfectly moral and living a good life, therefore, seem to be two different things.

If “The Good Place” explores the challenge of individual betterment, “Forever” is about improving our intimate relationships. In “Forever,” June (Maya Rudolph) and Oscar (Fred Armisen) are a childless married couple who die, in separate incidents, when they attempt to break out of their deeply ingrained middle-class routines. The scene of their afterlife is a generic California suburb, albeit one filled with exquisite midcentury ranch houses. June and Oscar play out a daily script of long walks, pottery, crosswords and shuffleboard with the neighbors. It is heaven as religious skeptics envision it: clean and boring.

An opportunity to escape this humdrum eternity drives the main narrative arc in “Forever.” In this afterlife, the desire to break from one’s past self, and past attachments, ends up looking shallow. Self-improvement is not a matter of adventure but of deepening the relationships you already have. “Sometimes I blamed you for being in the way of me becoming this hypothetical, amazing new version of myself,” June admits to Oscar. “But I was never gonna become that person.” Paradox-

ically, it is through accepting who you are—and who you are not—that you can venture into the unexplored moral territory right under your feet.

This deep insight doesn’t quite redeem a mediocre show, however. “Forever” unfolds over four languid hours and ends on a note that mostly gestures toward a second season. And it is surprisingly unfunny, given its cast. Armisen and Rudolph were frequent partners in “Saturday Night Live” musical sketches. In “Forever,” their characters are written to be too restrained for the actors to put their gifts to use. (Rudolph draws more laughs in a small role in “The Good Place” as a cosmic appeals-court judge.)

We want to believe we can improve morally after death, and our religions and philosophies suggest it is possible. But if that is true, then what is the incentive to improve ourselves and our relationships now? Doesn’t the possibility of delay just encourage moral laxity?

Apparently not. This is what is most remarkable both in “The Good Place” and in our lives. Eleanor and the others try and fail to be better over and over. They even keep trying after they learn that good works after death don’t count. Michael offers a sort of grace when he nudges the characters toward the right path, but that just amounts to bringing them closer together. Their bond is what helps them get better. It seems to be all the motivation they really need.

No, moral improvement is not easy. It is easy to give up. But still, as Eleanor says about a plan to help others advance morally, “Why not try? It’s better than not trying.”

Jonathan Malesic is a writer living in Dallas. Twitter: @jonmalesic.

The Power and the Glory

Readings: Is 40:1-11, Ps 104, Ti 2:11-3:7, Lk 3:15-22

If John's baptism symbolized repentance, what need could Jesus have had for it? This question troubled many in the first centuries of Christianity. All the synoptic writers use an account of this event to introduce the major themes of their Gospels. The fourth Gospel, meanwhile, leaves it out entirely, recording the encounter between Jesus and John the Baptist but omitting any mention of Jesus' baptism.

Luke understood the baptism that John offered to be about more than repentance. It was about making a public declaration of citizenship in God's coming kingdom. A conversion of heart was simply the necessary first step. Life under God's reign required a new heart and a new spirit, and such a life required a clean break with the past. In Jesus' case, no conversion was necessary for this public declaration. Baptism revealed instead his true nature as God's beloved Son.

Such moments of revelation are common in Luke's Gospel. God's kingdom comes into view gradually. It appears first to individuals who alone among their neighbors recognize that God's power is at work in a new way. The obedience of individuals like Elizabeth, Mary and Simeon transforms those around them. Luke uses images like these to show how one transformed individual can renew the lives of countless others.

The baptism of Jesus is one such "small beginning." It is the first demonstration of the loving relationship that all believers will come to share with God. The divine love revealed at Jesus' baptism grows clearer at his transfiguration, and its fullness appears in his resurrection. God extended the same divine love at Pentecost to any who took up the Son's mission, and through sacramental baptism to any who have dedicated themselves to the Son in subsequent ages.

Luke portrays Jesus' baptism as one of the "advancements in wisdom" that he experienced throughout his life (see Lk 2:52). Luke links Jesus' baptism closely to his promise at Nazareth to bring glad tidings to the poor and proclaim a year acceptable to God. At his baptism, Jesus

'He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.' (Lk 3:16)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

In what ways have you encountered the intensity of divine love?

What mission has divine love given you to continue Jesus' work?

experienced divine love with new intensity; he responded to that gift with such fierce passion that his subsequent life and death transformed the world.

This same "spirit and fire" is the inheritance of all Christians. When Christians announce to the world that their life is now under God's reign, they encounter the same divine love Jesus experienced. In that encounter, Christians find a mission that perfects their own abilities and continues some aspect of Jesus' work. St. Paul was already a skilled teacher of Jewish law when an encounter with divine love drew him to preach the new way of Christ. Hildegard of Bingen was already an expert composer when divine love inspired her to craft the "Celestial Symphony."

This same love is available to transform us today. Any who, like Christ, confess themselves publicly to be citizens of God's kingdom will find in that declaration a love no fear can extinguish. The divine love that renews an individual believer has, within that believer's response, the power to bring an entire community to new life.

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

The Good Wine

Readings: Is 62:1-5, Ps 96, 1 Cor 12:4-11, Jn 2:1-11

Jesus' ministry began because a friend needed help with a wedding. This is an important point to remember, because John has written a narrative so dense that its meaning eludes interpretation even as it inspires it. Some commentators, for example, believe John is presenting Jesus and Mary as the new Adam and Eve, signifying a new creation. Others see in this miracle a reference to Exodus, in which Moses' first sign was to turn the waters of Egypt into blood (Ex 7:14-25). Others believe John is criticizing the Pharisees; Christ's interpretation of Torah has replaced the "inferior wine" of their traditions. Still others find in this account a foreshadowing of the heavenly feast in which all Christ's disciples will someday join. In fact, all of these interpretations fit John's understanding of Jesus, and all may have been on the Evangelist's mind as he composed this passage.

In addition to these possibilities, the miracle at Cana is also a lesson in discipleship. This is why the church reads it near the beginning of the season of Ordinary Time. In this narrative, Christians can find a lesson for their own lives as they continue Jesus' mission, which, according to John, began at this feast.

John's understanding of Jesus is as simple as it is profound. God loves humanity and acted to save it from de-

struction (Jn 3:16). God told the Son—and only the Son—everything necessary for salvation (Jn 1:18; 12:49). The Son heard God's message perfectly, since the two were united in a love so strong that they were as one (Jn 10:30). Everything that the Son learned from the Father he taught to the disciples (Jn 15:15). This teaching can be summed up in the washing of the feet and the commandment to love one another as Jesus loved us (Jn 13:1-15, 34). All who believe in the Son and pattern their lives according to his example and commandment will share in the same Spirit of divine love that Jesus knew. Becoming like Jesus is thus the way humanity can fulfill God's dream that all "might not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

God's love hits a dead end in those who do not share it. Jesus experienced that love perfectly and shared it especially through the miracles he performed for others, but it was not only in these acts of healing and deliverance that Jesus shared God's gifts. Divine love drew Jesus' attention even to commonplace needs. A shortage of wine for a wedding does not symbolize the human condition as vividly as demonic possession or fatal illness, but a miracle's dramatic potential was never among the considerations Jesus weighed. Instead, his friends' predicament gave him an opportunity to share the love that God had first shared with him.

Jesus' disciples today must seek similar opportunities to share the divine love they have received. It is not enough to place one's faith in the Son and enjoy personal confidence in the Spirit that comes from belief. Believers must let that love draw their attention to others' needs, so that through service, the divine love they have received can grow ever stronger.

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

'How does your concern affect me?' (Jn 2:4)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How have you loved others the way God has loved you?

To whose needs does divine love draw your attention?

How can you share God's love more fully?

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



CATHOLIC
INITIATIVES

A Call to Prayer

Father Thomas Keating's parting wisdom

By Tim Shriver



On Oct. 26, one of the great spiritual leaders of our time, Thomas Keating, O.C.S.O., died at the age of 95 at St. Joseph's Monastery in Spencer, Mass. Though he was known to only a relatively small circle during his life, his loss is being felt by thousands who, like me, counted him as a gentle guide to our most personal challenges and a soaring guide to the aspirations of the spiritual life. But beyond the impact on those of us who knew and loved him, he left us a powerful but unlikely solution to our current national crisis: centering prayer.

Father Keating was a member of one of the most austere and rigorous Christian religious communities—the Cistercians—and belonged to the strictest version of that community, known as the Trappists. But it was not the strict order of the monastery that captured Father Keating's passion. Instead, it was the goal of all those disciplines and practices: to lead human beings to experience the unconditional "love beyond love" that is God's presence within us and to have that love lead us "to respect and befriend and love one another."

Father Keating and his fellow monks decided to try to teach an ancient way of developing a loving disposition of the heart. It was a practice deeply rooted in the history of Christianity and of many other religions, but to many believers it was new and original. They called it "centering prayer"

and suggested that it was not just for monks—it was for everyone.

Centering prayer involves sitting in silence and gently letting go of all thoughts and sensations while repeating a sacred word when thoughts arise. It emphasizes assent to the presence of God. Its goal is a personal relationship with God whose love is constant, trustworthy, gentle and safe. The changes we all seek in our lives and our world begin within: The sacred place of transformation is where you are.

Father Keating saw that centering prayer could help fill a void left when traditional religions focused too much on ideas and authority structures, especially when those ideas and authorities promote violence or division. "People are unhappy with authority these days," he said to me just a few months before his death, "and I understand why. But they shouldn't be unhappy with direct and intuitive practices of direct relationship with God."

If there is one thing our country needs right now, it is what Father Keating tried to teach: a disposition of the heart that leads us to love and respect one another. And even more, we need the calm and presence and silence that will help us reduce the toxicity in our public discourse and become present to the gentleness and goodness within each of us.

We can be Democrats, Republicans or independents; we can be Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists or have no

religion at all; we can be from cities or suburbs or rural areas. But no matter what identity we carry, we can each start to make the change our country needs by making ourselves into agents of transformation and healing from the inside out. The wholeness we hunger to see in our country we must first welcome into ourselves.

I was lucky to spend an hour with Father Keating two months before his death. In our last conversation, he emphasized trust. He heard my confession and stopped me when I said I was struggling to trust in these times of fear and violence and division. "Focus on trust," he said. "When you trust that we are all part of something beautiful beyond our wildest imagination, you will find healing." I left him moments later. "Til we meet again" were his final words to me, yet another expression of a man who trusted in the totality of God's love and who taught prayer as an act of surrender, an act of presence, an act of love.

Have the audacity to trust that we all belong to God: It may seem like an unlikely call to action in 2018, but it may be the only call that can start the healing in our divisive and fearful times.

Tim Shriver is a lifelong educator, co-founder of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning and chair of Special Olympics worldwide.

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