



America

FEBRUARY 4, 2019

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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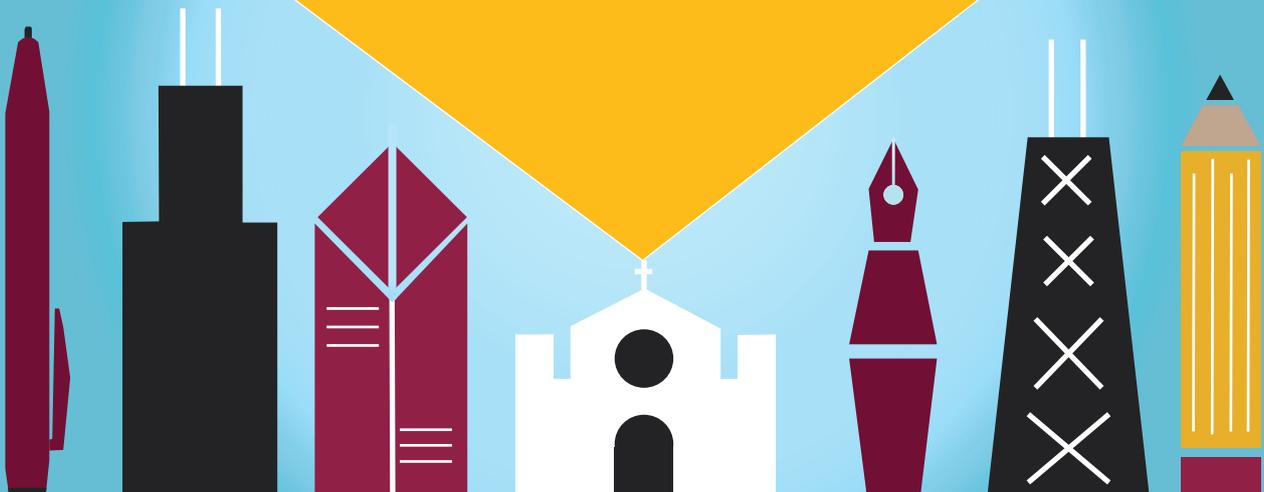
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Statement of the President & Editor in Chief

The past few months have not been easy for the editorial team at **America**. No one here became a Catholic journalist because they wanted to write about ecclesial scandals day after day. That the staff have done so with such devotion and care is a great testament to the depth of their commitment to our readers.

I know, of course, that our troubles are nothing compared to the pain inflicted by the perpetrators of these crimes. Their victims and survivors are always foremost in our hearts and minds, but never more so than on Jan. 9, 2019, when I learned that one of the Jesuits who has been credibly accused of sexual abuse worked at this magazine 25 years ago.

We quickly decided that we had a duty to disclose this information to you, to acknowledge that this person is a part of our history and to renew publicly our commitment to do everything in our power to make certain that history does not repeat itself.

What follows is a slightly edited version of the statement I issued on our digital platforms. I reproduce it here for our print readers and for the historical record.

•••

On Jan. 15, 2019, the USA Northeast Province of the Society of Jesus released a list of all Jesuits in that ecclesiastical jurisdiction, living and deceased, as well as any former Jesuits of the Northeast Province, who have been the subject of one or more credible allegations of abuse of a minor. The list includes all such allegations received by the Northeast Province since 1950.

As of Jan. 15, every Jesuit province in the United States has released

such a list. The public disclosure of this information is a necessary step toward justice and reconciliation for the victims and survivors of sexual abuse at the hands of clergy.

In light of this public disclosure, it is my sad duty to report to you the following: On Jan. 9, 2019, Northeast Province officials contacted me in my capacity as president of America Media. I learned then for the first time that the list released today would include the name of John T. Ryan, S.J., who was an employee of America Media (then America Press) from 1989 to 1994. During those years, Father Ryan was listed on the masthead of this magazine as “Associate Editor for Development.”

Father Ryan is the only Jesuit on any of the provincial lists of credibly accused Jesuits who was an employee of America Media.

Also on Jan. 9, I was informed by Northeast Province officials that Father Ryan was dismissed from the Society of Jesus in 2002 and that, according to their records, the allegations against Father Ryan were received by the Northeast Province in 2003 and 2014.

In light of the grave nature of this matter, I asked the current staff of America Media to review our files and to report to me any information regarding Father Ryan. I also spoke with the few members of our staff who might have known Father Ryan during his five years at America Media, some 25 years ago. I can report to you that I have received no information that indicates that any member of the America Media staff, then or now, had any knowledge of Father Ryan’s alleged misconduct with minors.

This is the extent of the infor-

mation in my possession regarding Father Ryan.

As you know, from 1962 to 2017, America Media owned a building located at 106 West 56th Street in New York City. The building housed the editorial and business offices of America Media, as well as a community of Jesuits. The community included both Jesuits who were employed by America Media and other Jesuits who were not employees of America Media. Starting in 1984, the Jesuit community at 106 West 56th Street was the exclusive responsibility of the religious superior of the New York Province (now part of the Northeast Province) and was not under the direction of the editors and staff of America Media. America Media was not empowered to decide who was assigned to reside at that location. Province officials have requested that all questions unrelated to the employment history of the men on these lists be directed to their respective province office.

You can find links to all the USA Jesuit provinces at www.jesuits.org. You can also access there links to all of the lists of credibly accused Jesuits that have been released by the Society of Jesus in the United States.

I also encourage you to read Michael O’Loughlin’s reporting on these recent developments. You can find that reporting at www.americamagazine.org/ne-list.

At this time, the editors and staff of America Media are most mindful of the victims and survivors of these crimes. We continue to pray for them and for the healing of the American church.

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



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AP Photo/Gregory Bull

Ilze Dariel, of Tijuana, Mexico, reaches for the hand of her daughter, Jimena, while taking family pictures on the beach next to the border wall, Jan. 9.

Cover: iStock

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Greatness comes from looking beyond our borders

What is the greatest challenge facing religious education programs for children?

In response to this question, 54 percent of respondents said a lack of parental involvement poses the greatest challenge to religious education programs for children.

Many readers suggested that formation begins at home. Leah Ramsdell, a parish staff member in Norwood, Mass., wrote, “We can offer great programs, but if it’s not reinforced at home, it’s not going to stick.” Readers also cited other challenges. Fifteen percent of respondents said conflicting schedules with other youth activities present the greatest challenge, and 15 percent pointed to problems with the curriculum or pedagogy.

Patrick Higgins, a parishioner in Pasadena, Calif., was among those with concerns about pedagogy. “When I was in C.C.D. as a kid, religious education consisted of making collages out of magazine clippings and learning hand gestures to church songs,” he wrote. “Now we’re the catechists, and we don’t have a strong background to

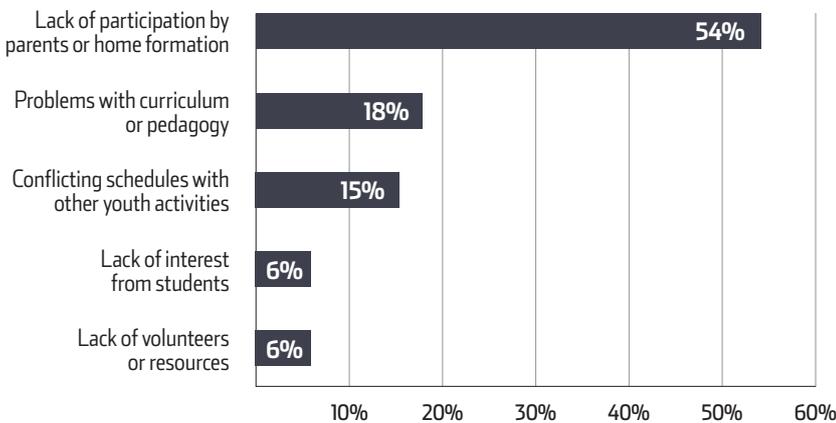
draw from.”

And Emese Hasznos, a parent and parishioner in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla., said she favors a “play-based” approach that centers on environmental literacy, culture and includes “no testing, no homework.”

Respondents made a number of suggestions to improve religious education programs at their parishes. Jeanne Duell, a teacher in Fairborn, Ohio, recommends “changing the Sunday Mass time to make it easier for families to attend Mass and then the religious education program.”

Maura Sweeney, a parish staff member in Fitchburg, Mass., agrees that family formation is important, but she thinks outreach efforts should start with adults. “Young parents rarely have integrated faith lives that connect them to the church in general, or their parish in particular,” she wrote. “Without those connections, their children are likewise disconnected.”

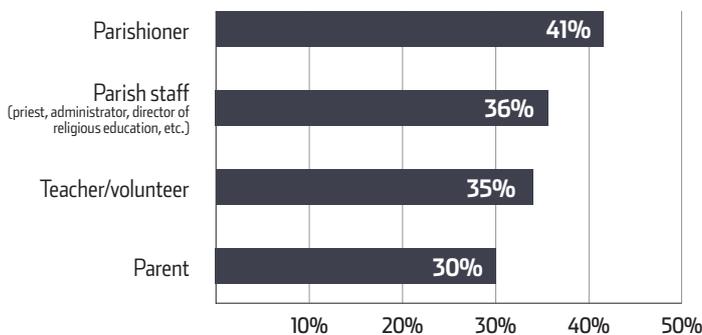
What is the greatest challenge facing religious education programs for children?



Classes should be right after school and run by paid teachers. It would be the afterschool program for working parents and not have to encroach on evening time with family.

Eileen Borski
Conroe, Tex.

What is your current connection to parish education?



I teach in a Catholic school but would like to see parents give participation in their faith top priority.

Maureen Meyers
Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

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

Responsibility

Re “Placement of Jesuits Under Supervision Raises Concerns,” by Michael J. O’Loughlin and Kevin Clarke (1/21): Priests must stop protecting one another. The nation must stop allowing abusive priests to be treated any differently from other abusers. They are breaking the law—not just God’s law but the actual law, and they should be held criminally responsible.

Dina Janis

To Brexit or Not to Brexit?

Re “Theresa May Fumbles Toward a No-deal Brexit,” by David Stewart, S.J. (1/21): Once the Brexit vote was confirmed, the process of Brexit appeared to be unstoppable—even when it became increasingly obvious to open-minded people how severe the consequences would be. Now there is chaos, confusion and apparently a no-win strategy. A hard Brexit would cause significant hardship for both the United Kingdom and the European Union. I hope I am wrong.

Michael Barberi

Real Help

Re “Single Mothers and the Catholic Church,” by Kaya Oakes (1/21): It was embarrassing, humiliating actually, to be a divorced woman in our parish in 1977. Saying “Let me know if I can do anything to help” is not real help. A single parents’ group might be a good organization and serve its purpose. But what I missed the most with my church friends was being included in their social life, as I had been when I was in a relationship.

Denise Delurgio

Assisted Discernment

Re “A Mid-Life Calling,” by John W. Miller (1/21): While I agree that not every conversion moment calls one to the convent, I have learned the value of assisted discernment when I am called to grow in a new direction. Otherwise, I default to what I perceive as familiar and safe.

Susan Crockett

Holding Both Sides Accountable

Re “To Support and Defend,” by Tom Kean (1/21): It is easy to say we need to hold both sides accountable when

the United States delivers foreign aid to fragile states in an effort to combat terrorism. I am not naïve enough to think that will ever happen. There needs to be a third-party oversight committee to hold both sides accountable.

Tess Blevins

The Right Thing

Re “Christmas Chaos at the Border,” by J.D. Long-García (1/7): The charitable organizations operating on both sides of the border, whose personnel are offering all the help that they can to migrants, are doing exactly the right thing according to our Christian principles. They should be supported in every way that we can think of within our individual capabilities.

Charles Erlinger

Complicated

Re “What Is at Stake?” by Paul P. Mariani, S.J. (1/7): It really is a complex situation. What worries me is the line that says the Chinese government doesn’t want a positive outcome for the church. I fear this could lead to the government controlling the church in China. I also feel there are positives in this agreement. This will be an interesting issue to follow.

Liam Foley

Mobilizing Love

Thank you for publishing Anne-Marie Drew’s article about suicide (“Mobilizing Love,” 1/7). But there was a glaring omission of the National Suicide Hotline phone number as a resource for those contemplating suicide: (800) 273-8255. The call is forwarded to a local hotline where volunteers are available 24/7. The resource is also helpful for family and friends who want to be able to support someone who is struggling. The website (suicidepreventionlifeline.org) is another wonderful resource.

I would suggest that the hotline number be included at the end of any article on suicide. If we can surround our loved ones with informed, caring people, we are truly mobilizing love.

Pat Langley
San Rafael, Calif.

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.

Politicians Fail the Country by Applying Religious Tests

On Jan. 16, the U.S. Senate unanimously adopted a resolution “to reaffirm religious liberty and condemn religious tests for federal officials.” It may seem odd that such an affirmation was necessary, and it is odder still that the proximate occasion of the resolution was the suggestion in confirmation hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee that the Knights of Columbus represent a form of dangerous extremism.

The resolution was proposed by Senator Ben Sasse, a Republican from Nebraska, in response to a line of questioning by two Democrats during the late November confirmation hearings for Brian Buescher, who had been nominated for a judgeship for the U.S. District Court for the District of Nebraska. Senator Kamala Harris of California asked Mr. Buescher if he was aware of the Knights’ advocacy against abortion when he joined and asked if he agreed with a statement from the Carl Anderson, who leads the Knights, describing abortion as “killing on a massive scale.” Senator Mazie Hirono of Hawaii described the Knights as having taken a “number of extreme positions,” referring to their opposition to same-sex marriage, and asked if Mr. Buescher would leave the Knights, who number more than two million members, if confirmed in order to avoid any appearance of bias.

This line of questioning has been widely criticized as displaying anti-Catholic bias, and certainly the willingness of two senators to depict a Catholic fraternal organization present in parishes across the country and around the world as a danger to the republic is chilling. It also shows a surprising ignorance of the Knights’

many religious, charitable and civic activities beyond their direct political advocacy, not to mention a complete disregard for their history in opposing virulent anti-Catholicism in the nation’s past. But there are at least three other factors at play beyond the appearance of anti-Catholic bias.

First, as we have pointed out before, *Roe v. Wade*’s confinement of the abortion question to the judiciary continues to distort the workings of political dialogue and compromise. Unable to debate the abortion question straightforwardly, legislators are left to read tea leaves about what judges might do. And since the American people are not of one mind about abortion, the judicial “settlement” of the issue is in constant need of shoring up, driving its defenders to depict anyone who opposes abortion as dangerously extreme.

Second, the current climate of “gotcha” politics is deeply opposed to the constitutional guarantee of freedom of association and the rich history of nongovernmental civic institutions building up the fabric of American public life. Many politicians, seeking short-term advantage, are willing to cast suspicion on any connection to a group or issue they oppose. The assumption that membership in a fraternal organization automatically constitutes endorsement of a particular political position—much less bias that would render a nominee unfit to be a judge—is catastrophically narrow.

Third, religious values are being conflated with bias—but the anemic state of the public conversation about religion makes it difficult to distinguish them properly. It is perfectly possible for judges to be motivated by their faith to recognize that abortion is a grave in-

justice, while still being committed to honor laws and precedent. And it is possible for senators to ask nominees how they will navigate tensions between personal religious values and their judicial duties without assuming that one must violate the other. A commitment to religious liberty demands that effort be devoted to resolving, rather than exacerbating, any real or apparent tension between religious obligation and civil duty. The United States deserves elected officials and judges who are willing to undertake that task.

Don’t You Buy Me A Mercedes Benz

The number of registered vehicles in the United States hit a record 276 million last year, and sales of cars and trucks were steady, confirming that the huge drop in sales of a decade ago was attributable to a bad economy rather than a long-lasting shift away from “car culture.” Indeed, the four-wheeled population is growing faster than the human population in many dense cities with strong economies, including New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Boston. This growth is mostly attributable to households’ buying second or third cars.

As they have been for over a century, cars are seen as a marker of prosperity, both as a measure of the national economy and as a symbol of personal success. It is disappointing that this cultural tradition continues despite the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, a leading cause of climate change. The total mileage logged by U.S. drivers is once again on the rise after a widely heralded decline during the last major recession, and the Census Bureau reported that 76.4 percent of U.S. workers drove alone

Founded in 1909

to work in 2017, a slight increase from the previous year. The data suggests that Americans use their cars less only in times of abnormally high fuel prices or high unemployment. But our commitment to protecting the environment is worthless if we act upon it only when times are bad.

There are ways to make nonessential driving less attractive, even if federal and state governments are reluctant to use them. The federal gas tax, for example, has been frozen at 18.4 cents per gallon since 1993. Twenty states and the District of Columbia are more flexible, imposing additional per-gallon gas taxes that rise with inflation or with the price of fuel. But this may be getting things backward. Instead of adding to financial burdens when the price of gas goes up, it could make more sense to increase the tax when falling gas prices encourage people to drive more. There is also logic in including electric cars and other fuel-efficient vehicles in a tax scheme, since they reinforce the habit of driving everywhere.

Other policies worth consideration include taxes on mileage rather than fuel, with which Oregon is experimenting, using a measurement device affixed to cars; congestion pricing, or tolls on entering heavy-traffic areas where there is adequate public transit; and infrastructure improvements that allow for safe bicycling and walking.

Any policy aimed at reducing greenhouse emissions should be sensible enough to take into account the needs of rural areas and workers for whom driving long distances is part of everyday life. But recent job growth has been concentrated in large urban areas where solo driving is both wasteful and destructive to the environment. In these places, it is essential to discard the idea that prosperity means more and bigger cars on the road.

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For true awareness, keep cellphones out of the classroom

Things reached a breaking point last November. I was leading a classroom discussion on the theological dimensions of Martin Luther King Jr.'s works. Much of the class listened with rapt attention. Many nodded; one noted that today's social media works to fan outrage and anger but does not often offer constructive solutions; and for a moment I felt that they saw why a course in theology is essential to their education.

My excitement was shattered when I turned and saw one student on his laptop looking at shoes for sale online, and another, head turned down, texting frantically on his cellphone.

I could have kept my focus on those who were showing enthusiasm, but I surrendered control to two students who quite probably had no sense of the impact they were having. Without singling them out directly, I stopped and made a snarky comment on how some people risk their lives for civil rights and others think shopping and texting are more important. They both registered that I was addressing them and turned away from their devices. It was a pyrrhic victory, though, because I could sense that I had lost them for the rest of the term.

This semester, I will be teaching a course with a "theology lab" component: Each meeting involves 15 minutes of contemplative silence. Rather than simply reading about contemplation, we will trek into what Martin Laird, O.S.A., calls "The Silent Land." We can avail ourselves of no GPS as we explore this desert for, as St. John of the Cross wrote, the land of the Spirit is a "land without a way." My goal is to foster a seeking community that will discover within the spiritual des-

ert the theological oasis from which the waters of justice flow. Instead of informing the students about theology, I want to invite them to be formed through the theological quest.

Because of the nature of the course, I am banning the use of all electronic devices. If I see them, their owners are marked absent from class. For the goal of this course is not for students to accumulate information but for them to undertake an experiment in theological formation. To serve this end, theology lab is doubling as "rehab" to help students kick their tech habits at least twice a week.

My syllabus takes a strong tone to get their attention:

Within a classroom environment, let alone any social context, texting or surfing the web can be interpreted as an act of disrespect. It communicates to your instructor and to your classmates that whatever is on your screen is more important than they are. It communicates: *What you are sharing is not worthy of my time or attention.* In addition to being rude, I suspect an unreflective use of technology contributes to anxiety and social isolation. Since this course invites us into a place of deep spiritual exploration and seeks to work against anxiety and isolation, you are being invited into a forced hiatus from your devices for 75 minutes twice a week.

This ban on devices may seem harsh, but I think it essential to pre-

vent the course's content and context from being separated. I want my students to surrender their electronic security blankets. (Of course, if a student is tending to an ailing parent or has child care concerns, accommodations can be made.) The class invites students to become pilgrims rather than mere theological tourists. Theology lab can help them to see how contemplation can help to integrate what we learn with *who* we are.

For a generation raised with phones, even temporarily giving up their devices is bound to provoke some initial anxiety and fear. My wager: If they invest themselves in this practice, they should find themselves ever more present to one another and to themselves. Anxieties will subside and feelings of isolation will dissipate as they discover how even when they are alone they are never truly alone. They are not "sole seekers" but, in this endeavor, "soul seekers" exploring the hitherto uncharted territory of the human spirit. In place of the latest apps, we have only to close our eyes and journey together into the silent land.

I have no illusion that my theology lab exercise will become a campus craze, but it might plant the seeds for a new mode of contemplative awareness in one group of students. And if these young pilgrims discover themselves to be drinking from the same wellspring as the prophets, Jesus and the saints, then the theology course may cease to be an elective and become an opportunity for students to know themselves as God's beloved.

Ryan Duns, S.J., is an assistant professor of theology at Marquette University in Milwaukee.

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Death toll remains high for world's migrant people

The Mediterranean claimed more than 2,200 victims in 2018

By Kevin Clarke

In the United States all eyes have turned to the southern border as the Trump administration continues a shutdown of the federal government in mid-January aimed at squeezing \$5.7 billion out of House Democrats to pay for the president's border wall. With all pretense of a Mexico-financed barrier abandoned, the president is now contemplating a declaration of national emergency to seize financing for his wall from the Defense Department construction budget or disaster relief accounts.

Across the Atlantic, a European drama over a group of migrants pulled from the Mediterranean was resolved with

the landing of 49 people in Malta. The group, which included several children, was rescued from the waters off Libya by ships operated by two German-based humanitarian rescue efforts, Sea-Watch and Sea-Eye. No Mediterranean state would accept responsibility for the migrants, who remained "stranded" on the rescue ships.

Italian ports have been closed to humanitarian landings since a populist coalition government came to power last year. Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, who leads the right-wing, anti-migrant League Party, has made it strict policy that no private aid group receive authorization to

◀ A woman being rescued from an inflatable dinghy on the Mediterranean Sea in December 2018.



transfer rescued migrants to land in Italian ports.

After allowing the ships to shelter off its coast during bad weather, Maltese authorities kept the rescue vessels offshore for 19 days as international pressure grew to allow them to land. Pope Francis issued a plea on Jan. 6 for European governments to demonstrate “concrete solidarity” with the rescued migrants. Merciful treatment for the world’s migrants and refugees has been a consistent theme of his papacy.

Archbishop Charles Scicluna of Malta visited one of the rescue vessels on Jan. 5 and appealed to European Union leaders to take in the stranded migrants. The migration phenomenon needed a European solution, he said. “People’s lives are priceless, and negotiations should never take place at the expense of the suffering,” Archbishop Scicluna said.

Joseph Muscat, prime minister of Malta, finally announced that the migrants would be allowed ashore on Jan. 9. An agreement, he said, had been reached with eight other European countries to relocate the 49 migrants rescued by Sea-Watch and 131 others picked up by Maltese authorities.

“Malta, the smallest European Union state,” he said, “is once again being called upon to shoulder responsibilities way beyond its remit.”

The rescues “took place outside Malta’s area of responsibility,” the prime minister pointed out. “We were not the responsible authority, and we were not the nearest safe port of call.”

In the United States headlines describing the migrant crisis on the Mediterranean have been displaced by the domestic political dispute over a border wall. But the suffering on the high seas at Europe’s doorstep continues, and the Mediterranean passage for migrants escaping poverty and conflict in Africa and the Middle East remains deeply perilous. Various efforts to formalize or halt the human flow have bogged down as diplomatic patience has run thin and populist resistance to refugee resettlements has escalated across Europe.

On Dec. 12, 164 of the 193 members of the United Nations adopted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and

Regular Migration in Marrakesh, but the pact is already showing signs of fraying beyond the European discord. Brazil’s Foreign Ministry informed U.N. officials on Jan. 9 that Brazil would be withdrawing from the compact at the direction of its new populist, ultra-conservative president, Jair Bolsonaro. Austria and the United States are among other countries that have already announced they would not participate in the pact because it places constraints on national migration policies.

The withdrawal from the compact was deplored by the Brazilian bishops’ conference. “Regrettably and erroneously, the new government abandons this tradition [of hosting migrants] and rejects the global migration pact,” Roberval Freire, who works at the conference’s Migration Pastoral office, said in a statement released on Jan. 10.

The statement continued: “We declare that we continue [to be] defenders and fighters [for] a society without borders, without walls, and we defend a more humane... treatment between Brazilians, other peoples and nations that need our help.

“We do not want a society that discards the human being.”

As sentiment continues to turn against migrants among populist political leaders around the world, the U.N.’s International Organization for Migration reported on Jan. 8 that for the fifth consecutive year more than 4,500 people are believed to have died or gone missing on migration routes around the world in 2018. The 2018 count of 4,648 deaths is down 20 percent from the number of lives lost in 2017. It is also far lower than the 8,000 who perished in 2016. At press time, the number of migrants and refugees who have died was 214.

Just about half of the deaths last year occurred among the more than 116,000 migrants who made their way to Europe via the Mediterranean passage. According to the report, multiple tragedies on all three Mediterranean routes in the final two weeks of 2018 claimed the lives of at least 23 people, including two children; 31 others are reported missing.

In a statement released on Jan. 5, the crew of Sea-Watch 3 demanded a coordinated and humane response by E.U. states to the ongoing migrant crisis. “It is high time that Europe makes new agreements for the reception and resettlement of people who are simply seeking a safe haven,” the statement read. “There must come an end to the

pushing to and fro of exhausted and often traumatized human beings—children and pregnant women among them—where again and again decisions are made on an ad hoc basis, apparently with the greatest difficulty, about which European country will admit a handful of people to their asylum procedure.”

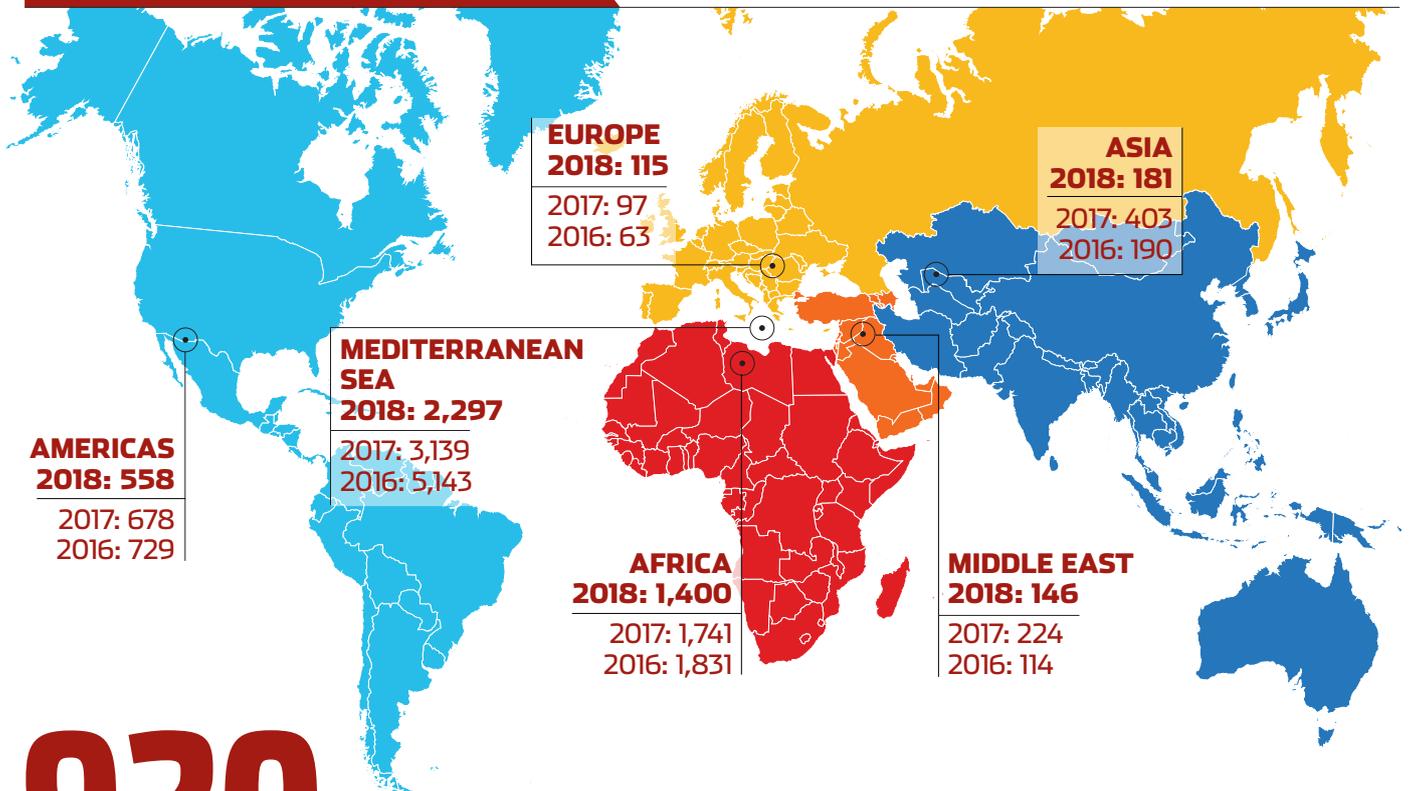
Noting the 2018 death toll and the drowning deaths of at least 17,589 people on the Mediterranean since 2014, the crew said: “If our political parties truly have respect for hu-

man lives and human rights, they will make sure, together with their European colleagues, that this terrible death toll isn’t repeated in 2019.”

Kevin Clarke, *chief correspondent.*
Twitter: @ClarkeAtAmerica.

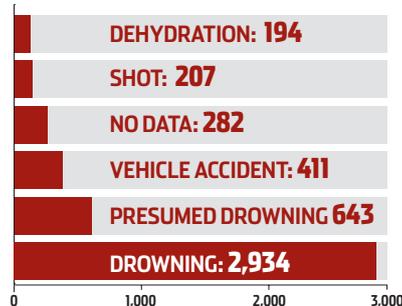
With content from *The Associated Press* and *Catholic News Service.*

RECORDED MIGRANT DEATHS BY REGION



920
MIGRANTS
WERE LOST
IN JUNE—2018'S
DEADLIEST MONTH

CAUSES OF DEATH (2017)



At least **2,959 PEOPLE DIED** MIGRATING IN THE AMERICAS IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS, more than 60 percent—at least 1,871—on the border between Mexico and the United States.

Sources: Missing Migrants Project, missingmigrants.iom.int.

The online discussion group for *America* readers interested in quality literature.

While we might look new, the Catholic Book Club has actually been around for many decades in different forms. Our goal has always been to provide *America* readers with additional literary resources and to come together around our shared enjoyment of and appreciation for fine works of literature. We introduce a new book four times a year, providing discussion questions, conversation prompts and supporting materials that you can use individually or with your home, parish or school group.

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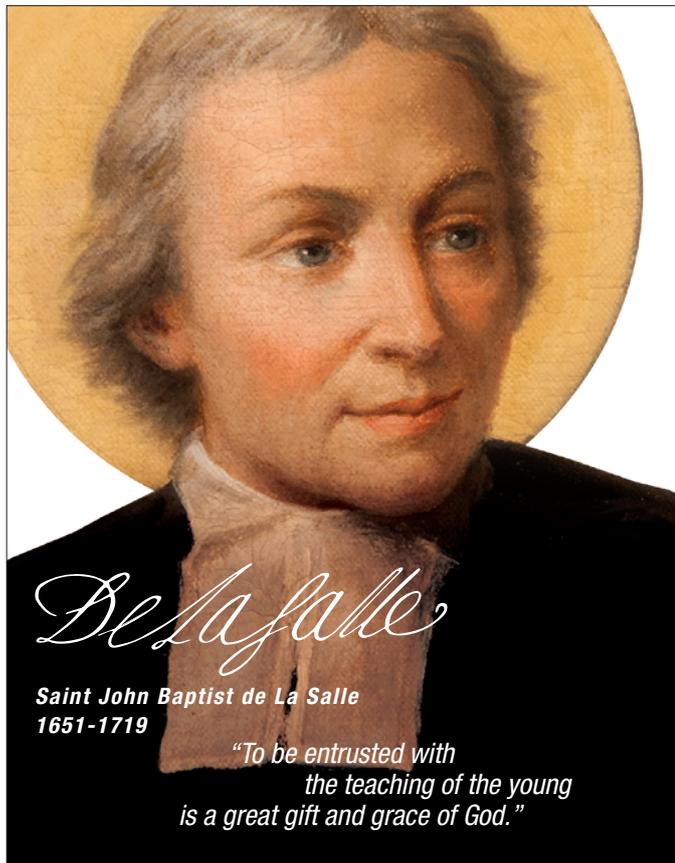
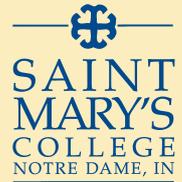
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De La Salle

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*"To be entrusted with
the teaching of the young
is a great gift and grace of God."*

1719–2019 HIS MISSION LIVES ON

THE LASALLIAN MISSION EMBODIES THE VISION AND INNOVATIVE SPIRIT OF SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE, PATRON SAINT OF ALL TEACHERS AND FOUNDER OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS (DE LA SALLE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS), A UNIQUE GROUP OF LAY RELIGIOUS MEN DEDICATED EXCLUSIVELY TO EDUCATION. Saint La Salle founded the mission to provide a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor. Today, 300 years after Saint La Salle's entry into eternal life, his mission remains strong with Brothers and Lasallian Partners serving more than one million young people in 1,000 ministries in 80 countries. Lasallian education centers on Catholic values and personal relationships, emphasizing academic excellence, faith formation, inclusion, respect for the individual, service and social justice.



Learn more about the
Lasallian mission at
www.lasallian.info.



A photograph of three Democratic representatives smiling and taking a selfie. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is on the left, holding a pink phone. Rep. Ann McLane Kuster is in the center, and Rep. Barbara Lee is on the right. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera.

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a freshman Democrat from New York, takes a selfie with Democratic Representatives Ann McLane Kuster of New Hampshire and Barbara Lee of California on Jan. 3.

Growing U.S. religious diversity reflected by Democrats in new Congress

AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite

Hours before being sworn in, many senators and representatives of the 116th Congress gathered inside St. Peter's Catholic Church, just steps from the U.S. Capitol, for a multi-faith, bipartisan prayer meeting on Jan. 3. There were readings from the Bhagavad-Gita, the Book of Psalms, the New Testament and Thomas Merton's writings. Representative Ilhan Omar, a Democrat from Minnesota, read an Islamic invocation. Members from both parties offered prayers, and the 30-minute service concluded with the song "America the Beautiful."

The service reflected a gradually rising religious diversity in Congress as it becomes a bit more representative of the U.S. population as a whole. But the institution still harkens back to a different time in the United States, when nearly nine in 10 members identified as Christian.

According to an analysis released on Jan. 3 by the Pew Research Center, about 88 percent of Congress identifies as Christian, compared with just 71 percent of all U.S. adults. Catholics now make up 30.5 percent of Congress; 21 percent of U.S. adults identify as Catholic.

Democrats, including the newly elected speaker of the house, Nancy Pelosi, are more likely than Republicans to identify as Catholic. More than a third of congressional Democrats (35 percent) are Catholic, while just over a quarter of Republicans (26 percent) identify as Catholic.

Of the 96 newly elected members of Congress, 78 are Christian, including 28 who are Catholic. Overall, there are 141 Catholics in the House, or 32 percent of the chamber; 22 of the 100 U.S. senators are Catholic.

The first two Muslim women elected to Congress were sworn in on Jan. 1, bringing the total of Muslim House members to three. There are 34 Jews in the new Congress, along with two Buddhists, three Hindus and three Unitarian Universalists.

But religious diversity in the new Congress is mostly rel-

egated to one party. Republican members of the Senate and House are 99.2 percent Christian and 0.8 percent Jewish. Congressional Democrats are also mostly Christian, at 78.3 percent, but all 29 members who are not Christians or Jews, or who did not volunteer a religious affiliation, are Democrats.

According to the Pew Center, the percentage of Catholics in the last four congresses has remained stable at around 31 percent. That is far higher than the 19 percent of Catholics who comprised the 87th Congress in 1961, just after the election of President John F. Kennedy.

The Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities reported on Jan. 3 that 10 percent of Congress—12 senators and 43 representatives—are alumni of a dozen Jesuit colleges and universities. Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., counts 28 alumni in the new Congress, with another half dozen each from Boston College and Fordham University.

As for priorities important to Catholic leaders, it remains unclear if the new Congress, in which Democrats control the House and Republicans the Senate, will be able to make any progress. The previous Congress, with both chambers controlled by Republicans, was largely sympathetic to President Donald Trump's agenda. U.S. Catholic bishops issued a number of statements opposed to Mr. Trump and Republican policy proposals on immigration, health care and taxes but supported some measures in harmony with the church's views on life issues.

With Democrats now in charge of the House, it is possible that bishops and other church leaders will find themselves shifting gears in terms of advocacy. House Democrats may seek to protect access to abortion, but U.S. bishops may find common ground with them when it comes to economic and immigration issues.

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

THE CHURCH IN AMERICA



Greg Boyle, S.J.
Founder,
Homeboy Industries

Greg Boyle, S.J., will deliver a lecture on gang and prison culture and the challenges of rebuilding communities impacted by violence. Father Boyle is the founder of Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, Calif., the largest gang intervention, rehabilitation, and re-entry program in the world.

Father Boyle witnessed the devastating impact of gang violence on his community during the so-called “decade of death” that began in Los Angeles in the late 1980s and peaked at 1,000 gang-related killings in 1992.

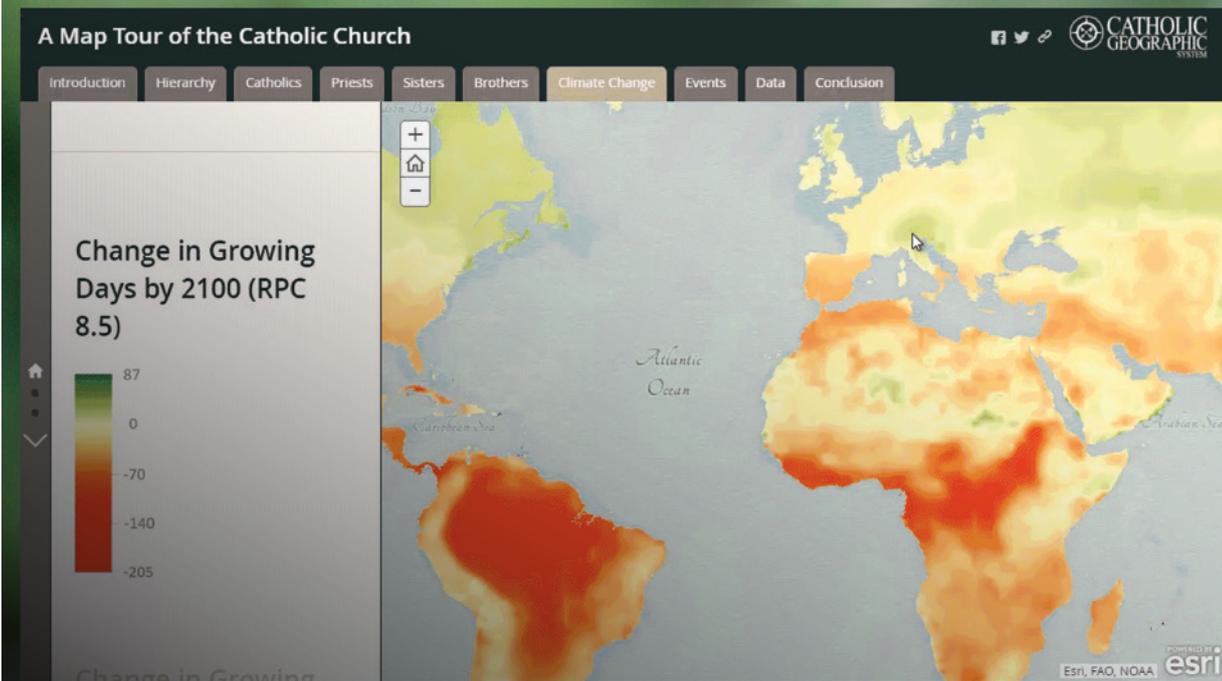
In 1988 they started what would eventually become Homeboy Industries, which employs and trains former gang members in a range of social enterprises, as well as provides critical services to thousands of men and women who walk through its doors every year seeking a better life.

APRIL 2, 2019 | 7:30PM

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High-tech maps lead the way

A data scientist prepares for good works on climate change and more

A stroll through the Vatican highlights the Catholic Church's historic interest in map making, from the 40 massive frescoes in the Gallery of Maps that depict the different regions of Italy to the illustrations of the world's hemispheres that decorate the walls of the papal apartments.

Some of these maps date back to the 16th century and would not prove helpful for managing a massive global enterprise. But a U.S. entrepreneur wants church leaders to take an interest in modern cartography, with the aim of using new technology to show how the global church's vast real estate portfolio can help it set an example for living out the Gospel—and saving the planet.

Molly Burhans is the founder of GoodLands, a nonprofit organization that aims “to help Catholic communities around the world use their property for good.” Since it launched in 2015, GoodLands has completed a global mapping of the Catholic Church and a database that includes the world's Catholic populations, buildings, lands and other data.

One of the purposes of this kind of data imaging, Ms. Burhans says, is to allow church leaders to prepare for life under intense heat waves that could be a consequence of climate change. Combined with other data, like the number of health care workers in Catholic hospitals or the availability

of lands in nearby areas that are less affected, church leaders can use the technology to prepare for potential disasters.

Ms. Burhans, a 29-year-old graduate of Canisius College in Buffalo, N.Y., and the Conway School of Landscape Design in Massachusetts, has traveled to Rome to present her maps to Vatican officials and Pope Francis.

There she urged church leaders to invest in an in-house cartography department. That might seem an odd use of resources, as anyone with a smartphone can pull up a detailed map of almost any place in the world with a few taps. But Ms. Burhans says that the way most people think of maps—for example, as they appear on a GPS device or showing how states vote in elections—is simplistic.

Instead, she says, maps can present complex data sets in intuitive ways that allow people to absorb more information more quickly than they can with charts, graphs and spreadsheets. Ms. Burhans uses geographic information systems, a more advanced kind of map making that she is encouraging the church to adopt.

When it comes to the church, large amounts of data already exist, but the information is often not presented using the latest technology. To fix that, Ms. Burhans and her team spend time burrowing in libraries and searching the web, harvesting datasets that may be useful to the church;



Photo by Ashoka, map images courtesy of GoodLands.

The church prepares for good works on climate change and more

then they compile the information to help make sense of it for leaders making decisions.

At the local level, this might mean using demographic information to pinpoint the best spot for a new food pantry; or ahead of a major storm, Catholic dioceses could quickly scan the property they own outside flood zones that could serve as shelters. On a global scale, the data can help Catholic institutions prepare a response to famines, natural disasters and environmental degradation.

“I’m trying to illustrate the relationship between the spaces we use and love with the well-being of our communities and the life of our mission and ministry,” Ms. Burhans says.

“[Catholics] have been leaders in this area, and then it somehow fell off the map a couple of hundred years ago,” she joked. “I’m very passionate about helping communities manage their finances, but most of all helping them live the Gospel.”

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

Molly Burhans spoke about GoodLands on the “Jesuitical” podcast of Sept. 1, 2017 (americamagazine.org/jesuitical).



Donations land at Orlando International Airport on Jan. 15 for furloughed T.S.A. agents.

AP Photo/John Raoux

GOODNEWS

Giving back, not giving up as federal shutdown continues

An epic battle of ill will between House Democrats and the Trump administration extended into late January as the longest partial shutdown of the federal government in history continued. Around the country rents came due and cupboards grew bare as the squabble went on in Washington. But in Catholic Charities offices around the nation, staff mobilized and resources were reallocated to support this latest vulnerable U.S. community, that of furloughed workers.

Catholic Charities San Antonio was offering help to all comers. “We have several cases coming, [and] yesterday we [had] many people calling in,” Antonio Fernandez, the Catholic Charities San Antonio director, told KSAT news. “The two biggest issues were food and rent. People did not get a paycheck on Friday [Jan. 11], so now they are struggling to make ends meet.”

In Washington, furloughed workers not used to seeking assistance were lining up outside of Catholic Charities offices to pick up \$500 checks to help with food, housing and utilities, according to the Catholic News Agency. With no clear end to the shutdown in sight, Catholic Charities said it would help anyone who applies for help, no matter their backgrounds, race or religion.

Laura Bandini, a federal worker, has been through unwelcome furloughs before. She made the best of her time off, she told *The Arlington Catholic Herald*, by volunteering.

This time Ms. Bandini and other members of her parish, Our Lady Queen of Peace Church in Arlington, have invited furloughed workers to volunteer at the parish thrift store and food pantry. Ms. Bandini finds herself especially worried about nongovernmental employees.

“Contract workers most likely won’t get any back pay—cafeteria workers and janitors,” she said. “We hope anybody [in need] will reach out to their parish community for help.”

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS REIMAGINED

By Betsy Shirley

The traditional parochial school is endangered. Can a group of educators and philanthropists forge a new path forward?

Abigail Akano was not sure she wanted to be principal. For 10 years she had been a teacher, then assistant principal at Sacred Heart, a pre-K through eighth grade parochial school in the Highbridge section of the Bronx. The building was beautiful: a four-story, Gothic-style schoolhouse built in 1926 with separate arched entrances for boys and girls. But the neighborhood—part of the poorest congressional district in the United States—was struggling. The median household income was \$28,042; more than 40 percent of families with kids under 18 lived in poverty.

Yet it was not the poverty that made Ms. Akano think twice about the job; it was the paperwork. Shortly into her first year as principal, her fears were confirmed. “I spent a lot of time learning to do tasks that, quite frankly, I was not educated for,” she recalled.

There were budgets to make, payrolls to process, teacher contracts to negotiate, candy-bar fundraisers to run, and that bathroom on the first floor was not going to fix itself. When she met with her supervisor, the parish pastor, they focused on whatever was urgent (like that bathroom) and seldom on what they cared about most: ensuring that every student at Sacred Heart was getting a character-shaping, life-changing education rooted in the Catholic faith. Plus, Ms. Akano felt disconnected from her teachers and stu-

dents. She rarely visited classrooms except to tally up data points for various forms she needed to complete.

She knew it was not an efficient way to run a school, but there was no time to think of a better system. In a crisis, she could call the diocesan superintendent or make a “mayday” call to a nearby principal, but for the most part, “the expectation was that you would figure stuff out on your own.”

‘All the Best!’

Multiplied stories like Ms. Akano’s across the United States and you are looking at one of the major challenges Catholic primary education currently faces: Running a parish school has become too much for one pastor and one principal to handle.

“For so long, we’ve held up independence and site-based management as the hallmarks of good Catholic schools,” said Tim Uhl, who is superintendent of Montana Catholic schools and host of the podcast, newsletter and blog “Catholic School Matters.” “But what we’re seeing today is that leaving someone alone to run their school and saying, ‘All the best! Hope you can do it!’ doesn’t always show excellence or progress.”

Mr. Uhl belongs to a movement of administrators, philanthropists, diocesan leaders and education experts who are rethinking the parochial, or parish-based,



Photo: Partnership Schools



At Sacred Heart School in the Bronx, the principal, Abigail Akano, encourages teachers to take ownership of their students' academic achievement.

The era of the parochial school—at least in the form that has dominated Catholic education in recent memory—is over. ●●

model of Catholic education. Traditionally, the pastor of St. Mary's Church governed St. Mary's School, providing the high-level, big-picture decisions about mission and vision and money, and often hiring a principal to implement day-to-day school management. But today Catholic schools are shifting some of that authority from pastors and principals to other sources. According to Mr. Uhl and his colleagues, these changes let principals focus on coaching teachers, free up pastors to focus on the school's spiritual life, offer the laity more robust opportunities for leadership, and—crucially—ensure that Catholic schools maximize educational quality and financial sustainability.

These alternative models—and there are many—do not offer a single vision for the future of Catholic schools. Embedded in these approaches are different answers to the big questions of Catholic education: How much power should be given to the laity and how much retained by the hierarchy? How do we balance independence with the call to be in solidarity with each other? What is the primary mission of Catholic education? And how do we pay for it?

Yet on one topic, there is agreement: The era of the parochial school—at least in the form that has dominated Catholic education in recent memory—is over.

Perishing Schools

For a quick study of the past several decades of parochial education, consider the following lines from the 1993 film starring Whoopi Goldberg, “Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit.” Nun: “St. Francis has been a beacon of hope to people here for many years. To close the school like that would be a disaster. You're sure there's nothing to be done?” Archdiocese Person No. 1: “We're afraid not.”

For extra credit, here is a primer. Though some parish schools existed during the colonial era, today's parochial system was shaped by the anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic spirit of the early 1800s. Justifiably fearing that public schools aimed to Americanize (read: Protestant-ize) Catholic children, U.S. bishops wrote increasingly stern pastoral

letters that culminated in a letter issued in 1884 the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore: “Pastors and parents should not rest,” insisted the bishop—until every parish “has schools adequate to the needs of its children.”

By 1960, nationwide enrollment in Catholic schools had peaked, with more than 5.2 million students. “Then change roared across the nation,” Catholic education experts Andy Smarick and Kelly Robson write in “Catholic School Renaissance,” their 2015 report for the Philanthropy Roundtable. “White Catholic families departed cities in droves. Church membership and Catholic observance declined, and the flow of new nuns and priests”—who had provided a steady supply of low-cost teachers—“shrank to a trickle.” Plus, the threat of anti-Catholic bigotry was no longer on parents' minds. All this spelled trouble: declining enrollment and rising costs. Despite the odds, some schools pulled through—even thrived—but the trend was clear: From 1966 to 2014, the number of Catholic schools was cut in half. Today, enrollment in Catholic schools hovers around 1.8 million.

Adding fresh urgency to this challenge is the sharp decline in elementary enrollment just within the past decade. According to the National Catholic Education Association, “elementary school enrollment has declined by 27.5 percent in the 12 urban dioceses and 19.4 percent in the rest of the U.S.”—one reason why innovation in Catholic schools has zeroed in on elementary campuses, especially in urban areas.

School Governance 101

Catholic schools are usually governed by a pastor, a bishop (or his diocesan staff) or a board, explained a 2015 report from Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities (Fadica), but “because canon law allows ecclesial officials to delegate responsibilities at their discretion, infinite configurations of authority are possible.” This makes the current landscape of Catholic elementary schools complicated. Survey Catholic school websites and you will see a jumble of terms like *consortium*, *limited jurisdiction*, *nonprofit network*, *local autonomy*, *two-tier boards* and *central governing entity*.

Despite these infinite possibilities, when it comes to decision-making, there is a clear pattern. Most schools today are shifting power from a single person (the pastor) to a board of directors that includes a combination of members of the clergy, laypersons and diocesan leaders. Driving this



Photo: Authenticated News/Archive Photos/Getty Images



St. Mary of the Lake School in Chicago, Ill., circa 1960. By 1960, nationwide enrollment in Catholic schools had peaked, with more than 5.2 million students.

shift toward more collaborative styles of decision-making is a twofold recognition. First, with a limited number of new ordinations, priests need to focus on the church's sacramental life; and second, schools benefit from the specialized skills lay leaders can offer.

"The church can no longer do it," said Christine Healey, president of the Healey Education Foundation, a New Jersey-based nonprofit organization that provides training and funding to Catholic schools. "And if we believe we want to invite the laity to help solve the equation, do we only want them to raise money for us? Or will we also give them some operating control to be part of the solution?"

Of course, how much control a board has—and who is a voting board member—varies considerably among schools. In some models, for example, parish pastors can appeal decisions made by the school board to the archdiocese; in others, the scope of a board's authority is limited to a narrow set of decisions—differences that reflect a range of approaches to balancing the leadership of clergy and laity. Yet the emphasis remains on empowering boards to act rather than just offer advice.

"Funders are really looking for models with a board of directors that has real authority to make decisions, like hiring and firing the principal, determining the education model, and making financial and operating decisions," said Alicia Simon of Fadica and one of the co-authors of the 2015 report.

A New York Story

Which brings us back to Abigail Akano. In 2010, the Archdiocese of New York announced a plan to reorganize 92 parish schools into nine regions. The schools in each new region switched from being individually governed by their parish pastor to being collectively governed by a centralized board.

This plan was already a significant shift, but a group of philanthropists committed to Catholic education had a further idea: What if the diocese outsourced the management and financial responsibility for some of these regionalized schools to an independent, nonprofit, nonecclesiastical organization?

"Our donors were weary of funding around the edges instead of funding for big impact," explained Jill Kafka, who formerly directed the Patrons Program, a philanthropic organization that later merged with the Endowment for Inner City Education to become Partnership Schools.

In 2013 the Archdiocese of New York agreed, granting Partnership Schools "full operational control" of six pre-K through eighth grade schools in Harlem and the Bronx. It was not a new model of governance per se; the diocese retains ownership and ultimate governance of Partnership Schools. But through a memo of understanding, the operation of these schools—creating an academic vision, maintaining the buildings, fundraising, hiring, finances—is turned over to the board of Partnership Schools, which has full authority to make decisions on behalf of the diocese.

“We’re basically an outsourced management contract with the diocese,” said Ms. Kafka, who is now Partnership Schools’s executive director. “They can hire us and they can fire us at any time if they don’t feel like we’re doing good by these schools.”

When Sacred Heart joined Partnership Schools, Ms. Akano was relieved. With the central office of Partnership Schools responsible for many of the tasks that once consumed her day, she could get back to what she was best at: ensuring teachers were providing instructional excellence.

On a typical school day, you will find Ms. Akano in the classroom, listening in on lessons from a student-sized desk, or working with the dean of students to plan the next professional development session—something that now happens weekly for all teachers. As a result, Ms. Akano sees teachers taking more ownership for their students’ academic achievement.

Ms. Kafka is also pleased. Since 2014, the six Partnership Schools have more than doubled the number of their students who pass the New York State language and math assessments. And while local public and charter schools spent an estimated \$19,000 to \$20,000 per student in 2016-17, the annual cost of educating a student at Partnership Schools was \$9,700. (But thanks to philanthropic funding, 82 percent of students receive a scholarship; the average amount collected from each family is \$2,700.)

Better Together

Partnership Schools shows what can happen when parochial schools are united by a strong central office: greater accountability to academic goals, more opportunities for leadership and professional development, resource sharing and cost savings through economies of scale.

For example, several years after the Archdiocese of Milwaukee approved the formation of Seton Catholic Schools, the network of 11 parochial schools reported saving \$735,000 on operational costs. “Different schools had different vendors and they were paying different levels of fees,” said Don Drees, the president of the Seton network. “We were able to consolidate all of our schools under one vendor and then renegotiate what that contract looks like for a lower cost and higher quality.” Seton was also able to hire a director of talent development to ensure its schools had a “big picture” plan to grow and to retain high-quality leaders—something that would never have been possible for stand-alone schools.

Leadership development is also an advantage of the network created by the Notre Dame ACE Academies, a partnership between the University of Notre Dame and clusters of schools in Indiana, Arizona and two different cities in Florida. For each of these clusters, ACE set up a board of limited jurisdiction with the power to make decisions on hiring and evaluating the principals in that region—a change that makes principals more accountable but also provides them with greater opportunities for professional development. ACE teachers visit each other’s campuses, take immersion trips to observe high-performing schools and gather at the University of Notre Dame in the summer to share best practices.

Sometimes, the advantage of a centralized model is simply the ability to spread a good idea across a greater number of schools. When Partnership Schools realized that their schools often pulled substandard math curricula from the internet, they switched to the widely used Eureka Math program. It was not a particularly expensive change, but it had a big impact, said Ms. Kafka. “Just by changing our curriculum, we were able to move our test scores 20 points higher.... It’s one of those untapped levers for change.” When the diocese saw those results, it implemented Eureka Math throughout the rest of its schools.

“We consider ourselves a laboratory,” said Ms. Kafka. “You do something in six schools; and if it works, then you can broaden it to the rest of the system.”

Solidarity, Subsidiarity

Centralized models of Catholic school governance, which usually serve students in poor, urban communities, model the principle of solidarity: working together to create systemic change for the common good, with special attention to those who lack resources. But Catholic social teaching also emphasizes the importance of subsidiarity: allowing local groups to make their own decisions whenever possible. This principle is rooted in the belief that all communities—including those that lack other resources—have wisdom in solving their own problems. And as the traditional parish model demonstrated, local decision-making has real advantages: “When the parish model works, it’s a powerhouse,” said William Hughes, who is chief academic officer for Seton Catholic Schools. “You’ve got family support, you might have a food pantry



Picture: The Healey Foundation

or activities for cross-generational work, and it becomes like a community center—something charter schools are constantly striving to create.”

Some centralized models try to address the tension between localized and centralized decision-making by inviting local pastors to serve on the network’s board or ensuring that staff from the central office meet regularly with on-site school leaders. In Seton Catholic Schools, the central network is given authority to operate not by the archdiocese but through voluntary—and revocable—agreements with individual schools. “We didn’t ‘take over’ the schools,” explained Don Drees. “We’re collaborating with parishes and the things that parishes have traditionally done—and continue to do—and we’re adding the expertise and leadership to drive results within the school.”

Still, a centralized model is not always the right move. “We started to see this collapse in urban settings with lower-income communities, so a lot of the passion around the work has tried to create centralized models to help these mission communities,” said Ms. Healey. “But we took the view that all schools are at risk of closure, not just the ones serving lower-income communities.”

So in addition to co-founding Catholic Partnership Schools—a network of five schools serving low-income communities in Camden, N.J.—the Healey Education Foundation created a local model that has been adopted by nearly 80 parish schools in dioceses across Delaware, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The Healey Advancement Methodology, as it is called, is aimed

at middle-income communities where the challenge confronting Catholic schools is not tuition affordability but rather declining interest in enrollment. The solution? “Somebody needs to get out and pound the pavement to get people to send kids to your school,” said Ms. Healey.

Creating a network is great at saving on costs and driving a rigorous academic model that attracts funders, explained Ms. Healey, but if your aim is to drive enrollment and parent engagement, joining with other schools does not help much. So schools using the Healey method also form a board that is empowered to make decisions that were formerly made by the parish, but just for that school. The foundation also helps elementary schools hire full-time directors of advancement, who become responsible for the two revenue drivers: enrollment and fundraising. Paired with a dynamic principal, Ms. Healey explained, the result can be a local school that offers parents a compelling reason to enroll their children.

Built to Last?

Until recently, if you wanted a success story of innovation in parochial education, Jubilee Catholic Schools Network in Memphis was an obvious choice.

In 2000—the Catholic Church’s jubilee year—the Diocese of Memphis shocked Catholic educators by reopening nine Catholic schools, some of which had been closed for 50 years, in some of the city’s poorest neighborhoods. Part of the “Memphis miracle” was that, thanks to generous funding from anonymous donors, the diocese prom-

Most schools today are shifting power from a single person to a board of directors with clergy, laity and diocesan leaders. ●●

ised that no family would be turned away if they could not afford tuition. Equally innovative was the structure. For efficiency, Mary McDonald, the Memphis Catholic schools superintendent, centralized some decision-making for the nine schools within the diocesan offices. The Jubilee School Network thrived, and its success inspired much of the innovation in Catholic schools today.

But in January 2018, the diocese of Memphis again shocked Catholic educators, this time with an announcement that all Jubilee schools would close at the end of the 2018-19 school year. Funding the schools had been a “challenge,” said the diocesan website, and despite annual fundraising efforts, the generous trust fund from donors was “nearly depleted.”

The news sent shockwaves through the world of Catholic education. “This is an inflection point in the history of Catholic schools,” wrote Tim Uhl in his newsletter. “It might be a harbinger of more closures to come. Or we might learn from this event and improve the landscape.”

For Mary McDonald, who retired from her role as superintendent in 2012, Jubilee’s impending closure is a lesson in why schools need greater independence from the diocese. In her work today as an education consultant, Ms. McDonald advises other school networks to be more like independent Catholic schools, which remain under the authority of the bishop in terms of Catholic identity but are owned and operated independently of a parish or diocese. As she put it: “With anything that’s owned and operated by the diocese, there’s only one vote that counts—and that’s the bishop.”

The importance of Ms. McDonald’s observation became clear last October, when Bishop Martin D. Holley, who had made the decision to close Jubilee Schools and also had controversially reassigned two-thirds of the diocese’s priests to new parishes, was removed from pastoral leadership for reasons related to “management of the diocese.”

For Jill Kafka, the news about the Jubilee closures was “a wake-up call about sustainability.” The central office of Partnership Schools still has to raise \$6,400 per pupil every year to cover operating expenses—more than \$14.2 million annually. And as Jubilee demonstrated, a model that relies heavily on donors to cover its operating expenses is risky.

For others, the collapse of a celebrated school network pointed to the importance of passing legislation that allows parents to use public money to help fund their child’s private schools. “Vouchers or other school choice programs, such as tax-credit scholarships, may be necessary to make Catholic schools affordable for low-income families,” wrote Seton’s William Hughes in a “post-mortem” analysis of Jubilee Schools.

Structure Versus Goals

The August following Jubilee’s startling announcement, a nonprofit formed by local Catholic leaders won approval to convert six of the former Jubilee schools into a network of charter schools, or schools that are independently operated but funded by taxpayers. If the appeal of this plan is obvious—a sustainable model for tuition-free, high-quality education in communities that need good schools—so is the downside: The schools are no longer Catholic. Though charter schools are free from some regulations imposed on public schools, they are still bound by law to be religiously neutral.

Obviously, not everyone was pleased by this development. “I think pastors and bishops can be made to feel like this is a way to save the school,” said Christian Dallavis, the founder of Notre Dame ACE Academies. “But in reality, it closes the school and it eliminates the possibility of them being permitted to hire principals and teachers on the basis of whether they believe the children are made in the image and likeness of God.”

No one hears these arguments more than Stephanie Saroki de García, co-founder and managing director of Seton Education Partners, a nonprofit organization on a mission to provide Catholic education to underserved communities (not to be confused with Seton Catholic Schools in Milwaukee). Like Mr. Dallavis, Ms. Saroki de García agrees that the ideal form of Catholic education is a school where the teachers can pray with students during the day and weave conversations about faith throughout the entire curriculum. But despite the efforts of her fellow education reformers, she knows that kind of Catholic education is not always an option. If parents cannot afford tuition and you do not have access to vouchers or donors with deep pockets, what are you supposed to do, especially in low-income

communities where quality schools—Catholic or otherwise—are already in short supply?

To Ms. Saroki de García, the answer is clear: “You stop being yoked to a particular structure and start being focused on goals.” So in 2013 Seton founded Brilla College Prep, a public charter school that operates out of three former parish schools in the South Bronx. During the day, Brilla uses a rigorous curriculum with religiously neutral virtues and values. But after school, it offers optional (and privately funded) faith programming. Since 2014, the program has led to 99 students receiving the sacrament of baptism; and 53 percent of participating families report praying together more. Brilla is not a Catholic school, but for the families who opt into the after-school program, it achieves the same goals of a Catholic education, said Ms. Saroki de García.

And the Mission Is...

The bottom line is: “The model of Catholic education we’ve relied on for a century is no longer working,” said Andy Smarick, one of the authors of “Catholic School Renaissance.” “Now there are people who think that old model is the only pure model and they don’t want to change it at all. And the question for those people is: ‘Would you rather continue to have that model and another 50 years of Catholic school loss, or are we going to be open to seeing some of these things different[ly] and try to preserve Catholic education, even though it may look different than in 1965?’”

Another question: What is the “pure” model of Catholic education? The first schools in North America were part of Spanish missions intended “to dominate, civilize, and educate” indigenous people, explains the historian Timothy Walch in *Parish Schools: A History of American Parochial Education From Colonial Times to the Present*. The earliest schools in the English colonies were not parochial, but rather independent schools supported and operated by the sisters and brothers of religious orders, including Elizabeth Ann Seton, whose early school-founding efforts led to her becoming the first American saint.

Even the parish model that peaked in the 1960s was the product of earlier experimentation. As leaders built schools in response to 19th-century anti-Catholicism,

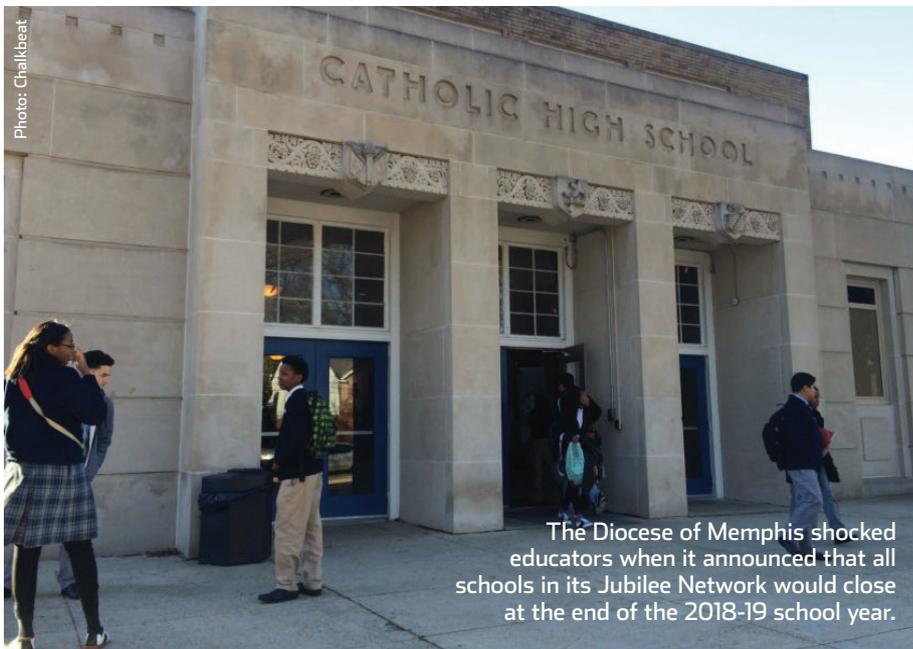


Photo: Chalkbeat

The Diocese of Memphis shocked educators when it announced that all schools in its Jubilee Network would close at the end of the 2018-19 school year.

some emphasized instruction in students’ native languages to maintain their ethnic heritage; others wanted a more “American” curriculum. Leaders like Bishop John Neumann of Philadelphia created central boards to raise money, review the curriculum and supervise the construction of new schools; others tried to change laws to make public funding available for Catholic schools. And from 1831 through 1916, Catholic communities in at least 14 states allowed public school boards to finance local Catholic schools, accepting the limitation that religious instruction would only take place after the school day had ended—a model similar to Ms. Saroki de García’s charter schools.

During the current era of experimentation in Catholic education, Mr. Smarick sees the church wrestling with a variety of ways to understand the primary mission of Catholic education: Is it to keep Catholic families rooted in the faith? Or is to provide high-quality education to low-income communities? Or is it an evangelization tool to help bring new people to the faith? Of course, many schools share all those goals, said Mr. Smarick, “but which one you put at the top of the list is important.”

“We’re trying to figure out how to prioritize these things the right way and update these institutions,” he continued. “So the fact that there are different people approaching this in different ways is both natural and very exciting.”

Betsy Shirley, of Washington, D.C., is an associate editor of *Sojourners* magazine.

THE REAL OFF

How a troubling letter forced me to reckon with our nation's history of prejudice

By Rachel Lu

It is one of those moments you do not forget: the first time you receive a friendly note from a virulent racist. Nothing quite compares to that nasty realization that you have been deemed recruitment-worthy by the foot-soldiers of the Ku Klux Klan.

For me, this first happened in the spring of 2015, a couple of years into my career as a freelance writer. I had recently written a piece for *The Federalist* on the failures of Democratic urban policy. The piece was a crowd pleaser, and I felt good about it. Shortly after it ran, I got a note from a reader who assured me that I was a gifted writer who had made some excellent points. Unfortunately, he said, I had not yet gotten to the heart of the issue. The Democrats had their problems, but bad policy was not the real scourge of American cities. They were simply ungovernable, he said, because there were too many black people.

I stopped on that sentence. My mouth was suddenly dry. I wanted to hit “delete” and consign this vile argument to oblivion. It was hard to look away though, so I read on to find a list of suggested books, ostensibly explaining the scientific basis for black violence and promiscuity. These books, I was assured, would truly open my eyes. At that, the reader wished me all success in my career and signed off.

UNITY RACISM



I genuinely believed that racism was not a significant problem in the United States. 🍊🍊

I was rattled. Like most public writers, I was used to getting notes that were crude, crazy or even mildly threatening. Normally, I would say a quick prayer for these obviously troubled people and get on with my day. This time it felt different, precisely because the author wasn't insulting or obviously deranged. He could spell, punctuate and summarize the central argument of a book. He was also a raging bigot. Worst of all, he saw me as some kind of kindred spirit. Why in the world would he think that?

Over the next few years, I would come to a clearer understanding of what that reader saw in my work. He did not mistake me for a fellow racist, which I am not. Still, there were reasons he thought I might be persuadable. In order to appreciate those reasons, I had to think more deeply about the subtleties of prejudice and the power of political narrative. By the end, I would understand more clearly why racial reconciliation has proven difficult, even in a society that overwhelmingly wants to distance itself from the injustices of a prejudiced past.

A Topic of Debate

I have spent much of my life among my fellow political conservatives. For most of that time, I genuinely believed that racism was not a significant problem in the United States. I thought we had successfully overcome the sins of our troubled history. Of course, I did notice that racial prejudice continued to be a topic of heated public debate. But I assumed (like many political conservatives) that this was politically manufactured outrage with almost no basis in reality.

Today I see things differently. Many do not though, so it is worth recalling why this perspective seemed reasonable to me for so long. I know many people who are politically conservative who could benefit from deeper reflection on racial prejudice and its historical roots. At the same time, I know many people who are politically liberal whose ignorant or intemperate comments have served to polarize and not to persuade. This results in the further entrenchment of complacent right-wing views.

Why was I so sanguine about the end of racial prejudice? One reason was simply that I knew a great many po-

litical conservatives, none of whom seemed at all racist. They never said racist things or showed noteworthy favoritism toward white people. They agreed unanimously that slavery and segregation were terrible things, probably the aspects of our American heritage least deserving of pride. Why would I suspect them of harboring racial prejudice when I saw absolutely no signs of this?

I was proud of our non-racist society, especially because I had lived and traveled in places where people did openly display racial bigotry. In Italy, I once conversed with an older gentleman who told me that he had not enjoyed visiting the United States because “there were too many blacks and Chinese.” As a Peace Corps volunteer in Uzbekistan, I was scolded by Uzbek acquaintances for befriending an Armenian woman because, they said, “those people are dirty, and they steal.” In the course of my travels and in my study of history, I had plenty of occasions to notice that racism is really quite a common human failing. Nevertheless, here in the United States I married a man of a different race without worrying for an instant that my conservative friends or family would be bothered. (They were not.) What a wonderful country!

In light of that experience, it was quite difficult to take seriously the hyperbolic left-leaning missives, lamenting the evils of right-wing racism. These warnings seemed especially shrill around 2008, when Barack Obama was elected president. Many people, it seemed, truly believed that racism was a primary explanation for conservative dissatisfaction with our 44th president. That seemed ludicrous to me. In such a polarized nation, was it really necessary to fall back on such damning explanations for political disagreement? I was especially amused by complaints that conservatives were “dog-whistling” to racist voters. The charge made me picture smoke-filled rooms filled with scheming strategists and pundits, debating effective strategies for pushing their readers' ugliest buttons. This sounded to me like the silliest kind of conspiracy-mongering.

Answering Painful Questions

A few years later, I started actually writing for right-wing political outlets. I was never invited into those nefarious smoke-filled rooms. But I did start to realize that things were more complicated than I had supposed.

The racist fan mail gave me my first jolt. It was discomfiting to realize that bigots really were out there, identifying me as a potential ally. Things really began to shift, though, when I engaged in an extended research project on criminal justice reform. Initially, I became interested

in the issue as a rare area of politics, in which productive, bipartisan conversations still seemed to be taking place. As I dug deeper into the history of criminal justice, however, it became increasingly impossible to ignore the relevance of race.

The justice system is one part of American life that has always been riven by racial tensions. As I read further on the subject, it struck me that there really has not ever been a point in our nation's history when black Americans could confidently believe that they would be viewed as equals in the eyes of the law. Criminal justice has always been a flash-point for racial tensions, from the lynch mobs of the old South through Jesse Washington, Marquette Frye, Rodney King, O. J. Simpson and now Tamir Rice, Philando Castile and Stephon Clark. As a conservative, I had long taken pride in our nation's vaunted legal tradition. Now I wondered: Might I feel differently if those faces were the ones I first associated with the arm of the law?

These questions are painful, throwing us into difficult reflections about predators and victims and how we recognize each category. I started thinking about cycles of violence and how they could arise between law enforcement and civilian populations, just as they arose between feuding families or warring ethnic and religious groups. These struggles, I realized, had deep historical roots; it was short-sighted how pundits always wanted to bring things back to an endless debate over "racist cops" and "black-on-black crime."

Writing about these insights in *The Federalist*, *National Review Online* and the *National Catholic Register* earned me more mail from racist readers. They were not fans anymore. But the most revealing responses did not come from extremists pitching racialist pseudoscience. Far more interesting were the responses from mainline conservatives of a more familiar sort. I was genuinely startled by how bothered some of them were. One acquaintance showed up to a social event with a list of talking points, anxious to rebut my latest essay on criminal justice reform. On another occasion, a reader sought me out at a parish talk to explain that my "social justice activism" was giving aid and succor to the left and that black Americans could improve their own neighborhoods quite easily by simply "not killing each other."



Black Lives Matter demonstrators were among those protesting the white nationalist rally Unite the Right 2 near LaFayette Square in Washington on Aug. 12.

CNS photo/Tyler O'Gaburn

In these reactions, I now saw a kind of cultivated insensitivity. Why, I wondered, should it be so terrible to agree that black communities today suffer disadvantages, which are connected to our unfortunate history of racial injustice? In admitting that, one need not confess to personal guilt. Neither is it necessary to disavow love of country. All societies have sins and shortcomings that need to be addressed; indeed, we should want to address these precisely because we love our country. As I saw it, I was merely asking my right-wing readers to consider that historical injustice might have long-lasting effects. Why was that so offensive to some people?

The fact that they took offense made me wonder whether the problem might be worse than I had feared. I also started to notice subtler cues that had escaped me before. What kind of placement did right-leaning publications give to pieces about rioting black youth, as opposed to other violent events? Which parts of the famed "Moynihan Report" did they best remember, and when did they bring them up? I started noticing how certain writers cherry-picked their data in such a way as to reinforce right-wing assumptions about the heroism of law enforcement and the deep lawlessness of black culture. One day it occurred to me: Maybe that was what liberals meant by "dog-whistling."

Political narrative is easier to recognize when you are looking across the aisle rather than at those beside you. It was easy for me to recognize how progressives were prone to intemperate or hyperbolic statements, presumably meant to galvanize readers. Now I saw what should have been obvious: Conservatives do this, too. On their side, the goal is usually to persuade readers (or voters) that racism is overwhelmingly a

Nothing quite compares to that nasty realization that you have been deemed recruitment-worthy by the Ku Klux Klan. 🍷🍷

historical phenomenon and that struggling minorities today have only themselves to blame for their problems.

Why are so many conservatives so ready to believe this? There are many reasons. Sometimes, they may just want to protect the reputation of people they are strongly inclined to admire. Most conservatives like the police, for instance. They warm to the “thin blue line” ideal of law enforcement as a bulwark against the ever-present threat of chaos. It is unpleasant to think about instances in which the police really have not been the good guys. Many conservatives also have warm feelings about certain historical periods, in which racial injustice was obviously very real. Racism was obviously still a significant force in the mid-20th-century United States, following World War II and before the civil rights movement hit its stride. Conservatives know this, but many still cherish the memories of this period, when our heroic veterans settled down in clean-cut suburbs to raise healthy families. Even acknowledging that their great-grandparents’ racism was itself reprehensible, it is still more pleasant to think of that as a somewhat-incidental blemish on an otherwise admirable age.

Some motives are less benign. In our age of political tribalism, a regrettable number have been willing to think in racial terms, using skin color as a semi-reliable proxy for defining friend and foe. Some right-wing personalities (including, regrettably, our own president) have encouraged this in fairly transparent ways. It is especially easy to do this in economically desiccated places where people feel left behind. They may resent this especially in light of their ancestors’ historical contributions as farmers, soldiers or builders of railroads. They feel these contributions entitle them to a certain sort of life, which others may not deserve as richly. It probably does not occur to them that these claims of historical entitlement should at least be set alongside more serious reflection on the duty to make amends for historical injustice.

Relatively few people descend to the dangerous extremes of my original bigoted correspondent. Still, it is easy enough to see how it happens. It is common for right-wing narratives to treat racial prejudice as a freakish historical oddity, which we regret but prefer not to discuss. Popular right-wing pundits like Heather Mac Donald will readily agree that racism is shameful and wrong and even that racist attitudes may surface now and again in particular misanthropic individuals but they treat this as just an aberration, with relatively little significance. For a certain kind of contrarian, that is a veritable invitation to breach the taboo, re-envisioning U.S. history through a new racialist lens. Conservative writers like myself, as I did when voicing my former perspectives, can unwittingly lay the groundwork for that transition, even when that is not our intention.

Despite everything that has happened in the United States these past few years, I am still proud of the steps we have taken toward racial reconciliation. We have come a long way over the past half century and even further, since our nation’s original founding. I do still believe that Americans, in general, want to have a harmonious, multi-ethnic society. But for that to happen, we may need to be less defensive, more generous and more open to contemplating the far-reaching effects that racial injustice can have. Conservatives need to relax their triumphalist impulses a bit and appreciate the tragic aspects of American history more fully. Liberals should be less zealous about wielding racial accusations as a weapon. All of us should recognize how hard it is to persuade people to be open-minded when they themselves are hurting. Correction is much likelier to be heeded when it is offered in a loving spirit.

St. Paul tells us that in Christ there is “neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female.” Our earthly identities, however important they might be to our experience and understanding of each other, do not define our worth. And in order to understand these identities, we must first see each other as children of God. It has always been difficult for groups of human beings to understand and live with people unlike themselves. Through grace, perhaps we can learn to see the humanity that we all share.

Rachel Lu, a contributing writer for *America*, lives in St. Paul, Minn.



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ENDURING PAIN

Facing up to cruelty and racism at a Jesuit high school

By Anonymous

I was one of the few African-American students when I started attending an all-boys Jesuit high school in the mid-1970s. But for my first few years I never doubted my place among my better-off, mostly white peers. My teachers and classmates challenged me to reach the heights of academic excellence and to embody the Jesuit ideals of service and social justice.

But during my junior year, this feeling of academic collegiality and brotherhood came to a painful halt. One day, I found some of my classmates gathered at the front of the classroom in a fit of laughter. When I approached them, I realized that they were gazing at a piece of paper. On it was an image of a naked African pygmy woman with her breasts exposed, and there was some sort of sticky substance smeared over the picture. There were words written across the top: It was my last name followed by the word “Mom.”

The students stopped laughing when they saw my morified face. The teacher came into the classroom and excoiated the boys. I was stunned both by the deeply personal

My academic standing did not protect me from being targeted for my race. 🍃

and savage nature of the insult and by the failure of anyone other than my teacher to speak out to defend my mother and me. I had walked arm in arm with my classmates since we were 13 years old, and I thought that they considered me one of them. I thought I had proven myself by being near the top of the class. But my academic standing did not protect me from being targeted for my race.

I composed myself and carried on with the rest of the day, dreading the moment when I would have to tell my mother what happened. Fortunately, when I did, she comforted me and handled the situation with the utmost dignity. It was not the first time she had encountered racism—though never, perhaps, with the added sexual degradation of this instance. Other than being forced to call my mother to apologize, the culprits escaped without punishment. I was expected to suck it up and get along with my studies. I did not receive an apology until last spring, when I reported the incident to the school's current administration.

I understand that the high school years are turbulent times and that most young men and women will make their share of errors. And I believe that most students and graduates of Jesuit schools today would be horrified by how those boys treated me and my mother. I suspect, however, that some Jesuit school alumni may not fully appreciate the impact such a public humiliation can have on a victim and his or her life choices.

My late mother was a beautiful, loving soul with a wonderful smile. She was passionately devoted to the Catholic Church and her family. She loved my Jesuit high school and beamed with pride at sporting events, social gatherings and academic ceremonies. She supported the school with her volunteer hours and whatever else she could contribute based on my family's limited financial means. Her only fault, one she readily admitted, was that she worried incessantly about her children.

I can only imagine the pain she felt when I came home

and explained that my classmates had depicted her as a naked and defiled pygmy woman. I do not believe that she, as a woman of color and a leading proponent of desegregation, had in that moment the freedom to express her outrage. I remember her carefully calibrating her reaction to prevent me from experiencing any additional self-doubt or sadness. Instead, she internalized the pain, which over time takes a toll on one's health. I cannot say this racist, sexist incident and other lesser ones caused my mother's death at a young age, but it certainly did not add years to her life.

For my part, the loss of innocence I experienced that day had lasting consequences. While I had no illusions about the state of racial relations in my community before this incident, I did see my Jesuit school as an island of humanity. After all, my classmates were the best and brightest kids from the finest families, and I was surrounded by caring, enlightened faculty. The incident made it hard for me to form lasting friendships. I now wonder if I was a coward not to seek revenge against those who violated my mother's honor.

I have enjoyed considerable professional success since graduating from high school. Nevertheless, I have found myself on many occasions to be easily triggered by racial or perceived racial slights. My sometimes unchecked anger has led to some career setbacks, for which I accept responsibility—but which I know in my heart are partially traceable to the unreconciled rage from the vile prank of my classmates. Even now, I am constantly on guard against being emasculated because of my race and social class. I regret mistakes I have made in relationships and the opportunities I have missed to build cultural bridges.

I care deeply about my alma mater, and I am profoundly grateful for the life-changing education I received. I have tried my best to live up to the motto *ad majorem Dei gloriam* and to follow in the footsteps of St. Ignatius Loyola. But I cannot continue to hide the enduring pain that I feel because of that vile and humiliating incident. By sharing this story, I hope to bring awareness of the cruelty and privilege in our midst and to help reduce the occurrence of racial and sexual bullying in the future by our children, grandchildren and others who join the ranks of proud Jesuit graduates.

I wish my fellow alumni, their families and friends nothing but the best. We have so much for which to be thankful, but we also have an obligation to be open about our shortcomings and work harder to be “men and women for others.”

The author is a graduate of a Jesuit high school.



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A Pope and a Rabbi In Abu Dhabi

By Abraham Skorka

Interfaith
dialogue is
'the imperative
of our age'

This February, I will be a participant with my friend Pope Francis at a “Global Conference on Human Fraternity” hosted by the United Arab Emirates in Abu Dhabi. It seeks a common framework of cooperation among religious leaders to achieve peace and human solidarity.

Interreligious dialogue has always been a priority for me. I learned its importance from my mentor Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer, a protégé of the great Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. I first met Jorge Mario Bergoglio nearly 20 years ago, when he was an auxiliary bishop in Buenos Aires. We recognized in the other a partner for the enactment of our shared commitment to dialogue between and among religions. In the following years, we engaged in numerous heartfelt conversations, which we both found deeply meaningful and transformative.

In preparation for the gathering in Abu Dhabi, I find myself asking why my dialogues with the future Pope Fran-

cis so powerfully affected both of us. How did they move beyond being superficial exchanges of information to become profound spiritual and personal experiences? How did they come to embody what he has described as “the journey of friendship” that Jews and Catholics have undertaken since the Second Vatican Council?

First, we consciously put God at the center of our exchanges. We talked about God and how to draw closer to God. We wanted to learn from each other’s experiences of God. This gave us both the certain awareness that God was accompanying us on our journey.

Keeping focused on our relationships with God kept us humble and more open to each other. As Francis put it in *On Heaven and Earth*, the book we co-authored, “To dialogue, one must know how to lower the defenses, to open the doors of one’s home and to offer warmth.” We understood that God has fashioned all of us in the divine image,

◀ Pope Francis embraces Rabbi Abraham Skorka during a brief stop at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia, Sept. 27, 2015.

enabling us to see God's reflection in each other's faces as we increasingly opened our hearts to each other.

Additionally, we never tried to persuade—or dissuade—each other of anything. As Pope Francis has recalled: “[T]here was a basis of total trust, and...neither of us negotiated our own identity. If we had, we would not have been able to talk. It would have been a sham.... And neither of us attempted to convert the other.” Because of our trust, “our dialogue was free-wheeling,” as Francis reminded me when I shared a draft of this essay with him. Respect for each other's religious integrity, in fact, helped us learn together. “My religious life became richer with his explanations, so much richer,” my friend observed.

Francis and I also understood that the demands of the present—the common effort for peace, the alleviation of hunger, the ending of the destruction of our global ecosystem—were urgent. Beyond the differences and perceived differences that have separated Jews and Christians for centuries, of far greater significance is the common ethical foundation we share in the Bible, which allows us to work together.

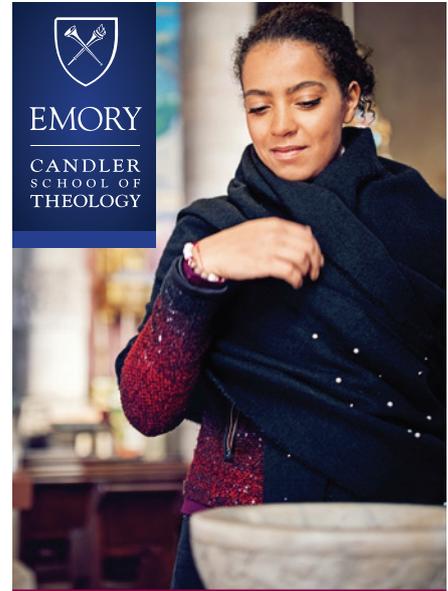
Crucially, we each tried to understand the other's religious identity on its own terms and to share each other's concerns. I recall Francis' pain over anti-Semitism. “A Christian cannot be an anti-Semite,” he has repeatedly declared as pope. He has also stated that “an outright attack on the state of Israel is [a form of] anti-Semitism” because “Israel has every right to exist in safety and prosperity.”

Although Francis has expressed these sentiments because of his deep respect for human rights and for the Jewish people and tradition—and not because of our friendship—his ability to empathize with the heartache of others was a great gift that often enriched our dialogues.

Finally, we treasured the differences within our commonalities. We have learned that it would be a blasphemy to God if we were to let even defining differences separate us as God's children and as brothers. Dialogue is the imperative of our age. Francis once wrote to me that “the seed of peace, once sown, will not be destroyed. You have to wait for the birth of the time that will favor its growth by praying and following the commandment of love.”

This is the message I hope to bring to Abu Dhabi. Striving for authentic friendship and peace through dialogue is not pursuing an illusion. Actually, it is the destiny of human existence.

Rabbi Abraham Skorka is university professor at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia and co-author with Pope Francis of *On Heaven and Earth*.



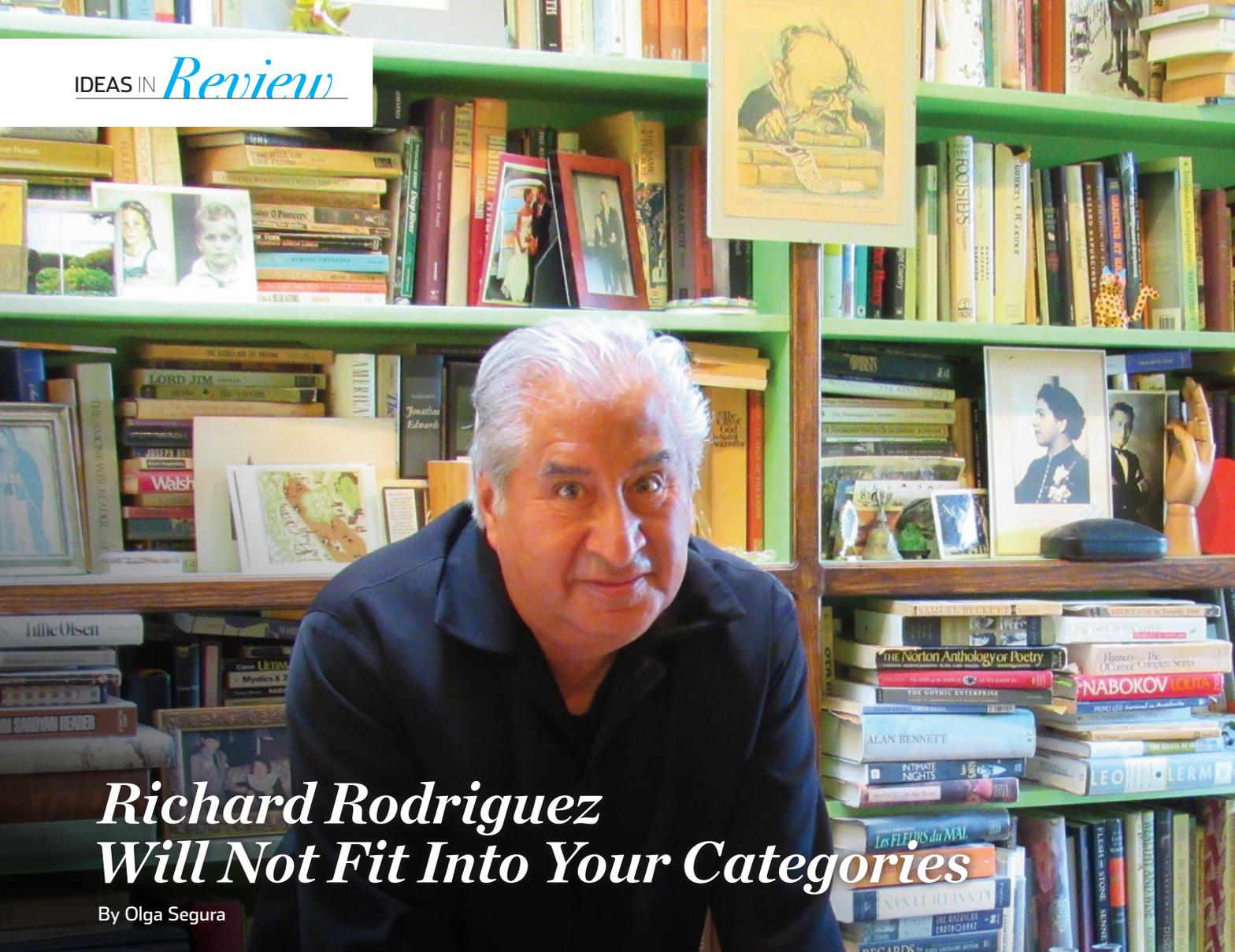
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Richard Rodriguez Will Not Fit Into Your Categories

By Olga Segura

The city of San Francisco sits atop the steep hills of northern California. Founded by Spanish colonizers in 1776 and named after St. Francis of Assisi, it is home to over 800,000 people. In August, the weather in the city famously changes from one moment to the next—chilly to warm, sunny to cloudy and back again. Throughout the city’s streets, more surprising than the climate is the number of men and women experiencing homelessness. Driving through these streets, I see groups of 10 or more, mostly men, gathered, block after block, and cars with windows left open with signs

that read “no valuables here”; I later learn that many of the individuals experiencing homelessness survive by breaking into cars to rummage for items to sell for food.

This reality of deep poverty seems especially jarring against the backdrop of the city’s architecture, a fascinating mix of modern and Victorian buildings. All along San Francisco’s hills are beautiful and pristine homes, towering Queen Anne houses with large bay windows and exuberant colors.

It is in one of these homes that I first meet the Mexican-American writer Richard Rodriguez. He lives in

a stunning three-level gray-and-white apartment building in the Pacific Heights neighborhood of the city. He welcomes me into his home and gives me a tour of each apartment in the building, all of which are unlocked and empty except for the one he shares with his partner, Jim, on the second floor. “I have lived in this lovely Victorian house since 1982,” he says. “Lots of lovely ghosts here since my beloved landlord and several other tenants died here over the years. The house doesn’t seem empty to me—or cold.”

It is in this home that Rodriguez wrote his autobiography, *Hunger of*



Photo by Olga Segura

◀ Part of Rodriguez's charm is his refusal to play to people's expectations of who he should be.

Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez, published in 1982. It was his first book and tells the story of his journey from the first grade at Sacred Heart School in Sacramento to becoming one of the most recognizable Catholic Latino writers in the United States. The book was extremely well received by critics and, in 1983, won the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for nonfiction.

Rodriguez has also found critical acclaim with *Days of Obligation: An Argument With My Mexican Father*, which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, and *Darling: A Spiritual Autobiography*. His essays have also been published in *First Things*, *The New York Times*, *Mother Jones* and *Time* magazine.

In *Hunger for Memory*, Rodriguez outlines his opposition to affirmative action and bilingual education on the grounds that it prevents assimilation. “Bilingualists

simplistically scorn the value of assimilation,” he writes. Assimilation, he insists, allowed him to “be able to think of myself as an American, no longer an alien in *gringo* society,” one who had “the rights and opportunities necessary for full public individuality.” This is a position readers have criticized; many have accused the author of betraying his own culture.

I read *Hunger* before meeting the author. For me, as a Latina, Rodriguez felt like a contradiction in terms. Despite being a brown, Catholic, gay man, who spoke only Spanish for the first six years of his life, he has spent

much of his career arguing against programs created to help communities like ours. I wanted to put him into a box, but upon meeting him I quickly realized that part of his charm is his refusal to play to people's expectations of who he should be.

Richard Rodriguez was born in San Francisco on July 31, 1944, to Victoria and Carlos Leopoldo Rodriguez, Mexican immigrants. They arrived in the United States from western Mexico in the 1930s; his mother from Jalisco, his father from Colima. His parents had very different relationships with Mexico, he tells me. “My mother loved everything about Mexico—the landscape of Jalisco, the family cow, the taste of Mexican ice cream, the sound of Mexican music, men singing,” he says.

His father, on the other hand, is what he describes as an “anti-Mexico Mexican.” Carlos Leopoldo was an orphan, raised by his uncle during the decades of anti-Catholic persecution in Mexico. In the late 19th century, President Benito Juárez passed legislation that repressed the Catholic Church in Mexico. In 1917, the government revised its constitution: The Catholic Church was banned from primary education, monastic orders were outlawed and clergy members were denied basic rights.

In 1926, President Plutarco Elías Calles enforced the “Calles Law,” which placed further restrictions on the Catholic Church and religious orders. During Calles's presidency, from 1926 to 1929, the Cristero Rebellion occurred. Over 40 priests were killed in Mexico between 1926 and 1934, including Blessed Miguel Pro, S.J. Rodriguez tells me that his father and uncle hid priests in family closets during this time. “One day, [my father] came

upon a young priest he knew hanging from a noose, from a tree in the garden,” he tells me, adding: “My father decided that day to leave Mexico. He was nearly 20 when he boarded a ship and ended up in San Francisco.”

His family left San Francisco when he was 6. They moved to Sacramento, almost two hours north of San Francisco, after doctors suggested the warm and dry climate would help alleviate the symptoms of his brother's asthma. Sacramento, he says, is the city that he truly considers home. Growing up there, he was an altar server and loved attending Mass. “I can't even begin to describe how wonderful my life was and how mysterious it was,” he says. “I would be called out of class to go to a funeral in the middle of the morning.” During one such service, he had to help carry the casket because there was no one present. “It was the first time I'd carried death and I didn't know how heavy death would be.”

He tells me that despite knowing he was gay at a very young age, he would not define his adolescence as a gay one but a Catholic one.

Catholicism has played a significant role in Rodriguez's life and work. In *Hunger*, he dedicates a chapter, “Credo,” to his family's faith, where he describes the way his parents' faith shifted when they left behind their Mexican church for an Irish-American one in the United States. “I cannot overstate the influence of the Irish on my life and the lives of my family,” he tells me. “All the nuns who taught me English and then introduced me to the idea that I was an American, albeit a Catholic, were Irish—and the priests, too. Ireland played a very large part in my Americanization and my Catholic formation.”

Along with the influence of the



Richard Rodriguez's family arrived in the United States from western Mexico in the 1930s.

church during his adolescence, he describes himself as a young boy who explored the world around him alone. He would go to boxing matches and lectures, including one where he heard Malcolm X speak. It was during these moments that he began to form his voice as a writer. "That's how I came to be, the loneliness, the embarrassment of being an immigrant child, the intensity of it," he says.

Rodriguez began writing for his high school newspaper. He later attended Stanford University, Columbia University and the University of California, Berkeley. On the first of our two afternoons together, he tells me that he has navigated two identities, two Richards: the Richard at home, who spoke only Spanish, and the Richard in the public world, the one encouraged by nuns to speak only English to better his education. This dual reality of speaking different languages for different contexts informs many of his positions, including his thoughts on bilingual teaching in the

American education system. "I don't think American education has taken seriously how difficult it is for working-class kids to achieve a public voice," he says. "Teachers don't do a good enough job impressing on students that their job as students is not to express themselves—their job is to make themselves understood by strangers."

Why can't language do both? I ask. Why can't language allow us to learn how to express our thoughts and feelings while also preparing us to talk to others who are not like us? Rodriguez tells me, "This desire you express for students, particularly students of color, to express themselves as strangers, because that is how they are seen, is a great, and I mean that word exactly, romantic dream.

"The problem is that the language—any language the young would use—already was crafted by centuries before them, by the dead of their own race or nation, villains and saints both. One must join the company of gener-

ations of tongues in order to voice oneself apart, in whatever tongue. Speaking thus becomes an act of socialization, even if it is the declaration of separation."

Hunger was rejected eight times before it was published by Bantam Books. Though hailed by critics, for his family it was a source of humiliation.

Rodriguez admits that when the book was first published, he never thought his family would read it. The family's humiliation was two-fold. "One, that I presented it at all, that I was talking about my relationship with my parents in public," he says. "Two it was the boy, the immigrant, working-class boy talking about his embarrassment at their foreignness."

His family hated the book because it presented their lives for all the world to see—especially the white world. In "Mr. Secrets," the book's last chapter, Rodriguez recalls a letter his mother wrote to him prior to *Hunger's* release: "Write about something else in the future. Our

family life is private,” she said. “Why do you need to tell the *gringos* about how divided you feel from the family?”

He had to tell *Hunger*, he says, because he was finishing a story. “What I realized in grammar school was that I was becoming a public person. I was getting a public voice, a voice that my father didn’t have. I was getting the voice of Richard Rodriguez. *Ladies and gentlemen, Richard Rodriguez.*”

“I was getting that voice,” he goes on, “and everything that I did in school with writing and reading was giving me this voice. It was becoming an American voice, all these books that I was reading, from Faulkner to F. Scott Fitzgerald to Joan Didion. They were teaching me how an American sounds and what an American says—the impersonations that we have with our voice.”

Last year, Rodriguez spoke to students at Duke University about the various ways Latinos identify themselves. While he spoke, he refused to use just one term to describe Latinos, choosing instead to use several like Latina, Hispanic, Latinx. For most of Rodriguez’s career—and his life—he has been dedicated to challenging the ways in which communities of color use language in America. These challenges often fall squarely into what is sometimes called respectability politics. (Respectability politics refers to the expectations of members of marginalized communities that their fellow community members conform to mainstream societal norms.)

No easy answers to these questions of language and identity arose during our time together, yet the more we spoke, the more I realized how pivotal Rodriguez’s voice is for Latino readers attempting to understand our role as American citizens in the 21st century. His next projects include an essay about the relationship Americans have to monuments like tombstones and civil war statues.

Richard Rodriguez cannot be placed into a box, as hard as readers, including myself, may try.

“My admiration for African-Americans is that they found their voice in mimicking the slave owner’s voice,” he says during our last conversation, referring to African-American Vernacular English. According to Rodriguez, it is by embracing linguistic assimilation, by accepting English as the dominant language in America, that Latinos can truly achieve any kind of radical change. “Real revolution in language is taking the stranger’s tongue and using it better than he.”

Olga Segura is an associate editor of *America*.

A Trajectory of Starlings

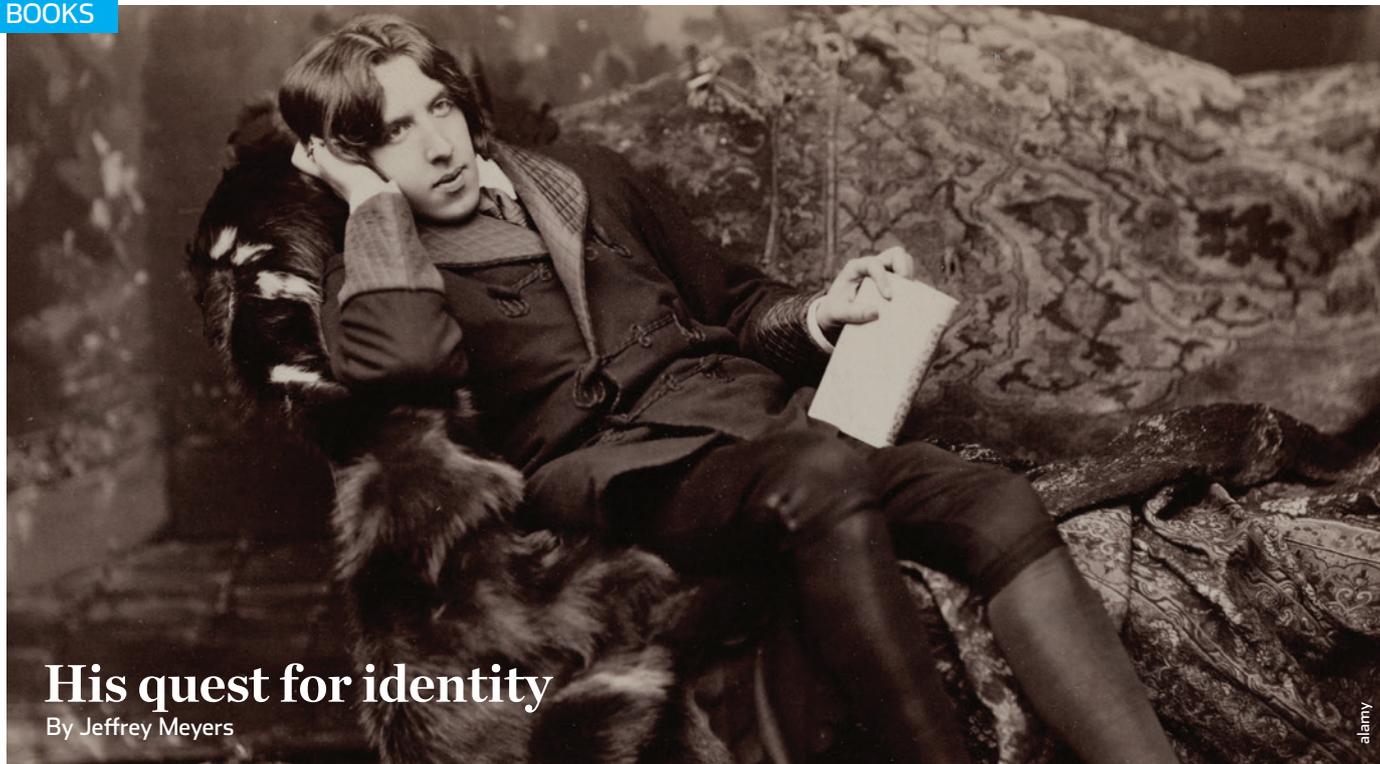
By Richard Schiffman

They blew in fast to the low slung tree hung fat
with beachball-orange fruitlets, a bickering gang of starlings—
little stars—dining after their own fashion fastidiously,
preferring the mash fermenting on the grasses
to the firm fruits strung upon the leaf-bare branches.
They swilled their modest fill, before flying off on cue,
from one ripe paradise above the West Side Highway

to another. What urge is it that lifts their wings
that heaves the flock from lawn to fence to tree?
What wings are these that rake from earth to sky,
then back again, that steer these troops of tipsy stars
about the fruited firmament? Where from this fire,
this vaulting flame that plants the tree, that swells
the fruit, that lights the fuse in starling and in star?

And where the words to sketch such odd trajectory
of flight? And then the whispered breeze confessed:
*There are no words, there is no breeze, no you, no me,
no bird, no tree. And even to say that there is only Life
would be untrue; Life never deigns to speak its name.
What can be said is only this: starlings swooping down,
scarfing fruit, winging off—God knows where.*

Richard Schiffman is an environmental journalist, poet and author of two biographies. His work has been published in *The Southern Poetry Review*, *The Alaska Quarterly*, *The New York Times* and elsewhere. His poetry collection *What the Dust Doesn’t Know* was published in 2017.



His quest for identity

By Jeffrey Meyers

alamy

MICHÈLE MENDELSSOHN



Making Oscar Wilde

By Michèle Mendelssohn
Oxford University Press
360p \$24.95

In January 1882, Oscar Wilde, 27 years old and still little-known, began his yearlong, coast-to-coast, 15,000-mile lecture tour throughout the United States. The ostensible purpose was to publicize the U.S. tour of Gilbert and Sullivan's "Patience," whose precious aesthete Bunthorne—"what a very singularly deep young man this deep young man must be!"—was partly based on Wilde. But the real reason was to promote himself as a celebrity while searching for his true sexual identity.

In the Victorian period men had to hide their homosexuality, but Wilde found a way to flaunt his feelings.

Wearing a theatrical costume while behaving outrageously on stage, his ambiguous sexuality became entertainment. His marriage in 1884 and his two sons (Cyril and Vyvyan) as well as the appearance of male lovers (Robbie Ross in 1886 and Lord Alfred Douglas in 1891) were still in the future. Wilde did not marry to "cure" his homosexuality. He fell in love with an attractive woman, but discovered that his deepest erotic yearnings were for men.

Wilde was better known for his wit than for his lectures, a long-running, one-man show, written by and starring himself. When he arrived at U.S. Customs he said, "I have nothing to declare but my genius." He rated the Atlantic Ocean "disappointing" and would have preferred more turbulence. He also put down the nation's iconic cataract: "I was disappointed with Niagara. Every American bride is taken there and the sight of the stupendous waterfall must be one of the earliest, if not the

keenest, disappointments in American married life."

Wilde was six feet, four inches tall, weighed 200 pounds and had thick lips and a puffy face. His lectures mixed paradox and wit, eccentricity and nonsense while spreading the war cry of beauty amid the agonizing ugliness of 19th-century American dress and décor. He favored a long fur-trimmed green coat, wide Byronic collar, knee breeches, silk stockings, silver-buckled pumps and a yellow handkerchief. The "queer, high-flavored fruit" seemed defective in masculinity.

Wilde's character was enigmatic, both appalling and appealing. He was Irish and English, an ass but clever, feminine and masculine, aesthetic and athletic. He wore Buffalo Bill's shoulder-length hair and was a heavy drinker. He went down into the mines with the bearded ruffians of Leadville, Colo.—"the roughest and most wicked town on earth"—then supped on three courses of whiskey and was hailed as

a hero, a man's man and one of their own. Wilde's repertoire of masks, talent for self-fashioning and skillful reinvention transformed him into a media star. In this respect, he foreshadowed modern U.S. writers whose flamboyant personalities attracted many readers: Hemingway and Mailer as well as the defiant gay writers Gore Vidal and Truman Capote.

While trying to solve the mystery of Wilde's identity as she wrote *Making Oscar Wilde*, Michèle Mendelssohn developed a new approach to biographical research. Vast online archives and databases provided a digital treasure trove of local newspapers in the obscure towns where Wilde had lectured that was unavailable to previous life-writers. Her innovative approach and exploration of unsuspected territory has yielded rich results, illuminating new aspects of Wilde's life and afterlife. *Making Oscar Wilde* reveals that his bold attempt to "civilize" U.S. taste and culture was closely connected to both 19th-century and contemporary debates about evolution, racial hierarchies, concepts of the primitive, ethnological hoaxes and popular theatrical performances. She belatedly states her theme on the last page of her lively, original and valuable work: "His story is intertwined with the history of Anglo-American society as it grappled with massive waves of immigration, nationalist movements, racial and ethnic conflicts, political upheavals, new media technologies and a sensation-hungry press."

Mendelssohn makes the most of a hot issue in Wilde's time and still a frequent subject in our own by connecting him to the rabid racism in the United States soon after Darwin's *The Origin of Species* and the end of

the U.S. Civil War. The waves of poor Irish immigrants to the United States were at the bottom of white society, and the recently freed slaves were crushed beneath the Irish. The Irish Wilde, who traveled with a black servant he jokingly called "my slave," was savagely caricatured by the hostile press. "The Wilde Man of Borneo" was portrayed as an evolutionary throwback, primitive degenerate and "negroified Paddy," closely linked to both monkeys and the shows of blackface minstrels.

The most interesting events of his tour were his crucial meetings with Walt Whitman in Camden, N.J., and with Henry James in Washington. Whitman had also created an attractive public persona. But there was a great contrast in age and appearance between the precious, pretentious, flamboyant fop that was Wilde and the bearded, hearty man of the people that was Whitman. Since Wilde came to pay tribute and Whitman magnanimously accepted it, the two giant egos got on well. Praising the qualities in Whitman that were so different from his own, Wilde declared, "He is the grandest man I have ever seen, the simplest, most natural, and strongest character I have ever met in my life."

In interviews about Whitman, Wilde talked about ancient Greek love, an idealized code for sex between men. Wilde later revealed that the poet "had made no effort to conceal his homosexuality," and "the kiss of Walt Whitman is still on my lips." Like Whitman, he tried to tell the truth about himself when describing his own poetry as "the song of Sex, of Amativeness, and even Animality."

While Whitman was warm and companionable with Wilde, Henry

James was frosty and hostile. James was repelled by Wilde's costume, contemptuous of his self-promotion, critical of his endless wandering and uneasy about his sexuality. He called Wilde "a fatuous fool," "a tenth-rate cad" and "an unclean beast," and later satirized him in *The Tragic Muse* as the restless aesthete Gabriel Nash.

Wilde was the agent of his own destruction. He rashly filed a libel suit against the Marquess of Queensbury—father of his idol, tormentor and nemesis Lord Alfred Douglas. But he did not realize that Queensbury had acquired damaging evidence to justify his accusation that Wilde was a "sodomite." After losing this case, Wilde was prosecuted for the sexual crime of "gross indecency." He then refused to flee to France to avoid arrest and remained to face his punishment. Provocative and aggressive in court, instead of charming and sympathetic, he was sentenced to solitary confinement and two years of hard labor.

He lamented that "the gods had given me almost everything. I had genius, a distinguished name, high social position, brilliancy, intellectual daring" and had "lost wife, children, fame, honour, position, wealth." As Samuel Johnson wrote of his infamous examples in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, "They mount, they shine, evaporate, and fall." In a series of spectacular transformations, Wilde went from obscurity to fame as the leading British playwright, to notoriety and ruin, and then to an almost miraculous rehabilitation as a modern martyr and saint.

Jeffrey Meyers is a biographer and cultural critic. His most recent book, *Resurrections: Authors, Heroes—and a Spy*, was published in 2018.



Interior States
Essays
By Meghan O’Gieblyn
Anchor
222p \$16

Precision instruments

When the essayist Meghan O’Gieblyn was a student at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, a Friday night out meant sidewalk evangelism. She and her friends would draw the plan of salvation on a portable chalkboard, hand out tracts and invite passersby to get saved. O’Gieblyn got few takers. Eventually, she left the school and lost her faith.

Much of O’Gieblyn’s collection *Interior States* analyzes the evangelical conviction and Midwestern earnestness that led her to the street corners. She suggests that these two unassuming yet politically powerful elements of American culture are essential elements in our national psychic complexes. In her eyes, the dubious virtue of niceness, “so ubiquitous that it seems practically constitutional” in the Midwest, is a veneer that covers Americans’ “sheer indifference” to neighbors and strangers alike.

These essays reflect an older understanding of “nice” as synonymous with “subtle but precise.” Beneath O’Gieblyn’s approachable style lies a sharp instrument for incising our culture. She avoids the twin temptations of thoughtful nonfiction today: the imprecision often justified by the “messiness”

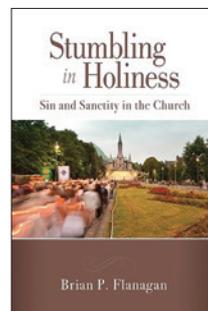
of lived experience and the oblique abstraction justified by a need for literary “difficulty.” As she writes in an essay on subtlety, a writer’s relationship to her readers is necessarily a matter of faith.

O’Gieblyn has an acute sense of irony, pointing out that the pastoral life re-enacted in Henry Ford’s nostalgic frontier theme park Deerfield Village was destroyed by the very industrialization he created. Or that evangelicals like Mike Pence claim to be exiles in a secular Babylon yet turn away actual exiles from Syria and Iraq.

O’Gieblyn refers frequently to losing the faith that anchored her and inspired her family to stockpile provisions for the apocalypse anticipated to occur in the year 2000. She intermittently mourns the loss of her place in evangelical culture; she confesses to listening to fire-and-brimstone radio preachers on long solitary drives and to playing her old albums by the Christian rock trio DC Talk in the privacy of her home.

What she doesn’t tell us is how the loss happened. She writes of disappointment with evangelicals’ response to 9/11, which occurred during her second year at Moody. She suggests at one point that she left the church in order to find intellectual clarity. “But as it turns out,” she writes, “the material world is every bit as elusive as the superstitions I’d left behind.”

Jonathan Malesic is a writer living in Dallas.



Stumbling in Holiness
Sin and Sanctity in the Church
By Brian P. Flanagan
Liturgical Press
179p \$24.95

A holy and sinful church

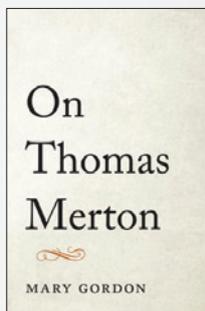
This past Advent, many of us were eager to turn the page to a new liturgical year. Perhaps, more honestly, we yearned to leave behind the past year in the church, plagued as it was by yet another wave of revelations, this time from Pennsylvania, of horrific crimes against children and the systematic coverup to which the hierarchy of the church seems perpetually inclined. The pain of polarization in the church and the nation seem to feed off each other, intensifying our desire to start anew, to renew ourselves, our church and our faith. For some, this past year has meant a confrontation with the reality of sin in the church, while others have reached a breaking point, writing off the church as irreparable and renouncing their membership.

Brian Flanagan does a great service to both these contingents in his book *Stumbling in Holiness* by taking a closer look at the realities of sin and holiness in the church. Flanagan’s careful, granular analysis of both holiness and evil, as these terms apply individually and collectively to Catholics and to the church, confronts the sin of the church in all its discomfiting reality. The sins committed individual-

ly by Christians, and collectively by churches and hierarchies, are neither glossed over nor accepted as inevitable features of humanity. But Flanagan's work also helps guide those who would give up on an institution they see as hopelessly flawed to a new appreciation of the complexity of a reality where God's grace and human sin coexist in personal, collective and structural ways.

Of the many valuable contributions this volume makes to theology broadly, and contemporary ecclesiology specifically, perhaps the most important are Flanagan's guidelines for speaking about a holy and sinful church. Flanagan invites scandal-plagued Catholics to face the reality of our sin with renewed hope with helpful rules, which include never speaking about one reality (holiness) without acknowledging the other reality (sin); clearly stating the historical sinfulness of the church in order to spur ecclesial repentance; and acknowledging that our faith, along with God's promise, ensures that the church "is a pilgrim, and not simply a wanderer" on an eschatological journey to union with God. It is difficult to imagine a better gift for the New Year.

Natalia Imperatori-Lee is an associate professor of religious studies at Manhattan College in New York and author of *Cuéntame: Narrative in the Ecclesial Present* (Orbis Books).



On Thomas Merton
By Mary Gordon
Shambhala Publications
146p \$24.95

Writer to writer

The fascinating premise of Mary Gordon's lovely little book *On Thomas Merton* is that, except for Merton's extensive correspondence with Evelyn Waugh and Czeslaw Milosz, he was without literary peers who could perceptively judge, critique and improve his writing. And so in this monograph Gordon has taken up the task to address him, "writer to writer." She does that by examining the enormous popularity of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, his quirky 1941 novel *My Argument With the Gestapo* (which was published only after his accidental death in Thailand) and the seven volumes of journal entries from 1939 to 1968 that probably represent his highest artistic achievement.

"*The Seven Storey Mountain* put him on the map," Gordon notes. "It made him a best seller. Its formal straightforwardness made it accessible to a large audience, who would have been baffled and alienated by *My Argument With the Gestapo*.... His success came about, then, not from following the daring path of [the novel] but by turning radically away from it, becoming the writer-monk, writing what would be of use."

She reserves her highest praise for the 2,500 pages of journals, where

"his talent for description is greatest. When his senses are fully engaged, his writing comes most vividly alive.... I detect a much greater sense of spiritual vitality in his journal passages than I do in his books that are self-consciously 'spiritual.' In those, I feel the strain, an excessive abstraction that leads to flaccid and disembodied language. But from the very first pages of the journals, everything he describes using sensory language shimmers and resonates."

Gordon is the author of eight critically acclaimed novels, including *There Your Heart Lies*; six works of nonfiction, including memoirs about her parents, *The Shadow Man* and *Circling My Mother*; and three collections of short stories. A highly regarded professor of English at Barnard College, she brings to this book on Merton what he himself often offered others: the frank convictions of a practiced teacher, the certainty of an established critic, and the sympathy of a successful writer who is equally aware of struggle.

Ron Hansen is a novelist and professor of creative writing at Santa Clara University, California.



Full book reviews at
americamagazine.org/books

Andy Warhol's camouflaged Catholicism

By Ciaran Freeman

A new exhibit offers various iterations of Warhol's ever-changing identity.

"Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again," now at the Whitney Museum in New York, begins and ends with nearly identical gargantuan canvases covered in a green camouflage pattern. Entering the exhibition space, you are immediately confronted by "Camouflage" (1986). At nine feet tall and 35 feet wide, the scale of this painting is monumental. The camouflage pattern is all-encompassing. There is nothing to hold the viewer's attention, just a seemingly endless void of green and brown. Here, at the entrance of a landmark retrospective for one of the biggest names in the history of American art, it serves as an opening curtain, inviting us to wonder: Behind the camouflage of celebrity, who was the real Andy Warhol?

The exhibit offers various itera-

tions of Warhol's ever-changing identity. His celebrity is kaleidoscopic, effortlessly transitioning into different manifestations of itself. In one room filled with images of Brillo boxes, Campbell's Soup cans and Coke bottles, Warhol is a poetic aesthete, finding beauty in everyday objects—or, perhaps, he is the curmudgeon of capitalism carefully criticizing consumerism. Another space features heavily saturated flower paintings hanging on cow-themed wallpaper. Here he is the king of camp, a gay icon embracing the "it's so bad, it's good" aesthetic.

In a large, airy gallery the exhibition's final monumental canvas, "Camouflage Last Supper," 1986, repeats the military pattern seen in the opening work, yet this time the camouflage fades in and out of transparency. Da Vinci's image of Christ breaking the

bread peeks out from underneath. Are the curators telling us something here? Is this image of Christ at the Last Supper the key to understanding Warhol?

Maybe the celebrity in a silver wig was really just a man—a grown-up version of the Byzantine Catholic boy, raised by immigrants in Pittsburgh, Pa. A congregant who, as an adult, attended Mass almost daily at the Church of St. Vincent Ferrer on Lexington Avenue in New York City. A gay Catholic living in a homophobic world and working in an irreligious art world. Can we find that Warhol in the commotion of his catalog?

Retracing my steps through the exhibition, I am struck by a group of eight screen prints titled "Sunset," from 1972. Simple and striking, they offer a rare natural sublimity amid a crowd of kitsch. The sun, a circle,

fades into the water, which blends into the sky. Each one is different, the colors ranging from cool purples to warm yellows, every one as effective as the next. Here Warhol captures the simple beauty of a sunset over water on paper again and again and again.

The curators tell us that the prints are from a series of 632, all of them unique. The series was commissioned by an architect who wanted an original work for each room in a hotel. The idea for the project was likely adapted from his earlier work, “Sunset,” a 33-minute unfinished film of the sun setting created for collectors who had commissioned “a work of spiritual significance” in 1967.

Can we find spiritual significance in the “Sunset” prints? The circular forms remind me of communion wafers—the perfect little circles of unleavened bread that become the Eucharist. I think of Warhol in the back of a church on Lexington Avenue watching a priest hold up a circle of bread, the tip of his finger blocking just the very bottom portion of it. I think of him watching this mystical, miraculous moment in awe of the sublime. Of him sitting in the pew, watching this again and again and again. But I also think of all the Catholics like myself who are asked why—amid the sexual abuse crisis, amid the homophobia and sexism built into the structures of the institutional church—they stay, and respond with a simple unwavering faith in the Eucharist. For me, Warhol’s sun is the son, and it is beautiful.

Ciaran Freeman, a Joseph A. O’Hare fellow.

From ‘Taxi Driver’ to ‘First Reformed’

“First Reformed” is a film that only Paul Schrader would make. Frame for frame, no other film is filled with more angst and art that is, uniquely and distinctly, *echt* Schrader—unless, of course, you go back 43 years. “It doesn’t really matter what I do,” he tells **America**. “The first line of my obituary will be ‘the writer of Taxi Driver.’”

Schrader grew up in a strict Calvinist home where movies were seen as sinful—he did not watch a movie until he was 15. A huge influence on his work has been Robert Bresson, most notably his 1959 French film, “Pickpocket.” Watching the film allowed Schrader to see a place for himself in the film world.

With Schrader, most roads lead to “Taxi Driver”—especially “First Reformed.” To create his latest, he rewatched two dozen spiritual films he really liked and cherry-picked from the best of them. “From Bresson’s ‘Diary of a Country Priest,’ I picked the main character, his stomach cancer, the other priest and the motorcycle ride that becomes a bike ride. There’s a journal in Bresson’s ‘Man Escaped,’ ‘Diary’ and ‘Pickpocket.’ I used it in ‘Taxi Driver,’ ‘Light Sleeper’ and,

again, here. It’s like advanced feeding: you’re slipping information into the audiences’ bloodstreams without them tasting it.”

Unlike most of us, Schrader’s form of teenage rebellion—running off to movies—has brought him success and acclaim in Hollywood, and, in recent years, he has even reacquainted himself with the comforting ritual of Sunday morning church services.

“I don’t know to what degree I’ve ever left the church,” he confesses. “Obviously, when I was in Los Angeles, I wasn’t going to church. When I had kids, we went to the Episcopal church. Then the kids grew up, and I dropped out again—but then, about three years ago, I switched to Presbyterian, and that’s where I go now.”

The demons that jump-started his career have long since receded and given way to emotional stability. “I’m actually free of the depression,” he is now happy to report, adding with a wry smile, “I’ve managed to give it to all my family members.”

Harry Haun has covered theater and film in New York for over 40 years.



Ethan Hawke in Paul Schrader’s “First Reformed”

A24

Unlikely Hero

Readings: Is 6:1-8, Ps 138, 1 Cor 15:1-11, Lk 5:1-11

Throughout the Bible, God makes heroes out of the unlikely. Jacob was a homeless grifter, Moses a murderer with a stammer, Ehud a disabled loner, Yael a foreigner, David an impulsive teen. But each of them also possessed gifts that had otherwise gone unnoticed. A surprise encounter with divine grace brought these hidden talents to light; and with a life transformed, each played an improbable role in salvation history.

As a literary motif, the rise of an unlikely hero is called a “great reversal.” The theme was popular in literature throughout the ancient Near East. It appears in each of this Sunday’s readings.

Although Isaiah used his talents to preach the word of God, this was not a straightforward path. His protest that he was a man of “unclean lips” suggests that he had not used his gifts wisely before his encounter with grace. After his call, however, he became the greatest prophet Israel has ever produced.

Paul came to burn with zeal for the Gospel, but only after he had persecuted the Christian community with a similar ardor. The grace necessary for such a transformation literally knocked him off his feet.

Luke was especially fond of the “great reversal” motif and incorporated it into many of his narratives. In the Gospel readings we have been hearing since the beginning of the liturgical year in Advent, elderly persons have conceived, a virgin has borne a son, shepherds have hosted angelic visitors, and paupers and foreigners have begun to populate God’s kingdom. In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus calls a sinful man to share his ministry.

The call of Simon Peter illustrates another of Luke’s favorite themes, the encounter with grace in the everyday. The interaction between Jesus and Peter unfolds at first along lines completely in keeping with Peter’s world: boats, sailing and fish. Jesus needs a boat to preach to the sizeable crowds that threaten to crush him. Why he chooses Peter’s is never clear; Luke draws our attention instead to Jesus’ reliance on Peter’s skill. “He asked him to put out a short distance from

*‘Getting into the boat belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out from the shore.’
(Lk 5:3)*



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Were you an unlikely disciple?

What unlikely talents did grace unlock in you?

Do you know someone whose talents are hidden?

the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.” Luke also says nothing about Peter’s sinfulness; it may have been nothing more than the rough behavior and foul speech that often accompany strenuous labor. Even after Peter responds to the grace he has encountered, Jesus speaks with metaphors from Peter’s world: “From now on you will be catching men.” Peter’s normal day at work changed his life and the lives of countless others.

Divine salvation advances because unlikely characters say yes to grace. As Jesus transformed Peter, so must we, Christ’s disciples, continue to seek out improbable champions of the Gospel and reveal the divine grace God constantly offers. Somewhere out there might be a foul-mouthed comedian who will become a new Isaiah, a fervent atheist who will become a new Paul or an anonymous blue-collar Simon Peter whose hidden gifts will appear when one of Christ’s disciples arrives with a word of grace.

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

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Prophet of Perception

Readings: Jer 17:5-8, Ps 1, 1 Cor 15:12-20, Lk 6:17-26

Luke understood Jesus to be a prophet. Matthew's Jesus had come to teach, Mark's was on a rescue mission, John's was a priest uniting heaven and earth; but Luke's Jesus came from God to teach humanity true discernment of the good.

This understanding explains the literary motif of the "great reversal" to which Luke comes back again and again. In his illustrations of this trope, Luke confronts his readers with the passing character of human social hierarchies. Categories like rich and poor, powerful and weak are not essential to God's plan and are often quite the opposite of what God has intended.

The Beatitudes and woes in this Sunday's Gospel starkly illustrate this point. Beatitudes have a special meaning in biblical theology. In almost every case, when the Bible proclaims someone "blessed," it is speaking of someone whose life is right in the eyes of God. Jeremiah makes that point quite explicitly in this Sunday's first reading, proclaiming, in effect, "Right in the eyes of God is the one who trusts in the LORD."

Every culture develops false notions of righteousness; in this the world of first-century Judaism is not different from that of 21st-century Christianity. In Jesus' culture many assumed that wealth, prosperity, happiness and so-

cial inclusion were signs that a person's life was right in the eyes of God. Luke made sure his readers knew that Jesus called this "trash theology." Poverty, hunger, grief and exclusion are not signs of the absence of God's love.

By contrast, Luke's Jesus insists, you rich might have a problem: Where did your money come from? Likewise, you who are satiated and fat: Who grew your food? Who brought it to you and prepared it for you? Did they have enough to eat? You who laugh now, look around you! Do you think God is as entertained as you are by the world you have built? And you whom everyone loves, what has happened to others who have shared similar fame? God does not see with human eyes, so call happy only those who live according to divine instruction.

Hebrew prophets often reminded people that God uses very different standards to judge what is good and evil, happy and woebegone. In addition to this Sunday's first reading, in which Jeremiah encourages Israel to trust in piety instead of military strength, such sermons can be found in passages like Am 4:1-5 and Ez 34:11-16. The sermon Luke records in Lk 6:20-26 reminds his listeners that Jesus is the inheritor of this prophetic tradition and that in him it reaches its fulfillment.

Christ's disciples must continue this tradition. Twenty-first-century society has a nearly inexhaustible supply of false righteousness against which to inveigh. Woe to you well-educated, for you will find no work. And woe to you who lead sheltered lives, for you will not see Christ arrive among the outcasts. But happy you high-school dropouts; someday you will achieve your goals. Happy you drug addicts, someday you will be clean. Happy you migrants and refugees and you who have no place to call home. Rejoice and leap, for you will recognize the Son of Man, who when he came also found no place to lay his head.

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

'Rejoice and leap for joy on that day!' (Lk 6:23)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

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How can you let the Gospel challenge those?

How can your voice be one that challenges others?

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Put Our Neighbors First

Greatness comes from looking beyond our borders

By Miguel H. Díaz



This year's papal address to the diplomatic corps, on Jan. 7, had special relevance to the United States. Pope Francis spoke in reaction to isolationist policies built around the misguided slogan "Make America Great Again." He also took on the unsettling trend across the globe of political narcissism, saying it was at odds with the vocation of international organizations "to be a setting for dialogue and encounter for all countries." And he raised his clarion voice to address four "points of contact" between the arena of international relations and the spiritual mission of the Holy See: the primacy of justice in lawmaking; the defense of the most vulnerable; bridge-building among peoples and nations; and the need to rethink our common destiny as citizens of the world.

With respect to the primacy of justice in lawmaking, the pope criticized the pursuit of individualistically driven national objectives and shortsighted political policies that he sees as incapable of advancing lasting world peace. Echoing his speech to the U.S. Congress in 2015, the pope argued that "a good politician...is called to make unity prevail over conflict." It is hard for Americans to miss the implications his words carry, especially when the current presidential administration has abandoned international diplomatic bodies, weakened the trust of our allies and pulled back from international initiatives.

Second, as might be expected from a Jesuit steeped in Latin American theology, Pope Francis reminded us of the preferential option for the poor. He argued that human indifference to migrants, including those motivated by poverty, has led "various governments to severely restrict the number of new entries, even those in transit." The pope also voiced concern about unjust working conditions throughout the world and, in particular, discrimination against women workers.

Third, Pope Francis turned to the diplomatic practice of bridge-building among peoples and efforts to prevent armed conflict. He emphasized the need to promote, not withdraw from international cooperation and international relations—"all the more urgent for favoring the development of infrastructures, the growth of prospects for future generations and the emancipation of the most vulnerable sectors of society."

Finally, Pope Francis returned to one of his favorite themes: the care of our planet, our creaturely interdependence and the need to take action on behalf of our common well-being. Surely, in order to enact just laws, defend the most vulnerable and bridge differences to build lasting peace, individuals and nations will need to think of our shared humanity. And as Pope Francis' speech cautions, the world needs to abandon its narcissistic ideol-

ogies that set one nation above another, embracing instead the reality of global interdependence that affirms our common origin, our common history and our common destiny.

Pope Francis' address to the diplomatic corps might be summarized with the following slogan: "Put Our Neighbors First Again." As pontifex maximus, the great bridge-builder, Francis calls upon Americans to denounce a cultural climate marked by "new centrifugal tendencies and the temptation to erect new curtains" that threaten to further divide us and the rest of the world on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national identity, immigration status, political affiliation and physical ability, to name but a few human markers.

Americans would do well to heed Pope Francis' pleas to the ambassadors. The United States shines the most when it opts for greatness by attending to the needs of our neighbors first, especially those most in need. In an age of increasing global interdependence on all fronts, this is the right thing to do. Let us rethink our common destiny. Make America great: Put our neighbors first again.

Miguel H. Díaz, former U.S. ambassador to the Holy See, holds the John Courtney Murray University Chair in Public Service at Loyola University Chicago.

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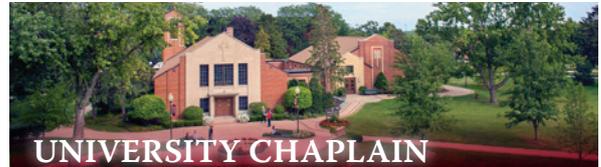
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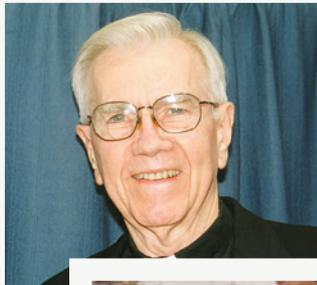
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