

America

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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on Politics

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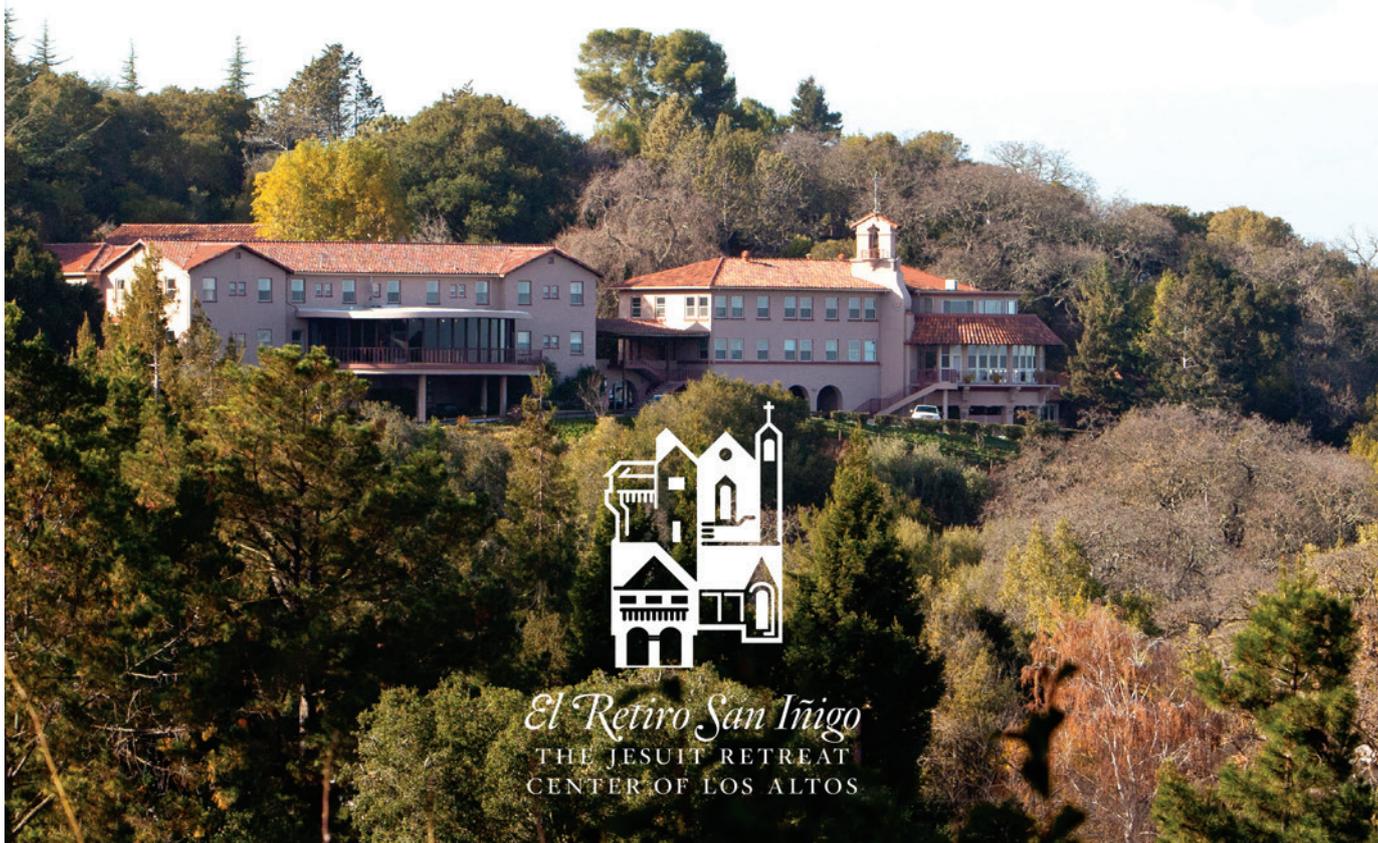
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President Trump's ties to Russia matter. Here's why.

Last month, as the political classes continued to fixate on Donald J. Trump's "war" with the media and as the president suggested "going nuclear" during confirmation hearings for the next Supreme Court justice, at least one global statesman worried that we were missing something more important: The world is preparing for a real war on a global scale. Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, winner of the 1990 Nobel Peace Prize, wrote in a little-noticed *Time* magazine essay in January that "politicians and military leaders sound increasingly belligerent and defense doctrines more dangerous. Commentators and TV personalities are joining the bellicose chorus. It all looks as if the world is preparing for war."

And it's not just the rhetoric that is escalating. As Mr. Gorbachev pointed out, "more troops, tanks and armored personnel carriers are being brought to Europe. NATO and Russian forces and weapons that used to be deployed at a distance are now placed closer to each other, as if to shoot point-blank." Three years ago, the last American tanks left Europe. Now they are back, as senior U.S. military officials take up the task of returning to Europe the personnel and matériel they moved out of Europe at the end of the Cold War. The buildup is a response to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, as well as increased Russian military maneuvering in the Baltics. The redeployments are "the embodiment of the United States' commitment to deterring aggression and defending our European allies and partners," General Frederick

Hodges, known as Ben, commander of the U.S. Army in Europe, told NBC News in December.

According to P. W. Singer and August Cole, two of the country's leading experts on 21st century warfare, the risk of a global war is greater still because "military planners and political leaders on all sides assume their side would be the one to win in a 'short' and 'sharp' fight." If that sounds familiar, it's because we've been here before. As Barbara Tuchman wrote in *The Guns of August*, her bestselling account of the origins of the first world war, the consensus among military planners then "had combined to fasten the short-war concept upon the European mind. Quick, decisive victory was the German orthodoxy." Instead, as we now know, the whole of Europe was plunged into years of stalemate and slaughter.

For his part, Pope Francis believes that the seeds of the Third World War have already been sown. "The word we hear a lot is insecurity," he said last summer, "but the real word is war," a growing global conflict over "interests, money, resources."

Will this conflict escalate further? Is a war among the great powers really in the cards, or is this just alarmist thinking? The Council on Foreign Relations recently surveyed foreign policy experts on this very question. While few believe that such a war is certain, a growing number believe that it is possible, and a NATO-Russian confrontation topped their list of potential threats in 2017. According to the survey, there is a "moderate" likelihood of a "high im-

pact" event involving "deliberate or unintended military confrontation between Russia and NATO members, stemming from assertive Russian behavior in Eastern Europe."

As you likely noticed, the key and most ominous phrase in the C.F.R. formulation is "deliberate or unintended." As Singer and Cole have written, "wars start through any number of pathways: One world war happened through deliberate action, the other was a crisis that spun out of control." Mismanagement or madness, in other words, are as likely to cause the next great war as are neonationalism or cynical strategic calculation.

Which brings me to the current occupant of the White House. President Trump and President Vladimir Putin "need to break out of this situation," as Mr. Gorbachev has said, "to resume political dialogue aiming at joint decisions and joint action." But there is a big elephant in the room: What does Mr. Trump know about Russia? What does he not know? Does he know what he doesn't know? What is the extent of his personal and business interests in Russia? Is there something there that could cloud his judgment? These are not just legal or political issues. Questions about Mr. Trump's ties to Russia are not irrelevant simply because some of the questioners may have base, partisan motives. Within the next year, the president may face the gravest international situation since the Cuban missile crisis. Americans need to know that he can prevent a catastrophe.

Matt Malone, S.J.
Twitter: @americaeditor



Tasawor Mujahid, an Afghan refugee, 17, shaves his beard outside an abandoned warehouse, where he and other migrants were taking refuge in Serbia in February. Hundreds of migrants have been sleeping in freezing conditions in Belgrade looking for ways to cross the heavily guarded EU borders.

(AP Photo/Muhammed Muheisen)

Cover: composite image istockphoto.com/America

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VALERIE SCHULTZ

I might have come in wounded, but during Mass I am made whole.

Refugees. Immigrants. Abortion.

Did you hear about current events at Mass?

Within his first few days in office, President Trump signed several executive orders pertaining to immigration and refugees, and tens of thousands of people around the country gathered to protest these measures. The annual March for Life also took place in Washington, D.C., with a sitting vice president addressing the crowd for the first time, just a week after the Women’s March on Washington. We surveyed America readers to find out if these current events were discussed during Mass on Sunday Jan. 29.

The overwhelming response to the survey was that these political issues were not discussed by homilists, and congregants were left wanting. Of the dissatisfied majority, many respondents mentioned that their parish priests were capable of thoughtful homilies but wished that these homilies spoke more directly to their practical lives. Elizabeth Reed from Costa Mesa, Calif., expressed this disappointment in the context of her own parish’s demographics: “We have a somewhat divided parish as the church family is composed of a very large immigrant population and the parish school is predominantly caucasian and upper middle class.... I think yesterday was a missed opportunity for connection.”

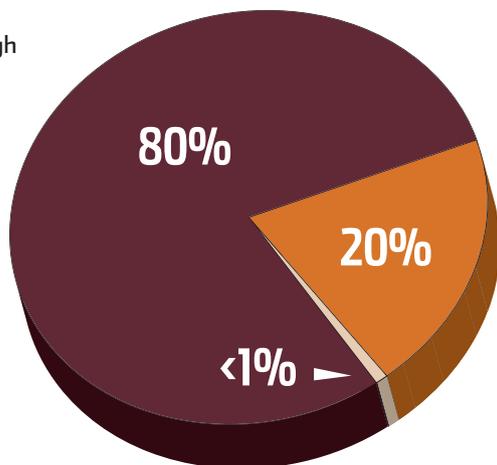
Also from California, Mayra Torres is a Catholic undocumented immigrant who experienced the impact of this

missed opportunity first hand. She wrote to us about how the silence of her parish is contributing to divisions in her community: “I feel alienated from my church, and I feel threatened by the present administration.... As a catequista I am questioning whether I should be serving and teaching my faith. I feel abandoned, not by God but by church leaders.”

This sense of abandonment was not felt in all parishes. At 20 percent, a low but not inconsiderable number of readers felt their parish adequately addressed current events during Mass. An anonymous reader from Washington, D.C., described his experience at Mass: “Our parish prayed in a special way for a refugee family that we are sponsoring.... Our prayers of the faithful included a prayer that we uphold the dignity of all human life, including the elderly, the unborn, refugees, and immigrants. I am proud to be part of a parish that demonstrates its commitment to minister to those at the margins.”

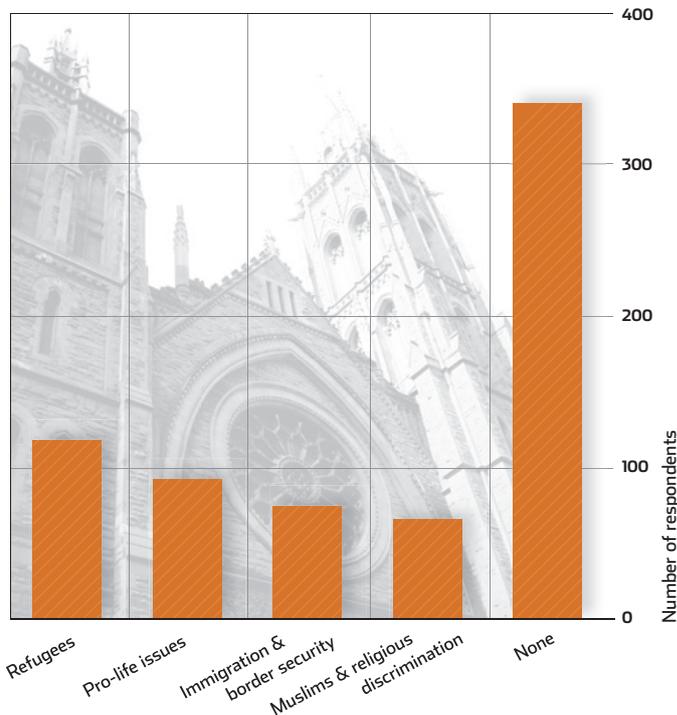
DID YOUR PARISH DO ENOUGH TO ADDRESS CURRENT EVENTS?

- Too much
- Not enough
- Just right



Due to rounding, these percentages may not add up to 100.

CURRENT EVENTS REFERRED TO AT MASS



The results of this unofficial poll are representative of the sample of America readers who responded to our questions via Facebook, Twitter and our email newsletter.

Right on Target

Thank you for the editorial, “President Trump’s Dangerous Nationalism” (Our Take, 2/6) immediately following the inauguration. It was right on target. I hope the Jesuit Conference helps mobilize Jesuit institutions to take stands in dealing with President Trump. I was also pleased that the bishops finally found it in their conscience to address the health care issue.

(Rev.) George E. Griener

Berkeley, Calif.

Richer and Stronger

Re “What Catholics owe their Muslim brothers and sisters,” by Jordan Denari Duffner (2/6): The best way I know to break down stereotypes and prejudices is to get people to meet each other in person. I am so pleased to see these efforts to address this very sad phenomenon of Islamophobia. Diversity makes us richer and stronger together. When we know people personally, we cannot keep pretending there is an “us” and a “them”—it seems ridiculous. There are some very poor examples of leadership in government in this matter, so I am really pleased to see church leaders like Archbishop Cupich and others speaking up. I really like the practical suggestions in this article.

Christina Coombe

Online Comment

Circle With Love

“Man of the House” (2/6), **America’s** interview with Patrick Conroy, S.J., the chaplain of the U.S. House of Representatives, by Jeremy Zippel, S.J., gave an interesting description of a Congressman’s life: “They work in a very toxic environment.”

As a result, it was suggested by one of our members that each Sister of St. Joseph who wishes should choose a member of Congress and contact him or her to say that she is praying for them. There was an amazing response. Our purpose is to circle Congress with love! We invite your readership to join us in this endeavor if they wish.

Marie B. Olwell

Westmont, N.J.

Global Instability

Re “Alternative facts and the coming constitutional crisis,” by Matt Malone, S.J. (Of Many Things, 2/6): These crises

cannot be about one man, convenient though that might be. Current global instability runs far deeper than that. There are constant calls to emotional outcry... There is a predilection for one-word adjudications, e.g., “unjust,” “immoral,” as reported here. All this seems to be little more than distraction. Everyone seems to know who the bad guy is; and, no surprise, it isn’t himself or herself.

Maryanne Kane

Online Comment

Way With Words

Re “Vows of Friendship,” by Eve Tushnet (2/6): “I think that idea of friendship being non-discardable is what the blessing says to me.” The Irish in me loves the way with words that authors like Dana Spiotta, quoted in the article, have. It brings to mind someone I’ve been friends with for over 40 years. We have very little in common, as I married and had lots of children, and she did not. We have different political views, different ways of spending our free time, different everything it seems. But somewhere deep down is the sense God put her in my life for a reason, and while I don’t know that reason, I should honor it.

Monica Quigley Doyle

Online Comment

Boundless Frustration

Re “It’s Time to Fix the ‘Sunday School’ Culture” (Our Take, 1/23): This editorial almost made me cry. My wife and I made the faith central in raising our four children. We went beyond obligations and joyfully observed feast days and received the sacraments. We also did what we were told to do regarding religious education. We dragged our children to Sunday school for almost three decades, clawing our way to Confirmation. I wrote to three different bishops begging for a change. I spoke once with a nun who was the director of religious education for our diocese. She admitted to me that “we do lose a few along the way,” as if we were speaking of something expendable, like tomatoes.

I’m convinced that religious education is the major factor in why my adult children have rejected the faith. My frustration is boundless. I hope that things can change for young parents and children today.

Kevin Kavanah

Online Comment

Prophetic, Not Partisan

Why we need courageous preaching about politics

Strange times for politics make for strange times for preaching. In just one week at the end of January, people in the United States and elsewhere participated in large and sometimes spontaneous demonstrations for the defense of human life, for recognition of women's rights and for justice for refugees and immigrants. At the same time, in addition to the Senate's consideration of President Donald J. Trump's cabinet nominees, commentators discussed revisiting what constitutes torture during the interrogation of terror suspects, the beginnings of a process of dismantling the Affordable Care Act and the abandonment of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal, to pick just a few examples.

Meanwhile, the liturgical cycle offered us the Sermon on the Mount from the Gospel of Matthew. But if the initial impassioned responses of our readers are any guide (see Your Take in this issue, page 6), few Catholic preachers and parishes accepted the invitation to connect the Good News with the news of the day. In a Pew Research Center survey last fall, just over a third of Catholics reported hearing about immigration and religious liberty at Mass, and just under a third reported hearing about abortion.

There are good reasons to be wary of addressing political issues from the pulpit. In addition to questions of the proper relationship between church and state, the church's own teaching allows for a great diversity of political regimes and actors.

Most important, the pastoral reality of congregations whose members support different candidates and political parties means that preachers need to avoid anything that could be construed as a partisan endorsement in order to avoid creating division instead of building communion.

But when only a third of Catholics report hearing from the pulpit about contemporary issues on which the teaching of the church is utterly clear and the bishops of the United States have spoken forcefully and consistently, we need to ask whether cautious prudence has crossed the line into unwarranted avoidance.

It seems that many Catholics, both in the pews and in the pulpit, have conflated politics with partisanship, assuming that addressing any issue on which our two major political parties are divided necessarily constitutes an endorsement of one and rejection of the other. This narrow focus produces a regrettable sidestepping of questions of the common good in preaching, which can lead to saccharine, feel-good homilies. On the other hand, some Catholics have been eager to "baptize" one party or the other—the Republicans for the issues of abortion and religious liberty, the Democrats for poverty and immigration—and pull out the pitchforks whenever support for their party's positions are challenged.

The Gospel demands more of us—both when we speak and when we listen. While we must avoid partisanship, we must also avoid letting the

fear of partisanship loom so large that it overpowers our ability to speak prophetically on issues that are political in the best sense: questions about how to order our common life toward the common good. Jesus in the Gospels is anything but silent on these questions, and those who follow him cannot be silent either.

School choice and the common good

One of President Trump's campaign promises for his first 100 days in office was to introduce legislation that "redirects education dollars to give parents the right to send their kids to the public, private, charter, magnet, religious or home school of their choice." This commitment to school choice was underscored by Mr. Trump's nomination of Betsy DeVos, a longtime champion of charter schools and voucher programs, as secretary of education.

Catholic schools constitute the largest alternative to the public educational system, and the National Catholic Educational Association strongly supports school choice. Its public policy director, Dale McDonald, P.B.V.M., recently told Catholic News Service that enabling families of all income levels to choose religious education is a matter of justice: "We aren't meant to serve only the rich," she said. "As a church, we're committed to serving all God's people."

School choice does not mean abandoning the commitment to the common good exemplified by the Catholic school system. All school sys-

tems that benefit from government funds, including charter schools, should be held accountable not only for standardized test scores but also for treating all students with dignity, including those with disabilities and those for whom English is a second language. (During her confirmation hearings, Ms. DeVos was disconcertingly vague about the duties of non-public schools that receive federal funds to provide an adequate education to special-needs students.)

Much of the opposition to voucher programs, and to the nomination of Ms. DeVos, has come from teachers' unions and others who fear the weakening of public schools, which bear the major responsibility for educating the nation's young people. But public schools should build support based on their performance rather than on keeping in place financial obstacles for families seeking faith-based or alternative education. It is especially distressing that 38 states still have so-called Blaine amendments, which proliferated in the late-19th century and prohibit public funds from going to "sectarian" schools. As a Supreme Court majority wrote in 2000, ruling that the U.S. Constitution allows public funds to go to religious schools, these state amendments arose "at a time of pervasive hostility to the Catholic Church...and it was an open secret that sectarian was code for Catholic." The attention given to charter schools should not distract us from the fact that true school choice is not possible as long as these noxious state restrictions remain in place.

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An open letter to President Trump from the head of Jesuit Refugee Service USA

Congratulations on your inauguration. Americans know that in the days ahead you will have to come to grips with many challenges that will affect the well-being not only of the people of the United States, but of all peoples worldwide.

Not least of these challenges is the U.S. response to human migration. Today people are on the move in unprecedented numbers. Some move voluntarily, drawn by economic opportunities or family ties. Others—some 65 million and growing—have been forcibly uprooted by war, persecution, ethnic and religious strife, dire poverty, natural catastrophe or environmental degradation. Their number is equivalent to the entire population of Great Britain.

Our organization, Jesuit Refugee Service, knows well the struggles refugees face. They are survivors who share our values: the will to overcome any obstacle, to assert independence, to defend hard-won freedoms and to achieve success through sheer determination. In earlier days, refugees were Irish escaping man-made famine, Jews and evangelicals escaping Soviet repression. In recent years they have included Vietnamese prisoners of war, the workers and translators who supported U.S. forces during our wars in Iraq and survivors of conflict in Somalia, Myanmar and Syria. In the past four decades, about three million such refugees have been offered new lives in the United States under our resettlement program. They are weaving their lives into the tapestry of this country through the work of their hands.

Our country's welcome of these

newcomers expresses who we are as a people. It reflects our desire to respond to the call of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures to welcome strangers among us, especially those in danger or great need. It is rooted in the recognition that all men and women possess a shared human dignity and, in the eyes of faith, are sons and daughters of a loving creator who calls us together as one human family.

Though essential for those most in need, asylum and resettlement can assist fewer than 1 percent of the world's refugees. Nevertheless, your latest executive order to bar Syrian refugees from entering the United States and to ban all refugee resettlements for four months fly in the face of our proudest traditions.

Most refugees will remain in temporary exile until they can return home. This places a tremendous strain on the very poor countries that host the vast majority of refugees. So it is also essential that U.S. assistance to these host countries be continued and, indeed, increased. In addition, the United States should intensify its leadership in diplomatic efforts to alleviate the underlying causes of forced migration and to facilitate safe return when conditions allow. As Pope Francis said before Congress during his U.S. visit, "In a word, if we want security, let us give security; if we want life, let us give life; if we want opportunities, let us provide opportunities."

Mr. President, the generosity of the United States in response to the needs of refugees is a source of our reputation as "the last best hope of humankind" and expresses our high-

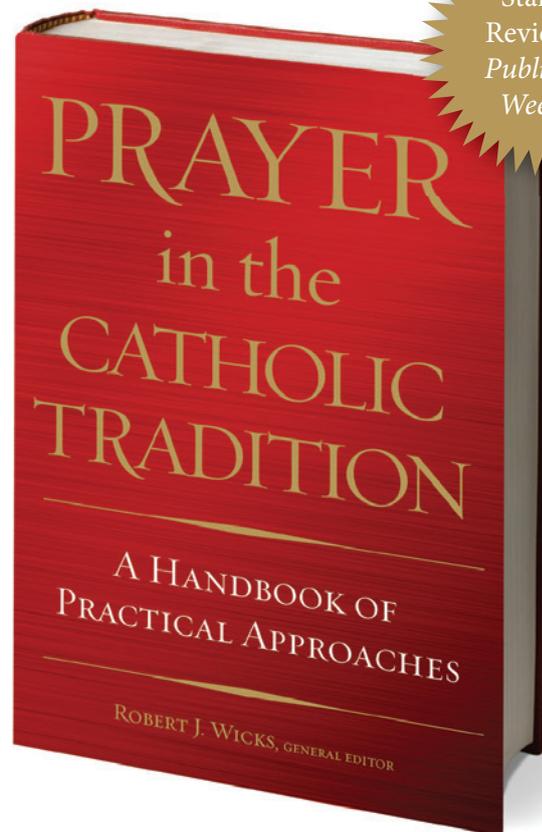
est moral values. Our leadership in this effort will also benefit our country economically and politically by contributing to world peace and stability. When you consider actions you might take to fulfill your promise to make America great again—and your decision to build a "large physical barrier" on the border with Mexico—please remember the greatness of heart that is at the foundation of just and humane U.S. refugee assistance. Without that heart we will have lost everything worth protecting. Our nation and our world look to you for a magnanimous response to those who have been forced from their homes.

Leo J. O'Donovan, S.J., is the interim executive director of Jesuit Refugee Service in Washington, D.C.

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UNDOCUMENTED IN AMERICA

The fear is real. Is the problem exaggerated?

They work in your restaurants and on your suburban lawns. They labor in your factories and build your homes. They do odd jobs or any jobs. Their children go to your schools and play with your children.

And after years in the United States as immigrants without legal documentation, many of them still live in the national shadows. In New York's Westchester County, a small group of undocumented parents surfaces one January night at a parish council meeting. Through a translator, Gustavo speaks on behalf of all.

By Kevin Clarke and
Robert David Sullivan



“The fear that we undocumented people have is very great,” he says. “Could a traffic stop mean deportation,” he wonders. What would become of the children left behind?

“I’m not sure how the community can help us in this difficult situation for our families, for our children,” Gustavo says, his eyes scanning the faces of the other members of his parish. “But *can* you help us?” he asks.

The simple appeal stills the parish meeting room. “If ever there was a time to take a stand, it’s now,” a council member finally says.

Containing undocumented immigration with a border wall and threats to deport millions of people were among President Donald J. Trump’s talking points as a candidate. Now, in the early weeks of his administration, the president is fulfilling commitments that many believed were mere campaign bluster. The fear created by Mr. Trump’s recent executive orders among undocumented families is real, but the urgency of addressing the “problem” of undocumented people may be less so.

Despite simplistic language that depicts a flood of undocumented migrants crossing the U.S. southern border, migration from Mexico has slowed considerably in recent years and even reversed. Apprehensions by the Border Patrol, reported by fiscal year, declined from about 1.1 million in 2006 to just over 337,000 in 2015. They spiked in 2016 to 416,000—with increasing numbers of Central American families and unaccompanied minors picked up.

But even if an immigrant inundation is more rhetorical than real, the question of how to deal with the undocumented people already in the United States remains. The overall number of undocumented immigrants has stabilized in recent years from a 2007 peak of 12.2 million to just over 11 million people.

A little more than half of undocumented residents are of Mexican origin. But from 2009 to 2014, the number of undocumented Mexican

immigrants fell from 6.4 million to 5.8 million, according to the Pew Research Center, while those from other nations rose from 5.0 million to 5.3 million, with significant increases from Guatemala, Honduras and the continents of Africa and Asia.

Two-thirds of the undocumented have lived in the United States for more than a decade, representing thousands of families that have inhabited a prolonged limbo. A comprehensive reform package that promised to rationalize U.S. immigration policy, long supported by the U.S. bishops, has moldered in Congress since 2013.

President Obama tried to push immigration policy forward with a mix of record deportations that emphasized enforcement and executive orders aimed at protecting some groups—among them the so-called Dreamers, young adults who were brought as children to the United States without authorization. But his successor appears intent on more punitive measures.

Mr. Trump has pledged to “begin removing the more than two million criminal illegal immigrants from the country,” a number disputed by advocates who say there are no more than 820,000 undocumented people with criminal convictions, many for crimes relating to their lack of status. The End Illegal Immigration Act would imprison anyone who re-enters the United States after having been deported.

Under President Obama, the United States deported a record 2.5 million people. Hundreds of thousands of these deportees left children and family behind, and many have sought to return to them. Under Mr. Trump’s proposed law, they would fill the nation’s prisons.

What becomes of the children of deported immigrants represents a unique challenge. The Migration Policy Institute estimates that there were 5.1 million children in the United States with at least one parent who was an undocumented immigrant between 2009 and 2013. Overall, about 80 percent of these children—4.1

million—are U.S. citizens themselves. Studies are only now grappling with the psychological and developmental impact on U.S.-citizen children when a parent—most often a father and the primary family earner—is removed from the household because of deportation, and how living with that threat day-to-day affects child development.

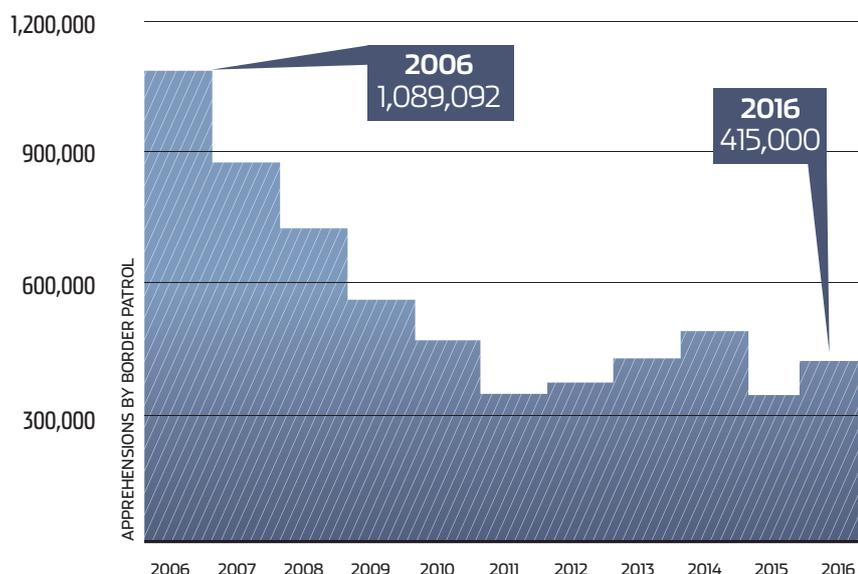
Over the past decade, as spending on immigration enforcement skyrocketed, budgets aimed at regional stabilization and economic development remained stingy. Though it committed \$142 million, in 2016 the United States actually delivered just \$47 million in aid to Mex-

ico, the lion's share directed to security initiatives and just \$4.4 million to economic development. Guatemala received just \$57 million in total aid that year; Honduras, \$49 million; and El Salvador, \$29 million.

That same year the United States spent \$19.4 billion on immigration enforcement, and America's border wall may cost as much as \$40 billion.

Kevin Clarke, chief correspondent. Twitter: @clarkeatamerica;
Robert David Sullivan, associate editor. Twitter: @RobertDSullivan.

UNDOCUMENTED IN AMERICA



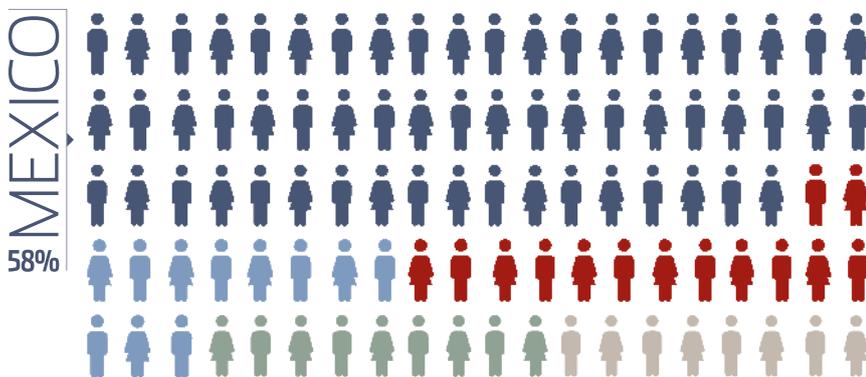
11.1M UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS IN 2014
3.5% OF THE U.S. POPULATION

Estimated undocumented origins rise/decline 2009-2014 (in thousands):

Nation	2009	2014	Change
Mexico	6,350	5,850	-500
Asia	1,300	1,450	+130
Central America	1,600	1,700	+100

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN OF ALL "ALIEN" APPREHENSIONS (2015)

■ Mexico 58% ■ Guatemala 14% ■ El Salvador 11% ■ Honduras 9% ■ Other 8%



COST OF THE TRUMP WALL [1,000 MILES]
\$27B TO \$40B
\$200M COST OF THE BERLIN WALL [96 MILES]

5.1M CHILDREN WITH AT LEAST ONE UNDOCUMENTED PARENT
7% OF TOTAL U.S. POPULATION UNDER 18
79% of these children are native-born U.S. CITIZENS.

Estimated cost of the "Trump Wall" from MIT Technology Review, based on 1,000-mile wall at a height of 50 feet (with the rest of the border secured by mountains and other natural barriers). Other sources: Department of Homeland Security (apprehensions by fiscal year), Pew Research Center (total undocumented), Migration Policy Institute (children of undocumented), CNBC (Berlin Wall cost adjusted for inflation).

Armagh Archbishop Martin contemplates changing times in Ireland

It has been over 10 years since the Irish bishops' last *ad limina* visit to Rome, a trip that is usually scheduled every five years to meet with the pope and confer with departments within the Holy See. In that time, "a lot has changed for us," says Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh, who led this year's visit as head of the Catholic Church in Ireland on Jan. 20.

Family life has been challenged in the last decade, according to Archbishop Martin, with the economic recession in Ireland bringing stress and returning the prospect of emigration into many homes. The definition of family has also been altered, after Ireland voted in same-sex marriage in 2015.

"The church is in a different space," says Archbishop Martin. "We are one of many players speaking in the public square. We must be more invitational, using a ministry of presence, gently explaining the message of the church and inviting people in. The church is called to work with people where they're at."

In Archbishop Martin's own Archdiocese of Armagh, communities are facing a unique set of challenges. Sixty percent of people in the archdiocese live in Northern Ireland and 40 percent in the republic. The United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union—popularly known as "Brexit"—has created considerable uncertainty. The people of Northern Ireland voted against the idea of withdrawing from the union. The Irish Republic would remain part of the European community after the Brexit process is finished.

"We're back to talking about borders between the north and south and restrictions on the movement of goods and a fear among some people of a restriction on a movement of people," the archbishop says.

The uncertainty in Northern Ireland has been wors-

A section of the Peace Wall that divides Catholic and Protestant communities in West Belfast, Northern Ireland.

ened by the collapse of the power-sharing government in January. Archbishop Martin released a statement asking politicians to realize the importance of stability.

"I was disappointed because the politicians were at last getting down to issues like the economy, health and creating brighter future. There's a whole generation that has grown up without violence, so it was a heartfelt plea not to let the progress slip away."

He adds, "You cannot underestimate the importance of the Good Friday Agreement. People around the world look to Northern Ireland as an example of people sorting out their differences. But here is a legacy of hurt and a deep legacy of suffering and we all need to play a part to work through it. We cannot leave a vacuum."

The next time the Irish bishops gather to meet Pope Francis it will be in Ireland in 2018 for the World Meeting of Families. It will be the first papal visit since Pope John Paul II in 1979, whose trip came as the Troubles raged in Northern Ireland. Much has changed since then, for both the church and Ireland, although violence has still not ended entirely.

"Just last week a police officer was shot by dissident republicans in Belfast," Archbishop Martin notes. "But what gives me consolation is that politicians from all sides and church leaders from all sides were condemning it. We won't let go of the progress we've made."

Rhona Tarrant, *Dublin correspondent*;
Twitter: @RhonaTarrant.



Sanctuary cities draw Trump administration threat

Less noticed among a number of migration related targets of an executive order issued by President Donald J. Trump on Jan. 25 was its impact on so-called sanctuary cities. Mr. Trump threatened federal retribution against them, a proposition that faces many legal challenges.

The term “sanctuary city” is used broadly to describe any locality, including a state, that welcomes unauthorized immigrants and promotes their involvement with the community. Most communities that embrace the designation simply commit to a lack of cooperation with federal agencies responsible for tracking, detaining or deporting undocumented people in the United States.

The executive order authorizes action, including the withholding of federal funding, against any municipal or state entity that “violates 8 U.S.C. 1373, or...prevents or hinders the enforcement of Federal law.” Sanctuary policies that limit information-sharing with federal authorities could be seen as violating that section, but that law prohibits only restrictions on the sharing of citizenship and immigration status information.

It does not require the collection or sharing of information related to a person’s criminal activity or release date from prison. Lack of compliance with section 1373 is difficult to prove. Of far greater value to federal immigration enforcement authorities is

local compliance with immigration detainers. Those are requests by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement to give notice regarding the arrest and/or release date of immigrants in local custody. Detainer requests are, however, voluntary, and any effort by federal authorities to require compliance would violate the Constitution.

The 10th Amendment, which reserves all nondelegated powers to the states and the people, prohibits the federal government from commandeering state authorities. The president cannot force localities to comply with detainer requests or assist in the arrest of immigration violators.

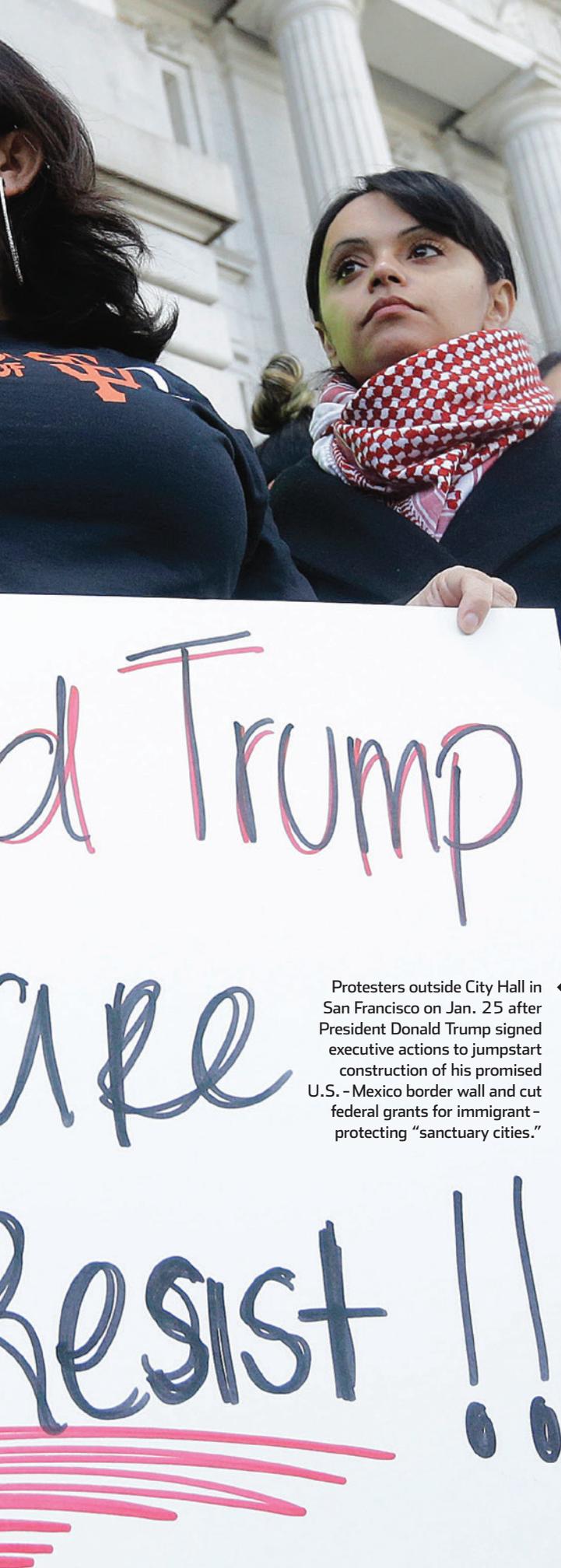
The withholding of federal funds to localities that the executive branch determines have hindered immigration enforcement raises two important constitutional claims. First, Congress, not the president, controls the federal budget. Second, Congress may use its power of the purse to entice localities to participate in federal programs and even may be permitted to withhold earmarked funds from localities that refuse to participate. But financial punishment that goes beyond persuasion to compulsion tantamount to “a gun to the head” has been held by the Supreme Court to be unconstitutional.

Controversies between localities and the federal government may become more frequent as the Trump

administration and Congress accelerate immigration enforcement efforts. Federal officials will determine whether resources will be aimed primarily at locating and deporting dangerous criminals or would sweep broadly to target even those who fled violence in their homelands or were brought to the United States as children.

Local officials will still get to determine the extent to which their communities will participate in federal enforcement efforts, and U.S. courts may in the end offer them a legal sanctuary to do so.

Ellen Boegel, a contributing editor, is an associate professor at St. John’s University in New York.



Protesters outside City Hall in San Francisco on Jan. 25 after President Donald Trump signed executive actions to jumpstart construction of his promised U.S. - Mexico border wall and cut federal grants for immigrant-protecting "sanctuary cities."

After decades, a dictator is overturned in Gambia

A peaceful and bloodless transfer of power has taken place in the West African nation of Gambia after weeks of rising tension. On Jan. 21 the country's former dictator, Yahya Jammeh, went into exile in Equatorial Guinea.

President Jammeh had refused to recognize his surprise loss in the national election on Dec. 1. A real-estate agent turned politician, Adama Barrow, was elected by Gambians. The prospect of civil war had been real as the now-former president dug his heels in and refused to hand over power.

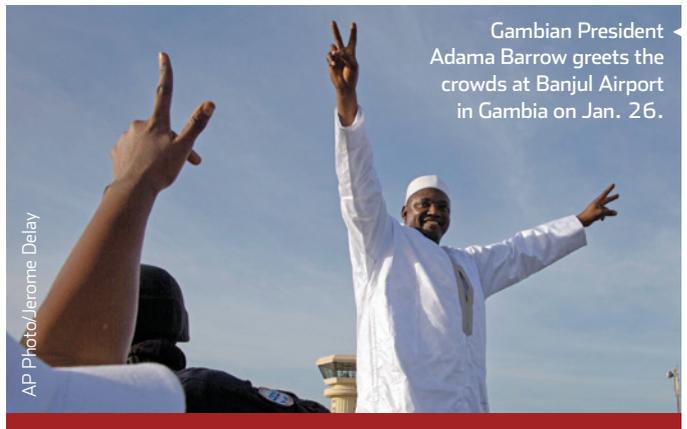
Mr. Barrow himself fled to neighboring Senegal as tensions grew. The new president was sworn in at Gambia's embassy in Dakar, Senegal, the day before Mr. Jammeh left the country. Gambians celebrated in the streets when they heard that the new president had been sworn in. Everyone in fact should be cheered by this peaceful outcome.

A regional political body, the Economic Community for West African States, was determined to ensure the will of the people was respected. Ecowas publicly condemned Gambian Mr. Jammeh, and representatives from its member states visited Banjul to negotiate his departure. The leaders even warned that they would coordinate a regional military force to intervene, if necessary.

After 22 years of Mr. Jammeh's rule, Gambians have high expectations, but the new president inherits a nation in economic crisis. Many Gambians are leaving the country seeking better lives in Europe.

Although the transfer of power was not straightforward, it at least did take place. For Gambians—and for the whole continent—that represents a significant triumph for democracy, and demonstrates that African solutions to African problems are possible.

Russell Pollitt, S.J., *Johannesburg correspondent.* Twitter: @rpollittsj.



Gambian President Adama Barrow greets the crowds at Banjul Airport in Gambia on Jan. 26.

AP Photo/Jerome Delay

CONFESSIONS OF A



CAPITALIST CONVERT

*Capitalism contains a mixture of
praiseworthy and damnable behavior.
What matters is the morality of those who
participate in the system.*

By Arthur C. Brooks

The greatest conversion story of all time began at daybreak on Dec. 9, 1531, on a hill outside Mexico City. The ruthless Spanish conquest of the indigenous peoples was proving an unconvincing advertisement for the Catholic faith. It had produced a meager stream of voluntary converts up to that point.

That morning, according to tradition, an indigenous, Mexican peasant named Juan Diego reported an apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her message was simple. “Dear little son, I love you,” she told him. “I want you to know who I am. I am the Virgin Mary, Mother of the one true God, of Him who gives life.”

That message might sound a little anodyne, but the political significance of the apparition was anything but. In the midst of a violent campaign that attributed little human dignity to the indigenous communities, Mary appeared as a *mestiza*, an ethnic mix of the Spanish and native peoples. And she appeared to an indigenous man, speaking in his native tongue. In this deeply transgressive act, Our Lady showed that the Catholic Church, despite the mistakes and crimes of those who had introduced it to Mexico, represented the radical equality of God’s love.

In the seven years after this apparition, eight million natives were brought into the church. The tilma of Juan Diego, a cloak that was miraculously imprinted with an image of Our Lady, became the spiritual symbol of an entire people. Even now, the image is reported to convert thousands of onlookers each year.

I know something about that last data point. I am one of those converts.

At age 15, I visited the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe as part of a school band trip to Mexico. I had no connections to the Catholic Church at the time; I am not sure I knew any Catholics at all. But from within a crowd of teenagers on a forced march through a boring old church, I looked up at the image of the Blessed Virgin on the famous *tilma*, which still hangs in the shrine. I did not fall into a rapturous trance. I was not overcome by sweeping emotion. But a simple observation captured my imagination and lodged in my memory: Mary was appearing to *me*.

“People often mistake their imagination for their heart,” wrote Blaise Pascal, “and so often are convinced they are converted as soon as they start thinking of becoming converted.” It is true that Mary did not convert me in that singular moment. But the image stuck in my mind. A few months later, I started the conversion process at my local parish in Seattle. My Protestant parents were mildly

chagrined but quickly recognized that if this was my teenage rebellion, Catholicism was probably better than drugs. I entered the church at 16 and began the great spiritual adventure of my life.

“The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps” (Prov 16:9). God puts the truth before us in unexpected places, I have learned. Our job is to look hard and remain open-minded.

Sometimes that open-minded search has counterintuitive steps. I found that out in my short and ill-fated run at college. As the son and grandson of academics, I should have been a successful student, but I was an aspiring classical French horn player with little interest in studying. This led to academic probation. So I followed my heart and launched an era that my long-suffering parents would affectionately term my “gap decade.”

The first six years, spent touring with a chamber ensemble, sound more glamorous than they were. Imagine driving a van around the country with four other guys, earning \$14,000 a year, and you get the idea. But this nomadic lifestyle had its rewards. In my early 20s, on a concert tour of France, I met a Spanish girl studying in Dijon for the summer. Shredding Pascal’s maxim and mistaking my imagination for my heart, I moved to Spain in hot pursuit, took a job with the City Orchestra of Barcelona and started working on my Spanish.

Big bets sometimes have big payoffs. Shortly thereafter, we married and commenced our journey of faith together. Twenty-five years later, as our children grow into adulthood, we find ourselves worrying they will do something crazy like drop out of college or move to Europe in pursuit of young love. We ask Our Lady of Guadalupe to pray for them.

POVERTY ON THE RUN



The next conversions were professional and ideological. As a Seattle-born bohemian living in Barcelona, my political views were predictably progressive. But my thinking began to change in my late 20s upon returning to college, which I did by correspondence while working as a musician.

I fancied myself a social justice warrior and regarded capitalism with a moderately hostile predisposition. I “knew” what everyone knows: Capitalism is great for the rich but terrible for the poor. The natural progression of free enterprise is that the rich and powerful accumulate more and more of the world’s resources while the poor are



Catholic faith instructs us in a moral program that we can implement under any economic system, including our own.

exploited. That state of affairs might be fine for a follower of Ayn Rand, but it is hardly consistent for a devotee of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Right?

As with most people of my generation, for me the symbol of world poverty was a starving child in Africa. I remember a picture from my childhood—I think it was from National Geographic—of an African boy about my own age. He had a distended belly and flies on his face, and he became for me the human face of true deprivation. As I grew up, I assumed, as do most Americans, that the tragic conditions facing the starving African boy had gotten worse. Today, more than two-thirds of Americans think global poverty has worsened over the past three decades.

This assumption and the attendant beliefs about capitalism hit a snag when I studied economics for the first time. In reality, I learned, humanity has starvation-level poverty on the run. Since 1970, the fraction of the global population that survives on one dollar or less a day (adjusted for inflation) has shrunk by 80 percent. Since 1990, the number of children who die before their fifth birthday has collapsed by more than 50 percent. Life expectancy and literacy rates have steadily climbed.

When faced with suffering, we often ask a conventional question: “Why are some people poor?” But grinding material poverty was the norm for the vast majority of people through the vast majority of human history. Our ancestors had no concept that mass poverty was an acute social problem that cried out for remedies. Deprivation was simply the background condition for everyone.

In just the last few hundred years, that all changed for a few billion people. So the right question today is: “Why did whole parts of the world cease to be poor for the first time in history?” And further: “What can we do to share this ahistorical prosperity with more people?” Economics taught me that two billion of my brothers and sisters had escaped poverty in my own lifetime. This was a modern-day miracle. I had to find its source.

My search for the “why” of this miracle required almost no detective work. Virtually all development economists, across the mainstream political spectrum, agreed on the core explanation. It was not the success of international organizations like the United Nations (as important as they are) nor benevolent foreign aid that pulled billions back from the brink of starvation. Rather, the responsibility lay with five interrelated forces that were in the midst of reshaping the worldwide economy: globalization, free trade, property rights, the rule of law and the culture of en-

trepreneurship. In short, it was the American free enterprise system, spreading around the world, that had effected this anti-poverty miracle.

Again, this is a mainstream scholarly finding, not some political cliché. Informed people from left to right agree on these basic points. As no less an avowed progressive than President Barack Obama put it in a 2015 public conversation we had together at Georgetown University, the “free market is the greatest producer of wealth in history—it has lifted billions of people out of poverty.”

None of this is to assert that free enterprise is a perfect system—but more on that in a moment. Nor is it to claim that free enterprise is all we need as people. But it has unambiguously improved the lives of billions. It became my view that if I was truly to be a “Matthew 25 Catholic” and live the Lord’s teaching that “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me,” then my vocation was to defend and improve the system that was achieving this miraculous result.

That is how an unlikely Catholic became an even more unlikely warrior for free enterprise.

THE INEQUALITY TRAP



My new mission gave meaning to my growing disenchantment with music. I was hungry for work that served vulnerable people more directly. Now I had a roadmap to point me toward that future. I graduated from correspondence college shortly before my 30th birthday. Traditional graduate work in economics followed, and I left music for good to pursue a Ph.D. in policy analysis. That sparked a career as a university professor, teaching economics and social entrepreneurship.

As I taught about the anti-poverty properties of free

**UNLIKE
WARRIOR
VENTURE
FOR
FREE**

**THIS IS HOW
I BECAME AN**





enterprise, a common objection—especially among my Catholic friends—remained. “Okay,” many said, “I see that markets have pulled up the living standards of billions, and that’s great. But they haven’t pulled people up *equally*. In fact, capitalism has created more inequality than we have ever seen.” This spawns ancillary concerns about the rich getting richer at the expense of the poor, and the rising inequality of opportunity. My challenge as a Catholic economist was to answer these questions in good faith.

The evidence on income inequality seems to be all around us and irrefutable, particularly in the United States. From 1979 to today, the income won by the “top 1 percent” of Americans has surged by roughly 200 percent, while the bottom four-fifths have seen income growth of only about 40 percent. Today, the share of income that flows to the top 10 percent is higher than it has been since at any point since 1928, the peak of the bubble in the Roaring Twenties. And our lackluster “recovery” following the Great Recession likely amplified these long-run trends. Emmanuel Saez, a University of California economist, estimates that 95 percent of all the country’s income growth from 2009 to 2012 wound up in the hands of the top 1 percent.

Taking this evidence on its face, it is easy to conclude that our capitalist system is hopelessly flawed. Digging deeper, however, produces a more textured story.

To begin with, we should remember that inequality is not necessarily a bad thing when the alternative is the equality of grinding poverty, which was the case in previous centuries. Few would prefer a nation of equal paupers to modern-day America. But in any case, the notion that global income inequality has been rising inexorably is incorrect. From 1988 to 2008, a key era in the continued worldwide spread of market systems, economists have shown that the worldwide Gini index—a common mea-

sure of inequality—at worst has stayed level and has most likely fallen.

The real concern is capitalism’s purported tendency to create radically and unfairly disparate economic outcomes. In reality, however, most of the places with sky-high inequality are not bastions of unfettered free enterprise. According to the World Bank, while the United States has the 63rd highest level of income inequality in the world, communist China is higher (57th place). Pope Francis’ native Argentina, characterized more by government edict and economic planning than by free enterprise, is higher still (53rd).

If capitalism *per se* does not cause income inequality, what does? One part of the answer becomes clear after spending just a few days in China or Argentina. It is impossible to miss that prosperity in these places depends largely on political power and privilege, much more so than in the United States. While the United States is not perfect on this score by any means, our relative success at decoupling non-merit-based clout from economic success goes a long way toward explaining why so many people are so eager to relocate here.

Most of you have a family like mine. You are probably the descendant not of nobility but of ambitious riffraff who risked everything to flee poverty, oppression or both. Initially, they knew, poverty and inequality would also greet them in America—but here those conditions would be mutable, and some measure of prosperity could be achieved through hard work and personal responsibility. All this is doubly true for American Catholics, who were long viewed by the elite as the very archetype of impoverished and unpolished immigrants. Generations of Catholic immigrants—perhaps Juan Diego would be one today—showed up on our shores and at our borders starving for jobs and opportunity. Our country’s attractiveness to immigrants

has persisted to this day, belying the idea that the United States is now some kind of plutocratic dystopia.

What about the worry that rich people are benefiting at the expense of the poor? It is ill-founded. All income groups in the United States have seen dramatic increases in their standard of consumption—not just since colonial times but also over the past few decades. Today, government data show, conveniences such as air-conditioning and color television—once literally inconceivable—have become ubiquitous all across the income distribution. Forty-five percent of Americans with incomes *below* the poverty line today live in a house with three or more bedrooms.

This is why many economists suggest that data on household consumption spending offer a better gauge of families' daily realities than pretax earned income. Many households lose significant funds when they pay their taxes; many others gain meaningful resources through government transfers and benefits. Yet all of this is lost in the conventional income statistics. This is an especially noteworthy omission for Catholics, since our preferential option for the poor and corporal acts of mercy aim at concrete, specific improvements in actual living conditions. Eliminating poverty should mean fighting to raise living standards to a satisfactory threshold and eliminating acute material insufficiency. Mathematically, there must be a bottom 10 percent and 20 percent of earners in any society. The morally relevant issue is not this mathematical truism but rather how these people are actually living.

So what happens when we turn to consumption statistics, painting a more holistic picture with the data on what households actually spend? The allegations of recent runaway growth in inequality evaporate. Measured this way, the gap has not grown meaningfully in decades.

In other words, the zero-sum fear about our economy is mistaken. True, the rich are doing plenty well in the United States. Should they pay their tithe and then some, devoting resources not only to their government through taxes but also voluntarily to their churches and charities to help those who are less fortunate? Of course. But there is no real sense in which their success is directly stolen from the poor or middle class. In material terms, *all* these groups are unimaginably better off today than before free enterprise entered their lives.

A bigger concern is inequality of economic opportunity. The waves of immigrants drawn to this country did not expect to exchange impoverished lives in their

homelands for instant wealth and luxury in the United States. But they *did* believe—accurately—that they were exchanging ossified lives in permanently stratified societies for one in which hard work could more directly yield a measure of prosperity.

Unfortunately, the best data available today suggest that absolute economic mobility is, in fact, declining. A recent study led by Raj Chetty, a Stanford economics professor, shows that the percentage of children who earn more than their parents has rapidly decreased. Their research shows that at age 30, about 90 percent of children born in 1940 were earning more than their parents had earned at that same age. Only half of children born in the 1980s were able to accomplish the same feat. And Americans' expectations are trending downward to match this reality: According to a survey from mid-2015, only one in eight Americans believe their kids will have more disposable income than adults today.

Of all the concerns about inequality, this is the most legitimate. Unfortunately, it is also the hardest to solve. For example, it is a dubious proposition at best that forcibly redistributing wealth to decrease inequality would necessarily reinvigorate opportunity. After all, the approximately \$20 trillion in transfer payments that have resulted from the War on Poverty have purchased a lot of welfare programs to make poverty a little less unbearable, but they have failed to do anything meaningful to make poverty more *escapable*. Even education spending, which is meant to level the playing field, has failed to do so. It has doubled per child (in real terms) since 1970, yet the achievement gap between students at the top and bottom of the income distribution has increased, not decreased, by a third.

The bottom line is that income inequality is not rising worldwide or, when properly measured, in the United States. Income inequality is not a unique product of capitalism, and it does not itself create impoverishment of the poor or the diminution of opportunity. Income inequality is the wrong focus for our anxieties about free enterprise. Opportunity inequality is the crisis we face today, and weakening the free enterprise system will not solve this problem.

CAPITALISM FOR THE SOUL



Once I climbed over common Catholic criticisms of inequality, I realized that I had summited only a small foothill in the debate over free enterprise. A much bigger



Our ancestors had no concept that poverty was an acute social problem that cried out for remedies. ”

mountain loomed: the effects of capitalism on the soul.

The critics' argument goes something like this: Capitalism makes us into materialists, into money-making automatons. Capitalism focuses us on greed and acquisition at the cost of our families, our faith, our friendships and even our planet. It sucks the life out of life.

The great G. K. Chesterton voiced this objection in his classic essay "Three Foes of the Family." "It cannot be too often repeated," he wrote, "that what destroyed the Family in the modern world was Capitalism." He charged that the ethos that accompanies free enterprise had "broken up households and encouraged divorces, and treated the old domestic virtues with more and more open contempt." Pope Francis put forward a similar point in his 2013 apostolic exhortation "Evangelii Gaudium": "In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule."

These critics claim that market-based societies destroy real human flourishing because they inevitably make their participants more acquisitive and selfish, and therefore more unethical and unhappy. The evidence on the happiness question is especially evocative. In 2009, for example, researchers from the University of Rochester conducted a study tracking recent graduates' progress at achieving goals they had set for themselves. Some of the 147 alumni had set out toward "intrinsic" goals, such as developing deep, enduring relationships. Others aimed at "extrinsic" goals, such as achieving wealth or becoming famous.

The results brought good and bad news. The good news is that, by and large, the subjects did achieve their stated goals. But be careful what you wish for, because it was only the alumni who had set intrinsic goals for whom success translated into actual happiness. The people who had successfully attained extrinsic goals, many of which boiled down to indulging avarice or pride, experienced more negative emotions, such as shame and anger. They even suffered more physical maladies such as headaches and loss of energy.

For Catholics, this is a potentially lethal criticism of free enterprise: As capitalism fixates us on wealth, it weakens the family, fragments the community and leaves us miserable. Is this not the very essence of idolatry?

The answer to this has occupied me for the past decade. I have lain awake worrying about the coarsening

materialism of our society and American popular culture. Turn on the television, go to the movies, glance at practically any advertisement, and you will learn that the formula for a happy life is simple: use people, love things, worship yourself. Is capitalism to blame?

My conclusion is that it is not. Systems are fundamentally amoral. The forces that make up the free enterprise system are fundamentally content-neutral. Free enterprise could be used for purely evil ends if capitalism produced only pornography and poison gas, or for purely virtuous ends if man were not fallen. In reality, like basically every human endeavor, capitalism as currently practiced contains a mixture of praiseworthy and damnable behavior. At root, then, what matters is the morality of those who participate in the system.

Confusion about this point is the reason for one of the most frequent misquotes in all of Scripture. St. Paul is often incorrectly cited as saying that "money is the root of all evil." On the contrary, his indictment was of inordinate *attachment* to money: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains" (1 Tm 6:20).

The problem is not money; it is attachment to money. Why else would God himself enter the world in complete poverty? More precisely for the topic at hand, the big problem is not free enterprise per se. It is the choice by many men and women to prioritize the struggle for riches ahead of higher goods such as faith, family and friendships.

Still, doesn't the free enterprise system's relentless efficiency at creating wealth make it a special offender at incentivizing selfishness and avarice? Even if humans tend naturally toward greed until we are corrected, doesn't cap-



We should rely wherever possible on market concepts of competition and choice, which have consistently transformed industries and improved living standards. ”

italism just slam our feet down on the accelerator?

In a word, no. Anyone who traveled behind the Iron Curtain in the 1980s (or China and Argentina today) has seen every bit as much human selfishness and greed on the part of the powerful and privileged. And there is little doubt that kings, princes and even popes throughout history fell to pecuniary idolatry. Greed was a deadly sin long before the invention of capitalism. Free enterprise—which has brought so much good to billions of people—is not the culprit.

Why is this particular flaw woven so deep into our postlapsarian humanity? From the perspective of armchair evolutionary psychology, it makes intuitive sense that we have an appetite for material security. Had one particular caveman not stored up enough food or acquired enough animal skins, he might either have perished prematurely or failed to find a mating partner, and you would not be here to read **America**.

This is why it is imperative never to forget that biology is not our loving Father. Unlike God, natural selection does not particularly care whether we are happy or whether we live flourishing lives that build up our communities. Our DNA certainly does not care how long we have to spend in purgatory—if we are fortunate enough to arrive there in the first place. This means the quicksand of materialism is one way in which we Catholics are called to mortify and purify our impulses. This is not made any easier, incidentally, by the pervasive popular advice that “if it feels good, do it.” Our Father gives us rational souls and inspired consciences for a reason. We must put them to use in our financial decisions and our careers, no less than in any other arena of our lives.

Catholic faith instructs us in a moral program that we can implement under any economic system, including our own. Our recipe for a better life simply inverts the world’s

mistaken formula and renders it virtuous: *Love people, use things, worship God.*

As St. Josemaría Escrivá reminded us, earthly goods are “debased when man sets them up as idols, when he adores them” instead of the Lord. But they are not inherently bad. In fact, worldly goods can be “ennobled when they are converted into instruments for good, for just and charitable Christian undertakings. We cannot seek after material goods as if they were a treasure. Our treasure is Christ and all our love and desire must be centered on him.”

The bottom line, in my view, is that Catholics have no cause to reject free enterprise. We must acknowledge the limitations of any economic system, and avoid fashioning false idols out of our wealth or the markets that make it possible. But those tempted to consider different economic systems must remember that only free enterprise (accompanied by necessary regulation and proper social safety nets) has helped fulfill the noble antipoverty goals of our faith for billions of people all around the world. Meanwhile, capitalism’s collectivist competitors, such as state socialism or communism, have left a long trail of misery, tyranny and atheism.

In the United States, practically no one advocates a complete overthrow of capitalism. But among many Catholics who are laudably dedicated to social justice, there remains a reflex to militate against market forces and advocate for more state control of the economy. Our prudential analysis of key issues, from education to taxes to corporate regulation, should not begin with hostility to free enterprise. We must conduct an honest accounting of market failures, to be sure—but we should rely wherever possible on market concepts of competition and choice, which have consistently transformed industries and improved living standards.

American free enterprise has imperfections that must

be mended. But at root, we should cultivate it widely, share it with everyone and celebrate its fruits with enthusiasm.

THE PRIVILEGE OF WORK



Earlier in this essay, I outlined my religious conversion to Catholicism, followed by my vocational conversion from French hornist to economist. Let me close with a few words about how they are related.

In “*Gaudium et Spes*,” the Second Vatican Council gave laypeople a clear teaching on the importance of our secular work. “Let Christians follow the example of Christ who worked as a craftsman,” the document declares. “Let them be proud of the opportunity to carry out their earthly activity in such a way as to integrate human, domestic, professional, scientific and technical enterprises with religious values, under whose supreme direction all things are ordered to the glory of God.” In short, the church teaches each of us with an honest profession to sanctify our work, no matter what it may be.

During the years when my work was music, my favorite composer was Johann Sebastian Bach. The master of the High Baroque published more than 1,000 works over the course of his 65 years. From keyboard études to church cantatas for every Sunday in the lectionary, Bach’s incredible compositions seemed to fall easily from his pen.

But music was not the most important force in Bach’s life. Before music came family. He was the father of 20 children. And before everything else came his love for God. Bach finished each of his scores with the words “*Soli Deo gloria*,” or “Glory to God alone.” When asked one time why he wrote music, his answer was simple but profound: “The aim and final end of all music should be none other than the glory of God and the refreshment of the soul.”

I first read that quotation when I was still playing the French horn. It inspired me, but it also sank in like a knife to the heart. I wanted to be able to sanctify my secular work as the church instructs; to be able to confidently say that my work glorified God and served my fellow men and women. In the orchestra, frankly, I was feeling that way less and less often. A lot of nights I was refreshing no one, and I began to crave a new profession that would offer a more direct path toward serving others.

To switch from music to economics might sound like moving from the sublime to the dismal. Yet as paradoxical

as it seems, economics is what enabled me finally to deliver something like Bach’s answer about my own work. As a Catholic dedicated to the welfare of those at the periphery of society, I am an expert witness to the fact that there has never been a better system than free enterprise for empowering real people to pull themselves out of poverty. There has never been a better system to allow people to unlock the unique sense of dignity that comes with earning their own way, deploying their talents to serve their community, colleagues or customers, and taking home justifiable pride in—and rewards for—their efforts. And there is no reason, if we are serious about our Christian apostolate, that free enterprise should become an idol in itself, impoverish anyone or capture our souls.

In sharing this truth, I can finally sanctify my work. Not on the level of the great Bach, to be sure, but in my own little way. What a privilege it is. Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for me.

Arthur C. Brooks is president of the American Enterprise Institute. He is the best-selling author of *The Conservative Heart* (Broadside Books) and a contributing opinion writer for *The New York Times*. Twitter: @arthurbrooks.



At Home in a Strange Land

By Jim McDermott

Refugees in Malta try to start over



Bright and early every Monday morning, Selam Bisrat emerges from her apartment on the island of Malta carrying her infant son, while her wide-eyed, 12-year-old daughter walks nearby, her hijab and dress as brilliant and spotless as her mother's.

Hurrying down a winding street of ancient buildings, they come to a parking lot, where a skinny young man sits in a red shuttle bus. For the next hour they will hurtle through roundabouts and 1,000-year-old side streets on their way to the Paulo Freire Institute, a literacy apostolate sponsored by the Society of Jesus.

Ms. Bisrat (whose name has been changed for security reasons) is not from Malta but Ethiopia. She came here with her children as refugees in 2013 following her husband, who arrived in 2008 and fought for five years to obtain refugee status. Under Malta's family reunification program, the families of people found to be legitimate refugees are able to join them. But the situation is complicated; rather than recognize family members as refugees in their own right, the government classifies them as dependent family. This is supposed to give them the same rights and access to services, but in the midst of it all, the institutional, bureaucratic agencies—including agencies of the government itself—frequently do not understand that.

Their ambiguous status keeps these families permanently anxious. If a refugee dies or there is some need for separation, it is not clear whether the family would have the right to stay. As if to highlight that possibility, their state identification cards are good for only three years at a time. At the same time, once claimed by Malta as legitimate refugees, families are not allowed to move somewhere else. They gain the right to travel within the European Union (though sometimes E.U. countries will refuse their visa, citing concern they might stay), but they have to come back to Malta within three months. Many asylum seekers express a hope that they actually will not get status in Malta, so that they will have the opportunity to apply elsewhere in the European Union or in the United States, which takes a number of asylum seekers from Malta every year.

A Place to Call Home

On the way to the institute, Ms. Bisrat is joined by others like her, mostly young women who have come from places like Syria, Somalia, Libya and Eritrea. Some have stories similar to hers—the constant threat from dangerous political situations and the hardship of years

spent waiting to hear from their husbands. Others have been through even worse. But while their driver fights to find passage through Malta's often-nightmarish traffic (think the most notorious freeways of Los Angeles crammed into every major thoroughfare of an island, with drivers who pay little or no attention to the street signs), here they all are now, visiting and playing with their babies, while a few teenagers play on their phones. (No matter what they have seen or been through, a teenager remains a teenager, thank goodness.)

Among the biggest challenges that all of these women faced upon arriving in Malta, and still today, is their living situation. Talking to asylum seekers in Malta, you hear often about the amazing opportunities afforded to friends and family in other E.U. countries—the housing provided in Germany, the vocational opportunities in Sweden, language studies, schooling. Here there is universal health care, but much of the rest they have to find for themselves. Initial housing options for asylum seekers consist of a number of "open centers," where the set-up ranges from rooms in converted schools or army barracks to groups of converted shipping containers.

The conditions in Malta today are nothing like the traumatic, overcrowded, barbed-wire camps one sees on the news. The flow of asylum seekers here has dropped dramatically in recent years, as people traveling by boat have started being taken to nearby Italy instead. According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, just over 2,000 asylum seekers arrived in Malta by boat in 2013. Between January and June of 2016 there were just five people, all on one boat. So whereas in 2010 more than 2,200 people lived in Malta's open centers, as of May 2016 the number was down to 539.

But finding adequate housing remains difficult, particularly for families like these. Ms. Bisrat and her husband have three children. They need more space than a one-bedroom apartment can provide. But a laborer's salary can barely support such a residence, especially when water, electricity and food must also be purchased. Refugees with families talk about having to choose between things like medicine and food. Landlords nervous or unwilling to rent to refugees only make the challenges greater.

The Jesuits of Malta were not unfamiliar with these problems. And they felt challenged by the words of Pope Francis. "We were reflecting as a province on how can we give some response to this invitation of the pope to host some refugee families," recalls Paul Chetcuti, S.J., superior of one Jesuit community. "We decided to do something."

Jesuit Refugee Service helps refugees like Selam Bisrat and her children, pictured at left, to venture out into their new communities.

“

The conditions in Malta today are nothing like the traumatic, overcrowded camp scenes one sees on the news.”



Opening Doors

In 2015 Jesuit province officials began looking into offering housing for refugee families in need for one year at a time. For guidance they looked to Jesuit Refugee Service Malta. Run by Katrine Camilleri, a lawyer who has fought for many years on behalf of refugees—indeed, every refugee you meet seems to have a story about how Ms. Camilleri has helped them—J.R.S. Malta offers a wide variety of services, from legal and psychological to employment advice and literacy. Seen from the outside, it is a humble operation, just a small suite of offices adjoining the cafeteria of a local Catholic school. But within one finds great warmth and a hive of activity. The youthful staff is much like Ms. Camilleri herself: ultra-competent, passionate and dedicated to helping any people who come through the doors, whether for a C.V. or for psychiatric help.

Having heard again and again the stories of families unable to find adequate housing, J.R.S. Malta developed “Communities of Hospitality,” a program that tries to match empty property owned by religious communities with families in need.

As it turned out, Loyola House, the Jesuit community where Father Chetcuti was superior, had a perfect space: a real apartment, with its own entrance and exit, and plen-

ty of room. Father Chetcuti sat down with his community—24 mostly elderly Jesuits—and presented the idea.

There were, of course, many questions about how this might affect their community. But the meeting was more notable for the willingness of the Jesuits to consider the idea. “I was positively surprised,” Father Chetcuti remarks. “The community was much more open to the idea than I expected. No major objection was brought forward.”

With that, Loyola House opened its doors. “They were warmly welcomed,” Father Chetcuti recalls, describing the community’s first lunch with the Bistrats, “even if at the beginning nobody was fully at ease.” The apartment was set up in such a way that both the family and the community could have their privacy. But some community members volunteered to get supplies for the family and to visit; the children are allowed to play in the community’s garden.

“They ask us if we have any problems. Sometimes even they help the children to do their homework,” Ms. Bistrat says. “They give us a lot of morals, virtue, by saying and by practice. They tell us to be strong and to live our lives.”

For the Jesuits, too, the arrangement has proven a blessing. “I was 45 years in India and two years in Kenya,” says George Camilleri, a Jesuit brother who oversees the



Katrine Camilleri, second from right, is a lawyer who has fought for many years on behalf of refugees.

Photo: Darin Zammit Lujfi

men in the province infirmary and often visits Ms. Bisrat's family. "It helps me to be with them, because I myself feel like an outsider." He also notes how positive the presence of the children has been on sick members of the community. "When they see those young children around, they feel so happy."

"The whole idea is not as unsettling as it seemed at the beginning," notes Father Chetcuti. "Most of what we learn of the refugee issue in Malta is through the media, so it remains an impersonal reality. But when we come in contact with actual persons, children and their families, it becomes a personal story. And the impact is very positive." "I hope that now I can say I have some friends from Ethiopia. I love them, and I think they know and love me, and I take that as a great gift," he said.

Moving Forward

Lacking vocational and language opportunities, resources for child care or even just peers, it can be very difficult for wives like Ms. Bisrat to venture out of their homes into the community. Their husbands often have been in Malta for years, have jobs that occupy them all day and have at least a basic understanding of how to get things done. Their children go to school and immediately begin catching up.

But the wives of refugees here are often isolated, without voice, forgotten.

This is why Ms. Bisrat and her companions take this helter-skelter bus ride every Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning to Paulo Freire. In partnership with J.R.S. the institute is offering a set of basic English and cultural orientation classes. There are occasional field trips, as well, and celebrations, all aimed at helping the women begin to feel at home in this new country, to feel that it can be their place—to feel they have what it takes to go out and make their way, and that even here in this strange land they have people who understand their situation and can help them.

Today, after the van arrives and the mothers have trundled their children and baby carriages into the waiting arms of the institute staff, they climb the stairs to a little classroom filled with shelves of children's books. On the walls, the carefully crafted words of children are next to shapes cut from craft paper. A retired primary school teacher waits for them. Once they are seated, she leaps in without delay, starting with words related to riding the bus, then days of the week, then the correct pronunciation of specific letters. It is all sort of like the van ride, woolly and wide-roaming, happy to turn down whatever nook or cranny comes along the way.

On the surface it can be hard to tell what is sinking in. As with anyone learning a foreign language, there is that stricken look that comes over the students' faces when they are asked to speak.

It is ironic, really. In the big picture, the challenge of learning English is nothing compared to what these women have already seen, the homes and countries and friends they and their families have already lost. And yet in their eyes you can see it: the anxiety born of a great and burning desire to take all of this in, to learn everything and get it just right. And just as J.R.S. and the institute hoped, being together creates an instant bond. They are constantly stopping to help one another, to translate, to share what they know. They might have each come to this country carrying a great burden, but it is clear here they no longer carry it alone.

At the end of the lesson the ladies gather their prams and their children and climb back onto the van for another hour's obstacle course/bumper-car ride, flying past little shops and wide stoops where old Maltese men cluster, watching the world go by with intense curiosity.

At their stop Ms. Bisrat and her children hop out, her daughter quietly carrying her son. She smiles and waves, and takes her family home.

Jim McDermott, S.J., a screenwriter, is America's Los Angeles correspondent. Twitter: @PopCulturPriest.

THE FUTURE OF BELIEF

Composite image: iStockphoto.com/America



Unexpected wisdom from seekers, scientists and techies

By Krista Tippett

Over the past 20 years, I have asked Christians and atheists, poets and physicists, authors and activists to speak on air about something that ultimately defies each and every one of our words. This radio adventure began in the mid-1990s, when I emerged from divinity school to find a media and political landscape in which the conversation about faith had been handed to a few strident, polarizing voices. I longed to create a conversational space that could honor the intellectual as well as the spiritual content of this aspect of human existence.

The history of theology is one long compulsion to not, as St. Augustine said, remain altogether silent. The history of theology, and humanity, is also brimming, of course, with words about faith's unreasonableness and limitations. One of my favorite definitions of faith emerged from an interview with a Jesuit priest—the Vatican astronomer George Coyne, who quoted the author Anne Lamott: “The opposite of faith is not doubt. The opposite of faith is certainty.” I have thrown this line into more than a few erudite discussions, and it delightfully shakes things up.

That is all by way of declaring that I can offer only incomplete and humble observations to the question of what I have learned about faith, in my life of radio conversation and the life I have led alongside it. Faith is evolutionary in every culture and in any life. The same enduring, fundamental belief will hold a transfigured substance in the beginning, the middle and the end of any lifetime. So here are three things I perceive about the state of faith's evolution in our world and in American culture right now.

The new nonreligious may be the greatest hope for the revitalization of religion.

The phrase “spiritual but not religious,” now common social parlance, is just the tip of an iceberg that has already moved on. We are among the first people in human history who do not broadly inherit religious identity as a given, a matter of kin and tribe, like hair color and hometown. And this is not leading to the decline of spiritual life but to its transformation. One might even use the loaded word “reformation.” This is reformation in a distinctly 21st-century form. Its impulses would make more sense to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, with his intimation of “religionless Christianity,” than to Luther, with those theses he could pin to a door.

Masses of airtime and print space have been given over to the phenomenon of the “nones”—the awkwardly named, fastest-growing segment of spiritual identification comprising something like 15 percent of the American population as a whole and a full third of people under 30. I do not find it surprising that young people born in the 1980s and ’90s have distanced themselves from the notion of religious declaration, coming of age as they did in that era, in which strident religious voices became toxic forces in American culture.

More to the point: The growing universe of the nones is one of the most spiritually vibrant and provocative spaces in modern life. It is not a world in which spiritual life is absent. It is a world that resists religious excesses and shallows. Large swaths of this universe are wild with ethical passion and delving, openly theological curiosity, and they are expressing this in unexpected places and unexpected ways. There are churches and synagogues full of nones. They are also filling up undergraduate classes on the New Testament and St. Augustine.

Nathan Schneider, a frequent **America** contributor, eloquently described to me during his interview on my show the paradox of his own spiritually eclectic upbringing and the depth of searching he and his peers engage when they encounter the traditions. He converted to Catholicism as a teen, attracted to the contemplative tradition of the medieval church and the radical social witness of people like Dorothy Day. But at Mass, he met many lifelong Catholics who appeared unaware of the riches of their own tradition and kept going “with a kind of inertia.” Meanwhile, among the unchurched, he found people who were grappling with the big questions. “They didn’t feel like they could really

commit themselves to these institutions, but they were curious, and they were looking for something.”

I see seekers in this realm pointing Christianity back to its own untameable, countercultural, service-oriented heart. I have spoken with a young man who started a digital enterprise that joins strangers for conversation and community around life traumas, from the economic to the familial; young Californians with a passion for social justice working to gain a theological grounding and spiritual resilience for their work and others; African-American meditators helping community initiatives cast a wider and more diverse net of neighbors. The line between sacred and secular does not quite make sense to any of them, even though none of them are religious in any traditional form. But they are animated by Martin Luther King Jr.’s vision of creating “the beloved community.” They are giving themselves over to this, with great intention and humility, as a calling that is spiritual and not merely social and political.

There is a new conversation and interplay between religion and science in human life, and it has wondering (not debating) at its heart.

In the century now past, certain kinds of religiosity turned themselves into boxes into which too little wondering could enter or escape. So did certain kinds of nonbelief. But this I believe: Any conviction worth its salt has chosen to cohabit with a piece of mystery, and that mystery is at the essence of the vitality and growth of the thing.

Einstein saw a capacity for wonder, a reverence for mystery, at the heart of the best of science and religion and the arts. And as this century opened, physicists, cosmologists and astronomers were no longer pushing mystery out but welcoming it back in. Physics came to the edge of what it thought to be final frontiers and discovered, among other premise-toppling things, that the expansion of the universe is not slowing down but speeding up. It turns out that the vast majority of the cosmos is brim full of forces we had never before imagined and cannot yet fathom—the intriguingly named dark matter, as well as dark energy.

Meanwhile, quantum physics, whose tenets Einstein compared to voodoo, has given us cellphones and personal computers, technologies of the everyday by which we populate online versions of outer space. In turn, these immersive, science-driven experiences are renewing ancient human intuitions that linear, immediate reality is not all there



The growing universe of the nones is one of the most spiritually vibrant and provocative spaces in modern life.

is. There is reality and there is virtual reality, space and cyberspace. Use whatever analogy you will. Our online lives take us down the rabbit hole, like Alice. We wake up in the morning and walk through the back of the closet into Narnia. The further we delve into artificial intelligence and the mapping of our own brains, the more fabulous our own consciousness appears.

I am strangely comforted when I hear from cosmologists that human beings are the most complex creatures we know of in the universe, still, by far. Black holes are in their way explicable; the simplest living being is not. I lean a bit more confidently into the experience that life is so endlessly perplexing. I love that word, *perplexing*. In this sense, spiritual life is a reasonable, reality-based pursuit. It can have mystical entry points and destinations, to be sure. But it is in the end about befriending reality, the common human experience of mystery included. It acknowledges the full drama of the human condition. It attends to beauty and pleasure; it attends to grief and pain and the enigma of our capacity to resist the very things we long for and need.

Science is even a new kind of companion in illuminating this, the mystery of ourselves. Biologists and neuroscientists and social psychologists are taking the great virtues into the laboratory—forgiveness, compassion, love, even awe. They are describing, in ways theology could never do alone, how such things work; in the process, they are making the practice of virtues and indeed the elements of righteousness more humanly possible. The science-religion “debate” of clashing certainties was never true to the spirit or the history of science or of faith. But this new conversation and interplay born of a shared wonder is revolutionary and redemptive for us all.

The connection points I hear to monasticism and contemplation, nearly everywhere in the emerging spiritual landscape, are beyond intriguing.

The desert fathers and mothers, the visionaries like St. Benedict and St. Francis and Julian of Norwich and St. Ignatius Loyola—they all found their voice at a distance from a church they experienced to have grown externally domesticated and inwardly cold, out of touch with its own spiritual core. I see their ecumenical, humanist, transnational analogs among the nones. There is a grow-

ing ecumenical constellation of communities called the new monasticism with deep roots in evangelical Christianity—a loose network around the United States in which single people and couples and families explore new forms of intentional community and service to the world around. And there are technologists “hacking” the Rule of St. Benedict to build open, networked communities beyond the grip of the internet giants.

Meanwhile, even as many Western monastic communities in their traditional forms are growing smaller, their spaces for prayer and retreat are bursting at the seams with modern people retreating for rest and silence and centering and prayer, which they take back with them into families and workplaces and communities and schools. As the noisy world seems to be pulling us apart, many people in and beyond the boundaries of tradition are experiencing their need for contemplative practices that were for centuries pursued by professional religious classes and too often missing from the lives of ordinary believers.

In so many ways, I see the new dynamics of spiritual life in our time as gifts to the wisdom of the ages, even as they unsettle the foundations of faith as we have known it. This is a dialectic by which faith, in order to survive, has the chance to live more profoundly into its own deepest sense than it ever could before. I have no idea what religion will look like a century from now, but this evolution of faith will change us all.

Krista Tippett is the creator and host of the public radio program and podcast “On Being” and the author of *Becoming Wise: An Inquiry Into the Mystery and Art of Living* (Penguin Press).

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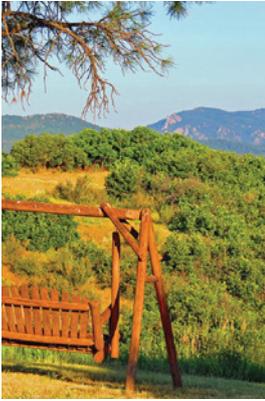
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*Viet
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remember
anymore.*

By Quang D. Tran

“Our job is to humanize the communities that we come from,” says the essayist and Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Viet Thanh Nguyen.

When Viet Thanh Nguyen’s bold and mesmerizing debut novel *The Sympathizer* received the 2016 Pulitzer Prize in fiction, it was an honor that took him by surprise. Having fled Vietnam in 1975 with his family at a young age, Nguyen was the first Vietnamese-American writer to win the Pulitzer. *The Sympathizer*, with intense and ironic prose, wrestles with issues of identity and loyalty through the confession of a communist double agent during the Vietnam War.

This month Grove Atlantic releases Nguyen’s *The Refugees*, a collection of eight short stories written over a span of 17 years. Nguyen’s stories deal with ghosts and patriotism, mental illness and infidelity, and gender roles and homosexuality, among other topics that highlight the tensions and complexities involved in the refugees’ search for identity and belonging. The stories humanize Vietnamese-Americans who do not always fit the inflexible “model minority” stereotype. They take a segment of the American population not always on the social radar and bring it into sharp relief.

I spoke with Nguyen over Skype while he was on Christmas break with family in San Jose. This interview has been edited and condensed.

In The Refugees, you make it difficult for readers to point out the “real enemy.” Your stories don’t allow for easy answers.

That reflects just how I experienced life in the Vietnamese-American

community. There were just so many situations that people found themselves in that really had no easy answers. People were suffering from various kinds of trauma. They were human beings who were trying to survive in the United States, but also deal with all kinds of complications with their families, and their children, and their partners. Some people made good choices, some people made bad choices, and some people made choices whose consequences depended on how you were looking at them.

You have a gift for humanizing characters of opposing sides.

Our job is to humanize the communities that we come from to people who don’t know anything about these communities. That’s important to do, but it’s also very constricting because writers who are not a part of the minority don’t feel that obligation. They don’t feel they have to humanize anybody because it’s already understood that they’re human. If they’re a part of the majority and if their readership is a part of the majority, you don’t need to explain the humanity of your own community to someone of your own community.

Each age group of Vietnamese-Americans will receive and process your stories from The Refugees differently—and certainly, differently from non-Vietnamese Americans as well. Who were you imagining reading these stories when you were composing them?

I had a couple of different audiences

in mind. I had readers that I thought I wanted to reach out to. And those would be other Americans, but certainly also Vietnamese-Americans as well. But then, also lurking in my mind were the readers who could really make a difference to a writer, and those readers were editors, agents and publishers. And that was, I think, very debilitating for me. I was worried about my career, and recognition, and all those kinds of worldly things.... For *The Sympathizer*, I had a very different audience in mind, and the audience was me.

The topic of faith comes up often in your writings. Did you grow up Catholic? Did you have statues and rosaries all over the place, like my family does?

If I turn the camera around you can see that I’m facing three Catholic pictures on the wall that my parents have hung up. You know, Jesus, Mary and Joseph; St. Teresa; and Pope John Paul II. These are the kind of things that I grew up with on my bedroom wall. And my parents were extremely devout Catholics. They were born in the North before 1954, and then they were part of that wave of Catholics that came south. I was raised as a Catholic, I went to Catholic school, and then Jesuit prep school, and went to church every week. So I grew up saturated in Catholic mythology, if that’s what you want to call it, but Catholic culture as well. Ironically, despite all the money and effort that my parents spent on turning me into a Catholic, I’m not a very good Catholic.

The Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Society at a parish in Houston, Tex., 2016. Viet Thanh Nguyen's stories look at different dimensions of the Vietnamese diaspora.



(CNS photo/James Ramos, Texas Catholic Herald).

You went to Bellarmine Jesuit Prep in San Jose. How was that experience, being a first-generation Vietnamese-American in a mostly white, affluent school?

It was a mixed experience where, on the one hand, it was a great education. I read all kinds of things that I think most people my age weren't reading. So I was reading Faulkner, and Joyce, and Karl Marx. And I was also being

inculcated with Jesuit and Catholic values of service to others, which was a major part of the curriculum at Bellarmine, and that has always stayed with me.... But on the other hand, it was primarily a white school, and mostly white curriculum, and that had a negative impact on me and other students of color at the time. We didn't have a political consciousness, so we couldn't articulate who we were.

We knew that we were different.

The topic of identity comes up a lot in The Refugees. How do questions of belonging and identity, race and racism differ for Asian-American citizens now, in comparison to your generation?

I've seen younger Asian-Americans who've grown up in California, in the urban neighborhoods, take be-

ing Asian-American for granted. They've always been surrounded by Asian-Americans, and so for them there's less of an impulse to make identity into an important issue because it's simply a fact of their life. They haven't experienced discrimination, they haven't even experienced not being a part of the majority. That's a very different experience than what I had. I think that's why when I went to college, taking Asian-American studies classes and ethnic studies classes was very important to me.

In almost all your stories, amid the tensions and all the struggles, there always seems to be a strong woman in the background. Was that intentional?

Yeah, definitely. And it's very different from *The Sympathizer*. *The Sympathizer* is told from a very heterosexual, masculine point of view, and there's a lot of sexism as a result of that. But in *The Refugees*, I really set out to try to capture a diversity of experiences, which meant I was literally mapping out stories thinking, "Okay, do I have women? Do I have young girls? Do I have older men? Do I have civilians? Do I have veterans?" I really wanted to get a broad demographic of the Vietnamese-American community.

You have stories about women's roles, sexuality and sexual orientation, and fidelity. What's the one thread that runs through all of these stories?

It was obvious to me that people's lives, even as they were defined and constricted by ethnicity and race, they saw themselves as Vietnamese people in a white country. Within that, they

For Leila Means Night and Night Is Beautiful to the Desert Mind

—for my daughter

By Philip Metres

*Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered.
Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.
Lk 12:7*

But the ends of the earth
writhe in crazy fire, so I narrow
my eyes to count each strand
upon your sweet and tender head,

replenished by their number.
Midway in this thicket, a father
now, my own skull bared
by time's flames, today I learn

for the first time the inside
of a girl's hair, to brush the hair
beneath the hair. The generous

scalp might give them up to brush,
the brush might give them up to trash,
but I will hoard their beautiful night.

Philip Metres, professor of English at John Carroll University and author of the poetry collection Sand Opera (2015), is the 2015 winner of the George W. Hunt, S.J., Prize.

defined themselves through sexuality and gender, their place as men and women, or as boys and girls learning to become men and women. They were very conscious of the choices

that they were making according to their gender and their choices in sexuality as well. That was very much part of the drama of being Vietnamese in this country. I would grow up

hearing stories of domestic violence and of parental abuse of children, and men going back to Vietnam and never returning because, obviously, they found another partner. And people losing their identities because they no longer could be the patriarchs of the family.

Being a second-generation Vietnamese, reading these stories—they certainly resonated with my experience, and I’m sure with the generation before me.

I do hope that Vietnamese-Americans, especially, find something relevant in these stories. I don’t know how it was for you when you were growing up here, but when I was growing up, you didn’t have these kinds of stories. And I also hope that the book is going to be read in Vietnam. It’s supposed to be translated, and I think there’s a lot of miscomprehension in Vietnam about the lives of the Vietnamese diaspora. So I hope the book helps to explain some of those experiences for the people in Vietnam.

Quang D. Tran, S.J., is a priest studying prevention science research at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.



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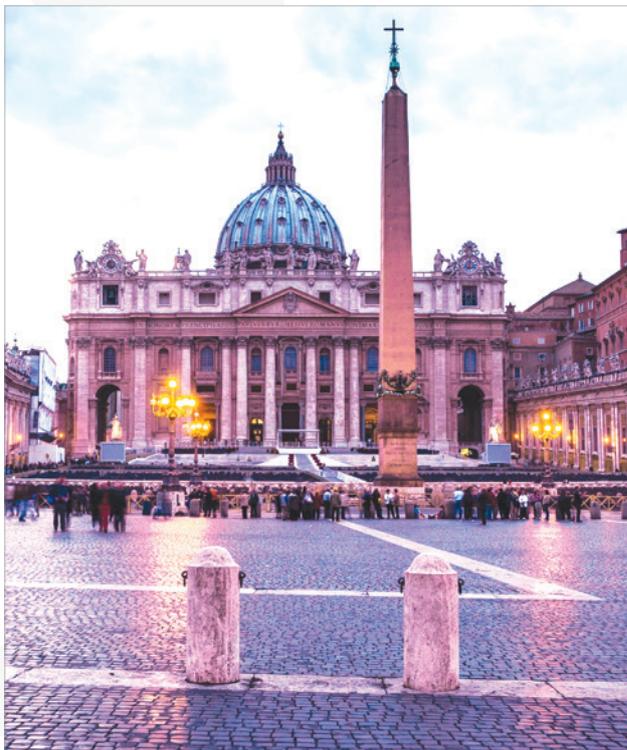
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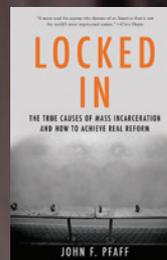
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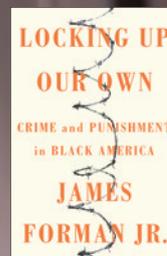
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Basic Books. 272p
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Locking Up Our Own
Crime and Punishment in Black America
By James Forman Jr.
Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 320p \$27

photo: istockphoto.com/bneword

The problem of mass incarceration is more complicated than we thought. By Alex Mikulich

We live in a so-called post-fact, post-truth era when politicians and media attempt to manipulate public opinion to their narrow interests. Yet, as President Obama warned in his farewell address, “reality has a way of catching up with you.”

Two new books help readers catch up with the reality of how the United States became the world’s incarceration leader. The authors, John Pfaff of Fordham University Law School and James Forman of Yale University Law School, unflinchingly cast their eyes on the hard reality of mass incarceration. They demonstrate the enduring—and crying—need for objective scholarship.

John Pfaff’s *Locked-In: The True Causes of Mass Incarceration and How to Achieve Real Reform* dismantles the argument made by Michelle Alexander in her award-winning book, *The New Jim Crow*. The first part of *Locked In* challenges the reigning consensus—the “standard story”—buttressed by Alexander’s work.

Pfaff begins by explaining how the standard story is wrong about the origins of mass incarceration. Pundits and academics often indict the failed drug wars of Presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. While Nixon employed tough rhetoric against crime, his policy actually favored public health responses over punitive enforcement. Furthermore, prison populations did not budge much during his presidency.

An opposite problem arises in Reagan’s case. By the time Reagan gave his “war on drugs” speech, the U.S. incarceration rate had risen nearly 80 percent over the past decade. The “slow, steady climb” of incarceration, Pfaff writes, was already well underway. More important, however, a narrow focus on the president is misplaced. In reality, there are over 3,000 wars on drugs and crime waged by district attorneys and local law enforcement.

Pfaff trains our attention on localities. The federal government does

play a role in mass incarceration and offers some policy direction. However, Pfaff shows that states and municipalities often ignore federal prescriptions, including monetary incentives to adopt different approaches.

A second weakness Pfaff exposes in the standard account is that although nonviolent offenders get the most attention from reformers, they account for less than 20 percent of all prisoners. Another complicating factor is that many drug offenders can in fact be violent. Policy makers and reformers alike need to attend to violent crime, not because it is on the rise—it is not—but because we need more nuanced responses to diverse individuals and forms of violence.

James Forman’s *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America* is no less erudite. Forman’s style is less pedantic and more engaging as he tells his personal story of serving as a public defender for six years in Washington, D.C.

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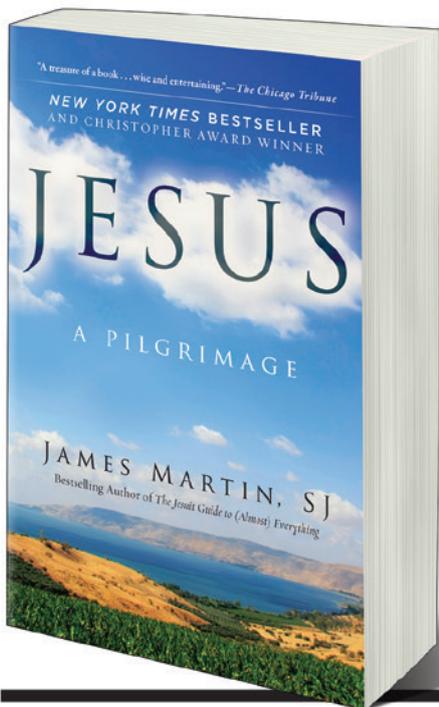
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When Forman clerked for Supreme Court Justice Sandra O'Connor, she asked him why he wanted to be a public defender. His clear response was that he believed that “today’s civil rights struggle will be fought in the criminal justice system.”

As a public defender, Forman found himself on the other side of judges, prosecutors, police and victims who also believed they were carrying the civil rights mantle of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. His book tells the living passion play of how all these actors contribute to a system that devastates African-American communities.

Just after the success of civil rights legislation in the 1960s, the first substantial cohort of African-American mayors, judges and police chiefs gained office just when there was a major surge in crime. Documenting a full range of responses by African-American leaders and citizens over the past 40 years, Forman repudiates claims by defenders of the criminal justice system that African-Americans protest police violence while ignoring violence by black criminals.

African-Americans have always viewed the protection of black lives as a civil rights issue, whether the threat comes from the police or street criminals. Far from ignoring black-on-black crime, Forman implores, African-American officials and citizens alike have been “consumed by it.”

Both Forman and Michelle Alexander demonstrate how African-American distrust of the police runs as deep as the nation’s long history of police brutality and racism. After all, U.S. policing traces its roots to the control of slaves. Forman and Alexander illuminate how shame operates in communities devastated by overlapping ills of poverty and the racial bias of

the dominant culture that associates blacks with criminality.

Forman’s compassionate narrative interweaves the complexities of racial and class dynamics, especially in how African-American political officials, police chiefs, judges and prosecutors came to support the punitive policies that now ravage poor communities of color more than anyone else.

Neither Pfaff nor Forman softens the role of racism throughout the criminal justice system. Both unpack how the system is fraught with racial disparities.

If we hope to regulate increased prosecutorial aggressiveness, Pfaff contends, we need to understand how prosecutors operate. Sadly, unlike other dimensions of the criminal justice system, we know little to nothing of how they operate because of a paucity of informative tracking data. Thus Pfaff calls prosecutors “the man behind the curtain,” and their offices “black boxes.”

Pfaff urges thorough scrutiny of prosecutors and their offices. He exhaustively considers the role of tougher sentencing laws; the role of “tough on crime” political rhetoric; the weakening of public defense; the fact that prosecutors rarely face competitive elections; the ways prosecutors reap the political benefits of sending someone to prison while costs are borne by the poor and the states; and the enduring role of implicit racial bias.

Until citizens and policy makers create ways to garner meaningful data in all of these areas, and develop more robust means of prosecutorial accountability, as Pfaff puts it, we are “flying blind” with no real understanding of how prosecution contributes to mass incarceration.

Pfaff and Forman lament how the

public defender system is so woefully underfunded that in 43 states, indigent defendants are required to pay some or all of their lawyer’s costs. Pfaff is rightly enraged that making the poor pay for their own constitutionally required lawyer is a mockery of everything for which the constitutional right to counsel stands. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that many localities are running modern debtor’s prisons, where the failure to pay a fine results in the defendant getting locked up.

Turning his attention to the “broken politics of punishment,” Pfaff detects multiple problems in punitive responses. One of these is the “safety first” approach adopted by liberals and conservatives alike. The problem is that punishment imposes heavy costs on offenders and their communities. Research and advocacy centers like the Pew Research Center and the Brennan Center for Justice need to pay more attention to funding de-carceration policies that lead to better employment opportunities for those released from prison.

Both texts should become required reading for students, citizens, activists and policy reformers interested in excavating how our system of hyper-incarceration was constructed incrementally over decades. Their analyses of root causes and extensive public policy prescriptions ought to instruct every reform debate. Otherwise, the reality of mass incarceration is not only catching up with us; it is choking life and justice to death.

Alex Mikulich is the co-author of *The Scandal of White Complicity in U.S. Hyper-incarceration: A Nonviolent Spirituality of White Resistance* (Palgrave MacMillan).

On the trail of Jorge Bergoglio

After what the Rev. Jorge Mario Bergoglio went through in Argentina—the 1976-1983 “Dirty War,” a painful fissure within the Jesuits during his leadership, economic and political turmoil—handling the job of being Pope Francis might seem relatively easy.

Mark K. Shriver, a member of America’s most famous Catholic family, the Kennedys (his mother was the late Eunice Kennedy Shriver, his father the late Sargent Shriver Jr., the first head of the Peace Corps), sets out to search for what he calls the “real” Pope Francis.

He takes a trip to Argentina, where he talks (mainly through translators) to everyone from slum priests

to garbage collectors who knew Bergoglio before he became Francis. He visits the key places that formed Bergoglio, including the Colegio Maximo, the seminary where he spent 30 years, and the lonely room in Cordoba where he spent two years in “exile” after a falling out with the Jesuits.

The result is a readable account of Bergoglio’s rise, fall and unlikely rise again to become pontiff. While this is not the definitive biography of Bergoglio—his dramatic experience with the Jesuits still needs to be fully told, for instance—it successfully captures what an unusual pope this is.

Pilgrimage is not only a journey into the heart of Pope Francis, but a journey into Shriver’s own life and identity as a Roman Catholic. It leads

him to question his work in Washington, D.C., as head of the nonprofit Save the Children. He concludes that Francis truly is a radical, hosting a three-day event at the Vatican about social change that went largely unnoticed and where he invited people like the head of an association of Argentinian *cartoneros*—garbage collectors.

Unfortunately, Shriver did not land a much sought-after interview with the pope. Which simply shows that for Francis, even a Kennedy writing a book about him is not more important than a *cartonero* from Argentina.

—————
Bart Jones is the religion editor of *Newsday*.

Searching for connections in the diaspora

Viet Thanh Nguyen’s short story collection *The Refugees*, the follow-up to his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Sympathizer*, arrives at a time in the modern era when there have never been more refugees. Nguyen himself was a refugee from Vietnam, arriving in the United States as a child (see XX, pg. X). His phenomenal collection asks: Do others see the refugees among us, and how do refugees see themselves? What violent memories and losses do they carry in their hearts and bodies? Never before has Joan Didion’s dictum, “We tell ourselves stories in order to live,” been so gracefully demonstrated.

His stories explore how individuals form tenuous connections in a community carved up by politics, war

and the vastness of geography; communication and its limits is a recurring theme. Yet the characters also confront problems that are not limited to refugees: dementia, for example, in “I’d Love You to Want Me.”

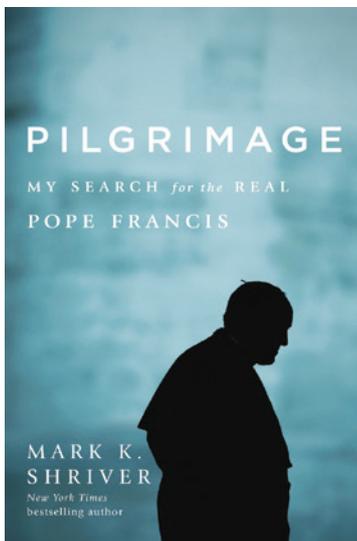
In “The Other Man,” the reader encounters a liminal state that nearly all of the book’s characters inhabit: “When his partner looked toward the window as well, Liem waved in return, and for a moment there were only the three of them, sharing a fleeting connection.

The desire for connection and the challenge of invisibility is paramount. In the opening story “Black-Eyed Women,” the narrator, a ghostwriter, confronts her mother’s idea that telling the truth is dangerous, a type of exposure that could lead to imprisonment. But the story also includes a miracle, one that the narrator struggles to be-

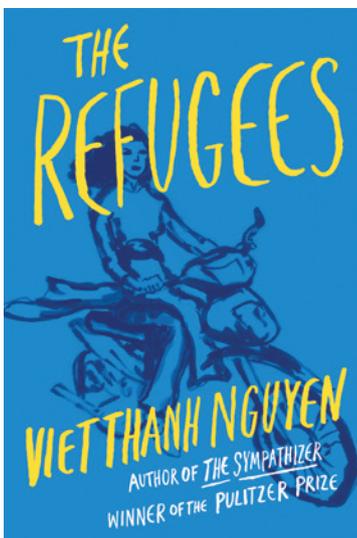
lieve: her brother, killed as the family escaped Vietnam more than two decades ago, comes back in the flesh as a ghost to visit. His very real body is even damp from, her mother claims, swimming to their house in the United States all the way from the ocean where he died a violent death. The narrator looks for plausible explanations for all of the signs her mother brings her until ultimately coming face to face with her beloved brother.

The penultimate story in this collection, “Someone Else Besides You,” concludes in a way that could end each story, “He was waiting, just like us, for what was to come.”

—————
Cynthia-Marie Marmo O’Brien has contributed to *Booklist*, *Killing the Buddha*, *Narratively* and other publications.



Pilgrimage
 My Search for the Real Pope Francis
 By Mark K. Shriver
 Random House. 320p \$19



The Refugees
 By Viet Thanh Nguyen
 Grove Press. 224p \$20

The manhunt for a martyr's killers

The *Assassination of a Saint* begins slowly, and at times its digression-heavy structure can be daunting, but before too long the inherent drama of the sorry tale of Archbishop Óscar Romero's murder builds. *Assassination* begins like a crime thriller, complete with a criminal manhunt, before transitioning into a courtroom drama. Ultimately, however, the book's lasting value is as a work of history.

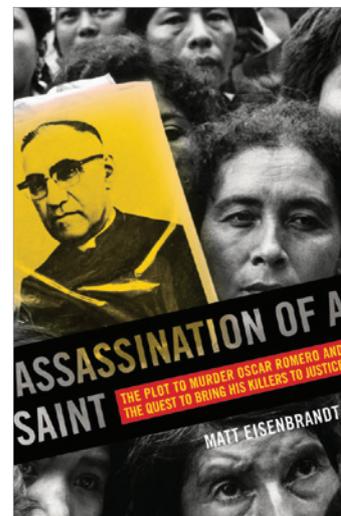
While working through the investigation of the archbishop's slaying and the increasingly tense hunt for one of his killers, readers are treated to commentary on Salvadoran history. The various digressions into the economy, history and complex political culture of El Salvador place Archbishop Romero's murder and the unspeakable violence of the brutal civil war into context. This is an invaluable service, particularly for folks who may know about the death of Archbishop Romero but who may never have learned much more about the geopolitical and cultural circumstances of this terrible crime.

Matt Eisenbrandt certainly knows of what he writes. A human rights attorney who has made a career out of developing innovative legal strategies to prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity, Eisenbrandt worked as the legal director at the Center for Justice and Accountability in San Francisco. As a member of the center's trial team, he helped chase down one of the conspirators in Archbishop Romero's assassination. Álvaro Saravia had "disappeared" in plain

sight in the United States after fleeing El Salvador and his blood-drenched past. It is through the pursuit of this sociopathic cog in El Salvador's machinery of death—a legal and literal odyssey across the hemisphere—that the role of other agents of Archbishop Romero's assassination, and the complicity of U.S. policymakers in El Salvador's great suffering, is brought to light.

Some of the excerpts of the often poignant courtroom testimony can be overlong, but this is a small quibble with a well-resourced and well-written work that offers a unique perspective on one of the great crimes of the late 20th century and the pursuit of justice that remains, regrettably, denied.

Kevin Clarke, *senior editor*.
 Twitter: @clarkeatamerica.



Assassination of a Saint
 The Plot to Murder Oscar Romero and the Quest to Bring His Killers to Justice
 By Matt Eisenbrandt
 University of California Press. 256 p \$29.95



A Swedish curmudgeon, redeemed by children and cats

Serious moviegoers have always had reasons to roll their eyes at the Academy Awards. For this writer, a particularly galling moment occurred in 2009, when the nominees for Best Foreign Language Film included the animated Israeli documentary “Waltz With Bashir” and the exquisite French film “The Class.” The winner: “Departures,” an anodyne drama about a Japanese mortician, most notable for its overt sentimentality.

In retrospect, “Departures” ought to have been the odds-on favorite, because in the Best Foreign Film category, sentimentality reigns supreme. Which is the long way of saying that “A Man Called Ove,” the Swedish submission for 2017, is going to win Best Foreign Language Film this year.

Oddly enough, it deserves to. Directed by Hannes Holm, the film’s title character is a well-traveled archetype—the curmudgeon who will be redeemed, in this case by children and cats. Although we meet him at the height of his long-simmering irrita-

bility, life for Ove (the wonderful Rolf Lassgård) has hardly been a bowl of lingonberries. He is kind of a Nordic George Bailey, reflecting on his life, even as he tries to end it—his suicide attempts, constantly and comically interrupted, are blackly hilarious. At 59, and looking far older (the film is also, somewhat oddly, among three nominated for Best Makeup and Hairstyling, a good omen), Ove has been unceremoniously dismissed from his job of 43 years. The world around him is changing for the worse. People who don’t look like him are moving into his neighborhood. No one follows the rules anymore. And his wife, Sonja (Ida Engvall), whom he all but worshiped, has betrayed him and died.

He is a comically misanthropic old man, one obsessed by rules. As the self-appointed policeman at his condo complex, he admonishes those who park incorrectly, monitors the recycling bins for violations and barks at dogs. At the same time, he harbors a hatred of bureaucracy and the

“whiteshirts” who have always had the power and wielded it against hard-working people like himself.

Does he see a contradiction? Even a parallel? Not at all. Perhaps by accident, Ove is the most sympathetic example we have seen of that oft-discussed and much analyzed figure, the Trump Voter. Even if he is Swedish.

Will this help the film’s Oscar chances? Perhaps. “Ove” is marvelously entertaining, but it also has an edge of political currency that is too obvious even for Oscar voters to miss. And the plight of Ove, whether or not he mirrors the kind of political disgruntlement being observed worldwide, is also something that speaks to everyone. As we see via flashbacks, Ove has always been a solid citizen, often a lovable one—occasionally a heroic one. At the same time, the system has always been tilted against him. As the movie progresses, and we watch Ove become increasingly humanized by his very pregnant Iranian neighbor, Parvaneh (the delightful Bahar Pars), and her



Courtesy of Music Box Films.

Played by Rolf Lassgård, Ove is kind of a Nordic George Bailey.

children, we understand that his heart has been hardened by injustice real and perceived, including the loss of his beloved wife. He is not a bad guy. But he certainly is a cranky one.

“A Man Called Ove” does not need an Oscar to be a generous, big-hearted movie, one that could actually make an audience laugh and cry. And it has some stiff competition, including “The Salesman,” from the Iranian genius Asghar Farhadi; the critics’ fave “Toni Erdmann,” from Germany; and “Land of Mine,” a ferocious post-war drama from Denmark. But “Ove” has a certain timeliness and charity that make it particularly worthy right now. If it doesn’t win, I won’t be rolling my eyes. But I may be shaking my head.

John Anderson is a television and film critic for *The Wall Street Journal* and a regular contributor to the Arts & Leisure section of *The New York Times*.

Alexa, please define knowledge

In *The Third Wave*, Steve Case, the founder of AOL, describes three waves in the life of the internet. We are about to move, he writes, from the second wave, where apps were built on top of the first wave’s infrastructure, into the third wave, where the so-called “Internet of Things” blossoms and infiltrates all of the objects around us, from refrigerators to thermostats to self-driving cars.

Amazon’s **Alexa**, the artificial intelligence behind the popular Echo and Dot, is currently riding on top of that wave. As computers have become an integral part of our lives, we have mastered the logic of directories and folders, of pointing and clicking. More recently, with touch screens, we have adapted our minds to swipes and gestures. If the brewing fight between Alexa and Apple’s Siri is any indication—not to mention Cortana from Microsoft and Ok Google—the platform for this next wave of technology will be quite familiar: the spoken word.

When I asked Alexa how she got her name, her response was, as always, flat and matter of fact, “My

name, Alexa, comes from the library of Alexandria, which stored the knowledge of the ancient world.”

Her words are grammatically correct, but I think she is misusing the term knowledge. The books in the ancient library were just information until they were opened and understood. Usage and application—these make for knowledge. Humans are malleable: We have changed the way we communicate to facilitate interaction with our machines. But not all of these changes in our modes of communication are positive. For all of its promise of connection, the internet also enables us to retreat into isolating tribalism. We can humanize these places, but that will require reflection paired with action. The new wave is coming. Will we learn to ride it, or will it overwhelm us?

Eric Sundrup, S.J., *associate editor*.
Twitter: @sunnysj.

Alexa, the artificial intelligence behind Amazon’s Echo, is slowly infiltrating our daily lives.



Photo courtesy of Amazon.com

I Tell You: Do Not Worry!

Readings: Is 49:14-15, Ps 62, 1 Cor 4:1-5, Mt 6:24-34

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is the fundamental ethical code of Christianity. It is a long text, which the church reads slowly over the course of six Sundays. It contains many of Jesus' best known exhortations: Turn the other cheek! Love your enemies! Give to all who ask! Unlike those passages, in which Jesus instructs his followers how to act, in this week's reading, Jesus teaches his disciples what to avoid.

"You cannot serve both God and mammon." *Mammon* is a word that has defied translation. Scholars debate whether it comes from a word meaning "treasure," a word meaning "rations, daily bread" or a word meaning "trust." In popular speech, the term may have implied all three, as Jesus plays on each of these ideas in his preaching. Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, he instructed his disciples to "store up for yourselves treasure in heaven." Later in the same discourse, he teaches them to pray by saying, "Give us this day our daily bread." In today's Gospel, he exhorts his disciples to trust God for their every need.

Mammon itself is not an evil thing; it includes nec-

essary things for survival, like food, clothing and shelter. But when concern for these things becomes a person's primary goal, one falls into a type of idolatry. Deified mammon preaches its own anti-Gospel: "There is not enough for all; everyone is against you; you must be anxious at all times or you will not get what you need; what little you do have is in constant danger of slipping away." Idols create more idols: "Clothes are important! What you wear means something about you. Food is important! What you eat means something about you."

Jesus cuts through this folderol with one command: "Do not worry!" God created everything we need to thrive and distributes it plentifully. Jesus illustrates this with examples from nature. Plants and animals do not worry about their survival, but they still find what they need. Their characteristics and actions manifest the Creator's will, which they never question and from which they never deviate. Jesus' disciples must display the same unself-conscious trust in divine providence and eagerness to do God's will.

Thou shalt not worry! This commandment comes from the fundamental ethical code of the Christian community. We ought to write it over the door of every home, on every kitchen calendar, on the frame of every computer or tablet or television screen, on every checkbook and housing loan. This is not because bad things will never happen; they will. Constant anxiety will not keep them from happening, but it will dull our ability to discern God's providence at work. A lifetime spent noticing God's gifts and offering thanks for them will help us recognize God's deliverance when times are bad. Anxiety gnaws away at our sensitivity to God's actions and the ability to feel gratitude. Instead of worry, Jesus teaches to go about the business of God's kingdom: to love our enemies, go the extra mile, share our gifts with the poor and do to others only what we would have them do to us. Then we will receive everything we need and more.

Michael R. Simone, S.J., is an assistant professor of Scripture at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

He pours gifts on his beloved while they slumber.

Ps 127:2



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Have you created any "idols of mammon"?

What anti-Gospel do they preach?

What worries do you need Jesus to take from you?

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Turning Over Our Will

Readings: Gn 2:7-9, 3:1-7, Ps. 51, Rom 5:12-19, Mt 4:1-11

The fasting of Lent likely made practical sense in the past, when food supplies were limited. On any given day, a town's marketplace had staples for a day or maybe two. Gluttons with money could easily deprive others of necessities. If all were to eat, all had to exercise restraint. In the springtime especially, when winter stores were depleted but new crops had not matured, fasting was necessary. Springtime hunger was part of the natural order of life, and many concluded thereby that it was God's will.

Modern technology and farming practices ensure that people in the developed world have an uninterrupted supply of food. This has obscured an important aspect of Lenten practice. In fasting, we no longer accommodate ourselves to God's will in a way that ensures enough food for all. In fact, Lenten "fasting" can come to serve our own will. We might have good intentions—trying to give up vices like smoking or excessive online entertainment—but the deeper meaning of Lenten fasting, to follow the will of God, is lost.

In our Gospel today, Jesus sharpens our awareness of true fasting. Satan tempts Jesus three times to use his divine gifts to serve himself. Three times Jesus responds by placing himself and his gifts at the service of the Father's mission. Taking his example, we can use the fasting, prayer and almsgiving of Lent to serve whatever mission God has given us.

Matthew's Gospel this week contains a subtle but important theological point. In Jesus, Israel—and by extension, all humanity—fulfills its side of the covenant. Matthew uses the desert setting to evoke Israel's time in the desert after the exodus from Egypt. At Sinai, God called Israel to be a divine child, and Israel promised to abide by God's will in all things. Matthew believed, as did many in his day, that no generation had lived up to this promise completely. In ways large and small, Israel had fallen to Satan's relentless testing. God's mercy is abundant, and Israel was always given another chance, but even after centuries, the covenant remained unfulfilled.

You will call me, "My Father," and never turn away from me.

Jer 3:19



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

What is God's dream for you?

Which of your talents or resources can you turn over to serve that dream?

Jesus passed the test. At every turn he resists the temptation to use his power for himself. Each response to Satan represents a surrender to the will of God. "If I am going to eat, it is because God gives the food. If I am going to fly, it is because God will lift me up. If I am going to rule, it is because God will set me on a throne." Later in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus uses his God-given power in exactly these ways but always for the service of the Father's mission and never for his own gain or glory. In Jesus, Israel becomes the child God hoped for.

What Jesus shows us this week is that God's will must be paramount in all things, even those over which we feel control or autonomy. During the season of Lent, we fast, pray and give alms not to become better people, but to remind ourselves that our gifts and resources come from God and are meant to be spent in the service of others.

Michael R. Simone, S.J., is an assistant professor of Scripture at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

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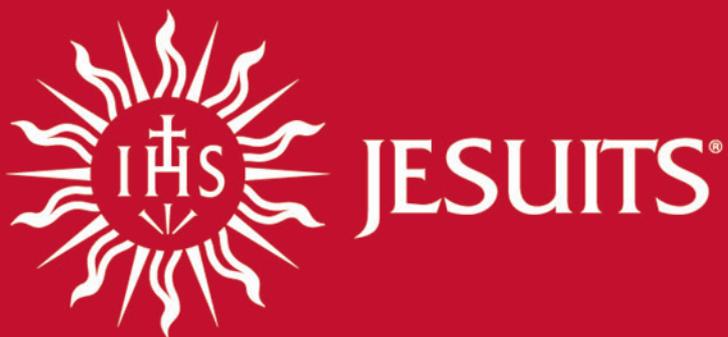
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Sunday Crybaby

Rediscovering the beauty of Mass

By Valerie Schultz



Sunday Mass is in my DNA. This was not always a given. For a brief time, mostly during my high school and undergrad years, I did not go to Mass. I rebelled. I flirted with atheism. What I saw in the church was at worst hypocrisy, at best rote boredom.

Before I flew to Europe to spend a college semester in Rome, my mother made me go to confession, in case the plane crashed. With the brashness of youth, I told the priest that I was there under duress, and that I could not think of anything I wanted to share with him. He was wise enough to have a conversation with me about the gift of travel rather than try to convert me.

A semester in Europe with a Eurail pass meant that I immersed myself in history. I visited churches and chapels and cathedrals. I walked through the piazza in front of the Vatican almost daily. I marveled at the Sistine Chapel. But I never once, in the midst of all that Catholicism, went to Mass. I regret that now, of course. At the time, I thought it was not for me.

Mass found me in my senior year of college at a Catholic university, and I have been going back ever since. I finally got it: the ritual, the communal celebration, the Eucharist, the palpable presence of God. I have not always been purely concentrated on worship; while my children were growing up, I often was more concerned that they

behave in church than I was in tune with the Mass.

Now, however, I usually go to Mass alone. I am anonymous in many different parishes, as there is not one I call home. I usually sit in a pew that I think of as “All the Single Ladies,” as we seek each other out and make room for each other without exchanging a word.

Each Sunday, I usually find myself in tears at some point before the final blessing. You might say it’s hormonal. Or the deep, satisfying breath that is only taken when one is at rest in a pew, where there is time to think, to reflect, to slow down, to let go. Or the reverence that Mass instills in me. Maybe it is all of the above. But there is something every Sunday that so deeply touches my nomadic Catholic soul that my eyes fill with tears. Sometimes I choke up. It may be a choir that is so full of joy that their music makes me cry. It may be the incense rising in a holy cloud as we in the pews are blessed. It may be an Irish hymn that reminds me of my mother, who died this year. Or last week: A little boy who had lost his father that very week led us in the “Our Father,” his voice sweet and clear. How could these things not make me cry?

I imagine I look like the odd old bird, sniffing during the homily, blowing her nose at the offertory or turning

a tear-stained beak to wish a stranger peace. It’s fine. I am a Sunday crybaby, the lady my own children would have felt sorry for, the crone who must have experienced some terrible sadness to make her weep so openly. But I am not usually sad. I am just moved to witness the Spirit so alive and so well. I am an open heart, so grateful to be so loved by God. I might have come in wounded, but during Mass I am healed and made whole by the risen Jesus, who accepts me as I am and sends me back out there for the week.

A few months ago, I went to Mass with my brother-in-law. The Communion song was “Be Not Afraid,” and as usual, I had to stop singing at the point when the song overwhelmed me and I could no longer get out the words. Then I noticed: he had stopped singing. There was a tear on his cheek, too. “That song gets me,” he said, a bit embarrassed. I just smiled. I know, brother. I know.

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

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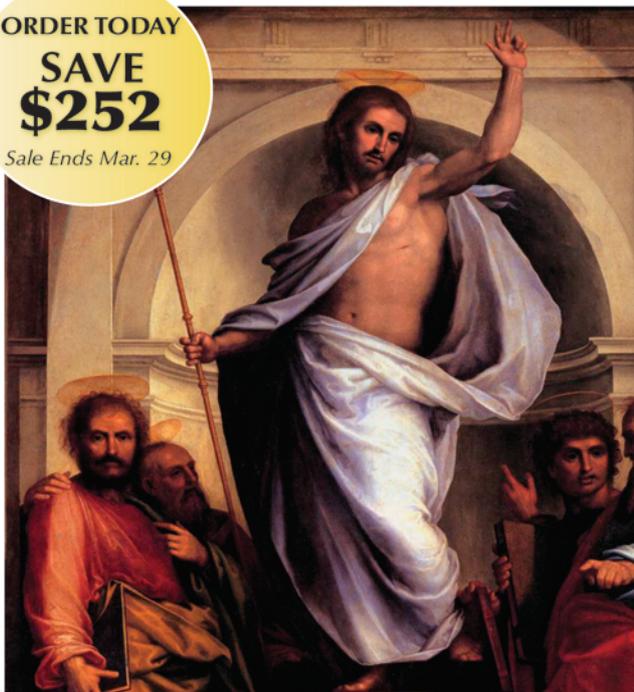
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