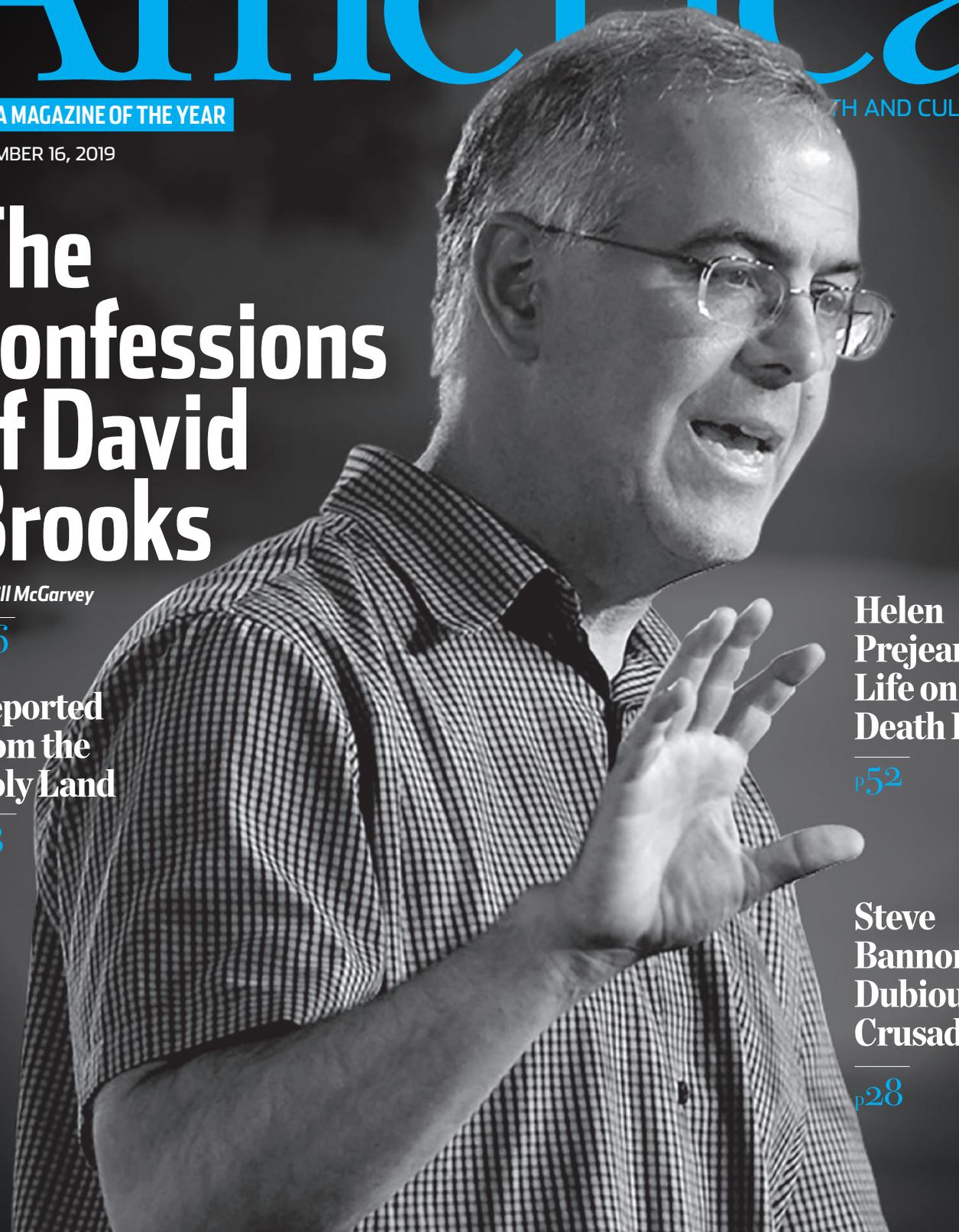


# America



2019 CPA MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

TH AND CULTURE

SEPTEMBER 16, 2019

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## The Special Relationship

If you are bored with endless news reports about the sundry dysfunctions of American politics, one option is to tune into the BBC and hear all about the political wreck of the good ship Britain. As you may have heard, in a national referendum held in 2016, a majority of the British electorate expressed their desire for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, the supranational political and economic system that has been the cornerstone of the post-war European consensus.

Two years and three prime ministers later, Britain is set to leave the union on Oct. 31—“no ifs or buts about it,” said the current prime minister, Boris Johnson, this week. The trouble is that there are quite a few “ifs” and “buts.” The British political establishment is divided among three factions: those who want Britain to remain in the European Union; those who wish to leave it—but with certain political and economic safeguards—a so-called deal; and those who want to exit come hell or high water, even if it means a risky no-deal departure.

The factions do not neatly align with the major British parties, and they are represented across the partisan lines of the House of Commons. The result is a looming constitutional crisis. William Hague, the former British foreign secretary and former leader of the Conservative Party, writing in *The Telegraph* on Sept. 2, put it this way: “The root cause” of the crisis “is not the actions of any one individual or party, but the historically unprecedented inability of a Parliament to agree on, let alone implement, any course of action at all.”

If that sounds familiar, it is because those words could well describe

the U.S. Congress. According to a study conducted last year by ProPublica and *The Washington Post*, the tradition of “forging compromises on the biggest issues of the day while asserting its authority to declare war, spend taxpayer money and keep the presidency in check”—which for centuries characterized the work of the U.S. Congress—“is effectively dead.” It has been replaced, say the study’s authors, “by a weakened legislative branch in which debate is strictly curtailed, party leaders dictate the agenda, most elected representatives rarely get a say and government shutdowns are a regular threat.”

The fact that the national legislatures of both the United States and the United Kingdom are unable to govern properly cannot be a mere coincidence. As for the United States, the ProPublica study concluded that a “transformation has occurred relatively fast—sparked by the hyperpolarized climate that has enveloped politics since the 2008 election.” During that time, the study says, “as the political center has largely evaporated, party leaders have adhered to the demands of their bases, while rules and traditions that long encouraged deliberative deal making have given way to partisan gridlock.”

That seems like an accurate description—as far as it goes. The better question is what are the larger forces that are driving our politics throughout the West? Nationalism is surely one of several factors. In this issue, Bill McCormick, S.J., rightly identifies nationalism, and specifically the project of the Bannon-esque right, as a “spiritual sickness” that pervades European politics, even and perhaps especially in those countries, like the

United Kingdom, which seek to distance themselves from the continent.

But this sickness also clearly afflicts the U.S. body politic as well; and its principal symptom, as I have mentioned before in this column, is the insidious influence of ideological partisanship. As Father McCormick notes, “political ideologies designate in-groups and out-groups for the benefit of ‘us versus them’ politics. In the United States, the language of exclusion often involves race and ethnicity. For European populism, identity has more often been about religion, and especially an opposition to Islam.”

In both cases, the national politics, then, is defined by who we are not, rather than who we are in light of a shared set of values. This phenomenon, which involves both the left and the right, is a mortally dangerous one, for it enables the rise of factions, which transform the “one” in *e pluribus unum*, into a “many.” It is not a coincidence that our founding fathers repeatedly warned us about this phenomenon, which they viewed as the fatal mistake of all democracies, whether republican or parliamentary.

What will happen in London and Washington is anyone’s guess, but the notion that we are simply mired in a protracted fight to the death about this or that public policy ignores the deeper, more disturbing truth: The institutions that are the safeguard of Western democracy are failing us. Can they be saved? And if not, what might take their place?

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



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CNS photo/Philippe Wojazer, pool via Reuters

World leaders, including President Emmanuel Macron of France and President Donald Trump, during a G-7 working session in Biarritz, France, on Aug. 25.

Cover: Property of the Aspen Institute / photo: Dan Bayer

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## Would you be more willing to support or learn more about a candidate if they shared your faith background? Why or why not?

I think Catholic values are the best ones a candidate could have, especially with regard to social justice. Catholics believe life issues are not just about abortion, but also the acceptance of the dignity of all persons from cradle to grave—including immigrants who seek help and safe harbor from America. I would be willing to vote for a candidate with a different faith if they were to hold those same values.

**Marilyn Martin**  
Tucson, Ariz.

I would be more willing to support a candidate who supports issues that for me are faith-based: immigration, affordable housing for all, universal health care, climate change and gun control.

I do understand that, for me, these are as much religious issues as they are social and political issues. And I understand that people of other faiths—and people of no faith—frequently do support these issues while coming from a completely different place. To me, they are still doing God's work, whether or not they recognize it.

**Christina Sahhar**  
Oceanside, Calif.

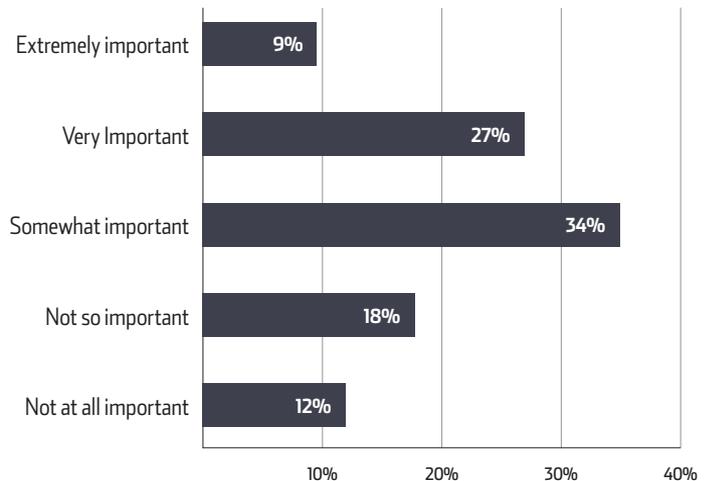
It is more important to me that a candidate is pro-life than a Catholic by name. In fact, it is a strong negative for me if a candidate is pro-abortion yet claims to be Catholic. If a candidate had no faith background, I would still want to know if they have sound values, rather than situational or utilitarian values.

**Thomas Extejt**  
Toledo, Ohio

The faith background of a politician is not particularly important to me; it's their policies that have to speak to the way I interpret my own faith. So many candidates use their faith as a way to secure votes that it all seems so fake now—even from candidates who I'm sure do actually care deeply. I'm far more impressed by candidates who do not push their "religious-ness" in voters' faces each and every day.

**John Elwell**  
Richmond, Va.

### How important is a candidate's faith to you?



I am involved in many interfaith activities on a regular basis. The more I get to know people and learn about their faith, the stronger mine becomes, and the more we all discover we have so much in common. We all came to support each other when we experienced a synagogue shooting and a fire at a mosque. Faith is relevant; integrity and ethics are essential. Even those who profess no faith can have integrity and ethics and a tremendous desire to serve.

**Carole Morales**  
El Cajon, Calif.

The candidate does not have to share my faith background. I would want a candidate that is sincere about their beliefs and also makes decisions after prayerful reflection.

We as a country, even though we have the separation of church and state, turn to prayer at significant moments in our day-to-day lives. I think that the president should be able to relate to these religious moments (such as a state funeral, a national tragedy, etc.) by drawing on his or her own religious background. When a president ends a speech by saying "God bless the United States of America," I want them to say it from their own experience of prayer, not just as a cliché.

**Boreta Singleton**  
Bronx, N.Y.

*These results are based on 212 reader responses to a poll promoted to our America Today newsletter subscribers.*

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## Fining Big Pharma Is Good, But Not Enough

Earlier this week, state District Court Judge Thad Balkman of Oklahoma ordered Johnson & Johnson to pay a \$572 million fine for violating the state's "public nuisance" laws, blaming the corporation for thousands of deaths from opioid addiction and drug overdoses. A few days later, Purdue Pharma was reported to be considering a multibillion-dollar settlement to resolve thousands of state and local lawsuits that similarly seek to hold the company accountable for its role in the opioid epidemic.

During what is still a crisis, these events begin to redress an injustice. Overdoses cause immeasurable pain and suffering in families and communities; addiction is expensive to treat; and the loss of economic output from incapacitated workers can be enormous. While heroin and fentanyl have displaced prescription opioids as the primary culprits in overdoses, corporations should be held responsible for introducing highly addictive drugs into the health care market in the 1990s and 2000s and then aggressively advertising them without sufficient regard to their negative effects. But the imposition of the fine in Oklahoma also presents an invitation to reflect on the broken structures of American society that led to the current situation.

While the money awarded will

provide some relief to communities still reeling from the deadliest drug crisis in American history, liability and public nuisance litigation for the half-million lives already lost is not enough. Part of the reason the Oklahoma case and Purdue settlement have attracted such attention is that they seem to be the only progress being made while many government leaders have failed to take action to curb the crisis.

The United States has historical models for responding to public health crises. In 1990, in a belated response to the H.I.V./AIDS epidemic, Congress approved billions in funding to support people with AIDS. Although a bipartisan bill containing several measures to address the abuse of opioids passed Congress last year, it fell far short of the spending necessary to respond to the present public health emergency of opioid addiction. Resolving questions of pharmaceutical companies' liability through the judicial system is necessary, but it cannot replace a broader systemic remedy.

In addition to providing funding to help the communities most immediately affected, Congress should examine the legal and economic incentives that contributed to the over-prescription of painkillers. The opioid crisis developed not just because of corporate action and misconduct

but also because we treat health care in this country as a consumer good rather than as an essential part of the common good.

The Johnson & Johnson case provides further evidence of the fundamental problem with a health care system that functions as if it were just another commercial market. From 2000 to 2011, Johnson & Johnson made over 150,000 sales visits to doctors in Oklahoma. The judge ruled that their marketing campaigns misled both doctors and patients about the addictiveness of opioids. In an effort to increase sales, Johnson & Johnson worked with consulting agencies to explore questions like "Are certain physician specialties more or less likely to prescribe long-acting opioids?" and "Can we influence flows to take advantage of this difference?"

Johnson & Johnson also vertically integrated their opioid supply chain, with two subsidiaries responsible for manufacturing most of the active ingredients used in all opioids sold in the United States.

As the nation mourns its dead, heals its sick and holds responsible parties accountable, a more holistic examination of our ideologies and dysfunctions is still needed. Payouts and settlements from pharma are a poor substitute for solving the systemic issues plaguing the body politic.

## The Needs of the Amazon Are a Call to Listen

In late August, fires burning in the Amazon caught the attention of the media, politicians, celebrities and ordinary citizens. Dire warnings about the imminent collapse of the "lungs of the earth" and dramatic photographs of flames bursting from the forest canopy

spread across the internet—and with them a fair amount of misleading information. Some of the most widely shared pictures were from years ago or places far from Brazil. And while the number of fires is at a 10-year high, the incidence of fire was higher in the

early 2000s. Still, the news inspired calls for action from Western leaders at the Group of 7 meeting in France and a defensive response from the Brazilian government, which sees current mobilization to save the rainforest as a threat to its national sovereignty.

Facing this challenge will require engaging with the people of the region, understanding their situation and listening to their concerns. That is precisely what the Vatican will do this October at the Synod on the Amazon, taking place in Rome from Oct. 6 to Oct. 27. In calling for the synod, Pope Francis seeks to open “paths of dialogue that will help us get out of the path towards self-destruction of the current socio-environmental crisis.” Topics deeply intertwined with the burning of the Amazon—deforestation, climate change, the rights of indigenous people and the exploitation of the rainforest for commercial gain—are all on the agenda.

In Catholic circles, however, much of the conversation before the gathering has focused not on the region’s ecological crisis but rather on celibacy. Critics of the synod see in this discussion a Trojan horse to bring married priests to the entire church.

In reality, the topic is being taken up in response to the needs of thousands of Catholics in remote parts of the Amazon, who often go weeks or months without seeing a priest or celebrating the Eucharist. It should be understood in the context of the Amazon’s unique pastoral situation, not through the ideological lens that frames the celibacy debate in the United States and Western Europe. And while it is an important question, it should not be allowed to hijack the entire meeting.

This October gives the church an opportunity to hear the cries of the earth and the people of the Amazon. Concerned citizens of the world would do well to emulate the synod’s “see, judge, act” approach, “a dynamic process of listening and discerning,” as they work to protect this richly diverse, life-giving and fragile gift of creation.

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## Discerning disruption: bringing Ignatian values to Silicon Valley

Silicon Valley, the heart of American tech entrepreneurship and business, has contributed immensely to human progress in the last few decades. There is much to admire, including new forms of immediate human connection, time-saving automation and placing powerful technology in the hands of wealthy and poor alike. But the pace and scale of disruption have come with costs that are becoming clearer to both the public and business leaders.

Nitasha Tiku, a senior writer at Wired magazine, observed last year, “It is only now, a decade after the financial crisis, that the American public seems to appreciate that what we thought was disruption worked more like extraction—of our data, our attention, our time, our creativity, our content, our DNA, our homes, our cities, our relationships.”

Hemant Taneja, the managing director of General Catalyst, recently added to the critique in the Harvard Business Review: “Move fast and break things’ is how entrepreneurs regard disruption: more is always better. We raced to put our products into consumers’ hands as fast as possible, without regard for the merit of—and rationale for—offline systems of governance.” Mr. Taneja continues, “If innovation is to survive into the 21st century, we need to change how companies are built by changing the questions we ask of them.” These new questions require a deeper ethical reflection—what in the Ignatian tradition we call “discernment.”

A recent meeting of Jesuit business school leaders and Silicon Valley executives at Santa Clara University—combining the third Global Jesuit Business Ethics Conference and the 22nd annual Colleagues in Jesuit

Business Education meeting—addressed this yearning for a new guiding framework through the Catholic and Ignatian imagination. Remember that St. Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuit order, was no technophobe or skeptic of the modern but was a disrupter himself. Far from retreating from the world, he immersed himself in the Renaissance humanism, civic life and exploratory fever of his time. He coupled the ancient and the new, both in spirituality and education, borrowing from others what worked and leaving behind what did not.

If the model of “move fast and break things” is itself broken, an Ignatian ethic of “discerning the disruption” offers an alternative. What if we advanced an ethic of “move thoughtfully and lift up people”?

This call to “move thoughtfully” does not mean excessive caution or slow-paced decision-making. We might still move fast and even break things to meet critical needs, but with discernment we would know why we are doing what we are doing. We do not just accept disruption as a good in itself simply because it is the newest thing or the hottest trend. If we want to be good people who will do good and sometimes heroic things, then we must have a clear sense of the good that drives and summons us. Moving thoughtfully means we take enough time to understand the foreseeable consequences of our innovations and disruptive actions—for example, the impacts on employment and the environment, and possible misuses of new technology by others.

Notice how impersonal the call to “break things” is. It does not invite us to consider *who* we might be breaking with our disruptions. It assumes

that breaking is the good that drives and summons us. An Ignatian ethic of disruption calls that assumption into question by putting the human person at the center of our discernment. In the Catholic tradition, the human person is created in the image of God with a dignity that can never be taken away. Likewise, in Jesuit education, we often talk about *cura personalis*: caring for the whole person in mind, body and spirit.

We should apply *cura personalis* to disruption. To lift up people is to think beyond how an app makes a task more convenient or how a new medical device will assist one part of the body. An Ignatian ethic asks us also to consider how the disruption affects people’s economic and physical security, whether or not it encourages a healthy lifestyle, whether it can nourish their spiritual life and how it affects both immediate and larger environments.

These considerations compose a healthy discernment about disruption. Yes, disruptive progress asks us to think differently, to take apart the way things are currently assembled, but we should do so only after we have thoughtfully discerned that our end is noble. Guided by our shared values, like St. Ignatius we can look at a rapidly changing world with great hope and anticipation. We can know that disruption can be for good if it moves not just fast but thoughtfully, and if lifts up people rather than simply breaking things.

---

Kevin O’Brien, S.J., is the president of Santa Clara University, in Santa Clara, Calif. This essay was adapted from a speech given on July 12 during the Global Jesuit Business Ethics Conference.

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## On abortion, U.S. Latinos are not in lockstep with the Democratic Party

By J.D. Long-García

Evangelical Christians stood side by side with Latino Catholics during pro-life rallies this summer at the State Capitol building in Providence, R.I. The two groups may not agree on every issue, including immigration, but they found a common foe in Rhode Island's Reproductive Health Care Act, which codified *Roe v. Wade* into state law.

"It was nice to see, but unfortunately we could not stop the bill," said Silvio Cuellar, the coordinator for Hispanic ministry in the Diocese of Providence. Gov. Gina Raimondo signed the bill into law in June.

This political alliance should not be surprising. A recent survey conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute found that most Hispanics who said they were affiliated with a religion were also pro-life, including 58 percent of Hispanic Protestants and 52 percent of Hispanic Catholics. Overall, Hispanics were the only race or ethnicity where a majority of respondents thought that abortion should be illegal in all or most cases. By contrast, 41 percent of non-Hispanic white Americans and 42 percent of white Catholics indicated mostly pro-life views.

Given this divide, Latino lawmakers may have a hard time representing their communities. Rhode Island Senator Sandra Cano, an immigrant from Colombia, is a Catholic who describes herself as a "pro-life Democrat." Yet she voted in favor of the Rhode Island abortion law. "My faith is very important to me. I believe that life is sacred," she said, according to *The Providence Journal*. "However, I also believe that *Roe v. Wade* is the law of the land and I can't impose my faith on others."

On the other side, a number of Latino Democrats in New Mexico joined Republicans in voting against a bill that would have repealed a 50-year-old anti-abortion law earlier this year. "The state of New Mexico must strive to protect and uphold the dignity of all people from conception to death," said one of them, State Senator Gabriel Ramos, according to *The Las Cruces Sun News*.

Drill down to subgroups, and the picture becomes more complicated. Among younger Hispanic Catholics in the P.R.R.I. study (ages 18 to 24), 55 percent said abortion should be legal in all or most cases. And while 59 percent

Pro-life advocate Joe San Pietro participates in a 40 Days for Life vigil near the entrance to a Planned Parenthood center in Smithtown, N.Y., on March 26, 2019.

of Hispanic immigrants took a pro-life position in the study, 57 percent of Hispanics born in the mainland United States supported legal abortion. (Fifty-three percent of Hispanics born in Puerto Rico said that abortion should be illegal in most or all cases.)

“The first-generation immigrants tend to be pro-life; but as our kids go to college, they become much more secularized,” said Mr. Cuellar, who was born in Argentina and raised in Bolivia.

Immigration issues can add complications, he said, given that many pro-life Latinos are also supportive of immigrants’ rights. “I feel like none of the parties represent us as Catholics,” Mr. Cuellar said, explaining that Democrats tend to be more pro-immigrant while Republicans are more pro-life. “I feel like we don’t have a place to go. I wish they would resolve the immigration issue so we can move on to other issues.”

Immigrants often lead different lives than U.S.-born Latinos, Mr. Cuellar said, which can complicate parish youth outreach.

First-generation young adults might be coming to the church after a long day on a construction site, he said, while second-generation young adults might come after a day of high school or college. First-generation immigrants are more likely to work two jobs, Mr. Cuellar said, and may be less available to pass along their faith to their children.

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles acknowledges the vital role of parents in its pro-life outreach. “It’s not helpful to talk about abortion as a stand-alone topic,” said Kathleen Domingo, the senior director of the archdiocesan Office of Life, Justice and Peace. Abortion needs to be addressed “within the context of the family. That’s a totally different conversation.”

Some parish-based groups may struggle to connect with young Latinos, Ms. Domingo said, noting that that pro-life ministry, like many church outreach groups across the United States, is still largely run by “elderly white ladies” from upper socioeconomic backgrounds. “They don’t know how to involve young adults, much less young adult Latinos,” she said.

“How do we not only get Latinos involved but let them lead with their values?” Ms. Domingo asked. V Encuentro, an initiative from the U.S. bishops to better serve the grow-

ing Latin American community, has emphasized that the church needs to create more leadership opportunities for young Latinos.

Parishes that are predominately Latino do not always engage in specific pro-life outreach, according to Gina De Los Santos, the parish engagement strategist for Ms. Domingo’s office. Instead, there may be large prayer groups or Guadalupanos, groups dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Culturally, Latinos are more likely to identify as pro-family than as pro-life, Ms. De Los Santos said, explaining that the term “pro-life” has only really become known in the community in the last 10 years. “We grow up with our grandparents and take care of them until they die,” she said. “And every grandmother understands the value of a child. Our families recognize that the baby in the womb has value, is a human being and is already part of the family.”

At the same time, a number of studies have found many Latino parents are uncomfortable discussing certain topics with their children, like sex, pornography and abortion. Ms. Domingo said that she suspects, for example, that parents do not realize their children as young as 13 could get an abortion without their permission.

Generational challenges are part of the fight against Senate Bill 24, according to María José Fernández Flores, the California Catholic Conference’s legislative advocate for life and immigration. That California bill would mandate that public colleges and universities make abortion-inducing drugs “accessible and cost effective” for their students.

California Senator Connie Leyva, a Democrat from Chino who is a sponsor of S.B. 24, said the bill was “an important step toward ensuring that the right to abortion is available to all Californians, and that our college students don’t face unnecessary barriers.”

Yet Ms. Domingo believes the push for abortion-inducing drugs makes the unwarranted presumption that most pregnancies among college students are unintended. “Being a mother is highly valued in Latino culture, and we don’t want to impose our own perspective on people who want to have these children,” she said.

“Women can go to school and be mothers at the same time,” Ms. De Los Santos said. “If you want to empower women, tell them they can be both mothers and students. It’s 2019.”

S.B. 24 is one of a number of legislative efforts that



CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

are complicating the political landscape in California, according to Andrew Rivas, the executive director of the California Catholic Conference. Political parties often oversimplify the interests of Latino voters, he said, and fail to appreciate cultural influences.

“We’re not a monolithic group,” agreed Raimundo Rojas, the director of Latino outreach for National Right to Life. He grew up in Miami’s Hialeah neighborhood, known for being more than 90 percent Hispanic.

Mr. Rojas was not surprised by P.R.R.I.’s findings. Despite the study’s finding that 45 percent of all Hispanic Americans support legal abortion, he said there is a stigma attached to it in the Hispanic community. “It’s something that isn’t done,” he said. “You can’t look at the Hispanic culture without dealing with telenovelas. Women who have abortions in telenovelas are the villains.” “La Rosa de Guadalupe,” a religiously themed Mexican television series, is another example of this. In one famous episode, a woman died after receiving an abortion.

This stigma notwithstanding, Hispanic women in the United States have abortions at a higher rate than do white,

non-Hispanic women, according to the Guttmacher Institute, which supports abortion rights. But social media is changing things, Mr. Rojas said, and Latinos now share 3-D ultrasound images on Twitter, Instagram and Whatsapp. He believes these photos and viral videos are changing minds, particularly among millennials.

“It seems like every month science allows us to show babies in utero are human beings,” he said. “In the end, this is a human rights issue, not a religious one. The single most dangerous place for a Hispanic in the United States isn’t on the southern border, it isn’t in a detention center, it is in her mother’s womb. Today, 538 Latino babies will be aborted.”

But the conversation has to go beyond politics and issues and focus on individuals, Ms. Domingo said.

“We talk about immigration and the unborn in the same sentence. We are talking about human dignity in both cases,” she said. “The more we can put these together, the more we can overcome divisive partisanship. We need to focus on the common good. That brings us together.”

J.D. Long-García is a senior editor of *America*.

**U.S. LATINO OPINIONS ON ABORTION**

**Abortion should be:**

	Legal in most/all cases	Illegal in most/all cases
All U.S. adults	54	40
White Catholics	52	42
Hispanic Catholics	41	52
White evangelical Protestant	30	65
White mainline Protestant	59	35
Black Protestant	56	35
Hispanic Protestant	37	58
Jewish	70	23
Unaffiliated	72	22
Mainland U.S.-born Hispanics	59	36
Puerto Rico-born Hispanics	41	53
Foreign-born Hispanics	33	59

**Compared to your views five years ago, are your current views about abortion generally:**

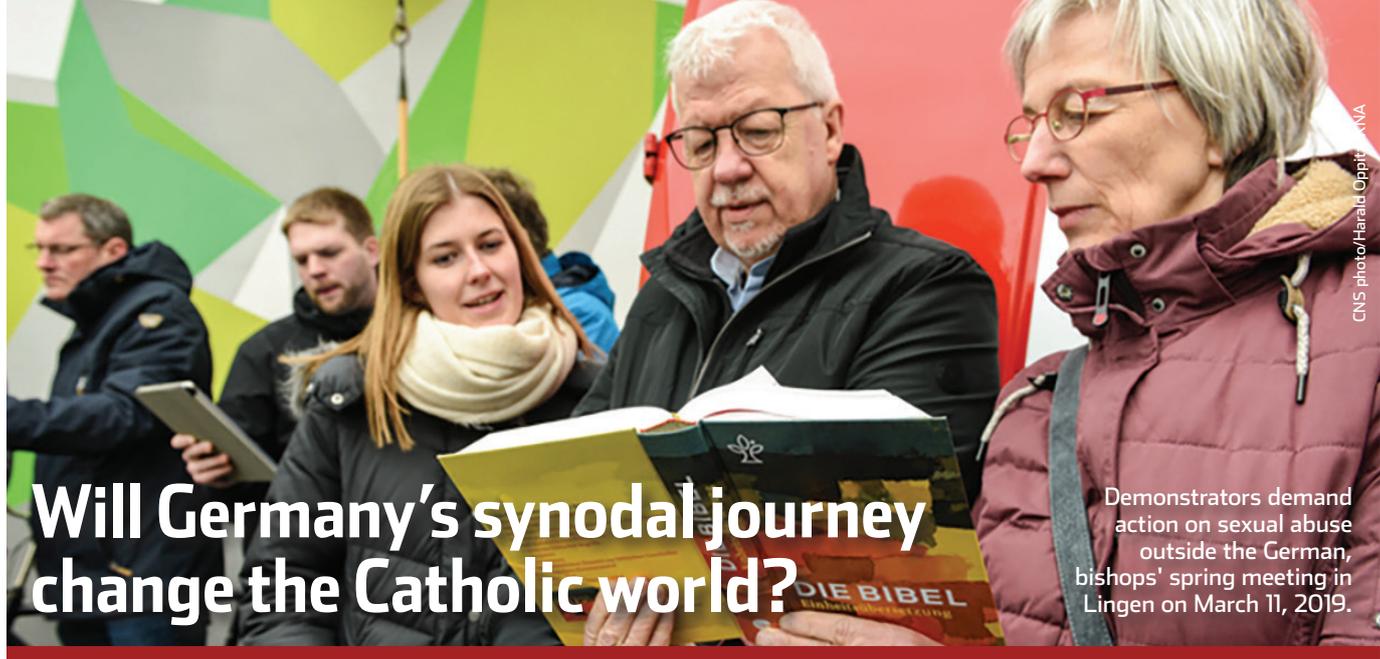
	More supportive	More opposed	Have not changed
All U.S. adults	11	9	78
White Catholics	8	9	81
Hispanic Catholics	11	16	70
White evangelical Protestant	6	13	80
White mainline Protestant	8	7	83
Black Protestant	15	10	73
Hispanic Protestant	13	21	64
Jewish	10	7	81
Unaffiliated	14	6	78

**Percent who would only vote for a candidate who shares their views on abortion:**

	Pro-choice	Pro-life
All U.S. adults	18	27
White Catholics	15	27
Hispanic Catholics	17	30
White evangelical Protestant	15	35
White mainline Protestant	14	19
Black Protestant	21	21
Hispanic Protestant	19	36
Jewish	31	22
Unaffiliated	20	20

According to the Public Religion Research Institute, abortion is more of a partisan issue than ever. In its latest survey, Democrats (70%) were twice as likely as Republicans (34%) to say that abortion should be legal in most or all cases. In a 2014 survey, 67% of Democrats and 39% of Republicans said abortion should be legal in most or all cases.

Sources: “The State of Abortion and Contraception Attitudes in All 50 States,” Public Religion Research Institute, Aug. 13, 2019.



CNS photo/Harald Oppitz/ANSA

# Will Germany's synodal journey change the Catholic world?

Demonstrators demand action on sexual abuse outside the German bishops' spring meeting in Lingen on March 11, 2019.

German Catholics are embarking on what is being called a synodal journey in Advent, but it promises to be a rocky one, treating subjects the church usually avoids: Why are women not allowed to be ordained as deacons or priests? Is mandatory celibacy the best way for a priest to live in the 21st century? How should the German church respond to the abuse crisis?

Turning on the television news in Germany lately does not leave viewers with a particularly good impression of the Catholic Church. Revelations of new scandals are broadcast almost daily.

Last autumn a study uncovered more than 3,000 cases of sexual abuse in Germany over recent decades. The Maria 2.0 movement has been mobilizing Catholic women all over Germany to skip Mass in a “strike” against sexism in the church and the exclusion of women from the priesthood.

There has been an alarming increase in the number of people leaving the church in recent years. In Germany a church tax paid by citizens registered as Catholics is collected by the government—it does the same for other faith groups—to support the church. Many “leavers” say that tax burden is part of the reason they have separated from the church, a bureaucratic process in Germany. Even more say they simply do not trust the church anymore.

The synodal process is supposed to begin on the first Sunday of Advent. But there are already several work groups coming together over the summer to build a framework for the discussions. They are expected to complete their work in September.

Surveys show that Catholics in Germany do not pay attention to the church's views on human sexuality. A document published by the bishops and the lay committee openly asks if the church should change its view on these matters.

The bishops attempted to respond. Ordaining women as

deacons or priests is out of the question, most of them admit, but they argued that this barrier does not mean women should not be able to take up positions of power in the church. Several German dioceses are establishing new positions of general and financial management that are explicitly open to women and laypeople. The bishops' conference has committed to a hiring quota that reserves 33 percent of leadership positions for women over the coming years.

The Vatican is following Germany's informal synod closely. At the end of June, Pope Francis sent a letter to the German church, explaining his views on the upcoming process.

Thomas Sternberg, head of the Central Committee of German Catholics, the highest organization of laypeople in the country, called the pope's intervention “a sensation.”

“Pope Francis tells us to carry on in the spirit of Vatican II,” he said.

Pope Francis has encouraged dialogue, but he also advised Germans to follow the Gospel first and foremost and not to break with the rest of the Catholic world. That latter possibility is exactly what some Catholics in Germany fear when they hear that celibacy or women's ordination will be put up for debate. “The church should follow Jesus, not the zeitgeist,” warned Cologne's Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki.

Catholics everywhere in Germany will follow this particular journey with a watchful eye. Some see it as the last chance to win back the trust the church has lost; others fear it suggests a departure of the church as Jesus established it and a surrender to modern times.

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## Mothers of La Candelaria continue a 20-year search for Colombia's 'disappeared'

Teresita Gaviria well remembers bidding her son Cristian Camilo farewell the morning he left for Bogotá 21 years ago. Colombia's capital is within a day's distance by car from Medellín, and making the trip seemed like a small risk at the time. But her son, then 15, never arrived at his destination.

Just after his disappearance, Ms. Gaviria stayed for more than a week in Doradal, the town where he was abducted. Her search for Cristian continues to this day. "There is where my long journey began through all the paths in Colombia, in every road, mountain, city, town—everywhere they told me he could be," she said. "And we continue to look because I think a mother never stops hoping."

For some women in Antioquia, a department in north-west Colombia, finding missing family members has become the focus of their lives. Antioquia is one of three regions that reported the highest rates of disappearances during the country's long civil war as right-wing paramilitaries and other armed groups—left-wing rebels, state military entities and criminal organizations were responsible for smaller percentages of these crimes—expanded their presence in the surrounding region.

A year after her son's disappearance, Ms. Gaviria founded Paths of Hope, Mothers of La Candelaria, bring-

ing together other women who were looking for answers on missing persons cases. They continue to demonstrate every Friday outside the steps of the oldest church in Medellín, the Basilica of Our Lady of Candelaria.

It has become the only location where the mothers have been permitted to gather as they chant their desire for the return of their family members—"alive, free and in peace." The movement was inspired by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who similarly protested disappearances under the military dictatorship in Argentina.

Francisco de Roux, S.J., who leads Colombia's truth commission, said it continues to cooperate with victims groups, including the Mothers of La Candelaria, to find some resolution to the disappearances. Although there is still fear, Father de Roux told **America** these organizations are helping advance reconciliation in Colombian society.

"At the same time that they've asked for the truth and the clarity of [what happened] to their children, they have been speaking directly with the perpetrators," he said. "[And] if there is truth, they are willing to offer forgiveness."

"I used to walk the streets of Medellín on my own," said Lourdes del Zocorro Zapata, a member of the Mothers of La Candelaria whose son went missing in 2007. "I suffered



A protest in Medellín

a lot in that time because I didn't have any counsel until I met Teresita."

Today, the organization has helped recover 111 missing persons. They are now waiting to observe upcoming hearings with former armed actors for any information that could provide closure to other families. And while these days they are able to accompany investigators at these burial sites, Ms. Gaviria has also led search groups through the Magdalena Medio region, an area in East Antioquia where mass graves have been found.

More than a decade ago, Ms. Gaviria discovered that her son's disappearance was the result of a forced recruitment gone wrong. An ex-paramilitary combatant told her that they were following orders from a commander when they left his body along the Magdalena River. Despite the risks, she plans to continue to look for Cristian and others along its shoreline.

Until then, "we don't have a tomb where we can cry, place flowers and put a cross because they are still disappeared," she said.

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## GOODNEWS: 'Laudato Si' powers this alternative energy consultant

Catholic Energies, a program begun by the Catholic Climate Covenant, has been helping Catholic institutions connect to low-cost sources of alternative energy since 2017. Recently, it partnered with the solar developers IGS Solar to build a large solar energy system for Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington. When completed, a 5,000-panel solar array will produce 2.7 million kilowatt-hours annually, offsetting nearly 3,400 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions each year.

"We went from a fairly small-scale, roof-based system to a larger, ground-based system that provides a much bigger benefit to Catholic Charities," said Dan Misleh, the executive director of the Catholic Climate Covenant. "It essentially takes away the cost of electricity for all Catholic Charities buildings. It lowers their rate to about two cents per kilowatt-hour from about 11 cents per kilowatt-hour."

"Those savings," he said, "then can go into the core mission of Catholic Charities: to shelter the homeless, to feed the hungry [and] to provide other services for the Archdiocese of Washington."

The Catholic Climate Covenant began in 2006. "The mission of the Catholic Climate Covenant is to help Catholics understand and act on the issue of climate change," said Mr. Misleh. "We're concerned both about God's gift of creation but also certainly about the people who inhabit the planet, including future generations."

According to Mr. Misleh, Catholic Energies was being developed around the same time as the publication of Pope Francis' encyclical on climate change, "Laudato Si'." The encyclical, Mr. Misleh said, "really gave the project wings."

The covenant hopes to expand Catholic Energies' efforts. "We're able to reach out to any place in the U.S. that wants to be more energy-efficient," Mr. Misleh said.

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Kevin Christopher Robles, editorial intern. Twitter: @its\_krobe.

Israeli-born Filipino children play during a rally against the deportation of undocumented foreign workers and their children in Tel Aviv, Israel, on Aug. 6, 2019.

# CARETAKERS IN CRISIS

By Eloise Blondiau

*Filipino health care workers spend decades caring for Israeli families. Now some face deportation.*

לא מגרשים ילדים



Beth Franco kissed the ground when she arrived at Israel's Ben Gurion airport in 1999. Though she never imagined she would be in the land where Jesus had once walked, she was eager to start this new chapter of her life. Back then, the beach city of Tel Aviv reminded her of Manila, in her native Philippines, but she has seen the skyline grow into jagged peaks as skyscrapers have shot up over the last two decades; and Ms. Franco has now lived almost half her 45 years in Israel.

Like many Filipinos who move to Israel, Ms. Franco entered the country on what is known as a caregiver visa. This allows foreign workers to stay in Israel temporarily, usually to care for elderly or disabled Israelis. Since she moved to Israel, Ms. Franco has lived with two different families during some of the most difficult parts of their



Corinna Kern

Many Filipinos who move to Israel enter the country on a caregiver visa. This allows foreign workers to stay in Israel temporarily, usually to care for elderly or disabled Israelis.

lives, working for them through illnesses and deaths. Ms. Franco frequently saw her employers more often than they saw their own families. She is now working for her third family in Israel, this time as a housekeeper. But because of Israel's strict rules about visas, she labors without the proper documents, putting her future in Israel at risk.

By becoming a mother while living in Israel, she violated the visa terms, which strictly prohibit workers from marrying or having children in Israel. She has no clear path to permanent residency or citizenship. She always knew this could happen, but she describes forming relationships and having children as almost inevitable for longtime workers in Israel. "Can you imagine yourself not having a child at my age?" she asked. "Of course you fall in love, and then eventually you have your own child," Ms. Franco said. "I'm not a robot."

Often without family members of their own nearby, workers like Ms. Franco often adopt the families under their care as their own. "You are entrusted with a person, a human being, a life," she said. "The more years you spend with them, the more you love them. Because you don't have your grandpa with you, you don't have your grandma with you.... You look at them as if they're your own family."

Even though she is Catholic, Ms. Franco visits the synagogue on high holidays. "I have a belief in one God," she said. When wished a happy Easter earlier this year,

she responded, "Chag Pesach Sameach," meaning "Happy Passover."

Despite these deep connections to Israeli society, Ms. Franco's future in the officially Jewish state is at risk, even despite becoming a mother to a child born in Israel. This child, Yael, now 12, identifies as Israeli. Yael says she feels more Israeli than Filipino. Hebrew is her first language, and she has never left Israel. "In every sense of the word she is Israeli," Ms. Franco said, "and that's the way she feels as well."

Still, Ms. Franco and her daughter are at a higher risk of deportation now than ever before.

Ms. Franco's conversations with Yael about their possible deportation have been difficult. She says her daughter tells her: "You can go back to the Philippines if you want, but I can't. This is my country, this is where I was born. How can I leave?"

Ms. Franco is heartbroken by the prospect of losing the life she has built. She feels it is unfair that she is unable to have her own family in Israel when she has spent decades caring for the families of others. "I don't understand—you're not allowed to love," she said. "How can it be, when we're giving our own lives?"

The Israeli government has deported undocumented babies and young children for decades. The mothers could choose either to leave with their children—in which case they would lose their visas—or send the children home to

Protestors hold photos of a mother, Geraldine Esta, and her children, who were recently arrested. There is almost no possibility that Filipino immigrants will become permanent residents of Israel.



Corinna Kern

live with relatives. Until recently, in something of a compromise, authorities allowed undocumented children who were enrolled in school to stay in the country. After a plan to deport school-going children in 2008 was later abandoned in response to a public outcry; for example, 800 children of migrant workers were granted amnesty.

Last year, however, immigration officials began to detain Filipino mothers and ask them to sign documents that said they would be deported with their children by the end of this summer.

“I am very sad that they are doing this to our children,” Ms. Franco said. “This is not the fault of our children.”

### Outsiders Residing in a Jewish State

When Filipino workers arrive in Israel, they find themselves in a nation whose culture, politics and laws are thoroughly Jewish—even though all its residents are not. That brings about some unexpected consequences for the Filipino Catholics living and working abroad in Israel. Some stop going to church, though in other cases, church becomes an even more important community than it was in the Philippines. Caregivers are surrounded by, and often partake in Jewish customs around the Sabbath (Shabbas), and some attend synagogue (schul) with the families they care for. A small number even convert to Judaism. As a result, caregivers describe feeling connected to Judaism.

But no matter the lengths Filipino workers in Israel go to assimilate—and they must assimilate, to some extent, to do their jobs well—there is almost no possibility that they will become permanent residents of Israel.

Questions about who can become a permanent resident of Israel are not confined to Filipinos. The debate about rights for long-term foreign workers takes place against the backdrop of an older, bloodier and more complicated conflict, in which Palestinians are either unable or struggle to live in the places their families lived for generations, places they consider their homeland. Only a fraction of Palestinians are eligible for Israeli citizenship, and parts of the land Israel occupies are disputed by the United Nations. This year, at least 300 Palestinians were made homeless after Israeli forces demolished their homes. In this context, Israel is reluctant to grant non-Jews residency or citizenship, citing security, religious and cultural reasons.

And in recent years, the Israeli government has been criticized for refusing to allow refugees from countries such as Sudan and Eritrea to live and work in Israel. In the case of migrant worker families from the Philippines and elsewhere, like Ms. Franco and her daughter, the Israeli paper Haaretz reports President Reuven Rivlin of Israel considered acting to prevent their deportation. But he decided not to intervene on advice that it would “create a precedent for Israel to allow other groups of foreign nationals to stay



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# Beth Franco has lived with Israeli families during some of the most difficult parts of their lives. Now her future in Israel is at risk. ●●

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in the country.” Knesset members such as Ofer Cassif, of the Hadash Party, and Michal Rozin, of the Meretz Party, have publicly denounced the deportations.

On the other hand, people who are Jewish, or married to or related to a Jew, can live in Israel long term. The Law of Return of 1950, which allows for all Jews to gain citizenship in Israel, is seen by many as a way to provide refuge for the Jewish people. The government was forced to define who is a Jew when, in the 1960s, a Catholic priest who had been raised Jewish in Poland attempted to claim Israeli citizenship under the law. He was refused. A Jew came to be legally defined as a person with at least one Jewish grandparent “or has become converted to Judaism and who is not a member of another religion.” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu helped pass a controversial law last year that specifies Israel as “the nation-state of the Jewish people, in which it fulfills its natural, religious, and historic right to self-determination.”

When it comes to Christians in the Middle East, the population has dwindled for years because of conflict and emigration. Though their numbers are not high, the arrival of Filipinos and other migrant populations in Israel has helped stabilize the Christian population in the Holy Land. About eight in 10 Filipinos are Roman Catholic. In Israel, Christians make up only 2 percent of the population and there are even fewer in the Palestinian territories. The long-established Palestinian Melkite Catholic and Orthodox communities are shrinking in the regions where Jesus himself walked.

Despite the cultural and religious differences, Filipino Catholics working in Israel often develop much stronger relationships with their Jewish employers and neighbors than they do with other Catholics and Christians in the Holy Land. Many of the Catholics in Israel are Palestinian, with whom Filipino Catholics, like Ms. Franco, have little interaction.

David Neuhaus, S.J., works to bridge that gap between Catholics in the Holy Land. Father Neuhaus’s parents were Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany, and he was raised Jewish in South Africa. But he converted to Catholicism after meeting a Russian Orthodox nun in Jerusalem who told him about her faith when he was a teenager. Father Neuhaus’s background prepared him to take on two key roles in the Roman Catholic Church in Israel. For 12 years, he led a church ministry serving Hebrew-speaking Catholics in the Holy Land, and he also led efforts to provide pastoral services for migrants.

One need became clear quickly. Families must find their own childcare for babies under three; and for overseas workers with limited resources, this proves difficult. In the past, this meant utilizing “baby warehouses” affordable for these women, institutions that were unsafe, sometimes tragically so. “The day care facilities were so disastrous that you didn’t know if you would come and find your child alive or not. And when the child was dead, [the church] had to find burial places for them,” Father Neuhaus said. So he decided to do something about it. The result was a day care center intended to serve mostly children of Filipino single mothers who work long hours, in the Jerusalem suburb of Talbiya. It is named for St. Rachel, the matriarch from the Hebrew Bible.

Father Neuhaus spoke to **America** while standing in the playground of the St. Rachel Center for Children, stopping every now and then as children tugged on his shirt, seeking his attention. Like much of the land in the Holy Land, this neighborhood has a history filled with conflict. Most of the land in the leafy, upscale neighborhood is today owned by the Greek Orthodox Church, but it was once a suburb for wealthy Middle Eastern Christians, including the Palestinian intellectual Edward Said.

When the State of Israel was established in 1948, about 700,000 Palestinians fled or lost the right to their homes, an event referred to by Palestinians as the Nakba, or catastrophe. Most of Talbiya’s longtime residents, who were Palestinian Christians, left. Now the suburb is home to Beit



Some Filipino immigrants in Israel must decide between being deported and being separated from their children. The sign reads, “Why do you want to deport me?”

HaNassi, the official residence of the president of Israel.

At the day care center, Father Neuhaus and his colleagues try to encourage a “sense of overarching Christian identity that makes us a little different,” he said. “But it’s not simple because of a lot of prejudice.” That prejudice appears to be mutual. Many Filipinos do not interact with Palestinians at work and perceive them as dangerous, while many Palestinians question why Filipinos are able to live and travel freely, to some extent, in the Holy Land when so many Palestinians face restrictions in their homeland.

“I try to work a lot on that by telling Palestinian Christians to come and visit us,” Father Neuhaus said. “There’s a bit of resentment, not only that we’re doing this for non-Palestinian Christians but also that we’re taking money that could go to Palestinian Christian communities. But I think that when people get to know what we’re doing, I think that [resentment] is allayed.”

Father Neuhaus said that despite the challenges, he

has also seen inspiring signs of solidarity. “A few years ago, a big Palestinian school in East Jerusalem called. They said, ‘Please come; we’ve collected some Christmas presents for the children,’” he said. Father Neuhaus said that when he arrived there were so many presents for migrants from the Palestinian Christian school that he needed help carrying them back.

Father Neuhaus also established an afterschool program. While Israel’s public school system is robust and enrolls undocumented migrant children, he wanted to supplement their education.

In the spring, Father Neuhaus’s colleagues threw a rowdy Purim party for the older children, complete with hamantaschen pastries—three-cornered, jam-filled cookies—and face-painting to mark the holiday. Purim is a festival that marks the defeat of a plot to massacre the Jews, as recorded in the Book of Esther. In Israel, it is celebrated by religious and nonobservant Jews alike, marked with wacky costumes and gift-giving (and, as the Talmud



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# The debate about rights for long-term foreign workers takes place as questions go unanswered about the rights of Palestinians.

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instructs, drinking, though that wasn't the case at this party). Here, the predominantly Catholic day care workers celebrated the holiday along with the mostly Catholic children in their care.

At 10 years of age, Prince was the oldest boy at the Purim party. Unlike the younger children, who were dressed in “Frozen” and Spider-Man costumes and in Israeli army uniforms, Prince opted for neon glitter sprayed in his black hair, as he skirted the fringes of the playground in his T-shirt and jeans. A little girl adjusted her black stick-on mustache before sprinting across the playground in her pale blue Israeli police uniform.

Prince was one of the first children the day care center took in. Father Neuhaus said most of the children in the older cohort at St. Rachel, aside from access to education, “have no rights, no status, are completely ignored by the state.” The purpose of the program is to provide a safe space for young people like Prince, who were without any type of supervision outside of school, and to help them with their Hebrew as well as to give them religious education.

When asked why he came to the day care center, Prince told me it was a place to have fun and get help with his homework. Father Neuhaus asked Prince about everything he's learned about the catechism. Prince laughed and shook his head—he was not as excited about the religious education, even though the after-school program he loved was at a Catholic day care center.

A more urgent concern for Prince and other children

at St. Rachel is how they will be able to stay in Israel amid looming plans to deport up to 100 mothers and their undocumented children this summer. While the Roman Catholic Church in Israel has not spoken publicly in defense of the children—the last time they made a stance on migration was in defense of asylum seekers whom Israel was threatening to deport. But, personally, Father Neuhaus feels the new wave of deportations is immoral and that people in Israel should speak out against them.

“I feel very strongly that we should be shouting loud and clear that this is totally against human rights,” he said. “These children are born here. We cannot deport them.”

## Overseas Work Essential for Filipino Families

Like other wealthy countries, including the United States, Israel relies on foreign workers to fill its labor needs. It is estimated that 250,000 foreign workers live in Israel, including about 30,000 Filipinos. Sometimes workers overstay or violate the terms of their visas, and for those reasons, cases of undocumented adults and children living in Israel illegally are not uncommon.

The Philippines created a model of exporting labor in the 1970s that is still in use today, and one that other countries have tried to follow. An estimated 2.3 million Filipinos, more than half of whom are women, work overseas in about 190 countries, according to the Philippines Statistics Authority. That is about a tenth of the population of the Philippines. More than half of those overseas workers, 51 percent, labor in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Kuwait. Another 4 percent work in Bahrain, Israel, Lebanon or Jordan. Many Filipinos work abroad because of the low wages, scarce jobs and political turmoil they face in their home country; and the economy of the Philippines is now reliant on the money sent home by overseas workers. In 2017, Filipinos working abroad sent more than \$28 billion back home, which makes it about as dependent on personal remittances as Egypt and Guatemala, according to the World Bank.

In the 1990s, the Israeli Ministry of Health sought to move care from hospitals to private homes to cut costs. At first, these minimum-wage jobs with long hours were held by Palestinians. As restrictions were put on the movement of Palestinians following the first and second intifadas, migrants from countries like the Philippines began to fill the

jobs. Filipinos who work in Israel tend to work exclusively in health care services for Israeli families. In fact, the word caregiver is so closely associated with Filipino migrants today that Israelis use the nationality as shorthand. “I need a Filipino,” they might say in Hebrew if they are looking for a caregiver.

Amy Dillo moved to Israel more than a decade ago to work as a caregiver in order to send money home to her family. She spoke to America in Jerusalem, just outside the Catholic church that she attends weekly, where she sings in the choir. Her father’s salary back in the Philippines is 2,500 Filipino pesos a month, which is less than \$50 U.S. By comparison, Ms. Dillo earns about 50,000 pesos a month, or \$1,000, looking after an elderly Israeli woman.

Filipino caregivers like Ms. Dillo rely on their employer for income that supports themselves and their families at home—and to keep their visas. They have limited recourse if they are not paid on time, or paid enough, or face abuse or discrimination from their employers, though Israeli nonprofit organizations like Hotline and Kav La’Oved work to help protect their rights. This power imbalance can lead Filipino caregivers to abandon their caregiving jobs to work without documents, which leaves them even more vulnerable.

Ms. Dillo has a dark sense of humor about the challenges she faces as an overseas worker in Israel. When she talks about the hardest parts of being a caregiver here, Ms. Dillo gives a list: the difficulty in learning Hebrew; the misconception she is from “a tribe” and grew up without proper clothes (“Listen,” she recalled telling her employer, “a woman who has a lot of shoes is from the Philippines,” an allusion to the former Filipino First Lady); the struggle to convince her employer to respect her right to take off days when she wants to take them—and not just on the Jewish holidays.

But by far the hardest part of working in Israel for Ms. Dillo is being apart from her son. She gave birth to him in Israel but he was deported at the age of 3 months. “Aside from being religious, we are very family oriented. It is so difficult,” she said.

She said that immigration officials told her in 2010 she had to choose between losing her work visa or staying with her son. Knowing that her family back home relied on her income, she sent him back to the Philippines to live with her family. (Since 2011 authorities have allowed babies to

remain with their mothers until their visas run out, but that was not the case when Ms. Dillo gave birth.)

When talking about the pain of this separation, Ms. Dillo is quick to downplay it. Comparing herself to the mothers of older children whom they left behind in the Philippines, she said, “It’s not as hard as they’re experiencing.”

“After a few months, O.K., I’m single again,” she joked. “But of course I’m looking after him; I’m watching him grow on the internet.”

But later, Ms. Dillo admitted that she does not think she can cope with the separation from her son for much longer. She has seen her son in person only once since he was a few months old—and he is now 9. She plans to leave Israel to be reunited with him for good in a year or two. “Before he forgets that I’m his mother,” she said.

### **Seeking God’s Help for Children in Israel**

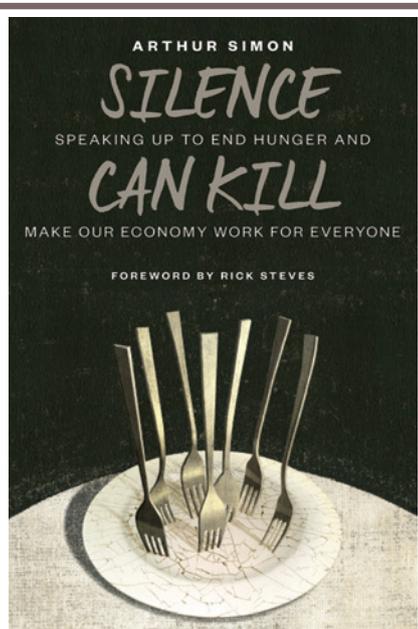
Every Friday, Ma’ann and Margaret take the hourlong bus ride from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, where they seek divine aid—from multiple sources.

They are from the Philippines and they asked that only their first names be used, as they live and work without documents as housekeepers in Tel Aviv. From the bus stop in Jerusalem they walk through the Old City, where they find themselves in the overcrowded courtyard before the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. One of the most important Christian sites in the world, the church is thought to be built on the site where Jesus was crucified and buried.

On this particular Friday, the springtime sun bore down on the crowds pushing themselves into the dark church. Once Ma’ann and Margaret visited the tomb of Jesus, they began to walk to the Western Wall. Unlike the tourists who flounder in groups in the narrow, slippery cobbled streets, they wove their way quickly through the steady channel of Palestinian Muslims who walk to Jum’ah, Friday prayers, as the call to prayer sounded above them.

At the wall, the two women wrote their prayers on paper torn from a notebook, and after folding them into thick rectangles, pushed them into the cracks of the wall that they are able to reach through crowds of praying women. At each holy site, they asked God for the same thing: That their children will not be deported in this latest crackdown.

Ma’ann and Margaret are Catholics. While they do not go to church as much as they did while growing up in the Philippines, they still believe in God. And living in the



Eerdmans Publishing, July 2019  
Paperback, 300 pages

**“An inspiration and a call to action, *Silence Can Kill* is a guidebook for changing the world and an urgent invitation to take on the task.”**

— E. J. Dionne, Jr.,  
*Washington Post*

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Holy Land has given them a new appreciation for the Jewish faith of the families they work for and with whom they spend so much time.

“I promised that for nine consecutive Fridays I would be here because I am asking and begging for these kids that I’m trying to fight for, that they give us the chance to grant them to have a [legal] status,” said Ma’ann.

Together with her prayers, Ma’ann has been organizing meetings and protests against the anticipated deportations. Her friend and fellow organizer, Margaret, is one of the mothers who have been warned of being deported with their children in July. She was detained last year when she went to the pharmacy to buy medicine for her child. She was asked to sign deportation papers, which she refused to do, and was eventually released.

The protests organized by Ma’ann bear the name of her organization, the United Children of Israel. She chose the name so that the organization could vouch for more than Filipino children, including Eritrean and Nepali children. The protests have also garnered support from Israelis. In person, the classmates of children threatened with deportation have joined rallies, along with their teachers and school principals. Online, Israelis have posted selfies holding up signs that read, “Don’t deport kids.”

“You’re making me like Noah, like Moses,” Ma’ann said she had told God in prayer. “And the kids are behind me.”

Thousands of people attended a protest Ma’ann organized outside Yad Vashem, Tel Aviv’s Holocaust memorial, on Aug. 6 to support the right of Israeli-born children and their mothers to stay in Israel. At the protest, kids and their parents watched the sunset as they held up placards and waved Israeli flags. A group of Israeli students lifted up a sign that read: “We are also children of immigrants.” Elderly Israelis showed up to support their caregivers and housekeepers. But not everyone showed up in solidarity—some came to assert that Israel is within its rights to deport migrants, especially those from the Philippines. According to the Times of Israel, a group of counter-protesters held up a large sign reading, “Manila is not Auschwitz.”

Authorities are planning up to 100 deportations this summer alone, and U.C.I. estimates hundreds more to come. As of late August, two people—a Filipino mother and her 13-year-old son—have been deported and another four will be deported soon. More have been arrested and detained. Each protest Ma’ann organizes with her colleagues at U.C.I. becomes more fraught. Parents are afraid when walking to work or in the streets that they will be detained and deported. This helps explain why she prays at both the Western Wall and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. “There’s no harm in trying,” she said. “There is only one God.”

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Eloise Blondiau is a producer at America.



NEW YORK CITY COMMEMORATION OF  
**The Canonization of  
Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman, C.O.**

Sunday, October 13, 2019  
at 4pm

Assumption Church in Brooklyn Heights  
Solemn Vespers with the Oratory Choir

**SPEAKER: Mr. Edward Short\***

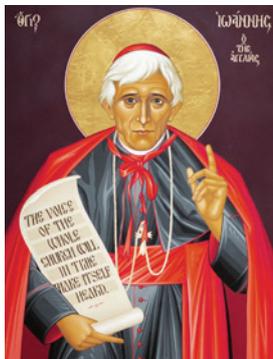
*“A Short Road to Perfection: Saint John Henry’s Practical Approach to Sanctity”*

Reception immediately to follow in the Oratory Residence

\*Mr. Edward Short is the author of *Newman and History* (2017),  
*Newman and his Family* (2013) and *Newman and his Contemporaries* (2011).

John Henry Newman, founder of the Birmingham Oratory, was one of the most significant theologians of the 19th century. Long after his death in 1890, his work significantly shaped Vatican II and continues to be an inspiration to Catholics and many other Christians everywhere.

On Sunday, October 13 in Rome Pope Francis will canonize Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman. In order to commemorate this important moment in the life of the universal Church, the Brooklyn Oratory will host a Solemn Vespers and reception for the Oratory’s newest saint.



Assumption Church is readily accessible by the A/C, F, 2/3, and 4/5 subway lines. If using GPS, enter “55 Cranberry Street” for the church.

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# STEVE BANNON'S CRUSADE

His plan to rejuvenate Western Europe  
undermines Christian principles

By Bill McCormick

Europe is sick. Despite its apparent material success, a spiritual sickness pervades it that politics will not cure.

Pope Francis shares this view. In the United States, the pope may be known as a sharp critic of President Trump, but he has also been vocal about the trends that have led to populist backlashes in the Americas and in Europe. In 2014, for instance, Francis said: "Europe is tired. We have to help rejuvenate it, to find its roots. It's true: It has disowned its roots."

Even for some non-Christians, Christianity offers a grounding for European culture that has become dangerously depleted. The famously secular German philosopher Jürgen Habermas has admitted that the West, especially liberal democracy, depends upon Christians as a creative minority for key values of conscience and human rights. Mr. Habermas argues: "To this day, we have no other options. We continue to nourish ourselves from this source. Everything else is postmodern chatter."

But a bastardized form of Christianity cannot provide this nourishment and may, in fact, hasten Europe's decline. This is the risk

posed by Stephen K. Bannon, a former adviser to the Trump administration, who has embarked on his own project to rejuvenate Europe. The politics he offers has only a veneer of Christianity, intended to justify his political aims. And his notion of Europe is perhaps just as shallow, ignoring the profound spiritual and intellectual challenges that predate the continent's latest demographic changes.

Inclusion and civility are often dismissed as pieties of procedural liberalism. But *ut unum sint* ("that they may be one") is the message of Christianity. A politics that divides is not good politics. And it is not good for Christianity.

## **Bannon's 'Gladiator School' Takes Shape**

Mr. Bannon has caused a stir with his plans to found near Rome what he calls the Academy for the Judeo-Christian West. The imagination has run wild as many speculate about a "gladiator school" for neopopulist ideologues, even after the Italian government blocked plans to site the school at an ancient Carthusian monastery.

The political strategist is not starting from scratch. He is building upon the work of the



Steve Bannon is a controversial former adviser to President Donald Trump.

English political activist Benjamin Harnwell, who founded and runs the Dignitatis Humanae Institute. Mr. Harnwell has advocated for Christian politics for several years in the European Parliament, including drafting a “Universal Declaration of Human Dignity.” The D.H.I. presents the *imago Dei* as the center of Christian politics and has promoted it by organizing members of the European Parliament and now by founding a school. (It is unclear how the academy would relate to “The Movement,” Mr. Bannon’s umbrella organization in Brussels for Euro-skeptic parties in the European Parliament.)

Mr. Bannon’s proposed school is described by the D.H.I. website as “an initiative defending the Judaeo-Christian foundations of Western Civilisation based on the recognition that every single person without exception is made in the image and likeness of God.”

That initiative, the D.H.I. website notes, “is a direct response to a growing secularist intolerance to Christians of all confessions that has led to a myriad of attacks on human dignity.” The D.H.I. cites many examples of “intolerance” and “attacks,” including the legalization of euthanasia and abortion, the “redefinition” of marriage, and “a growing reliance on the state for welfare, entitlements and other assistance,” which “is undermining human dignity by removing a person’s own sense of duty and personal responsibility.”

More specifically, many observers, and the D.H.I. itself in its literature, link the foundation of the D.H.I. in 2008 to Italy’s withdrawal of Rocco Buttiglione as a candidate for the European Commission in 2004. Mr. Buttiglione, a Catholic political scientist and politician who was close to St. John Paul II, came under attack because of his statements about homosexuality (“an indicator of a moral disorder”) and women. “The family exists in order to allow women to have children and to have the protection of a male who takes care of them,” he said at his confirmation hearing.

His nomination sparked debate about the role of Christianity in European politics and culture, with many arguing that the reluctance of the European Parliament to confirm Mr. Buttiglione’s appointment underlined a new intolerance of Christians. As Mr. Harnwell told the Catholic news site Zenit in 2011, “For the first time, I appreciated the extent to which a requirement was being placed on public figures to divest themselves of their Christianity in order to be acceptable to a militant secular environment.”

This sort of debate over Christian public witness has trans-Atlantic resonance, and U.S. interest in the D.H.I. increased considerably when two Americans became associated with the institute. Cardinal Raymond L. Burke assumed the presidency of the D.H.I. advisory board in early

2019. This caused a flurry of speculation not only about an unholy alliance between the Catholic political right and members of the church hierarchy, but also between European Christian democracy and Trump-style populists, who together would import American-style culture wars to Europe.

But then Cardinal Burke resigned from the D.H.I. in a dramatic letter in June 2019. With his letter, Cardinal Burke has not only dispelled suspicions of an alliance with Mr. Bannon, but questioned the Catholicity of Mr. Bannon’s project. In his letter of resignation, Cardinal Burke argued that “the Institute has become more and more identified with the political program of Mr. Bannon.” (The cardinal also objected to Mr. Bannon’s endorsement of Frédéric Martel’s book *In the Closet of the Vatican*, which alleges the presence of an extensive “gay lobby” in the Vatican, and to Mr. Bannon’s “calling into question” of clerical celibacy.)

Despite this setback, Mr. Bannon has attracted a great deal of attention to a project that has not even happened yet. The question is: Can it offer what it claims to?

I argue that it cannot. The project, like much of current European populism, seems to have a shallow understanding of both Europe and Christianity. This is particularly troubling in the case of Christianity.

Many political ideologies designate in-groups and out-groups for the benefit of “us versus them” politics. In the United States, the language of exclusion often involves race and ethnicity. For European populism, identity has more often been about religion, and especially an opposition to Islam.

While any identity can become pathological in the service of politics, such tribalism violates the core message of Christianity: the universality of the Gospel. Again, *ut unum sint*.

The D.H.I. presumably wishes not to engage in such politics, but rather to promote the heart of the Gospel. But Cardinal Burke’s resignation only underlines the urgency of this question: If the D.H.I. desires to promote the *imago Dei*, why would it work with Mr. Bannon, a man who is now at loggerheads with church officials from Pope Francis to Cardinal Burke?

### **A West That Belongs Without Believing**

Most Christian intellectuals and theologians agree with Mr. Bannon that Christianity played an important role in the foundation of what we call the Western world, one that continues to matter today. It particularly matters in accounts of how the West can revive itself.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI has argued that Europe—as not merely a geographic designation but a spiritual

## AMERICA'S GUIDE TO RETREATS

Many of our readers are curious about retreats. What does one do on a retreat? Where does one go? What are some good retreat houses? Simply put, a retreat is an extended period of prayer, usually done in silence, and usually at a retreat house, where a team of spiritual directors helps you find God in your prayer. There are also different kinds of retreats. On a directed retreat a person meets daily with a spiritual director to discuss what is happening in prayer. A guided retreat focuses more on one topic (say, women's spirituality) and offers presentations as well as opportunities to meet with a director a few times. Preached retreats consist in listening to presentations and praying on your own, but with less opportunity for direction.

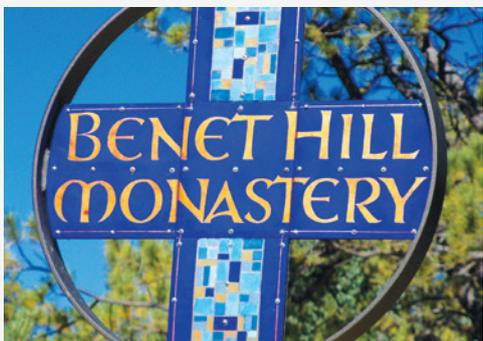
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Ph: (404) 255-0503; Email: [registrar@ignatiushouse.org](mailto:registrar@ignatiushouse.org)  
Website: [www.ignatiusHouse.org](http://www.ignatiusHouse.org)

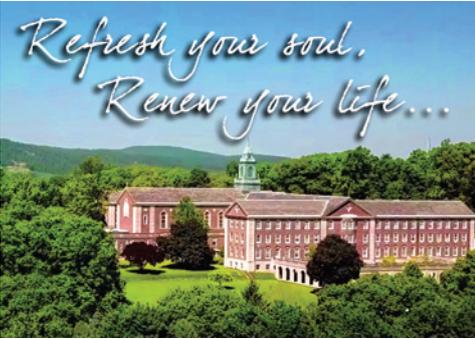
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P.O. Box 223, 501 N. Church Road, Wernersville, PA 19565  
 Ph: (610) 670-3642; Email: mleonowitz@jesuitcenter.org  
 Website: www.jesuitcenter.org

The Jesuit Center for Spiritual Growth, situated on 240 acres in Wernersville, Pa., is a place of natural beauty, welcoming quiet and spiritual sustenance. We offer a variety of retreats and programs based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius for Roman Catholics, Christians of every denomination, and seekers.



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5629 State Road, Parma, OH 44143  
 Ph: (440) 884-9300; Email: info@jesuitretreatcenter.org  
 Website: www.jesuitretreatcenter.org

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300 Manresa Way, Los Altos, CA 94022  
 Ph: (650) 917-4010; Email: reservations@jrclosaltos.org  
 Website: www.jrclosaltos.org

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### **Jesuit Spiritual Center at Milford**

5361 South Milford Road, Milford, OH 45150

Ph: (513) 248-3500; Email: [reservations@jesuitspiritualcenter.com](mailto:reservations@jesuitspiritualcenter.com)

Website: [www.jesuitspiritualcenter.com](http://www.jesuitspiritualcenter.com)

Celebrating over 90 years of retreat ministry, the Jesuit Spiritual Center, located outside Cincinnati, sits on 37 beautiful acres along a scenic river, providing a tranquil place for prayer and renewal. In the Ignatian tradition, weekend retreats and week-long personally directed retreats are offered year-round. Visit [www.jesuitspiritualcenter.com](http://www.jesuitspiritualcenter.com) for our complete retreat listing.



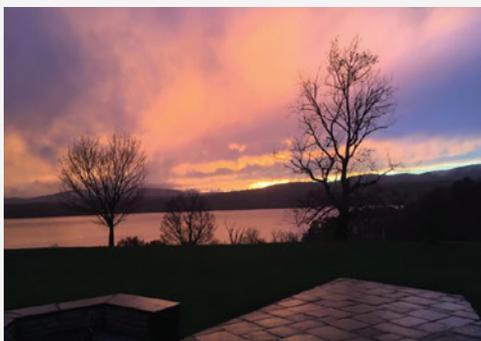
### **Lial Renewal Center**

5908 Davis Road, Whitehouse, OH 43571

Ph: (419) 877-0432; Email: [lialrenewalcenter@toledosnd.org](mailto:lialrenewalcenter@toledosnd.org)

Website: [www.lialrenewalcenter.org](http://www.lialrenewalcenter.org)

Lial Renewal Center is located on 94 wooded acres in the beautiful Oak Openings region of Northwest Ohio. It is a peaceful, serene setting for renewals, retreats and conferences in Whitehouse, Ohio. Sponsored by the Sisters of Notre Dame, the Center welcomes people of all faiths who are looking to replenish heart and soul. Against the backdrop of nature's changing seasons, seekers come for personal prayer, reflection and retreats.



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Ph: (519) 824-1250 ext. 266; Email: [registration@ignatiusguelph.ca](mailto:registration@ignatiusguelph.ca)

Website: [www.loyolahouse.com](http://www.loyolahouse.com)

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 Website: www.loyola.org

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 Website: www.maryjoseph.org

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 Ph: (855) 656-4113; Email: mtcarmel@carmelniagara.com  
 Website: www.carmelniagara.com

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214 Church Street, Grand Coteau, LA 70541  
 Email: oloaks@centurytel.net; Website: www.ourladyoftheoaks.com

The mission of Our Lady of the Oaks Jesuit Retreat House is to draw men and women closer to Jesus Christ through the preaching of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola and the celebration of the sacraments of the Catholic Church.



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4801 North Highway 67, P.O. Box 185, Sedalia, CO 80135  
 Ph: (866) 930-1181 ext. 122; Ph: (303) 688-4198 ext. 122  
 Website: [www.sacredheartretreat.org](http://www.sacredheartretreat.org)

A Colorado oasis of peace and beauty, surrounded by spectacular natural beauty and panoramic views of the Rockies, Sacred Heart Retreat House is the perfect setting for solitude, reflection and prayer. We offer summer directed retreats as well as individual directed retreats year round. For more information, visit [www.sacredheartretreat.org](http://www.sacredheartretreat.org).



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755 Ocean Ave., Long Branch, NJ 07740  
 Ph: (732) 222-2731 ext. 159; Website: [www.sanalfonso retreats.org](http://www.sanalfonso retreats.org)

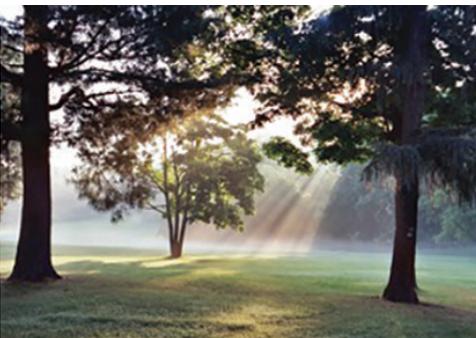
San Alfonso Retreat House and Conference Center, a ministry of the Redemptorist fathers and brothers, is situated on eight acres on the New Jersey coast, providing a setting of great natural beauty to meditate and pray, reflect and study, and to be still and listen.



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 Website: [www.mariandale.org](http://www.mariandale.org)

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 Ph: (517) 266-4000; Email: [webercenter@adriandominicans.org](mailto:webercenter@adriandominicans.org)  
 Website: [www.webercenter.org](http://www.webercenter.org)

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 Ph: (800) 643-1003; Website: [www.whretreat.org](http://www.whretreat.org)

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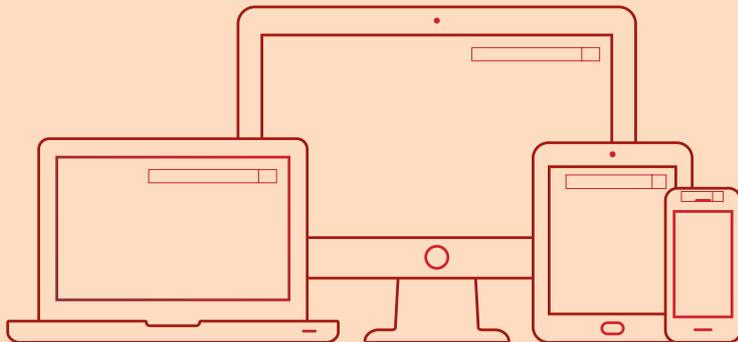
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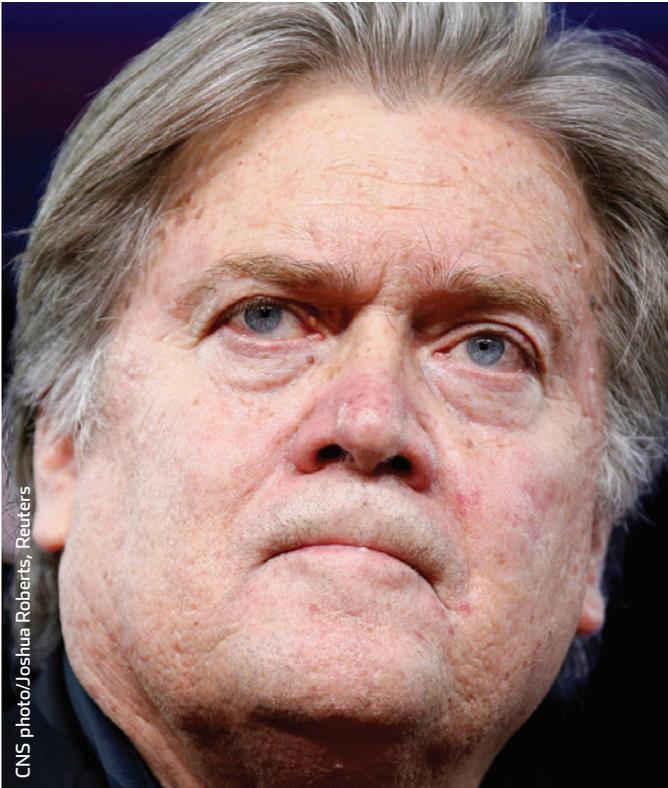
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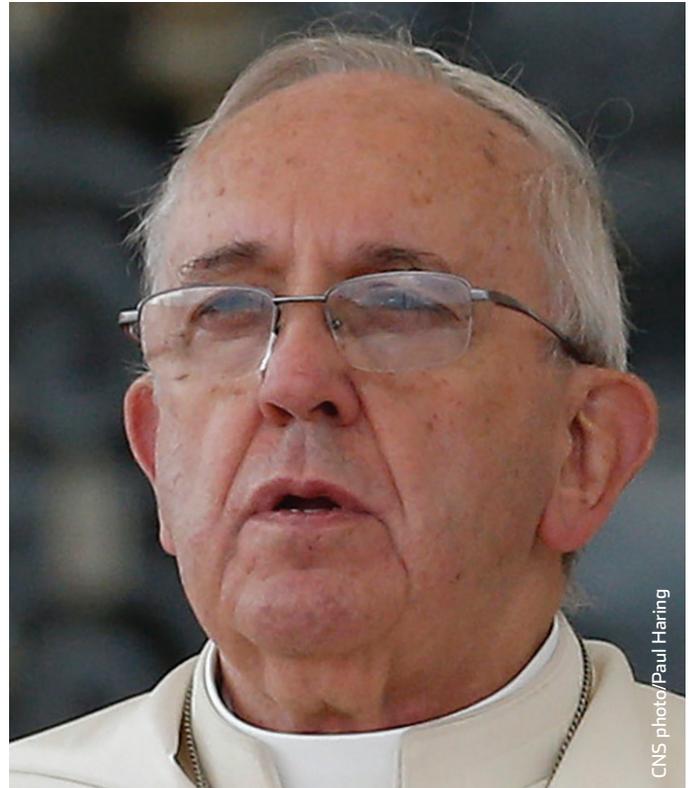
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CNS photo/Joshua Roberts, Reuters



CNS photo/Paul Haring

Steve Bannon is now at loggerheads with church officials, including Pope Francis.

*Continued from Page 30*

entity—is in a crisis because of the loss of its spiritual roots. This crisis is reflected in everything from declining birth rates among Christians to the controversial decision to omit any reference to God in the European Union’s Lisbon Treaty, the 2007 text that amended the E.U.’s constitutional structure. Since the Enlightenment, Europe has increasingly adopted a politics of technical reason, one defined against a narrative of the inherent violence of religion but also by the false promise that economic progress can secure eternal peace. This politics has become antipolitical, failing to see that the challenge of politics is the profoundly moral one of attaining peace and justice. Christianity, in its vision of the dignity and rights of humankind, can help Europe reclaim that latter vision of politics and thereby guide the world.

Pope Francis has continued that argument, warning that Europe “will wither” if it does not recover “its own identity, its own unity.” Francis particularly sees Europe’s crisis in its unwillingness to welcome strangers—in other words, to offer charity and also to assimilate new peoples as it has historically done for millennia.

Both popes see Europe’s challenge as not merely one of identity but as a crisis of faith and reason that goes to the core of human existence. Part of Benedict’s proposed solution is the “mutual purification” of faith and reason, where-

by reason can help faith realize its public nature, and, as he said in “God Is Love” (“Deus Caritas Est”), “faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore helps it to be ever more fully itself.”

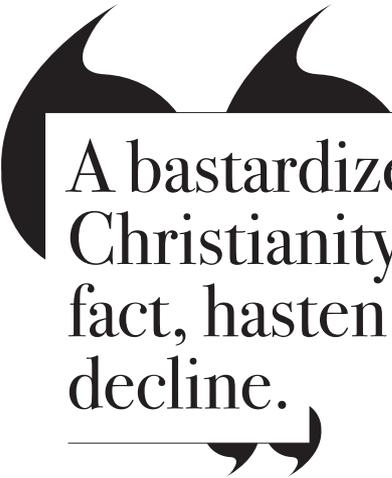
Needless to say, Benedict is calling for Europe to do a great deal more than reclaim the superficial identity of “Christian.” That is because Benedict sees Europe as more than the protector of a religious identity. It is also the protector of a way of life that cultivates the harmony of faith and reason.

Seeing Europe, or the larger West, as merely grappling with identity fails to see the profound spiritual and intellectual challenges that have been building for centuries. And without an accurate diagnosis, how will we find a cure?

### **The West Against the Rest**

Articulating intellectual challenges does not always make for good politics. It is more profitable to scapegoat enemies. Mr. Bannon and others like to see the West as a mere identity because it allows them to focus on who is *not* Western. But if *Christian* and *Western* merely mean “not Muslim,” then Mr. Bannon and his supporters have not found the true meaning of the West, much less of the Gospel.

The Dutch populist Geert Wilders has said that “our Judeo-Christian culture is far superior to the Islamic one.... I can give you a million reasons.” Many of his supporters



# A bastardized form of Christianity may, in fact, hasten Europe's decline.

were so gleeful at this statement that they missed the obvious: Mr. Wilders is celebrating “Judeo-Christian culture” rather than religion.

Can Christianity be restricted to one culture? Not according to St. Paul, who told the Galatians, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” And not according to Jesus, who proclaimed himself the bringer of good news to the captive.

Indeed, Christianity spread in its early days because it was as universal as the Roman Empire—much more so, as it turned out. But Christianity’s striking universality has been erased from Mr. Bannon’s understanding of it. It is no longer a *lumen gentium* (light of nations). Practically, this Christianity no longer feels the imperative to welcome the stranger, to serve as the good Samaritan.

It is not even clear that such a Christianity could survive. A key dynamism of Christianity has been its claim that it transcends any regime and, indeed, the world itself. What is Christianity without transcendence?

Christianity is bigger than the West. Yes, Christianity has important roots in the West that cannot be easily dismissed. But the good news of the Gospel is meant to be a light to all nations.

The great irony in Mr. Bannon’s project is that to strengthen populism, he is invoking a Christianity that is itself weakened. He speaks as though the “Judeo-Christian” religion does not need to revitalize itself but rather faces only external threats.

In remarks delivered to a 2014 conference on poverty held in the Vatican, for instance, he said, “We’re at the very beginning stages of a very brutal and bloody conflict” and that people of faith must fight “against this new barbarity that’s starting, that will completely eradicate everything that we’ve been bequeathed over the last 2,000, 2,500 years.” Mr. Bannon attacked not only “a capitalism that really looks to make people commodities and to objectify people” (which is not too far off from Pope Francis’

“throwaway culture” critiques) but also said that the “Judeo-Christian West” is under threat from both “immense secularization” and “jihadist Islamic fascism.”

Other observers say the most honest approach for the church is to look within.

Christianity has weathered the Great Schism, the Reformation, the rise of capitalism, the Enlightenment and the malaise of late modernity, but not without a few wounds. Recent popes have seen the need to nurture the heart of Christianity.

St. John Paul II famously called for a “new evangelization,” particularly within those lands that were once at the heart of Christendom. Benedict XVI called for the world to see faith as an encounter with a person. Pope Francis both teaches and exemplifies the name of God: mercy. But all three have urged Christians to see faith in Christ as transcending any particular time and place.

Mr. Bannon proposes the opposite, linking Christianity to a specific culture. But he is tying the fortunes of Christianity to a culture that has largely already rejected it. He is also setting it against other cultures, presenting Christianity to much of the world as an enemy.

In all of these ways, Mr. Bannon is moving against the current of the spiritual giants of our time, all of whom see the need for Christianity to renew its universalism.

This should give Mr. Harnwell of the D.H.I. and others pause. Does Mr. Bannon’s plan to salvage the West only hasten Christianity’s demise?

## The Polyhedron and Pentecost

The problem with fear-mongering is not just that it is wrong. It is that critics of fear-mongering often prefer to believe that there are no real problems at play. But Mr. Bannon’s populism has found a market in part because liberal democracy is indeed beset by difficulties it cannot solve. And if Mr. Bannon has no real solutions, neither does anyone else.

How are Catholics to respond to liberalism’s difficulties? Inevitably, Catholics from different political traditions will respond to this challenge in different ways.

In the United States, many politically conservative Catholics have grown weary of their subordinate status in the Republican Party. As the New York Times columnist Ross Douthat explains, many feel betrayed by the coalition supporting the Republican Party and believe that “something else is needed in American society besides just classical-liberal, limited-government commitments.” Such conservatives, including Mr. Douthat himself, want a “philosophical reconsideration of where the liberal order has



The failed candidacy of the former Italian minister Rocco Buttiglione, center, for the European Commission in 2004 sparked debate about the role of Christianity in European politics and culture.

European People's Party photo via Creative Commons

ended up” and a political movement that does more than pay “lip service to traditional values.” They also seek, however, to learn from the electoral success of Mr. Trump, and seek particularly to cultivate a virtuous nationalism free of American exceptionalism. Given the fragmented nature of U.S. conservatism, it is hard to predict where this movement will go. But Catholics will almost certainly be an important part of the conversation.

On the left, economic inequality, climate change and questions of race and sexuality have led to rifts within the party over what constitutes social justice, with many Catholic Democrats often caught in the middle. If President Trump is re-elected in 2020, then the next four years will be of crucial importance for how Catholics do and do not fit within the post-Trump Democratic party.

Whether left or right, however, all Catholics must beware of any party or ideology that sacrifices the universal mission of Christianity in the name of politics.

Everyone says this, and yet no one seems to know how to do it. In part this is because this task is at least as spiritual as it is political.

Appeals to the common good ring hollow in our time, as it is the very notion of “common” that is under dispute. Pope Francis, however, has spoken of a “reconciled diversity.” The Holy Spirit brings about communion and unity despite all the manifold differences among humans. The Spirit brings about “harmonic unity in diversity.”

This communion is a gift of the Spirit, but Christians can and need to cooperate with the Spirit. This unity takes real work, beginning with the acknowledgement of differences. That acknowledgement in turn will require both cooling heated passions and articulating differences that are often as poorly understood as they are divisive.

Ideologues will claim to offer such unity, usually by redefining who gets to be included in that unity. But this unity does not come on the cheap.

Pope Francis favors the model of a many-sided polyhedron rather than a sphere because it shows how the world can be integrated while remaining particular, how we can achieve a world where “all cultures are respected, but all are united.” This is the genius of Catholicism: holding in tension the universal and particular.

It is also an image of the common good we desperately need in our time.

By refusing to give in to the temptation to reap immediate, short-lived gains in politics, the ideological shortcuts that promise the success of some at the expense of others, and rather training our sights of the unity of all in God, we can work toward the development of all peoples.

This is easier said than done, especially as our society makes it difficult to cultivate this desire for community. Perhaps that is something parishes can embrace around the Eucharist.

Further, the resolve of Christians for unity will always be tested by polemical issues. As the affair surrounding Mr. Martel (as well as recent controversies concerning teachers in Catholic schools in civilly recognized same-sex marriages) reveals, sexuality will be a flashpoint of contention. Catholics will have to see sexuality as not merely a tool of the culture wars, but a place of genuine reconciliation. Rejecting division and cheap unity, that reconciliation will be key to presenting an image of true unity to a world that so desperately longs for wholeness and integrity.

Yes, deep divisions mar our world. But the solution to those divisions can never be to bring those divisions into the heart of the church.

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*Bill McCormick, S.J., is a visiting assistant professor at Saint Louis University in the departments of political science and philosophy. He is an editor and writer for The Jesuit Post.*

DAILY B  
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The only way to be loved by God, I once believed, was to avoid sin or do penance. I did not excel at the former, and so I thought I could make up for my imperfection by being the perfect penitent. Growing up going to Mass and Catholic school, I knew a lot about Jesus, but I didn't know who he was. The God I had been taught about was tainted by lies: My parents, teachers and priests told me I had to “earn” heaven. The God I knew was the benevolent creator of the world and a generous father—but only if his rules were kept to the letter.

Thankfully, once a month in confession I was able to clean my sin-dirty soul. My priest emphasized the importance of making sacrifices to atone for the sins of those who do not love Jesus. To win God's favor, I repented not only

for my sins but the sins of others. I imagined myself growing in Christ and in faith, but at the end of the day, all I was growing in was scrupulosity.

When I was 15, a priest told me in confession to inflict a little pain upon myself—a pinch on my arm or a twist of the ear—when I experienced temptation so that I would associate it with pain. I became obsessed with the mortification of the flesh, despising my body for being a stumbling block on the road to sanctity. I would beat myself and wore a belt made of binder twine against my bare skin. A few times, I fasted to the point of starving myself. My goal was self-obliteration, to become a nothing, a victim of God's wrath on earth so that I could earn heaven by my good works. Punishing myself for sins real and imagined, I

# READ, DAILY MEDS

## I received God's healing through the hands of a pharmacist

By Shannon DeGrave

excused my self-torture as piety. I examined my conscience daily, cross-referencing different lists of mortal and venial sins, picking anxiously over what I had done wrong that day: failing to finish a Rosary, sleeping in late, getting distracted during prayer.

Confession granted little relief because upon leaving the confessional, I would immediately berate myself for forgetting to mention a peccadillo or two. In college, my scrupulosity grew worse, as I had access to daily Mass for the first time in my life. If I overslept and missed Mass, I would criticize myself hatefully. Eventually, I avoided weekday Mass and other religious practices because they had become so painful. I attended Mass on the weekend—but only because of my fear of eternal damnation.

Early one Saturday morning, a friend made me come to confession with her at one of the parishes in town. I was not keen on going, but she dragged me like a condemned criminal into the confessional anyway. I began confessing to the priest the same sins I told God about every week—not praying well enough, thinking ill of others, feeling impatient. But internally, I was scoffing at the futility of the sacrament.

In the middle of mindlessly reciting the Act of Contrition, however, I stopped and thought about what I had just said. Before God and this priest, I said that I was sorry for my sins because I was afraid of God's "just punishments." Suddenly, I did not want to be sorry out a fear of fire and brimstone anymore. For so long I had feared God as a stern father in the sky who checked off all I had done and all I had failed to do, and it had nearly destroyed my faith.

Never before had I prayed with that wound. Awestruck, I was able to look into the face of God for the first

time without shame and without fear. I saw myself reflected in his eyes as a beloved daughter whom he designed with purpose, worthy of being known by him, good and bad, for he has deposited his beauty deep within me.

This was just the beginning of the long journey of healing ahead of me. As a teenager, I had been told by priests and teachers that I did not need a doctor, that I just needed to "have more faith" and "trust Jesus more." While both those statements are true, little did I realize that my scruples were not just a spiritual problem but evidence of undiagnosed anxiety disorder. With much prompting by both my spiritual guide and my academic advisor, I went to a psychiatrist, dragging my feet the entire way.

After months of trying different pills that did not work, we found the right prescription. It became easier to manage my scruples and choose to be peaceful. I found that God's healing is not bound by sacrament alone and can be received as a gift through the hands of a pharmacist. The confessional and the psychiatrist's office are both holy ground, and it was essential for the growth of the entirety of my person—mind, soul and body—to have both.

To this day, I write on the side of the bottle of my medication, "Daily Bread," to remind myself of the sacramentality of my meds, that they too are a visible sign that God desires my happiness and wholeness. Mental illness made me poor in spirit, and that dependency has brought me into deeper communion with God, others and myself.

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Shannon DeGrave *studies theology and English at Silver Lake College of the Holy Family in Manitowoc, Wis. This essay is the first-place winner in America's annual Generation Faith essay contest.*



# ‘An Unlikely Catholic’

A conversation with Mary Karr

Edited by Ashley McKinless

*Mary Karr is a best-selling memoirist and award-winning poet. Her memoir, *Lit*, an account of her turbulent childhood in East Texas, was recently named one of the 50 best memoirs of the past 50 years by *The New York Times*. On the talk show “Faith in Focus with Fr. James Martin, S.J.,” produced by America Media, Ms. Karr spoke with Father Martin about her turn from agnosticism to the Catholic Church and how Ignatian spirituality has changed her life. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

***You have described yourself as an unlikely Catholic. How does your faith influence your writing or your practice?***

I grew up in an agnostic household, which in the '50s and '60s was weird, especially in the Bible Belt—in Texas. So I was an agnostic my whole life. Then my son got me to go to church when he was little. He said he wanted to go. I said, “Why do you want to go to church?”—sort of cynically. And he said, “To see if God is there.” And, I mean, what other reason is there to go to church? I thought, “Well, you know, I didn’t like [taking him to] soccer either.”

So we did this thing—we called it God-O-Rama—and we went to all these different churches that our friends went to. We went to a zendo, a Jewish midrasha and Southern Baptist churches. And I met this really amazing priest, Father Joseph Cain. I realize now how almost no one else could have converted me. He was exactly what I was not interested in. I remember when I did the Ignatian [Spiritual] Exercises asking him, “Did you ever do those?” He said, “Oh, I can never read all those books.” But he was incredibly humble. He lived his life as though whoever came in front of him was sent by Jesus.

***What is your prayer life like?***

I pray every morning. I do probably 10 or 15 minutes of centering prayer and then maybe 10 minutes of *lectio divina*. Centering prayer can be any dumb thing to quiet

your mind. So I started out counting my breaths, you know, one to 10, over and over. Lately, I have been doing the Jesus prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me, a sinner,” as a kind of mantra. The idea is just to get myself quiet. And then I read the liturgy for the day, and I try to just see if anything about it speaks specifically to me or to my life.

At night and sometimes in the morning, I do something called the Examen, where I go over my day, kind of like you are pressing play on a video recorder. I try to not just make a list of places I saw God but to really re-live that day through imagination. Like, “I was really thirsty when I first woke up, and, wow, that first cup of coffee was really good.”

And then there are those moments; sometimes they are very strange. There was a moment I walked out of my house and there was a man screaming on the street, a big guy screaming at the sky: “Murder or suicide, murder or suicide.” Everybody was walking around him. I started to walk around him, and then I just thought, “This man is my brother, and he is suffering.” I just said: “Excuse me, isn’t there another door? Isn’t there a third option other than murder or suicide?” And he cocked his head at the sky and kind of seemed to be thinking. That was a moment that I might have just forgotten. But in my reflection, I remembered being a little afraid of him and tried to be in that place and think that the call to speak to him really was a



call from God or the Holy Spirit guiding me to try to connect with somebody who might have been in pain.

***So the Examen for you, as it is for a lot of people, is a prayer of noticing, noticing where God is. Is that right?***

It is. But it has also made me change the way I live. I make my living not as a writer but as a professor. I teach, and like everybody who teaches, I spend a lot of time complaining. It was just a habit. Like you would put up office hours and they would fill, and then you would have to add more hours to meet everybody. And there are very important things that I am thinking I have to do, you know—like get my mascara on and get my nails done.

So I would complain about those students. But from doing the Examen, I noticed every single time somebody came into my office to show me their poems or their memoir, their novel or just to talk about their lives, God was always there. I just noticed in that savoring—even students who did not particularly like me or who were angry at me and would come in and complain about something I was doing in class, even when it was awkward—I noticed God was always there with me.

So I doubled the number of office hours I do, and I started having dinner with whoever came in in the afternoon and made that a thing where I would have extra time with them. So it really has changed me.

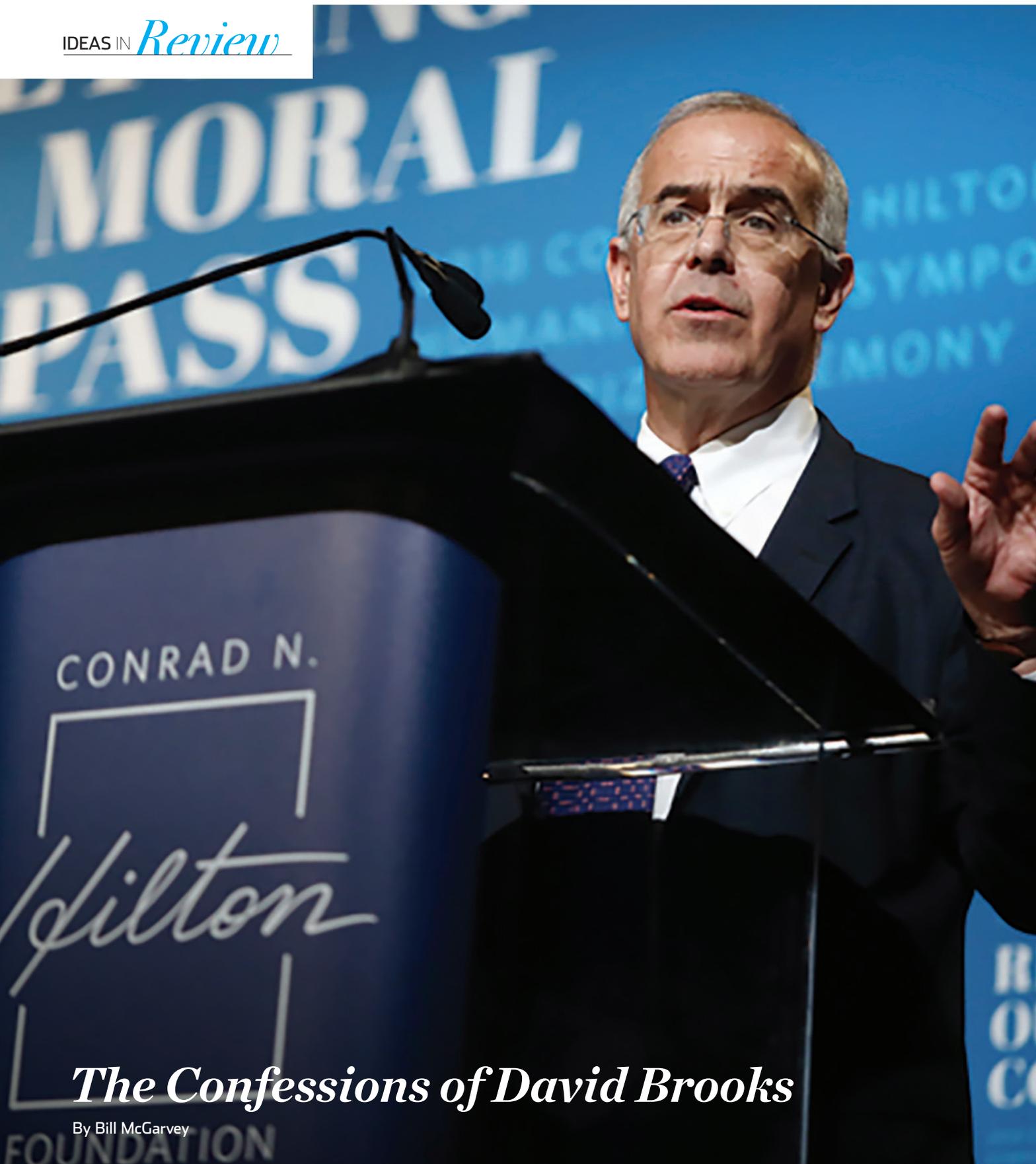
***Where is Jesus in all this? Who is Jesus for you?***

I just re-did the Spiritual Exercises in 2017, and one of the ways you do them is you imagine yourself in these Bible scenes. And I had these very rich meditations on Mary, who I had never had much feeling for, and on Jesus as a boy. When I had done the Exercises before, Jesus didn't have any pores; he was very airbrushed. But this time I saw him and that idea of being born a human—having all the power that there is and having this luminous mystery of creation at your fingertips and deciding to put on a meat mask and to go take a whipping from a bunch of Romans. It is going to be a short line of people who are going sign up for that duty. So I guess for me the risen Christ as well as Jesus as a human being are both very central in my meditation on the Scriptures.

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Ashley McKinless is an associate editor of *America*.

 **Watch *America's* full interview at [americamag.org/faithshow](http://americamag.org/faithshow).**



## *The Confessions of David Brooks*

By Bill McGarvey

Once a self-described atheist, David Brooks has recently found himself drawn to the lives and writings of St. Augustine and Dorothy Day.

David Brooks quietly walks into a small, glass-enclosed conference room at the Aspen Institute offices in Washington, D.C., right on time and tastefully dressed in a conservative suit and tie. The veteran New York Times columnist looks as if he could have just walked off the set of one of the numerous news shows on which he has become a fixture over the past 20 years. He is soft-spoken and—in a surprising inversion of “the camera adds ten pounds” cliché—not as tall as one might have expected.

His calm demeanor and well-turned-out appearance belie the fact that Brooks, 57, is a man who has been experiencing enormous upheaval in his life over the past few years. In 2013 he separated from his wife of 27 years, with whom he has three grown children. In the wake of the breakup, he was alone and adrift. Despite being raised in a secular Jewish family and having been a self-described atheist, he found himself drawn to the lives and writings of St. Augustine and Dorothy Day. He began exploring Christianity in earnest, reading more deeply and visiting various churches near his home.

In 2017 he married Anne Snyder, a writer and former researcher for Brooks’s 2015 bestseller *The Road to Character*, who is 23 years his junior and a committed Christian. It was a move that set a few tongues wagging inside the Beltway punditocracy.

“Having failed at a commitment,” he writes regarding his divorce and the aftermath in his latest book, *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life*, “I’ve spent

the ensuing five years thinking and reading about how to do commitments well, how to give your life meaning after worldly success has failed to fulfill. This book is a product of that search.”

Anyone who follows his twice-weekly columns or reads his books knows that Brooks has been circling the topics of virtue and what constitutes a life of meaning for years. This focus has led to much speculation; Google the question “What religion is David Brooks?” and you will discover that the subject has become a bit of a parlor game. Meeting him in person, the first question feels unavoidable: “What is it like going through the most public conversion process in recent memory?”

“It’s been pretty much fine,” Brooks says after a brief laugh. “My Jewish friends have been mostly fine and charming and given me a long leash. The Christian world has been welcoming.”

More problematic has been what he believes is the secular news media’s tin ear on issues of faith. “They treat it like you have changed from being a Republican to a Democrat,” he says. “As if it’s that kind of choice. ‘I used to like french fries; now I like sweet potatoes.’ You feel like there’s something that’s sacred and mysterious that is being handled with boxing gloves.”

Brooks is no stranger to rough treatment. His Twitter feed brims with vitriolic comments from trolls taunting him about his divorce and remarriage. Among Times readers he is like a Rorschach test. Ask a random sampling of them and you

are bound to hear everything from genuine interest, affection and puzzlement regarding where he stands (“Is he still a conservative?”) to deep frustration and anger at his changing perspectives and moralizing.

### Morality in the Public Square

Brooks is fine with being tagged as a moralizer. “I’m very happy to spark that reaction,” he says, “because I do think the public square has been denuded of moral conversation, and yet it’s completely hungry for it.” But what exactly does this integration of a budding Christian faith—particularly one heavily influenced by the life of Dorothy Day—look like in the public square? How do his beliefs regarding the roles of business, government, market economics and more square with a Gospel message that emphasizes a radical identification with the poor, the sick and the hungry?

There is no short answer to that question. It’s complicated. It is no accident that Brooks’s last two books have been constructed around the notion of journeying. With Brooks, it is better to speak in terms of provisional findings than final conclusions.

In Brooks’s reckoning, the “second mountain” he writes about is the one people begin climbing once the goals of the first mountain—the goals of success, personal fulfillment and happiness—have been met and found wanting. “If the first mountain is about building up the ego and defining the self,” he writes, “the second mountain is about shedding the ego and losing the self.”

# Being the dutiful student that he is, Brooks initially attacked the question of faith as if it were a syllabus for a challenging new course. ●●

It is similar to the distinction he made between the “résumé virtues” and the “eulogy virtues” in *The Road to Character*, but the years since he wrote that book have been the most turbulent of his life, and his own understanding has changed. “I no longer believe that character formation is mostly an individual task,” he writes. “I now think good character is a byproduct of giving yourself away. You love things that are worthy of love. You surrender to a community or cause, make promises to other people, build a thick jungle of loving attachments, lose yourself in the daily act of serving others.”

Those thick, loving attachments and values are at the core of Weave: The Social Fabric Project, an initiative Brooks has directed for the Aspen Institute since 2018. The project highlights people and organizations across the United States who are working on the local level to relieve the social fragmentation, loneliness, division and distrust so prevalent in our society and replace them with relationship, community and purpose.

Weave reflects a communitarian instinct that has long been part of Brooks’s worldview. “David is the last living, surviving American Whig,” says E. J. Dionne Jr., a Washington Post columnist and Brooks’s frequent debate partner on NPR. In the mid-19th century, the Whig Party—typified by Henry Clay and Abraham Lincoln—advocated for “old national greatness conservatism...internal im-

provements, use the government to build the country and its competitive capacity. But there was also a very strong moral and religious strain to the Whigs,” he says. “Even in David’s most conservative period, he was always drawn to the communitarian strains of conservatism.”

## Mining the Second Mountain

Brooks freely admits that it is his own story that he is mining in *The Second Mountain*. Conquering his first mountain turned him into someone who was “aloof, invulnerable, and uncommunicative—at least when it came to my private life.” He calls himself out as being guilty of evasion, workaholic and conflict avoidance and as lacking in empathy. “This pattern—not being present to what I love because I prioritize time over people, productivity over relationship—is a recurring motif in my life.”

“Life has to tender you up before you can be touched. So when bad things happened to me in 2013, I moved out of the typical neocon camp, which is ‘I really approve of religion for other people. I think it’s good for them and good for society, sort of like eating vitamin D or something,’” he says. “But I never thought I would actually be implicated. And then I think somehow you just get implicated.” For readers, Brooks’s getting implicated can feel like a voyeuristic window into an intelligent mind at work on the ultimate mystery.

Being the dutiful student that he is, Brooks initially attacked the question of faith as if it were a syllabus for a challenging new course. He thought that he could just come to belief by doing the homework and reading the right books. He came into the Christian world through reading Dorothy Day and St. Augustine but found the Christian concept of grace a stumbling block. “[Day and Augustine] don’t place as much emphasis on agency, and I had real trouble understanding surrender and grace,” he says. “And at first I thought, ‘O.K., it means take your hands off the wheel and just lay back and let God take over.’” The more deeply he read, the more he realized how foreign the notion of grace was to him—and yet he was fascinated and captivated by it.

During his religious exploration, Brooks was taken by the unabashed faith he encountered in Christianity and how it contrasted with what he experienced at conservative synagogues on the high holy days during his childhood. Referring to different traditions in Judaism, he comments, “you see faith. In the conservative tradition, you see peoplehood,” he says. “The rabbis probably have faith, and some people in the congregation have faith. It’s just not the main subject. And I think that is, frankly, a weakness that there’s not more God-talk.”

He also encountered some serious impediments. “I found that Christians, especially of the Protestant evangelical



Anna Stonehouse/The Aspen Times via AP

David Brooks on a panel at the Aspen Ideas Festival in June 2018.

variety, are plagued by the sensation that they are not quite as intellectually rigorous or as cool as the secular world,” he writes. “At the same time, many of them are inflated by the notion that they are a quantum leap or two more moral.” Brooks believes the critique offered in Mark Noll’s 2010 book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*—“The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind”—is essentially still true.

“When you have any spiritual wandering, if people think of you as a thoughtful person, they all say, ‘Oh, you’ll wind up Catholic someday.’ Just because they think you’re going to want the spiritual...the hardcore stuff.” Brooks and his wife attend a Christian church in the D.C. area, but he says it is no secret that his wife has always been drawn to a certain “Catholic air.” “I don’t know,” he says, reflecting on what all that means, “there is something different. I’m too new to this world to really put my hand on it.”

### Power to Shock

Brooks considers St. Augustine the most brilliant mind he has ever encountered. “His capacity to understand human psychology 1,600 years ago is equal to our own,” he says. But he also recognizes himself in the broad strokes of Augustine’s own life story: the Ivy League student who found his success empty and unsatisfying. “[Augustine] was a classic achievement-aholic who went for the things that clever people go for—which is closed intellectual systems like Manichaeism. And then he sort of let his soul take him on the journey it took him.”

The pilgrim journey on which Brooks’s own soul has taken him reveals a fascinating contrast. On the surface, it can seem as though this very buttoned-down personality is having a life-changing conversion experience while still fully clothed. The inclusion of numerous lists—“Stages of Intimacy,” “Stages of Community Building” and more—throughout *The Second Mountain* only heighten that sense.

But in conversation with Brooks, it is hard to ignore that something deeper is going on. As much as he might be seduced by a beautiful mind like Augustine’s, he has come across great minds before. In the lives of St. Augustine and Dorothy Day, it is their acute emotional openness and insight combined with intelligence that is so compelling. It is an awakening for which his rational mind does not yet have words.

“I think for people like me, [Day’s] kind of goodness has the power to shock,” he says. “Just because, as she said, ‘You should live in a way that wouldn’t make sense unless God exists.’ She really did live that way.”

So how has that shocking goodness affected his voice in the public square? “I think I’m more aware of how capitalism, unbalanced, just rationalizes selfishness.... And it also justifies a sort of amorality. It turns off the moral lens,” says Brooks. “It hasn’t made me anti-capitalist, but it’s made me see the ways that capitalism—and specifically the meritocracy—have on balance cre-

ated a very shallow view of life.”

Though he concedes there are people better able to debate the issue, he perceives the relationship between Catholicism and capitalism “as rival mind-sets that balance out each other in a productive way. It’s a tension that never gets squared.”

It will be interesting to see how the body of Catholic social thought and the life of Dorothy Day—that has inspired so much of his wife’s work—will influence his own thinking moving forward. Day’s faith life was deeply devotional and conventional; her political, social and economic critiques are not so easily domesticated.

### Pilgrim’s Progress

Thinking, writing and living in tension has become Brooks’s stock in trade. He grew up a secular Jew who attended an Episcopal elementary school and summer camp, both of which hadalloy positive impacts on him. He is a self-described “border stalker,” who has always lived on the line between worlds. No doubt this is one reason he frustrates so many readers. What some of us experience as cognitive dissonance is simply a fact of life in the world in which he grew up.

Having been on a pilgrimage of his own over the past seven years, Brooks has studied the pilgrim narratives of others, deeply human stories of profound vulnerability and gradual transformation. If the stories in this genre have a general sense of coherence and direction to them, it is because they are written retrospectively, after a fuller understanding of the change has come. Brooks has not granted himself that luxury; he is writing in real time. Perhaps the problem is ours, then. Has our desperate need for fixed coordinates in a complex world made the notion of pilgrimage so foreign that we are frus-

trated and intolerant of it in others?

For his part, Brooks reports he is reading more Jewish authors than ever. He has a particular fascination with the Book of Exodus. “Frankly, I feel the blood of 3,000 years of my ancestors more strongly, and I feel protective of it,” he says. “Maybe because I’m wracked by guilt by somewhat leaving it. So I feel more Jewish than ever before. I prize Judaism more than before.”

He is also fascinated by the idea of looking at the roots of Judaism and Christianity and how the two faiths have become different by 2,000 years of cultural history in which each group defined itself against the other. He believes that if you go back to the actual Jesus, the traditions were a lot closer than they seem today.

Wherever Brooks’s pilgrimage is taking him, the journey will almost certainly include open expressions of doubt and unknowingness. “The way I experience faith is not a block of concrete,” he writes in *Second Mountain*. “Faith is change. Faith is here one moment, gone the next, a stream that evaporates. At least for me.” Brooks comes to faith from a journey that is intensely personal and connected to his own unique makeup and personality. If we are honest, that is also the story of everyone who comes to faith as a mature adult.

“I connect more with a smaller group of people who struggle with faith, who wrestle with all the ridiculous unlikelihood of faith,” he says. “I experienced grace before I experienced God, and sometimes I still have trouble getting back to the source.”

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Bill McGarvey, a musician and writer, is the author of *The Freshman Survival Guide* and owner of *McG-Media.com*.



William F. Buckley in 2004  
AP Photo/Frank Franklin II

### The Influence of William F. Buckley

“I was very much introduced to the Catholic world through Buckley,” David Brooks says about William F. Buckley, the founder of *National Review* and one of the leading intellectuals of the conservative movement in the United States beginning in the mid-1950s. He recalls being in *National Review*’s conference room for drinks after closing the first issue he had worked on, when 15 priests—friends of Buckley—walked in and joined them. Brooks thought to himself, “I’m in the Vatican here.”

“When I grew up in New York, I grew up with a lot of Catholics,” he says. “But that usually meant rooting for Notre Dame.” Being around Buckley, who was “just a straight-up believer” who integrated faith into his life, was a new experience for Brooks.

Brooks describes his former boss as a pugilist at a time when religious leaders and issues of faith were more prevalent in the public square. “He was not civil for most of his career,” he says. “If you go back to his early debates, they’re savage. And even with some of the communist stuff, he wasn’t great on Joe McCarthy a lot of the time. He wasn’t great

on civil rights.”

Brooks clearly respects and is grateful to Buckley for the opportunity he gave him early on, but he struggles to reconcile the pugilist with a belief system that preaches gentleness and grace. “I really hadn’t thought about how you mix the pugilism that he could do with the belief and gentleness and grace and the Lamb of God,” he says. “I don’t have words to describe that combination. It was a time, of course, when there was just so much religious thinking in the public square—Fulton Sheen, [Abraham] Heschel and [Martin] Buber. People were more comfortable with you bringing faith into the public square than they would be today.”

It certainly was not the only contradiction he experienced. He recalls that one of Buckley’s biographers unearthed a story that Brooks was being considered for the editorship of *National Review* until Buckley nixed the idea because he was Jewish.

Brooks says he is “not sure it’s true, but it wouldn’t offend me if it was true.” When pressed on why it would not offend him, he says: “It should intellectually. But my affection for Buckley is so high, and he was so good to me, I can’t really hold it against him. And I wouldn’t want to do the job anyway.”

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Bill McGarvey

## Late in October

By Terry Savoie

Into their once full garden that’s now  
close to barren, two ancient nuns shuffle  
along looking for a few late autumn blossoms  
to paint their lives. Covered in grey habits  
& (winter) coats, they’re two of nine  
lastlings living out their remaining days  
in a convent that once housed dozens.  
Wielding a pair of garden shears,  
one glances my way & challenges

the blast of morning sun shining  
directly in her eyes as I pass by on  
the sidewalk outside their gated house  
while the second, stooped over low, carries  
along as best she’s able, summoning up all her  
fortitude beneath her burden of a dowager’s hump.  
These two venerable servants of God are the only ones  
plucky enough to venture out in the cold morning air  
searching for whatever might still remain of the bed

of dusky zinnias & marigolds, a meager blessing,  
perhaps memorable, of the Master Gardener’s  
mission. I nod a greeting & gently smile  
back, not chancing a sound to mar  
the morning silence they take  
so seriously. A short row of dried-out  
sunflower heads crowning at the convent’s  
entrance rattle, shaking off the garden’s near  
silence & seemingly praying for some attention.

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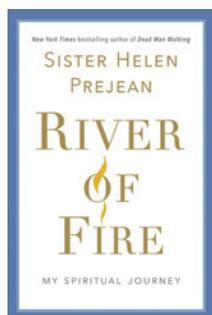
*Terry Savoie is a retired teacher living in Iowa. He has published nearly 400 poems in the United States and abroad in the past 40 years in the pages of Poetry, Commonweal, American Poetry Review and elsewhere.*



## The story of a passionate soul

By Colleen Dulle

Alamy



### River of Fire

by Helen Prejean  
Random House,  
320p \$27

Helen Prejean, C.S.J., is best known for her work against the death penalty, but her new memoir, *River of Fire*, tells the story of the woman she was before she ever set foot on death row. The book leaves off, literally, where her famous memoir *Dead Man Walking* begins. The last sentence of *River of Fire* is the opening line of *Dead Man Walking*: “When Chava Colon from the Prison Coalition asks me one January day in 1982 to become a pen pal to a death-row inmate, I say, Sure.”

That pen pal was Patrick Sonnier, whose correspondence with Sister Prejean would lead to her accompanying him to the execution chamber at the

Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, the nation’s largest maximum-security prison. Mr. Sonnier was put to death in the electric chair with Sister Prejean looking on. Sr. Prejean vomited, and then resolved to spend her life fighting state-sanctioned executions.

The magnitude of this resolution might surprise even longtime followers of the activist sister. It seems almost impossible to imagine Sister Prejean as anything but the fiery, outspoken woman who has spent decades addressing structural inequality with barbed statements like, “Capital punishment means those without the capital get the punishment.” But in *River of Fire*, Sister Prejean explains that it was a long road from her parents’ Louisiana estate, Goodwood, where the family employed black household servants, to St. Thomas Housing Projects in New Orleans and the death chambers of Angola.

Sister Prejean describes her childhood at Goodwood, near Baton Rouge, with humor and fondness while lovingly chiding her past self for

her ignorance, particularly of racial injustices. Storytelling is the Louisiana vernacular, and it comes naturally to Sister Prejean. She details her mother’s piety by explaining how when her brother was sick, her mother drew crosses on his skin with holy water. She details her own internalized racism by recounting how she bristled when her classmates called her “blackie,” or when they used the most offensive racial slur when she returned from summer break with a tan.

Soon, though, young Helen leaves Goodwood behind to become Sister Louis Augustine, a headstrong novice trying (and often failing) to fit into her 1950s-style novitiate with its silent meals, early morning prayers, ill-fitting habits and ban on “particular friendships.” It is in this nearly silent world that Sister Prejean’s sassy and self-deprecating internal monologue shines. After complaining about a novice who sits behind her in chapel and annoys her by sighing and clicking her fingernails together, she says:

At our weekly conference, our novice mistress, Mother Noemi, talks to us about putting up with one another's faults and foibles. Now, there's a new nun word, *foible*, part of a whole new lexicon I'm learning...a quaint little word if there ever was one. I've seen it written but never heard it used by real people in real conversations. Well, ol' Click may well be the Foible Queen of the World. As far as I know, I don't have too many foibles, but you can never be sure.

After a sigh of relief when her novitiate is over, Sister Prejean goes onto teach English and then work at a parish, both in ritzy, white neighborhoods in 1960s New Orleans. It is during the time of the Second Vatican Council, and Sister Prejean describes the thrill and tumult of its effects both in her parish and in her religious order. She is sent to study theology for the first time, where she falls in love with an intelligent young priest. She describes their seven-year affair with candor, explaining how they unsuccessfully tried to live a "third way" between religious and married life. (The two ultimately recommitted themselves to their religious vows.)

Following Vatican II, the Sisters of St. Joseph, like many other orders of women religious, began to wrestle with what kind of institute they wanted to be: Sister Prejean boils it down to "spiritual" versus "social justice"—and says she gave impassioned speeches in favor of the spiritual:

I'm up at the microphone at our meetings arguing that

we're nuns, first of all, not social workers, and our main job, our only real mission is to help people find God, and if people have God in their hearts, they'll be able to conquer whatever oppresses them. *What do you mean, "poor" people?*

It is not until almost the end of the book that Sister Prejean describes her awakening. At a gathering of her religious order in 1980, one of the "social justice" sisters says, "Jesus preached good news to the poor.... Integral to that good news is that the poor are to be poor no longer." She describes the statement as striking her like lightning, causing her to realize at once that in the four decades of her life, she had never known a single poor person, nor had she known any black person as an equal. She began to realize that her conception of herself as an apolitical person had been wrong, because supporting the status quo is an inherently political position.

For a full year after her lightning-strike realization, Sister Prejean struggles to put her newfound call to social justice into action. She writes with honesty about hatching lofty plans and failing to implement them until a member of her community delivers a stinging critique: "Barbara Miller stood up and challenged me to live and work among poor people myself before I try to inspire young people to work for justice. How can I teach them what I don't live?"

In the last chapter of *River of Fire*, Sr. Prejean packs her bags and moves into the city to work at Hope House, a ministry in the St. Thomas Housing Projects, where, she says, she finally

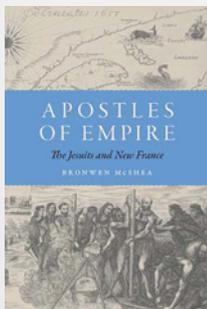
learns to listen. In working with the people there, she sees firsthand and begins to understand generational poverty and racial bias in the criminal justice system.

Sister Prejean clearly sees *River of Fire* as her last book. She writes in the afterword that she is now 80 years old: "Mama and Daddy both died at age eighty-one, so I know my death can't be far away." And lest the reader assume that Sister Prejean's work against the death penalty—the legacy that most will have in mind when reading *River of Fire*—is the sum total of her story, she spends the final pages of her afterword calling out the places where she sees continued injustices, particularly in the treatment of women and L.G.B.T. people in the church. She includes as an appendix a letter she wrote to Pope Francis calling "for the Catholic Church to fully respect the dignity of women," in which she describes her dismay at being excluded from "certain opportunities of service" in the church, like preaching a homily and proclaiming the Gospel.

Although Sister Prejean can count among her victories Pope Francis' change to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in 2018 outlawing the death penalty, support for the practice is ramping up again in the United States. Just last month, U.S. Attorney General William Barr directed the Bureau of Prisons to resume federal executions in the United States after nearly two decades. Sister Prejean was fighting capital punishment back then, and she is ready to continue doing so now.

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**Apostles of Empire**  
The Jesuits and New France  
By Bronwen McShea  
University of Nebraska Press  
378p \$60

### The lost world

To illustrate the force of Bronwen McShea's fascinating treatment of the Jesuit missions in New France, one might begin with Francis Parkman—scion of a Unitarian dynasty, Harvard horticulturist and insufferably condescending historian of French and English conflict in North America. Speaking of Sébastien Rale, S.J., the Jesuit missionary and lexicographer who labored to convert the Abenaki and died in battle with the English, Parkman writes: “In considering the ascription of martyrdom, it is to be remembered that [Rale] did not die because he was an apostle of the faith, but because he was an active agent of the...government” (i.e., of New France).

McShea demonstrates beyond cavil that this sort of distinction stumbles into, or imposes, a grievous anachronism about the Jesuit “apostles of empire,” for whom faith and polity were two inseparable aspects.

Alas, McShea does not target Parkman in this connection, but she cites a plethora of other interpreters of the Jesuit missions who offer the same unthinking disjunction between otherworldly “spirituality” and embodied polity. Her great theme, which she expounds at length but with such a generosity of fasci-

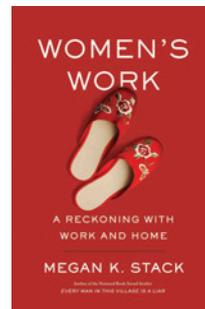
nating detail that the journey is well worth the effort, is that distinctions of this sort embody a category mistake. What emerges unforgettably from the book is what McShea refers to as “the almost shocking consistency” of the Jesuit missionaries.

In our world, commitments are almost always fractured, compartmentalized and truncated—politics here, faith there, social welfare and social justice elsewhere, learning somewhere else. McShea gives us the shock of the unfamiliar, bringing to life a company of men for whom all these spheres, without becoming simply identical, were seamlessly integrated into a complementary but unified total mission. (Men, and certainly also women. Striking cameos are presented in the book of female converts among the Native Americans, many of whom took a line toward the English, hostile Iroquois and other enemies of the Jesuits that was distinctly more reminiscent of Jeanne d'Arc than of the Algonquin/Mohawk saint Kateri Tekakwitha, as McShea quips and explains in vivid detail that is not for the squeamish.)

One comes away from the book with a sense of a lost world recovered and portrayed in loving detail. McShea has done for early modern North America and New France what Andrew Willard Jones's *Before Church and State* did for the France of the 13th century. The result is a triumph of the historian's art.

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**Women's Work**  
A Reckoning With Work and Home  
By Megan K. Stack  
Doubleday  
352p \$27.95

### The post-baby battleground

Before having children, Megan K. Stack worked as a war correspondent for The Los Angeles Times, a career that proves to be useful preparation for navigating the post-baby battleground. Her husband's own journalistic work lands her family in China and India, where household help is cheap, and Stack quits her job to work on a book and manage the household.

But even with a nanny and housekeeper in place, Stack struggles to carve out time for her career. Hiring help means her home becomes both a “job site” and a kind of war zone, as the women of the house navigate misunderstandings and cultural differences, as well as violence, injuries and hurts that change the course of lives and friendships.

In *Women's Work: A Reckoning With Work and Home*, Stack offers a brutally honest look at her own efforts to navigate the strange dance between her and her employees, who must perform the functions of a family without truly being part of it. Through vivid prose and tight narratives, she actively and effectively dispels the notion that stereotypical “women's work” should be categorized as a “soft” subject.

*Women's Work* illuminates the shared obstacles that face both

mothers who hope to thrive at work and at home and those who are simply trying to survive. But Stack does not shy away from describing how the stakes differ for each. Hiring household help meant that Stack's sons gained loving caretakers and an international upbringing. But the children of Xiao Li, Mary and Pooja, the women who serve Stack's household, "got money but grew up without their mothers," Stack writes.

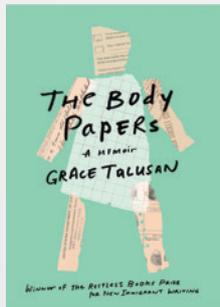
Stack's Catholic upbringing influences her understanding of justice, guilt and rituals throughout, and her journalistic background pushes her to ask more and more questions of Xiao Li, Mary and Pooja. The third section of the book focuses on their stories, and the resulting narrative honors the complexity of their experience as women, workers and mothers. But while all three consent to be written about, only Pooja seems to embrace it.

Stack is self-aware and recognizes the fact that even being able to ask questions about work-life balance makes her a part of a privileged class. She concludes with a call for men to do more at home. It is a necessary one. But this tidy answer cannot fully address the central tension of Stack's narrative, which has no easy solution. The ability to find balance in the midst of her own struggles relies entirely on the work of women who are struggling even more.

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 Full book reviews at  
[americamagazine.org/books](http://americamagazine.org/books)



### The Body Papers

By Grace Talusan  
Restless Books  
272p. \$22.99

#### Hiding and hiding

Americans are increasingly familiar with stories of unauthorized border crossings, but what about those who enter the United States legally—and stay longer than permitted? Grace Talusan's new memoir, *The Body Papers*, explores this underrepresented immigrant story. In the Filipino diaspora, these immigrants are called T.N.T.s, short for *tago ng tago*, or "hiding and hiding." T.N.T.s have visas and they simply remain when those visas expire. Most undocumented immigrants here fall into this category.

Talusan and her family relocated to New England with every intention of returning home, but they found success and freedom here. Talusan's father became a successful ophthalmologist and her mother found employment at the same hospital. By the time the work visa expired, the Talusan children included immigrants and native-born citizens.

An immigrant is, of course, more than her legal status. Talusan discusses much more, particularly her own body. In youth, she pleaded with God to give her blonde hair and blue eyes. When her fourth-grade teacher teaches the class about the "uncivilized" Tasaday tribe in the Philippines, Talusan shrinks away from her classmates' stares and ridicule.

In adulthood, Talusan struggles with breast cancer and motherhood. When she returned to the Philippines as an adult, she felt she could finally blend in, only to realize that her American voice immediately gives her away.

Woven throughout Talusan's memoir is the trauma of nightly abuse by her grandfather. Believing the abuse was her fault, the author sought to disassociate from her own body. But her body revolted, regularly breaking out into hives. This corporeal outcry—an "archipelago of inflamed skin," as Talusan puts it—desperately called for acknowledgement from the adults in the author's life, but they could not fathom such a horror.

This abuse can complicate the stereotype that Filipinos are all blindly faithful Catholics. Talusan offers nuanced insights into one Filipina woman's real struggles with faith. Belonging to the Body of Christ consoled her for a long time. "Without my faith," Talusan writes, "I don't think I could have kept going." The 2002 sexual abuse scandal, however, fractured her relationship with the church.

When she periodically returns to Mass, Talusan reflects: "I wonder how many of these children we will fail."

In a brilliant and concise way, *The Body Papers* holds a lifetime of insights for readers who may not know about this side of the undocumented immigrants' struggle.

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## The theology of noir

By Tara Isabella Burton

Like many noirs, “Veronica Mars” navigates the line between exploring moral nuance and capitulating to nihilism.

“I’m never getting married.”

So opens the first episode of the first season of “Veronica Mars,” the Southern California-set teenager neo-noir that premiered on UPN in 2004. The titular Mars (Kirsten Bell), a scrappy blonde high school junior and after-school private investigator from Neptune, Calif.—a fictional bastion of class inequality—has just been doing what she does best: taking photographs of an illicit extramarital affair at a seedy motel. It is part of the work she needs to do for her father’s

P.I. firm, Mars Investigations, to keep food on the table for both of them.

In the space of a single year, Veronica—once the best friend of Neptune’s wealthy golden girl (the daughter of the town sheriff) and the girlfriend of her best friend’s brother—has lost her social place and her sense of self. Her friend, Lily Kane, has been murdered. Veronica’s father, who publicly bungled the investigation, has become a pariah. Her mother has abandoned them both. Her ex-boyfriend, Duncan, refuses to speak to her. Veronica

has been roofied and raped at a party during a final attempt to win back her former friends. Veronica finally sees Neptune as it truly is: a place where the rich get richer, the poor get poorer, and the wicked prosper. And people betray the people they trust.

Over the show’s stellar first season, Veronica solves the twin mysteries of Kane’s murder and her own rape, along with plenty of other Neptune conspiracies: in both episode-long one-offs and full-season arcs. Veronica’s learned, hardened precociousness and the iron-

ically color-saturated noir atmosphere of the show is less literally horrifying than it is darkly comic. After all, we are not meant to take Veronica's damage literally.

If "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" was famously a riff on the idea that "high school is hell"—each thematic monster a chance to explore a different side of what it means to come of age—then "Veronica Mars" told us that growing up was Roman Polanski's film "Chinatown": a process of learning that the world is not quite as rose-tinted as a 15-year-old expects it to be. Sure, the first incarnation of "Veronica Mars" was a noir, but it was also a coming-of-age story. Candy-colored visuals aside, it taught Veronica and the show's audience how to think in shades of gray.

But in the rebooted fourth season of "Veronica Mars," which premiered on Hulu in July and depicts Veronica back in Neptune as an adult, high school noir gives way to, well, noir. Veronica is no longer a scrappy teenager, fighting for moral certainty in a world and system that has failed her; she is now both a product and a perpetrator of that system. She is back in Neptune, having given up a promising law career to work for her now-disabled father. That storyline, told in a fan-funded and perfunctory 2014 movie, framed Veronica's decision as one made by a self-sacrificing pursuer of justice. But in the reboot, it is just another example of Veronica being unable to move on.

In the season premiere, she cavalierly refuses the proposal of her long-

time, on-again-off-again love (and one-time *homme fatale*), Logan Echolls (Lily Kane's ex-boyfriend and, spoiler alert, the son of her killer), with those same words: "I'm never getting married." She can achieve sexual satisfaction only by stoking Logan's darkest impulses, constantly reminding him of the decade of trauma the two have shared. Logan attempts at psychic self-improvement—he has joined the military and is in therapy—infuriate her. For Veronica, Logan has gotten boring.

It is a searing indictment both of Veronica and of what we, as viewers, think we want from the noir genre. Having a happy Veronica ride off into the sunset with Logan (as the admittedly mediocre movie suggested would happen) would be a betrayal of everything we know about the character. But the show's creator, Rob Thomas, uses reboot to remind us of the very human cost of keeping our Veronica, well, *our* Veronica. She has become a terrible person: suspicious, callous, incapable of trust. She plants bugs on her friends. She takes drugs. The mysteries she solves (this season involves a bomber sabotaging Neptune's vital spring break industry) are not indicators of the complexity of navigating adulthood but rather thematic expressions of resignation: This is how the world is. It sucks. People suck. Get used to it. Without the hopefulness of its coming-of-age component, "Veronica Mars" is not so much transgressive as just plain sad.

Like many noirs, "Veronica Mars" explores the line between shades of moral nuance and capitulating to the inevitability of nihilism. It at once revels in—and makes the viewer complicit in reveling in—how terrible the world is, how terrible the world has been to Veronica, how terrible Veronica has become. It gives us what we want—a

chance to wallow in the wrongness of the world—and assails us for wanting it. We, like Veronica, find growth boring, hope profoundly unerotic. We get off on pain.

At its core, noir is the most nihilistic genre there is, perhaps the only one in which the defining convention is that its characters live in a world where God absolutely, definitely does not exist. Noir demands not simply that we see a broken world but that we despair of ever repairing it—or seeing it repaired through grace.

Nowhere is this nihilism echoed more strongly than in the season's closing moments. Veronica solves the case—as she always does. She finally, finally trusts Logan enough to agree to be his wife. Veronica Mars finally gets married. Then—moments later—Logan is killed by a car bomb left behind by our wily season villain. See, Thomas seems to be telling us, even if Veronica tries to change, it's no use. Veronica can never be a caped crusader, fighting unambiguously for goodness with a devoted husband by her side. (According to interviews he has given post-premiere, Thomas seems to think that a married Veronica would have been anathema to viewers.)

In other words: Forget it, Veronica, it's Neptune.

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Tara Isabella Burton is the author of *Social Creature*. Her next book, *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless Age*, will explore the rites and practices of the religiously unaffiliated. She is also a columnist for Religion News Service. Twitter: @NotoriousTIB.

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# Obvious Truths

Readings: Am 8:4-7, Ps 113, 1 Tm 2:1-8, Lk 16:1-13

This is not one of Luke's clearer narratives. As many commentators suggest, the complicating factor is the narrative's use of comedy. The steward is an anti-hero who achieves his goals through deceit. Similar heroes appear in popular Greek and Roman comedies, suggesting at least some background for this parable. Translating humor is difficult; anyone who has tried to do so quickly realizes how important cultural context is for humor. Since Scripture contains very few humorous narratives, a biblical context that could help interpret this narrative simply does not exist.

If one focuses purely on the role of possessions, certain insights come through. An important clue comes from the description of the steward's action—he "squanders" his employer's property. Luke used the same Greek word, *diaskorpízō*, to describe the profligate spending of the prodigal son, whose story appears in the passage immediately before this one.

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, the word takes on a different nuance. The root meaning of the word is "to scatter." The prodigal son "scattered" his wealth in dissolute living, but the steward scatters his through loans. Loans of cash and tools or the investment of seed at planting would increase the rich man's property, but it would also enrich the steward, who could add a personal commission to each transaction. The steward overdid it, however, and scattered too much of his employer's wealth. The rich man, perhaps stricken at the loss of his liquidity, demands to know where all his property has gone and orders a full account.

What happens next is confusing. The steward meets with his employer's debtors and modifies the terms of their loans. Some commentators speculate that he had overcharged them and was now providing more acceptable terms. Others suggest that he was rewriting the loans without his commission, which, as steward no longer, he would not have been in a position to collect. Still other commentators suggest that he was defrauding his employer outright by lowering the terms and cheating the rich man out of his due. Any of these possibilities could justify Jesus' charac-

*'The children of this world are more prudent than the children of light.'* Lk 16:8

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How can you lighten the burdens you have placed on others?

Whose debts can you cancel?

Do you trust the generosity of others as much as the dishonest steward did?

terization of the steward as dishonest.

The moral point lies in the steward's purpose for lowering the terms. He is corrupt but not a fool. He knows that people appreciate generosity and that they will respond with generosity of their own. Jesus uses this comic anti-hero as evidence for the truth of the Gospel: If even scoundrels recognize the value of generosity and forgiveness, then "children of light" ought to recognize their value all the more.

This is not always the case. The verse that follows this Gospel passage states, "The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all these things and sneered at him" (Lk 16:14). In every age, otherwise righteous and pious people tend to forget that the same God who gave them so many gifts also gave instructions to share them. The benefits of generosity are obvious even to a crook like the steward. His brazen acts may have been utterly self-serving, but they can also challenge us to consider whether we have learned the lessons that were so obvious to him.

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

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# The World Upside Down

Readings: Am 6:1-7, Ps 146, 1 Tm 6:11-16, Lk 16:19-31

“Remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented.” Luke often returns to this theme of “great reversal.” One of the signs of the kingdom was the rise of the lowly and the fall of the mighty. Mary’s Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55) includes this insight, as do the blessings and woes in Luke’s version of the beatitudes (Lk 6:20-26). For Luke, the arrival of God’s kingdom turns the world upside down.

This idea has deep roots in Israel. In this Sunday’s first reading, the prophet Amos foretells a historical reversal. Writing during a time of invasion and famine, he chastises Jerusalem’s wealthy for their personal indulgences during a national emergency. As punishment, they will be among the first conquered Israelites to face exile.

By Jesus’ time, these prophecies had given rise to apocalyptic speculation. These writings claimed that God was acting in unseen ways to undo the evil that humans had introduced into creation. The result would be a world with no hunger, illness, war or poverty. God’s intervention would cause the toppling of kings and the plundering of the

conquerors. The coming reversal would transform all humanity.

The parable in today’s Gospel reading makes that cosmic reversal personal. The person who in life enjoyed extravagant pleasure after death experiences torment, while the homeless leper enjoys comfort in the companionship of his ancestors. In this parable, Jesus emphasizes a point he makes many times: Riches draw one’s attention away from God. The teachings of Moses and the writings of the prophets insist that Israelites use their gifts from God to care for each other. Jews followed these laws with enthusiasm. One ancient Gentile writer notes with awe that he had never seen a Jewish beggar among Rome’s teeming poor. The rich man suffers torment because his attention to pleasure not only violated God’s law but led in part to the death of the starving, sick man at the very door of his house. Like the Jerusalemites in Amos’s prophecy who feasted while their nation collapsed, the rich man’s indifference condemned him to exile in the next life.

Such a punishment was not inevitable. If the rich man had attended to God’s instruction, he would have spared himself torment. Likewise, if he had followed the teachings of the covenant, Lazarus would not have had to wait until death for comfort. Luke thus finds in this parable a deeper teaching on discipleship. We disciples need to live out the great reversal in our daily lives. Through repentance and the power of the Spirit, we must sacrifice luxuries to provide for others’ necessities. We must share our bread and even accept times of hunger in order to ensure the hungry are fed. We must leave behind achievements and status and even risk persecution in order to lift up the lowly. In this way, every act of mercy proclaims our faith in Christ and reveals God still at work, making all things new.

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

*‘They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.’ (Lk 16:29)*

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Has your encounter with Christ turned your world upside down in any way?

What keeps you from being aware of others’ needs?

How can you become more aware of them?

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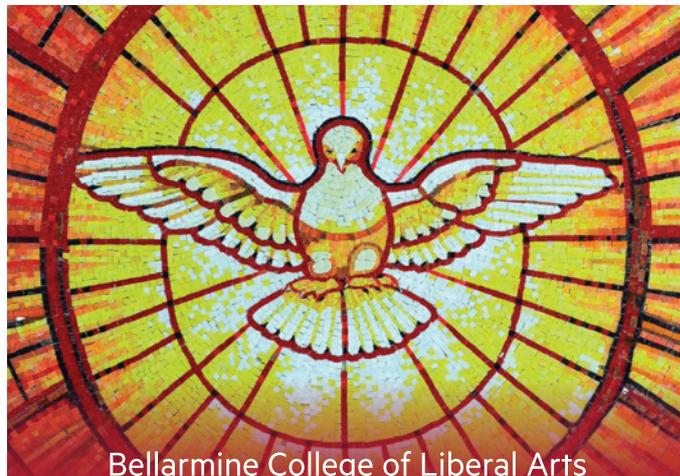
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Oct. 24, 2019

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# After El Paso

*A tragedy shows us that we need one another*

By Juan Vidal



To be a person of faith in this world is to live in a constant state of tension. It is a daily bending and contorting, an almost up-to-the-minute discomfort that sits in your chest and bones. To be a Latino of faith in this country—to complicate matters further—is to hope in a living God while knowing that some people simply do not want us to exist. That they would rather see us cold and lifeless in the ground than to be a part of the same community.

Following the tragedies in August—the murders in El Paso and Dayton, Ohio, on Aug. 3 and 4, respectively—the temptation is either to want to retaliate or to completely disengage, whatever that looks like for you.

It can be a strange dance, this whole “love your neighbor” thing—a difficult idea to confront and attempt to reconcile at times, even as the president of the United States continues to fan the flames of bigotry and intolerance.

I was thinking about these things as I sat in church on Aug. 4, mere hours after two gunmen took the lives of innocent men, women and children. I was looking at all the Latinos around me, in my row, across the aisle. I wondered if they were thinking similar thoughts—if they, too, were wrestling with the weight of their existence in an increasingly hostile environment. Were they wondering, as I was, if the person sitting next to them, in church, harbored any

hatred toward them?

I was also thinking about Priscilla Zavala, whom I had read about the night before. Ms. Zavala, along with her husband and four children, was among the survivors of the shootings in El Paso. After the shooter was apprehended and people were being escorted out of the shopping mall, Ms. Zavala heard police shout, “We’re letting the victims out.” Naturally, she started to cry.

“What hit me the hardest was being called a victim,” Ms. Zavala said. “Because I didn’t realize we were victims in the whole thing. That’s what we are.”

Part of me hesitates to say this, but I know that, in some sense, we are all victims now—Latinos especially. We are carriers of this collective grief and sadness and anger whose burden will begin to manifest itself daily and in any number of ways. And so, yes, we are victims.

We are victims of the brutality of time. The minutes, days and years of unwarranted death and suffering, the endless clamor and collision of politicians, talking heads, all vying for the same space. All God’s kids, all damaged. Eking out a life in his or her own way, many with little to no regard for anything but their own name. Drifting in the wind from one moment to the next. The brutality of time.

I do not know what you believe. I

do not know if faith plays a part in how you maneuver through this world in such a time as this. I cannot pretend to know what your eyes have seen or what your past has taught you, the harm it has done. But I do know that I need you. And I need you to know that I need you. And that you need me.

I will not pretend to have deciphered the reasons why there is so much injustice, or why evil spreads the way it does in the age of social media feeds. It is a delicate balancing act, this juggling of belief and deep-rooted cynicism. But I have to believe that something good and beautiful can exist on the other side of grief. Hell may be other people, but we are all we’ve got for now.

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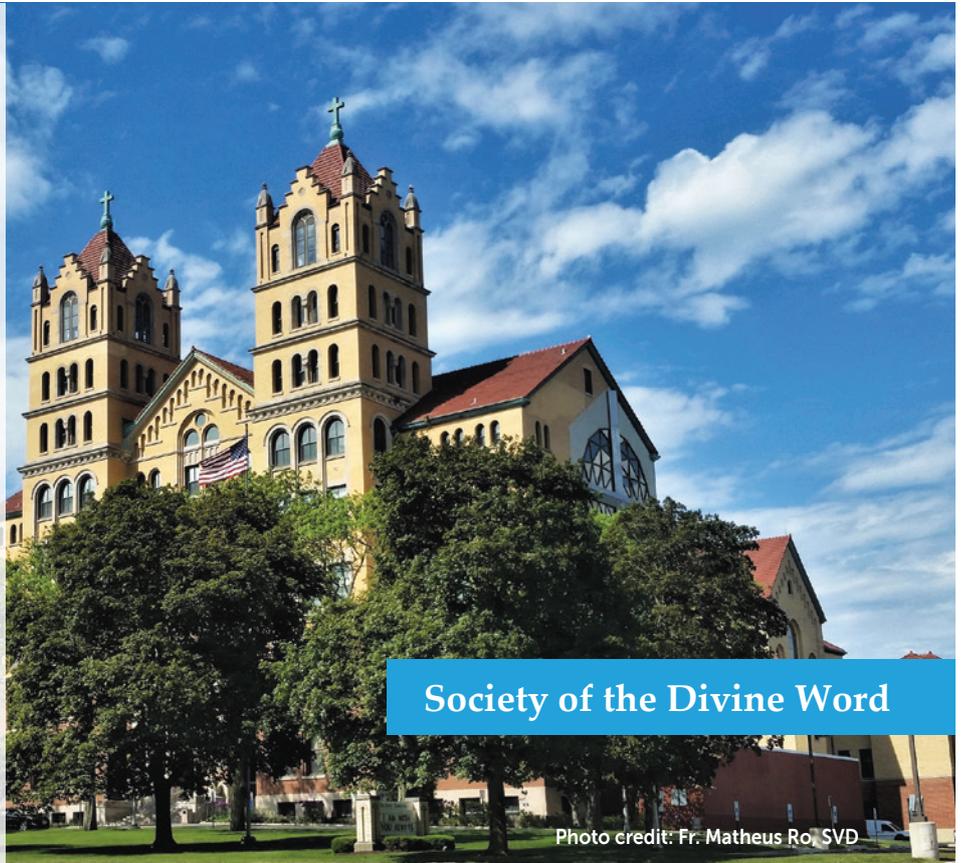
*Juan Vidal is the author of **Rap Dad: A Story of Family and the Subculture That Shaped a Generation**. His writing has appeared in **NPR**, **Rolling Stone** and **The Los Angeles Times**.*

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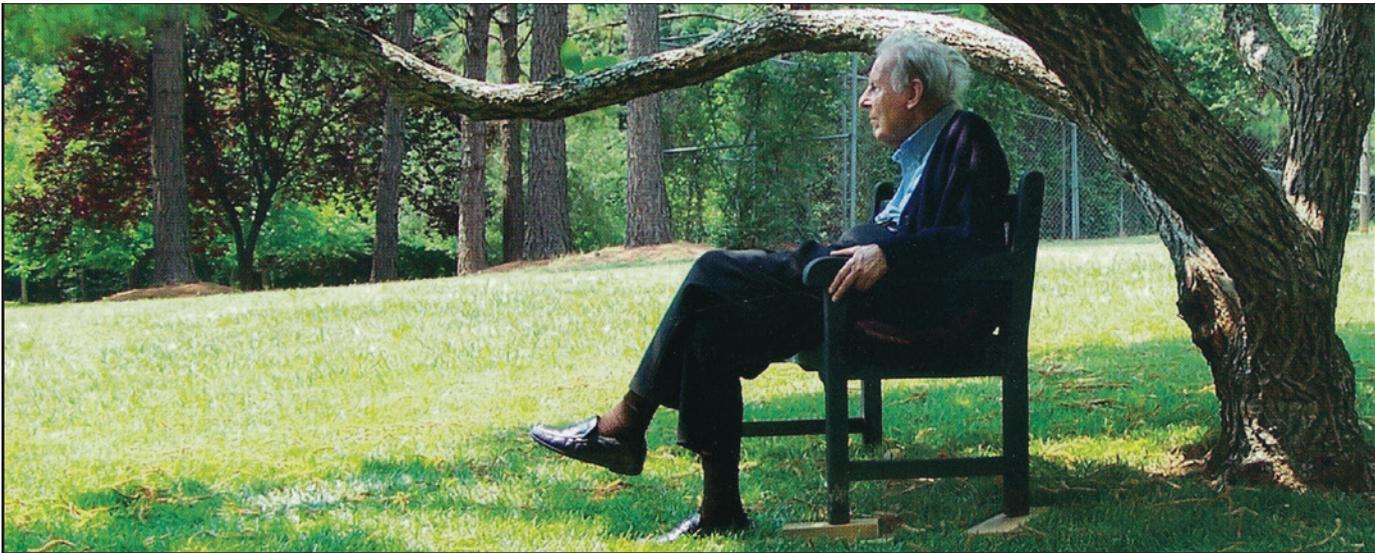


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