

America

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Pope Francis' teachings on the rights of the poor have enormous implications for the culture and politics of the United States and for the church in this country. These teachings demand a transformation of the existing Catholic political conversation.

—BISHOP ROBERT W. McELROY
ON THE PRIORITIES OF THE U.S. CHURCH

ALSO: RESPONSES TO
THE PAPAL INTERVIEW

‘**W**ar Without End,’ Bishop Robert W. McElroy’s spot-on and heartfelt account of the conflict in Afghanistan, was undoubtedly among the finest articles we’ve published in recent years. It just so happens that the Catholic Press Association agreed, including “War Without End” on its short list of the best analytical writing of 2011.

You can understand, then, why I sought out Bishop McElroy at the annual meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops last year in Baltimore and asked him directly when he was going to write again for *America*. Months went by, very busy months for the Archdiocese of San Francisco, where Bishop McElroy serves as an auxiliary. I began to think that one of our favorite authors just might not have the time to put pen to paper—or fingers to keyboard—these days.

I was therefore delighted when the bishop called my office a few weeks back and said he was sending along a manuscript. I was even more impressed when I read it. Bishop McElroy speaks to us in this week’s pages with clarity and passion: “If the Catholic Church is truly to be a ‘church for the poor’ in the United States, it must elevate the issue of poverty to the very top of its political agenda, establishing poverty alongside abortion as the pre-eminent moral issues the Catholic community pursues at this moment in the church’s history.”

Bishop McElroy’s prose is clear enough; he doesn’t really need me to interpret it for you. It’s worth pointing out, though, what he is not saying. He is not saying that we shouldn’t focus on abortion or other intrinsically evil acts; he is simply suggesting that the structural sin of poverty is also a life and death issue for many—too many—of our fellow citizens.

In many ways, these comments sound a lot like some comments by the Bishop of Rome that recently appeared

in these pages: “We cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage and the use of contraceptive methods. This is not possible.... We have to find a new balance; otherwise even the moral edifice of the church is likely to fall like a house of cards, losing the freshness and fragrance of the Gospel.”

Those words from Pope Francis, indeed the entire interview we were pleased to co-publish, have elicited a variety of reactions, from Catholics and non-Catholics, within the United States and abroad. Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl of Washington leads off the responses in this issue by praising Francis’ new genre of papal communication, one that the cardinal likens to an “embodiment of [the pope’s] many invitations to ‘go out’ to people, to build bridges, not walls, and establish a dialogue with all the people.” In other words, Pope Francis teaches by doing and encourages us to do the same.

Elsewhere, Bishop Blase J. Cupich endorses Michael Gerson’s description of the interview as an “extemporaneous encyclical,” and Meghan J. Clark recounts how the pope is “continuously pushing us” beyond our provincial boundaries, in order “to encounter the one human family.” The Rev. Robert P. Imbelli, meanwhile, poses some respectful, critical questions, which one imagines this pope would eagerly welcome, and Stephen P. White cautions us against binary readings of the pope’s words.

For my part, recent events confirm my suspicion that we are experiencing a *kairos* moment in the life of the church that began with Pope Benedict’s humble and holy final act, a moment in which the Holy Spirit is at work in a powerful way. Francis is a part of that, but he is only one small part of it. The Holy Spirit is speaking to you and me as well, and the Spirit’s first words to us must be the watchwords for us all: “Be not afraid.”

MATT MALONE, S.J.

106 West 56th Street
New York, NY 10019-3803
Ph: 212-581-4640; Fax: 212-399-3596
Subscriptions: 1-800-627-9533
www.americamagazine.org
facebook.com/amicamag
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EDITOR IN CHIEF Matt Malone, S.J.

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CORRESPONDENTS

John Carr –Washington, D.C.

MODERATOR, CATHOLIC BOOK CLUB
Kevin Spinale, S.J.

EDITORIAL E-MAIL

america@americamagazine.org

V.P. & CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

Lisa Pope

OPERATIONS STAFF

Rosa Del Saz, Chris Keller, Kerry Goleski, Steven Keller, Glenda Castro, Judith Felix

ADVERTISING CONTACT

ads@americamagazine.org; 212-515-0102

SUBSCRIPTION CONTACT

subscriptions@americamagazine.org;
1-800-627-9533

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‘Sell By’ Dates

It is not breaking news that we waste literally tons of food in this country. A recent study, however, sheds new light on one factor contributing to the estimated 160 billion pounds of food Americans throw out each year: misleading expiration dates.

According to a report published by Harvard Law School and the Natural Resources Defense Council, an unreliable, inconsistent and piecemeal system of food labeling leads to a great deal of confusion over what is safe to eat. For example, 91 percent of Americans occasionally (and 25 percent always) toss products that are past the “sell by” date, a label that helps retailers control inventory but, according to the report, offers consumers “no useful guidance” after purchase.

In a country where one in six people face food insecurity and many more lack access to healthy, fresh meals, throwing away perfectly edible food is not acceptable. As the report’s authors suggest, the Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture should exercise their authority to set clear, consistent standards to inform consumers about food quality and safety. Better regulation alone, however, will not get food to those who suffer hunger. Creative solutions are needed to tackle the twin problems of waste and equitable distribution. One plan is the Daily Table, a market that a former president of Trader Joe’s plans to open next year that will prepare discarded but otherwise wholesome food from grocery stores and sell it at steeply discounted prices in underserved “food deserts.” Initiatives like this should be multiplied.

Play On?

In a church where parishes sometimes raise money by running Bingo games, leaders may well be reluctant to condemn gambling outright. A statement from the bishops of the New York State Catholic Conference about an approaching referendum on Nov. 5 to authorize up to seven full-scale casinos in the state, describes gambling, quoting the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, as “a morally neutral act.” But the statement’s analysis of the negative impact of gambling points clearly to the conclusion: Vote no. The bishops repeat the catechism’s warning that “the passion for gambling risks becoming an enslavement,” and they stress gambling’s connection to embezzlement, drunk driving and “catastrophic losses” to individual gamblers.

The United States already has 1,500 casinos in 20 states and legalized gambling of various forms in 48 states. Though casinos allegedly promote jobs, stimulate tourism and boost the local economy, in fact casino owners are

often outsiders who bring in their employees from other places. Instead of stimulating business in the surrounding neighborhoods, casinos are deliberately designed to keep the players inside, with no sense of time or place. There are restaurants and shops, but no windows or clocks.

The strongest argument against casinos is that they exploit the weaknesses of vulnerable citizens, lured by a corrupted version of the American dream, in which Lady Luck suddenly delivers bags of gold. The obligation to empower those in poverty rests on the shoulders of the whole community, including government. One Christian response to poverty would be a just tax system that allows for a redistribution of wealth directed by prudence—not by slot machines.

Just War for Oil?

In a speech to the United Nations on Sept. 24 President Obama said the organization has “made a difference” in eradicating disease, providing education and establishing peace, but that the international community “has not matched the scale of the challenge” in Syria. Mr. Obama reiterated his belief that a military strike against the Assad regime was a meaningful way to enforce an international ban on chemical weapons.

The president also took the opportunity to outline U.S. policy in the Middle East and North Africa. His first claim: the United States “is prepared to use all elements of our power, including military force, to secure our core interests in the region,” including “the free flow of energy from the region to the world” because “a severe disruption could destabilize the entire global economy.”

This threat of military force against other nations again raises questions (and red flags) about how the United States relates to the world community and views resources that lie within others’ sovereign borders. Is military force, which produces great suffering through human casualties and the destruction of essential infrastructure and the natural environment, ever justifiable for the purpose of securing natural resources? Not to mention the question of who benefits the most from those resources. At an interfaith peace gathering in Rome on Sept. 30, Pope Francis said peace is so difficult to achieve because “one finds it difficult to move out of the narrow horizon of one’s own interests in order to open up to a real and sincere encounter” with others. Such an encounter, especially with the most vulnerable, might help the United States re-evaluate its core interests and the most appropriate means to achieve them.

Paralysis in Washington



While some members of the House Republican “suicide caucus” shrug their shoulders in, one hopes, feigned nonchalance, and media outlets sputter that anxieties over the shutdown of the federal government are overblown, more than 800,000 other Americans are wondering when they are going to see their next paycheck. In New York harbor, Lady Liberty, like other federal park facilities across the nation, has gone dark; and hundreds of cancer patients, including 30 children each week, have been locked out of their last-resort treatment at the National Institutes of Health’s Clinical Center. What little time—and hope—these patients have left is burning away while a gang of House Republicans fiddles with the American government.

These are just a handful of the pernicious effects of the shutdown that resulted on Oct. 1 after the G.O.P.’s latest effort to obstruct the Affordable Care Act. The closing of the federal government not only shuts down so-called nonessential services, like nutrition aid to women, infants and children, it also means that a federal flow of \$3 billion a day into the already twitchy American economy has been cut off.

A Republican fringe has generated a major legislative impasse, holding the national economy and majority rule hostage to an *idée fixe* on the Affordable Care Act, a law that has been passed by Congress, vetted by the Supreme Court and signed into effect by a now twice-elected president. This is a law intended to provide health insurance and care to previously unmoored citizens and legal residents. It deploys a free-market model once endorsed by Republicans in a manner consistent with other liberal democracies since the late 19th century, an era many in Congress seem eager to revisit. If Congress’s health care extortionists are able to achieve even a “compromise” remnant of the ransom they seek, it could mean that government by fiscal hostage-taking will become a regular and profoundly destabilizing feature of U.S. political life.

The U.S. bishops, unhappy themselves with the A.C.A.’s contraception mandate, nonetheless were aghast at the political breakdown. In a letter to Congress on Oct. 1, they reminded the nation’s legislators that the proper role of government is to “make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life,” including food, clothing, health care, education and culture. “In our country today, millions of Americans struggle to meet these basic needs, through

no fault of their own, as a result of an economy that continues to fail to create sufficient economic opportunities,” the bishops wrote, adding that internationally, millions more rely on “life saving” aid from the United States. “This work must continue,” the bishops said, “and human needs must be met.”

In other words: Get back to work. A shutdown may make good political theater, but it is an unconscionable burden on those least able to bear it.

A tolerance for some factionalism and legislative log-jamming is programmed into the nation’s constitutional DNA, but this month’s paralysis, joining other recent examples of ongoing dysfunction, the “sequestration” failure and the ascendance of the fake filibuster, begins to call into question the effectiveness of the two-party system itself. Many Republican representatives come from conservative districts where the only significant threat to re-election comes from Tea Party challengers in the primaries—a dynamic that tends to produce ever higher levels of ideological purity.

The Supreme Court decision in the *Citizens United* case has allowed a handful of plutocrats to become major players on national social policy; and the permanent election cycle means that members of Congress are forever scurrying back to their base, however indifferent that base may be to compromise, good government or even to reason. It is enough to provoke longing gazes toward European parliamentary systems.

Responsible voices within the Republican Party are already trying to find a way out of this artificial standoff. But even if the nation escapes this time, it is clear that something has to change in Washington. The problem, as always, is that the people most in need of reforming are the only ones constitutionally empowered to make it happen.

Perhaps this latest debacle will propel a popular drive to revisit congressional procedures and privileges, even to force legislation to neutralize the worst effects of the *Citizens United* decision. But a campaign that might result in loosening the political stranglehold of the nation’s two dominant parties will likely have to bubble up from below, as citizen initiatives lead to structural reforms at the local, then state levels. This is a reform that can only trickle up from an outraged public that deserves—and must learn how to demand—better.

STATE OF THE QUESTION

THE POPE'S INTERVIEW

Readers respond to "A Big Heart Open to God," by Antonio Spadaro, S.J. (9/30)

A Beautiful Heart

The wonderful interview with Pope Francis is something that I will read over and over, trying to grasp for my own life the deep values that Francis holds dear and his vision for the church. It is wonderful spiritual reading in the truest sense.

This interview has given us a glimpse into the beautiful heart of our pope—a person so human, a person who loves God and others so much. I thank him for sharing his heart so personally and humbly, and I thank **America** for making this available to all of us! God bless you!

MARY DIANE ACKERMAN, O.S.C.
Yangyang, South Korea

The Next Edition

Pope John XXIII referred to Vatican II as "opening the windows of the church" to let in some fresh air. Pope Francis is opening the doors. Perhaps we should refer to this era as Vatican 2.2. Francis is making a huge impact, not like a new council would, but in that direction.

DON RAMPOLLA
Torrance, Calif.

Like a Parish Priest

While Francis hasn't changed church policies or dogma he has changed the discussion and returned the emphasis to the poor and the spiritually wounded. I think he has set a new, optimistic direction for the church.

He acknowledges the role of women. While he opposes their ordination to the priesthood he does acknowledge our issues are important and deserve discussion and respect. My great hope is that he will reverse the damage that has been done to the American nuns and to Roy Bourgeois and welcome

him back as a full participant in the church.

Francis seems to have flipped the power structure; he's behaving more like a parish priest than a pope. I hope the cardinals and bishops will listen to Francis with an open heart and speak out against U.S. policies that hurt the poor, children, immigrants, elderly—all targets of mean-spirited politics like the vote in Congress to cut food stamps, but the people whom Christ holds most dear.

SHARON STOCKARD
Anchorage, Alaska

Persistent Preaching

I can't recall the last time I heard a church sermon denouncing abortion, homosexuality or contraception. Hence I am puzzled by Pope Francis' desire to de-emphasize these teachings in favor of striking a "new balance" that completely favors compassion and mercy over orthodox teaching and justice.

The church must remain vocal in promoting the truth on the most pressing issues of the day. There is an overwhelming fear among priests to talk about topics that are "politically incorrect." In contrast the Bible exhorts the church to "preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching" (2 Tm 4:2).

PAUL KOKOSKI
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

Prophetic Post

Thanks to you all for collaborating on this interview with Pope Francis. What a truly great message to the world. His openness and sincerity about humility and service is food for thought for many retreats and days of

recollection to come.

My wife was diagnosed with a Stage 4 cancer last year, so as we make this journey I have been sharing my thoughts on caringbridge.org with friends and relatives. During the conclave I posted these words: "We have been following with interest the events in Rome. She and I pray that the Holy Spirit will move the leaders to choose a true pastor to serve all with simplicity and joy. Where is my patron, St. Francis, when you need him?"

Lo and behold, a Jesuit emerges and chooses the name Francis, who is also my patron saint. Thanks be to God.

FRANCIS J. WIESNER
Milwaukee, Wis.

Choice of Words

This is a wonderful and thoughtful interview, very encouraging and renewing. One problem I see, however, is the pope's constant references to God as "he." The last line of the interview sums this up. Francis says: "It is this memory that makes me his son and that makes me a father, too."

I understand this but what room does it leave for my 12-year-old daughter or my wife? The pope seems to speak out of a theology of man, and so he is right when he says we do not yet have a theology of woman. I suggest the pope might consider using "she" for God half of the time and see where that leads him and his listeners.

TOM O'CONNOR
Salem, Ore.

No More Monomania

For far too long the Catholic Church has been overemphasizing issues related to sexual morality. These concerns have been used, cynically in my opinion, by financial interests to distract the faithful from turning the same kind of critical gaze to questions of economic morality. The reasons for this are not hard to deduce: our present system of amoral, predatory capitalism cannot hold up under such scrutiny, and the "Mammonists" (as I

like to call them) know this full well.

So it is a great relief, and very exciting, to hear the Holy Father finally call the church to account for maintaining this monomaniacal focus for so long.

W. S. MENDLER
Honesdale, Pa.

Letter to Francis

Thank you, Francis, for walking in the footsteps of Jesus and making the Gospel come alive once again in my lifetime by simple acts of kindness and love and by speaking out on behalf of the poor. And thank you for your words of challenge to those of us who have more than enough and usually think that we've earned it and have a right to do what we want with it, no matter the poor and unfortunate.

I'm 72 years old, and not since Good Pope John have we had a shepherd who speaks such words of comfort and mercy and hope to those of us who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. The

scribes and Pharisees are not going to be happy with you, Brother Francis. But I am. I, a fellow sinner, love you!

MIKE CHEW
Stuttgart, Germany

Immediate Steps

The interview, of course, is magnificent, and that this wonderful human being is our pope is beyond wonder. However, I respond to the question about a greater role for women in the church. I have two suggestions that could be implemented when Pope Francis meets with the "Gang of Eight," his cardinal-advisors.

First, open the ministry of permanent diaconate to women, and second, instate the office of permanent lector for both men and woman with the ministry of proclaiming the Scriptures, followed by exegesis with commentary. Of course, this service to God's people would require proper and inclusive preparation and the necessary human qualities as advanced by the apostle Paul.

Blessings to the Society of Jesus for providing such a pastor in Papa Francisco.

ELIZABETH LYNN, O.S.C.
Minneapolis, Minn.

Leads by Example

The link to this interview should go viral. Pope Francis was so generous to open so genuinely his heart, thoughts and views. Politicians should learn from him: it is the truth that connects hearts. In this time of having to keep our thoughts and words to ourselves, as one could be judged or misquoted, the pope leads, once again by example, with discernment and honesty.

He is the harbinger of a new Catholic Church, and he is the right person to help "heal the wounds." If I could only be as hopeful about our priests! I hope each one of them will be inspired by the pope's vision for them, so my young adult children, who I had almost given up hope would return to the Catholic Church of yesteryear, can come home.

GERALDINA I. WISE
Houston, Tex.

STATUS UPDATE

Readers respond to "A Big Heart Open to God," by Antonio Spadaro, S.J. (9/30).

Astonishing. Refreshing. Compassionate. Christian. This pope is clearly a gift of the Holy Spirit.

MARY CATHERINE FOX

As a Jew I read (and will reread) this beautiful interview with delight, amazement, appreciation, awe and deep emotion. Some of it is beyond me. Some is specific to the church. Much of it speaks directly to the heart. I have never felt closer to my Christian brethren. Thanks to all involved.

LIZ ROSENBERG

I read the interview with a highlighter in hand, and then ran around campus at Jesuit High School (Sacramento)

sharing my delight and hope with colleagues and students!

KELLY SCHALLER BARNES

He fills this wounded but healing divorced Catholic with tears, joy and hope. I am praying for the Spirit to permeate the upcoming gatherings of cardinals and bishops. And I forgive him for loving Wagner.

JILLENA ROSE

My dilemma is with "what's next." If we encounter an openly gay person or an unmarried heterosexual person who may also be actively engaged in a sexual relationship, why does Francis not address or reference the teaching on how to discuss this? It's as if we are to simply look away and allow others to think it's OK to engage in that activity. Isn't this the reason why so many in the church

have drifted away from the doctrine we are to follow?

RUDY CASTRO

It seems that Pope Francis is saying that the teachings have not changed, but let's not talk about them. This is very confusing to faithful Catholics. What are we supposed to say to people about some of these issues?

BARBARA SCHLUMPF

"I am a sinner," Francis said. "This is not a figure of speech, [nor] a literary genre." That points so elegantly, and so astutely to the intellectual gumbo constantly being splashed across our eyes; that the world was expecting a witty, glib, innovative sound bite. St. Francis taught us how to reject such desires, and rejoice in the [plain] truth. Pope Francis honors him well.

HEATHER BASSETT

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SIGNS OF THE TIMES

THE VATICAN

Pope, Cardinals Push Dramatic Reform of Roman Curia

Pope Francis and his international council of cardinals are laying out plans to overhaul the Roman Curia completely, underlining its role of “service to the universal church and the local churches,” the Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi, S.J., said.

As the pope and the eight cardinals he named to advise him were about to begin the final session of their meeting in early October, Father Lombardi said the role and responsibilities of the Vatican secretary of state, the revamping of the World Synod of Bishops and the Vatican’s attention to the role and responsibility of the laity also were major themes of discussion. The discussions, Father Lombardi said, are going clearly in the direction of an apostolic constitution to replace “Pastor Bonus,” and not simply “cosmetic retouches or marginal modifications” of the 1988 document.

Father Lombardi said the group’s agenda was partially dictated by the pope’s own timetable. Pope Francis has named Archbishop Pietro Parolin to be his secretary of state and has given him an Oct. 15 start date, so it made sense to discuss how the pope and cardinals planned to reshape his role in a renewed Curia.

Under the terms of Blessed John Paul II’s constitution “Pastor Bonus,” the secretariat of state includes two

sections. One deals with foreign relations and the other with internal church matters. According to



“Pastor Bonus,” the secretariat is intended to “foster relations” with other Curia offices and “coordinate their

POPE FRANCIS AT ASSISI

Renounce the ‘Spirit of the World’

Making his first pilgrimage as pope to the birthplace of his papal namesake, Pope Francis called on the whole church to imitate St. Francis of Assisi, embracing poverty and stripping itself of the “spirit of world.”

“A Christian cannot coexist with the spirit of the world,” he said. Worldliness “leads us to vanity, arrogance, pride. And this is an idol, it is not of God.”

The pope spoke on Oct. 4, the feast of St. Francis, in the “stripping room” of the residence of the archbishop of Assisi, where the saint himself set aside

his rich clothes and embraced a life of poverty. “This is a good occasion for inviting the church to strip itself,” the pope said, adding that he directed his invitation not merely to the hierarchy, but all the church’s members and that he sought renunciation of spiritual complacency as well as material riches.

“It is so sad to find a worldly Christian, who thinks he enjoys the security of the faith and of the world,” Pope Francis said. “One cannot have it both ways.”

The pope’s morning in Assisi culminated in a Mass in the square outside the Basilica of St. Francis. In his hom-

ily, the pope disputed what he characterized as popular misconceptions of St. Francis and his legacy. “Many people, when they think of St. Francis, think of peace,” he said. “Very few people, however, go deeper.”

“What is the peace which Francis received, experienced and lived, and which he passes on to us?” the pope asked. “It is the peace of Christ, which is born of the greatest love of all, the love of the cross.” He added: “Franciscan peace is not something saccharine. Hardly. That is not the real St. Francis. Nor is it a kind of pantheistic harmony with the forces of the cosmos. That is not Franciscan either; it is a notion some people have invented.”

Pope Francis called his namesake a “man of harmony and peace” and drew



work.”

Father Lombardi said the pope and the cardinals emphasized the role of

the secretariat of state as “the secretariat of the pope” and said the discussions included “the hypothesis of a new figure—‘moderator of the Curia’” to ensure greater communication and cooperation among the Curia offices.

Possible changes to the organization of the World Synod of Bishops, which has been a periodic gathering of bishops from around the world to discuss a specific theme of church life, were moved to the top of the meeting’s agenda because the synod council will meet at the Vatican on Oct. 7–8, the spokesman said.

Father Lombardi said the pope is expected to decide the theme for the next synod “in the coming days.”

The eight cardinals—six of whom currently serve as diocesan bishops—brought to the meeting with the pope suggestions they had received from church leaders around the world. One of the topics mentioned most often, Father Lombardi said, was concern for the role of the laity in the church and the

world. The pope and his cardinal advisers talked about “how to ensure that this dimension of the church’s reality is more adequately and effectively recognized and followed in the governance of the church,” Father Lombardi said.

A second meeting with the pope has been scheduled for Dec. 3–5, and another meeting will be held in February “so that the work of the council, especially in this initial phase, can proceed quickly,” Father Lombardi said.

The eight cardinal members, who represent six continents, are Francisco Javier Errazuriz Ossa, retired archbishop of Santiago, Chile; Oswald Gracias of Mumbai, India; Reinhard Marx of Munich and Freising, Germany; Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya of Kinshasa, Congo; Sean P. O’Malley, O.F.M.Cap., of Boston; George Pell of Sydney; Giuseppe Bertello, president of the commission that governs the Vatican City State; and Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga of Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

attention to those “who are suffering and who are dying because of violence, terrorism or war, in the Holy Land, so dear to St. Francis, in Syria, throughout the Middle East and everywhere in the world.”

At the archbishop’s residence Pope Francis addressed a group of people who receive assistance from local Catholic charities. “Many of you have been stripped by this savage world, which doesn’t provide work, which doesn’t help, to which it makes no difference that children die of hunger,” he said. The pope also mourned the African immigrants killed in the previous day’s sinking of a boat near the southern Mediterranean island of Lampedusa, where in July he made his first trip as pope outside Rome.

Earlier in the morning, he addressed a group of disabled children and their caregivers at a church-run rehabilitation center. Pope Francis spent about 45 minutes personally greeting the young patients, many confined to wheelchairs.

“We are among the wounds of Jesus,” the pope said. “Jesus is hidden in these kids, in these children, in these people.” The pope noted that Jesus’ body after the resurrection was unblemished except for the five wounds he had received during his crucifixion.

“He wanted to preserve only the wounds, and he took them with him into heaven,” the pope said. “We treat the wounds of Jesus here and he, in heaven, shows us his wounds and tells all of us, all of us: ‘I am waiting for you.’”



OVERLOOKING ASSISI. On Oct. 4, Pope Francis made his first pilgrimage as pope to the birthplace of his namesake.

Chaos in Central African Republic

A Catholic religious order has urged international action to stem “uncontrolled lawlessness” in the Central African Republic after one of its Italian missionaries was threatened with death by rebel soldiers. “Let us pray that peace may return in this country torn apart by different factions,” the order of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram said in a statement released on Sept. 30 on its Web site. The statement said rebel soldiers had bound and gagged the Rev. Beniamino Gusmeroli and an African brother, Martial Maru, during a raid on the Our Lady of Fatima mission in Bouar on Sept. 28. The rebels threatened to kill the mission doorkeeper and “turned everything upside down,” taking money, computers and anything of value. “This action is a sign of how the situation is deteriorating,” the order added. “No glimmer of change is in sight unless the international community intervenes quickly and firmly.”

Obligation to Protect Not a License for War

An international obligation to intervene in situations of war or widespread violations of human rights does not mean a country or group of countries can decide to take military action inside another nation, said the Vatican’s foreign minister. “The responsibility to protect” is not a call to arms, “but to a profound and mandatory spirit of solidarity,” Archbishop Dominique Mamberti told the U.N. General Assembly on Oct. 1. Archbishop Mamberti acknowledged that after the Syrian government allegedly used chemical weapons on its own people in August, some countries recognized they had to act in accordance with their

NEWS BRIEFS

The fall **General Assembly** of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops begins on Nov. 11 in Baltimore. + Great Britain’s Catholic Agency for Overseas Development declined Dennis MacBride’s donation of the proceeds from his **political memoir** *Power Trip*, after increasing criticism of the rough political tactics and personal attacks on opponents described by MacBride, an aide to former British chancellor Gordon Brown. + For the first time in 48 years the Archdiocese of Chicago reports an increase of **1,300 more students** at its Chicago and suburban elementary schools. + **Recovery efforts** following September’s heavy rains in Colorado are expected to take years, but “Catholic Charities will be there to help in any way we can,” pledged Larry Smith, president and C.E.O. of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Denver. + New Jersey’s Gov. Chris Christie planned to appeal a state judge’s ruling on Sept. 27 that same-sex couples “**must be allowed to marry**” to receive “equal protection of the law” under the state constitution. + The North Dakota Catholic Conference filed a friend-of-the-court brief on Oct. 1 urging the state Supreme Court to reverse a district court ruling that found a **right to an abortion** in the state constitution.



Crisis in Colorado

“responsibility to protect” the defenseless. He worried that the principle is sometimes understood erroneously, “as if it consisted of a justification of the recourse to arms.” But the shared obligation to protect others, he said, “asks each person, starting with the leaders of nations, to feel affected by the great humanitarian crises as if they were their own...and to work immediately to put into action all available means—diplomatic, economic, public opinion, as well as the measures envisioned by the U.N. Charter—in view of an effective solution.”

Church ‘Covers’ Federal Tab

Around the country thousands of organizations were digging into reserves to keep Head Start programs open or provide nutrition and other services

for children after the federal government shutdown on Oct. 1. In Kansas, shelters for homeless families and for battered women and children, a foster grandparent program and a “Marriage for Keeps” program for struggling families, run by Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Wichita, remain open for now, with the diocese picking up the costs. Johnny Young, director of Migration and Refugee Services for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said that federal contracts to help resettle refugees and provide other assistance to immigrants were held up by the government freeze. Work for those beneficiaries did not stop, however, said Young. Although there’s no money coming in, M.R.S. will use funds from the U.S.C.C.B. to continue to provide services, he said.

From CNS and other sources.



The Francis Factor

On Oct. 1, a standing room only crowd of 750 filled Gaston Hall at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., for the inaugural dialogue of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life. What brought them? Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl of Washington and the university's president, John J. DeGioia, and an impressive panel certainly offered insights. But that was not what filled the hall. It was the Francis factor. They came to hear about Pope Francis and how he is affecting public life...and our lives.

As director of the initiative, my expectations were modest. Panels about popes are rarely standing room only affairs. This was different. As Mark Shields observed, for someone who avoided news conferences and interviews, the pope is really good at them. Mr. Shields asked when any leader had said something in an airplane or magazine that led to so much thoughtful reflection? David Brooks pointed out that the pope is a countercultural leader using the culture and media to reach people directly. Kim Daniels cited the authenticity of a humble pastor who sounds like Jesus. Alexia Kelley reported on young people drawn to a message of joy and mercy and an "infallible" leader who talks about past failures.

There were warnings against reducing Francis' challenging call to an ethic of universal reassurance and against diminishing John Paul II and Benedict

XVI, whose teaching Francis carries into action. There is still much work to be done to heal a church deeply wounded by the scandal of sexual abuse by members of the clergy and still searching for ways to fully involve women. Another caution had come from the pope himself earlier, on May 18, when he said: "All of you in the square shouted out 'Francis, Francis, Pope Francis,' but where was Jesus? ...From now on enough of Francis; just Jesus!" Still, in six months the perception of the church has moved from a besieged institution so mired in scandal that a pope resigned to a vibrant community with a leader who captures the world's attention.

Who would have thought that Washington would be the place of paralysis and the church the place of "hope and change"? As Washington ground to a halt, stuck in old battles, Francis is charting a new course with eight cardinals returning to the core of the Gospel: mercy, the cross and the call to live our faith everyday with joy. Francis challenges all of us without the self-righteousness of a culture warrior or the disdain of the elite secularists. When he tells a frightened single mother he would be honored to baptize her child, this advances the pro-life cause more than a million letters. When he asks, "Who weeps?" for lost immigrant workers, he confronts the fear of the stranger that undermines immigration reform. He challenges the false moralizing of the extremes and says that abortion is part of our "throwaway culture" and nothing to be celebrated.

I now await a column by Maureen Dowd urging liberals to stop "obsessing" about same-sex marriage and abortion and start focusing on overcoming poverty. Those left behind by the market are human beings, not collateral damage. When conservatives cut \$40 billion from food stamps and nothing from subsidies for agribusiness, they are not friends of Francis. Who left Planned Parenthood in charge of Democrats and the Tea Party in charge of Republicans?

As
Washington
ground to
a halt,
Francis is
charting a
new course.

In another recent interview, Pope Francis said: "We must restore hope to the young, aid the old, open ourselves to the future, spread love. [We must be] the poor among the poor. We must include the excluded and preach peace."

On politics, he said, "I believe that Catholics tasked with political life must keep the values of their religion before them, but with a mature conscience and competence to realize them."

Francis focuses on the poor and peace, the young and the old and challenges lay men and women to use our consciences and competence to advance the common good. In the end, the Francis factor is not just about Francis, but about our responsibility to be "salt, light and leaven" in public life.

Francis wants a church "of the poor and for the poor." That is a church to be reckoned with in public life, not because of the power it has gained, but because of the credibility it has won. In identifying with the lowly, it can reach the high and mighty. **JOHN CARR**

JOHN CARR is the director of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. He previously served for two decades as director of the Department of Justice and Peace of the U.S. Bishops' Conference.

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A Church for the Poor

BY ROBERT W. McELROY

THE BABY WHISPERER.
Pope Francis at a home in the Varginha slum in Rio de Janeiro on July 25.

‘How many poor people there still are in the world! And what great suffering they have to endure!” With these words the new pope explained to international diplomats assembled at the Vatican on March 22 why he chose the name Francis at the moment of his election. And since then Pope Francis has unswervingly pointed to the scandal of poverty in a world of plenty as a piercing moral challenge for the church and the whole human community.

In part, the pope’s message has called us to personal conversion, speaking powerfully to each of us about how we let patterns of materialism captivate our lives and distort our humanity. In a disarming way, Francis seeks to make us all deeply uncomfortable, so that in our discomfort we may recognize and confront the alienation from our own humanity that occurs when we seek happiness in objects rather than in relationship with God and others.

MOST REV. ROBERT W. McELROY *is auxiliary bishop of San Francisco.*

Francis' message also has been an invitation to cultural conversion, laying bare the three false cultures that materialism has created in our world: the culture of comfort that makes us think only of ourselves; the culture of waste that seizes the gifts of the created order only to savor them for a moment and then discard them; and the culture of indifference that desensitizes us to the suffering of others, no matter how intense, no matter how sustained. Pope Francis' words about the "globalization of indifference" echo the poignant observation of Pope Benedict in his encyclical "Charity in Truth" (2009): "As society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbors but does not make us brothers."

And finally, the pope's message has been one of structural reform in the world. In June Francis explained: "A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table." Francis has made clear that the present economic slowdown cannot be an excuse for inaction. Rather, there must immediately commence "a new stimulus to international activity on behalf of the poor, inspired by something more than mere goodwill, or, worse, promises which all too often have not been kept."

Both the substance and methodology of Pope Francis' teachings on the rights of the poor have enormous implications for the culture and politics of the United States and for the church in this country. These teachings demand a transformation of the existing Catholic political conversation in our nation, a transformation reflecting three themes: prioritizing the issue of poverty, focusing not only on intrinsic evils but also on structural sin, and acting with prudence when applying Catholic moral principles to specific legal enactments.

Prioritize Poverty

The depth of the moral responsibility of the United States to fight global poverty arises from the tremendous power that our country exerts in the world economy. More than any other nation, the United States has the capacity to influence trading relationships, the availability of capital and market conditions. If Francis' vision of a world with truly just trading and financial structures is to be realized, then the United States and Europe must take a leading role in reforming the existing rules that so often victimize incipient markets in staggeringly poor countries.

In addition, the United States and the richest nations of the world community have a moral responsibility to share from their plenty with the poorest peoples in the human family. In 2002 the wealthy nations of the world pledged to direct 0.7 percent of their gross domestic product toward the alleviation of dire poverty by the year 2015. This level of investment would largely eliminate severe poverty on the plan-

et. However, the United States and most of the other leading economic powers have reneged on their commitment; today the United States only gives 0.2 percent of its gross domestic product in development assistance. As a result, millions of children die each year from disease and malnutrition that could be prevented. This is social sin, arising from individual decisions. This is the visible presence of a "global culture of indifference" that lets us avert our eyes while our governments consciously make choices to reinforce our culture of comfort while ignoring the countless human lives lost as a consequence.

Within the United States, we also turn our eyes away from the growing domestic inequality that ruins lives and breaks spirits. Pope Francis speaks directly to this: "While the income of a minority is increasing exponentially, that of the majority is crumbling. This imbalance results from ideologies which uphold the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation, and thus deny the right of control to States, which are themselves charged with providing for the common good." The United States, which for so much of its great history has stood for economic mobility and a broad, comfortable middle class, now reflects gross disparities in income and wealth and barriers to mobility. The poor suffer a "benign neglect" in our political conversations, and absorb brutal cuts in governmental aid, especially at the state level.

If the Catholic Church is truly to be a "church for the poor" in the United States, it must elevate the issue of poverty to the very top of its political agenda, establishing poverty alongside abortion as the pre-eminent moral issues the Catholic community pursues at this moment in our nation's history. Both abortion and poverty countenance the deaths of millions of children in a world where government action could end the slaughter. Both abortion and poverty, each in its own way and to its own degree, constitute an assault on the very core of the dignity of the human person, instrumentalizing life as part of a throwaway culture. The cry of the unborn and the cry of the poor must be at the core of Catholic political conversation in the coming years because these realities dwarf other threats to human life and dignity that confront us today.

Structural Sin

Another part of the needed transformation in Catholic political conversation is a renewed focus on structural sin. In pursuing many vital elements of the common good, structural sin is actually more relevant than sins of intrinsic evil.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the common good as "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment fully and more easily." There are three elements in the common good: respect for the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person, the social well being and development of society, and the stability and security of a just order. The common good is primarily accomplished by the variety of social insti-

tutions—family, religious communities, economic enterprises, labor unions and service organizations—that lie outside of government. But a crucial element of the common good falls to government for its realization. John Courtney Murray, S.J., called this element “the public order.”

The mission of the Catholic community within the public order in the United States is to move in a comprehensive way to focus government on the enhancement of human rights, the development of society and social peace. Part of that movement must address issues of intrinsic evil—acts that can never be justified regardless of intentions and circumstances—like murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, racism, torture, suicide and slavery.

Intrinsically evil acts are always and everywhere wrong, but not all intrinsically evil acts fall within the scope of the public order and the role of government. Intrinsically evil acts like adultery and blasphemy are always wrong, but they do not lie within the jurisdiction of government. Some intrinsically evil acts, like racism, lie partly within the scope of government and partly outside. Racial discrimination in housing or unemployment must be legally proscribed, but contemptible racism expressed in private conversation generally should not. Finally, there are acts of intrinsic evil so grave and so contrary to the role of law in society that opposition to them is absolutely central to the Catholic mission of seeking the common good. Abortion and euthanasia are such issues because they involve the most fundamental duty of government to prevent the taking of innocent human life.

It is crucial to fully recognize the nature of intrinsic evil and its relationship to the common good. In recent years, however, some arguments have been broadly advanced in Catholic political conversation proposing that issues pertaining to intrinsically evil acts automatically have priority in the public order over all other issues of grave evil, like poverty, war, unjust immigration laws and the lack of restorative justice in the criminal justice system. This has the effect of labeling these other crucial issues of Catholic social teaching “optional” in the minds of many Catholics.


The statements of Pope Francis on poverty demonstrate why issues of intrinsic evil do not automatically have priority in advancing the common good. The category of intrinsic evil is vital in identifying the exceptionless evil inherent in certain types of actions. Poverty, however, is not a one-time action. It is the result of countless specific human actions with varying degrees of responsibility that give rise to social structures and practices imbued with selfishness and evil. The category of intrinsic evil cannot capture the type of entrenched evil inherent in poverty. Yet Francis clearly teaches that alleviating the grave evil of poverty must be at the very heart of the church’s mission. It is neither optional nor secondary.

Like war, the exploitation of undocumented immigrants and our distorted system of criminal justice, poverty is a structural

sin rooted in the very life of society and government. Structural sin constitutes the effect of personal sins that collectively create social situations and institutions fundamentally opposed to divine goodness.

Pope Francis attested poignantly to the reality and the impersonality of structural sin when he visited Lampedusa, where hundreds of undocumented immigrants died in a shipwreck while seeking a new life in Italy. “Who is responsible for the blood of these brothers and sisters of ours?” Francis asked. “Nobody! That is our answer. It isn’t me; I don’t have anything to do with it; it must be someone else, but certainly not me. Yet God is asking each of us: ‘Where is the blood of your brother that cries out to me?’”

Some essential elements for advancing the common good pertain to opposing intrinsically evil acts. Some pertain to issues of structural sin. And others, as “The Splendor of Truth” (1993) reminds us, fall under the category of accomplishing great goods, like the profoundly beautiful vision of social solidarity advanced by Pope John Paul II or the pioneering reflections on stewardship and creation that Pope Benedict XVI brought to the world. There is no single category of sin or evil, social good or virtue, that is the filter for discerning the priorities of the church in the public order. The concept of the common good is multidimensional in its very nature, and any reductionist effort to minimize this quality is a distortion of our heritage and teaching.



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Role of Prudence

The role of prudence has been one of the most misused elements in the Catholic political conversation in the United States in recent years. It is frequently asserted, particularly in election years, that issues pertaining to intrinsic evils do not necessitate prudential judgment, while other grave evils like war, poverty or the unjust treatment of immigrants are merely prudentially laden issues on which people of good will can disagree.

The truth is that prudence is a necessary element of any effort to advance the common good through governmental action. Moving from even the clearest moral principle to specific legislation or administrative action involves questions of strategy, prioritization and practicality. Even then, no law or program can ever encapsulate the clarity and fullness of the original moral principle.

Consider the issue of abortion, which represents probably the least complex application of clear and compelling Catholic moral principle to law. It is clear that Catholic teaching demands robust and effective legal sanctions against abortion. But should the law criminalize abortion for the mother or for those performing the abortion? Alternatively, should there be noncriminal sanctions? What is the best pathway to outlawing abortion: a series of graduated proposals beginning with parental notification and prohibitions

ON THE WEB

Bishop Robert W. McElroy on the church under Pope Francis. americamagazine.org/podcast

on late-term abortion, or an immediate full court press for comprehensive prohibitions? These are questions on which people of good will can disagree in full accord with Catholic teaching, since all of these approaches seek to achieve the core principle that the law should protect the life of the unborn. Thus this is wholly different from the candidate who refuses to vote for any legal restrictions on abortion and argues that he is in fact doing more to reduce abortions by his support for aid to the poor and health care programs. Such a candidate has rejected the core substance contained in the Catholic teaching on abortion and civil law.

So it is with the issue of poverty. The core teaching of the church on the role of government in combating poverty declares that in addition to promoting conditions that provide meaningful jobs for their citizens, nations must provide a humane threshold of income, health benefits and housing. Just as important, as Pope Francis has repeatedly taught, wealthy nations must work ardently to reduce gross inequalities of wealth within their borders and beyond. Accomplishing

these goals requires a series of complex prudential decisions about financial structures, incentives for wealth creation and income support programs that enhance rather than undermine family life. Many different types of choices are compatible within a full commitment to Catholic teachings on economic justice.

But choices by citizens or public officials that systematically, and therefore unjustly, decrease governmental financial support for the poor clearly reject core Catholic teachings on poverty and economic justice. Policy decisions that reduce development assistance to the poorest countries reject core Catholic teachings. Tax policies that increase rather than decrease inequalities reject core Catholic teachings. The nature and tone of Pope Francis' declarations on poverty and evil in the world powerfully convey that while prudence is necessary in the formulation of economically just policies, the categorical nature of Catholic teaching on economic justice is clear and binding.

The teachings of Pope Francis on "a church for the poor" not only speak to the centrality of addressing poverty as an imperative for Catholics in the public order, but also call us to look anew at the nature of the common good in society and how we seek to achieve it. We are called to see the issues of abortion and poverty, marriage and immigrant rights, euthanasia and war, religious liberty and restorative justice, not as competing alternatives often set within a partisan framework, but as a complementary continuum of life and dignity. We are called to create a Catholic political conversation that proclaims the greatest problems of our day can only be solved with a vision rooted in the transcendent dignity of the human person. For in the end, the very purpose of Catholic political conversations is to help our nation see human suffering and human striving not through the lens of politics but as God sees them. **A**

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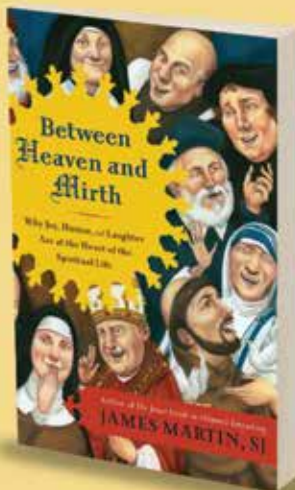
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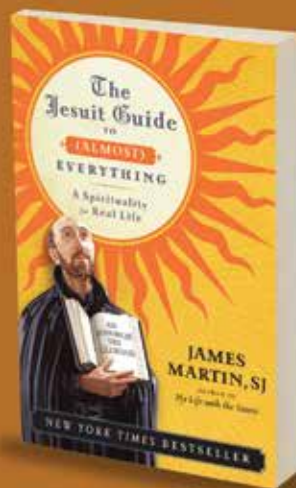
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A Pastoral Invitation

BY DONALD W. WUERL

When I first read the substantive interview with Pope Francis in *America*, I was drawn by the pope's openness, engaging style and repeated call to "go out" and meet people where they are. What is needed, he says, is nearness and proximity to those who are wounded.

This certainly is a theme he has made something of a mantra in his ministry. I also immediately thought of his remarks as a vivid expression of the new evangelization—to present the Gospel in ways "new in ardor, methods and expression" (Blessed John Paul II, Address to the Latin American Episcopal Conference, March 9, 1983). In the interview Pope Francis says: "The proposal of the Gospel must be more simple, profound, radiant. It is from this proposition that the moral consequences then flow."

The more I reflected on his message, it struck me as so very pastoral and precisely what the church needs today. His many references to God's love for us and Christ's embrace of us reminded me of Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical "God Is Love" (2005) but now in a whole new way of saying the same message and never losing sight of the heart of the proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you!

Our Holy Father begins with a remarkable assertion, "I am a sinner," prompting us to admit that we too are sinners, but, as he adds, "God is greater than sin." When I read, "The confessional is not a torture chamber, but the place in which the Lord's mercy motivates us to do better," I could not help but think of Blessed John Paul II's "Dives in Misericordia" (1980) and "Reconciliatio et Paenitentia" (1984). Clearly this also echoes the Synod of Bishops in October 2012 on "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith" that recognized penance as the sacrament of the new evangelization and called for this sacrament to "be put again at the center of the pastoral activity of the Church" (Proposition 33).

The full pastoral focus of both the synod and Pope Francis' interview is reflected in so many ways. "Those who today always look for disciplinary solutions, those who long for an

exaggerated doctrinal 'security,' those who stubbornly try to recover a past that no longer exists—they have a static and inward-directed view of things," the pope says. "In this way, faith becomes an ideology among other ideologies."

Reading the interview again—because one really must read it multiple times to take in the richness of the Holy Father's message—I realized it may be a whole new way for the pope to share his thoughts. This is not so much the pope speaking about what we need to know about the Gospel message as it is



NEW EVANGELIZER.
Pope Francis in Cagliari,
Sardinia, on Sept. 22.

how to "do" the Gospel message. Again, it is the embodiment of his many invitations to "go out" to people, to build bridges, not walls, and establish a dialogue with all people, even those who do not embrace all of the church's teachings. He has invited us to meet people where they are and walk with them on the journey to experience God's love in very practical ways like an invitation to Mass or a conversation about faith. He shares that it takes "audacity and courage." As Pope Francis himself has spoken about his own shyness, I feel he knows just how courageous we all need to be.

In this interview we meet the pope as homilist. What came to mind was each priest—in the Sunday homily—trying to

CARDINAL DONALD W. WUERL *is the archbishop of Washington.*

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present God's love, inspire acceptance of the Gospel and still meet the members of the congregation in real time. I thought of a lesson we were taught years ago in the seminary. From the pulpit we are expected to proclaim the Gospel message in an unvarnished and clear manner, in all its fullness. But then we are to go out to meet people where they are and try to bring them a little closer to Christ. The interview, in my view, has a way of coming out of the pulpit and taking that next and important pastoral step. It is an old message in a new and exciting form. An interview that expresses pastoral responses to people's needs is by its nature not meant to have the precision of an encyclical.


In the propositions from the synod on the new evangelization, there is a whole section on the primacy of the kerygma—the good news that Jesus died out of love for us, is risen from the dead and wants to be with each of us today in our life journey (Proposition 9).

The interview, in all its wide-ranging observations, is the call for a new evangelization in action. "Proclamation in a missionary style focuses on the essentials, on the necessary things," Pope Francis asserts. "We have to find a new balance; otherwise even the moral edifice of the church is likely to fall like a house of cards, losing the freshness and fragrance of the Gospel."

Over and over again, I heard in the interview echoes of the calls, insistent and persistent during the Synod and the general congregations before the conclave, to speak to the issues that people are struggling with—but first and foremost to bring them an experience, a sense of God's love. "I see clearly that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful," the pope said. "Then we can talk about everything else."

The third time I read the interview, I focused on a few highly personal elements that really touched me. When the pope spoke about his prayer life, I felt he was actually talking to me. Finding a pattern for prayer—conversation with God—that works in the midst of all the requirements of our pastoral office was so reassuring because it was not abstract. It showed a pastor balancing his personal spiritual life with his ministry. I particularly liked his comments about taking his work with him to the chapel and not seeing this as a distraction. It reminded me of the same advice from a very wise spiritual director.

Going over the pope's words, I feel so encouraged. It is refreshing to hear, "The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you. And the ministers of the church must be ministers of mercy above all." It is encouraging to hear again, "In pastoral ministry we must accompany people, and we must heal their wounds."

While I recognize this is an interview, not an apostolic exhortation, it is still the voice of the bishop of Rome, the pope, who is providing such pastoral emphasis. It is a gift. 

Francis in 'America'

A historic papal interview draws world-wide reaction

Editor's note: The historic interview with Pope Francis (Am. 9/30) has generated a great deal of dialogue in the church and in society at large. We asked several writers to offer their reactions to the pope's words. Selections from these responses are printed below. The full versions of these pieces can be read at americamagazine.org/papal-responses.

Francis as Witness

BY BLASE J. CUPICH

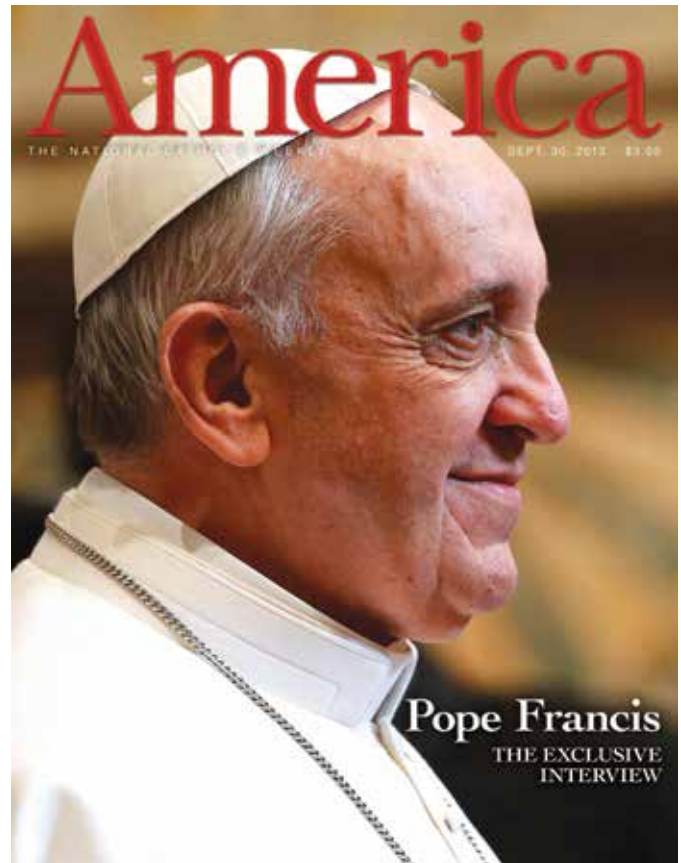
Each of us needs to take time to reflect on how to respond to this "extemporaneous encyclical," as the commentator Michael Gerson calls it. But even now, as a diocesan bishop for 15 years, I can already identify some areas of my ministry of teaching, sanctifying and governing that will benefit. These initially come to mind:

1) Catechesis, preaching and passing on the faith must not only be about educating the members of our communities in the content of our tradition. This is important, but it must equally be about developing their spiritual sensitivity to the ways God manifests his presence and action in the world. Schooling people in the ways of ongoing discernment produces a greater receptivity to the tradition of the church and at the same time creates the freedom that will make them more responsive to the will of God throughout their lives. This balance is in keeping with the Lord's great commission: "Go teach and make disciples."

2) Pope Francis' emphasis on ongoing discernment of the action and will of the ever-merciful One has implications also for our worship and the promotion of communion among Christians. As the source and summit of Christian life, the liturgy needs to be the celebration that reveals his saving and redeeming work taking place through and in the midst of the people called to be his own. Reflecting that aspiration more fully in our multicultural communities makes the task of inculturation all the more urgent.

3) Similarly, instead of a minimalist approach to promoting ecumenism by healing differences and reconciling the past, the work of Christian unity becomes foremost an opportunity to look for how God is working in our separated brothers and sisters and "recognize what the Spirit has sown in the other as a gift for us."

4) Collaborative governance needs to be more than calling on the advice and competence of others to make up for our episcopal shortcomings. Rather, governance involves seeking how God is revealing his work through others in the com-



munity. Rather than limiting our consultation to those with financial and legal abilities, we also need to listen to those who work side by side with the poor each day, and who are on the front lines in health care, education and other fields of ministry. We diminish our effectiveness when we do not call on these brothers and sisters to gain insight before making decisions in these areas. But even more important, we pass up the chance to see how God is working through them and to more fully know God's will.

Francis offers the witness of one who has personally internalized and who himself lives what he preaches or proclaims. This is the essential feature of true evangelization, which Paul VI had in mind in "Evangelii Nuntiandi" (1975). The modern person "listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." Ultimately, it is only the witness who convinces people, not the teacher.

MOST REVEREND BLASE J. CUPICH is the bishop of the Diocese of Spokane, Wash.

A Vatican II Pope

BY JOHN W. O'MALLEY

Francis is the first pope from the Americas, the first Jesuit pope, the first to take the name Francis. He is also the first pope in 50 years who did not participate in the Second Vatican Council. And that is good news! Popes Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI all participated in the council. During their pontificates they had to deal with the battles of the council.

Francis is above that. Not having participated, he was freer to get the council's basic message, and he has been putting it into action by word and deed ever since his election.

The council was more concerned with how the church is rather than what it is, even if those two things cannot really be separated. The council was concerned with how the church behaves, how it bears itself toward its members and those who are not members. Does it behave first and foremost as the loving mother of all, or does it behave as the world's moral policeman? Francis has clearly chosen the former.

But is he really going to change things? Well, don't you think he has already changed things—big time? In choosing the name Francis, he wrote his first encyclical in a way more powerful than any written document. He did the same when he washed the feet of the Muslim woman.

There is an old saying you may be familiar with: actions speak louder than words. There is another: who you are thunders so loud I cannot hear what you are saying. By his actions Francis has been revealing himself, and those actions have for six months been thundering through the church and the world beyond it.

JOHN W. O'MALLEY, S.J., is university professor in the theology department of Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., and author of *What Happened at Vatican II*.

One Human Family

BY MEGHAN J. CLARK

When Pope Francis decided to live at Casa Santa Marta, the Vatican guesthouse, instead of the traditional papal apartment in the Apostolic Palace, many lauded him for his simplicity and rejection of perceived luxury. While he is indeed a humble man, Francis gives another reason for his decision to remain at Santa Marta: his yearning for a strong sense of community. "I cannot live without people. I need to live my life with others."

Francis bears testimony to this interpersonal spirituality not only in his words but in his visits around Italy. Earlier this month, Pope Francis visited the Jesuit Refugee Center in Rome. Standing with the refugees, many of them fleeing horrific violence, he stated, "To serve means to work alongside the neediest, first of all to establish a close human relationship with them, based on solidarity. Solidarity, this word elicits fear in the developed world. They try not to say it. It's almost a dirty word for them. But it's our word!"

Our word—Pope Francis is continuously pushing us beyond the comforts of our religious boundaries to encounter the one human family.

The pope's recognition that my humanity is bound up with his and with those suffering in poverty is the

pastoral message America needs most today. The United States is experiencing a crisis of community, evidenced by the House of Representatives recent vote to cut \$4 billion from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Can we say solidarity is "our word" when our country is so individualistic that we do not feel a moral responsibility to feed the hungry? The Gospel and Pope Francis remind us that Christ entered into our community by becoming vulnerable and going to the margins.

MEGHAN J. CLARK is an assistant professor of moral theology at St. John's University and a displaced resident of Long Beach, N.Y.

The Work of a Christian Lifetime

BY RICHARD ROHR

Pope Francis has become for many of us a living example of the very healthy fruits of the "discernment of spirits" that Paul speaks of (1 Cor 12:10) and the Society of Jesus has so skillfully unpackaged for the church universal.

The result is a subtlety that we have not come to expect from the hierarchy, an intelligence that is nondualistic and contemplative, an amazing courage that could only be sustained by very real prayer and a compassion that has become a challenge and inspiration to all of us. Pope Francis is not dismissing the old, but like all true prophets he is revealing what the Big Tradition was really saying all along. Looking at much of our Catholic past, I can only think of Jesus' words to the people of Jerusalem: "How often I have longed to gather the children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would have none of it" (Mt 23:38). Now we cannot get enough of it! We have a pope who gath-

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ers instead of scatters (Lk 11:23).

As a teacher of contemplative prayer and the contemplative mind, I have come to believe that the Western church has put far too much effort and fight into metaphysics (“What certainly is”) and not nearly enough energy into practical epistemology (“How do you know what you think you know about what certainly is?”). This has made most of us victims of our own temperament and prejudices, while presuming we are speaking for the truly catholic. Far too often it has been our small mind’s understanding and very recent traditions that have had to pass for “what eternally is.” Ironically, it is Pope Francis’ ability to critique his own mind (“discernment”) that enables him to trust his own experience, while also balancing it with Scripture and Tradition.

The Gospel cautions us: “Be careful how you listen” (Lk 8:18). Pope Francis is emerging as a giant corrective to so much of our small seeing and listening by telling us that the first Christian hearing aid and lens through which we receive the moment must always be nothing less than the ears and eyes of love. It is almost too simple, and yet as we have all learned, it is the hard work of a whole Christian lifetime. Pope Francis appears to be the work of art that emerges after a whole Christian lifetime. The world loves to look at it.

RICHARD ROHR, O.F.M., is the author of many books on spirituality, including *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*.

‘I Am A Sinner’

BY STEPHEN BULLIVANT

‘**W**ho is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?’ “I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech.... I am a sinner.” Our pope’s admissions and gestures of humility have become one of his trademarks. Francis’ humility, however, is not like Uriah Heep’s: a purely formal show of being “ever so ‘umble.” Instead, it expresses a central conviction of the Christian faith. As we now know, Cardinal Bergoglio accepted his election to the papacy with the words: “I am a sinner, but I trust in the infinite mercy and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And these whispered words, I realized on reading the interview, help to explain many of the pope’s more pyrotechnic utterances.

For the Christian, the searing guilt one feels for one’s sins is, or ought to be underwritten with hope in the One who is “rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4). With great sorrow at having sinned, comes the greater appreciation of him who is able, and willing, to forgive us. Thus the famous words of 1 Tm 1:15: “The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost.” Or as Paul writes in Romans, “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (5:20). From Paul

and Augustine, right down to Dorothy Day and Mother Teresa, it is always the saints who are most painfully aware of how sinful they are, of how desperately they need God’s mercy.

If “sin” is a concept that has fallen out of fashion, word seems not to have reached Casa Santa Marta. Francis uses it often, and not only when speaking candidly of his own “faults and...sins.” Elsewhere in the interview, he speaks of “the life of a human person” as “a land full of thorns and weeds,” and—developing Augustine—outlines his vision of the church as a “field hospital” administering first aid (“Heal the wounds, heal the wounds”). Behind each of these images, of course, is a Gospel idea: “the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth” that risk choking out the sower’s word (Mk 4:19), and Christ’s declaration that “those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come not to call the righteous but sinners” (Mk 2:17).

STEPHEN BULLIVANT is senior lecturer in theology and ethics at St. Mary’s University College, England. His books include *Faith and Unbelief* and *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*.

In Need of Mercy

BY PATRICK J. GILGER

For those deeply immersed in the spirituality of Ignatius, being a “sinner” does not mean “having done things wrong” (although that is true). It doesn’t even mean that we will always do things wrong in the future (also true). It means that humans are—at root, ontologically—always in need of the living mercy of God.

This is the reason Pope Francis calls himself a sinner. It is the reason he speaks so relentlessly about mercy. It is because he knows what all women and men who live deeply an Ignatian life know, that God’s mercy reframes our interpretation of everything, institutions included. It does so because, having understood the joy of being wrong, we have learned to hold our own plans loosely so as to be better led by God. This is what St. Ignatius means by another famous spiritual term, “indifference”—the freedom to be led by God into the previously unimaginable.

It is this triptych of mercy-sin-indifference that, I think, makes Francis seem so strange and so attractive to us. It’s also how he can seem both so politically naïve and astute at the same time. All of these things are possible because Pope Francis knows himself as a loved sinner, as a follower of the Christ who is actually setting the direction of our pilgrim church.

Because he knows himself to be a loved sinner, he is able to again and again throw a wrench of mercy into our gears of interpretation. It’s not that he doesn’t care about change, or institutional reform, or theo-political structures, or the

mobilization of the Catholic middle. Actually, on second thought, he does not care about any of those in themselves. Or, more accurately, he only cares about them indifferently—only when the God who shows sinners mercy also cares about them first.

All this is to say that Pope Francis is simply not playing by the rules of the game. He is not keeping score, not tallying up points on one side or another of a Vatican II “continuity versus discontinuity” argument. He does not have some secret plan either to reform doctrine or to pacify the prophets among us with charm. He simply does not care about any of that. He only cares about proclaiming God’s merciful love for sinners, and from that everything can follow.

PATRICK J. GILGER, S.J., *founding editor in chief of The Jesuit Post, is the associate pastor of St. John’s Parish at Creighton University in Omaha, Neb. A longer version of this comment appeared at WashingtonPost.com*

An Ongoing Conversation

BY ROBERT P. IMBELLI

If America were to commission me for a follow-up conversation with Pope Francis, here are some of the questions I would raise.

Holy Father, in the first conversation you seem more critical of “restorationists” and “legalists” than of “relativists” (who so troubled your illustrious predecessor). You do brief-

ly refer to “relativism,” only to posit that the God of the Bible, whom we encounter on the journey (“nel cammino”), transcends relativism. I think the many eavesdroppers on the conversation would profit greatly from further elucidation of your thinking in this regard. How can we speak today of the God revealed in Jesus Christ as “absolute”?

You also issue a powerful call to the Society that bears Jesus’ name to be “de-centered” from itself and ever centered upon “Christ and his church.” But what are the implications of claiming Christ as center? Does it not impel us beyond narrative to engage questions of truth, beyond practice to its contemplative foundation? Having followed your homilies at Casa Santa Marta on the Letter to the Colossians, proclaiming Christ as “the image of the invisible God...in whom all things hold together,” I can certainly anticipate your response. But your further reflections on this theme would much enrich and challenge the continuing conversation, especially among those standing in “the courtyard of the gentiles.”

At the close of your conversation, Father Spadaro posed a question about changes in human self-understanding over the centuries. You endorsed his point and instanced works of art from different historical periods to illustrate the fact. At the same time, as an astute spiritual director, you admit that men and women are often prone to self-deception. May I urge that we would all derive considerable profit from a further conversation that sets forth those principles that can



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guide our discernment of what constitutes authentic human flourishing. For, as I remind my own students, “finding God in all things” is the fruit of the first three weeks of Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises, not the point of departure.

REV. ROBERT P. IMBELLI, a priest of the Archdiocese of New York, teaches theology at Boston College. He was on the founding committee of Cardinal Joseph Bernardin’s Catholic Common Ground Initiative.

A Pope Engaged With the World

BY KAREN SUE SMITH

In his interview with *America* one glimpses the pope as an inquisitive child, as a young man called to the priesthood, as a priest with so much potential that he was promoted to leadership too early and made some mistakes in governance. From his mistakes, however, he has learned to listen, to value collaboration and to practice discernment. The pope reveals himself as a complex person. He is a holy man of prayer, an empathetic pastor, a discerning Jesuit, a family man deeply influenced by his grandmother and a loving father who as “il papa” eagerly cares for his “children” in the church. He is also the director of a field hospital whose mission is to heal the world’s wounded with the Gospel.

It seems to me that the media’s convergence on a single point from this long interview as “the news”—namely, the pope’s desire to change (or at least put on hold) the church’s obsession with moral condemnations of sex-related sins—confirms the pope’s insight that the church’s priorities urgently need fixing. Pope Francis gets it. He understands what is vital: how others see the church and why that matters; what the contemporary world needs from the church; how the people of God together

ensure the faith (infallibly, he says); what synods and local bishops’ conferences could contribute, if empowered; and how the Curia should help church leaders rather than run the church. Hooray!

Even if only a few of these insights were to be actualized, the church would be improved immensely. Some doors and windows might be opened again, a welcome mat rolled out. If it is not too late, young people might even give the church a look.

What strikes me as most lasting is the pope’s personal example. Like Francis, the beloved saint, Pope Francis seems truly to love the people of this world. He embodies the compassion of Jesus, which attracts followers, not just fans, and changes lives. This pope wants to walk with us, says he needs us to be his “community.” And this same pope who relishes great art, books, films and music has an ear attuned to the cry of the poor and wants to serve them. History will remember that.

KAREN SUE SMITH is the former editorial director of *America*.

The People of God

BY DREW CHRISTIANSEN

Of the images of the church that emerged from the Second Vatican Council, the people of God was the most important and the most popular. For almost 20 years, it was a constant in the Catholic vocabulary, even entering into the liturgy. But from the beginning, it was regarded as suspect.

The late Cardinal Avery Dulles worried, in *Models of the Church*, about its democratizing subtext. Others probably feared it as subversive of hierarchical authority. John Paul II neglected it, preferring the magisterial (institutional) model of the church, and sometimes even the teaching church seemed to be reduced to the pope alone.

For me the real news, potentially the most church-renewing news in Pope Francis’ interview, is his revival of the understanding of the church as the people of God. No longer an institution or, worse, an office, the church is “a community, a web of relations.” Francis embraces the model of the church that the late Cardinal Dulles called his own favorite, “a community of disciples.”

For me the other headline in the Francis interview is the re-focusing of the church on the Gospel. God’s love is the center once more of the church’s preaching. Morality has a place, but it is secondary to the Gospel of God’s love and mercy.

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To be sure, what Pope John Paul II called “the Gospel of Life” has a place in the church’s proclamation, as it has had from the beginning. But it is not the central message, and what Pope Francis calls the “obsession” with sexual morality has distorted Catholic pastoral theology and practice and social ministry, especially in the United States.

Like the Gospel of Jesus itself, the Gospel Francis preaches also shows up the Pharisaism of the moral righteousness that seeks to establish public morality according to abstract norms without making pastoral allowance for context and persons. Can there be any convincing answer to his question, “Tell me: when God looks at a gay person, does he endorse the existence of this person with love, or reject and condemn this person?”

DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S.J., is a former editor in chief of *America*.

A Cause for Confusion

BY STEPHEN P. WHITE

Pope Francis’ interview with *America* has elicited a flood of commentary, but it has also produced a lot of confusion. Much of the commentary, and virtually all of the confusion, arose from Pope Francis’ remarks about the church’s moral doctrine, particularly, this sentence: “We cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage and the use of contraceptive methods.” The fact that so much attention has been paid to the pope’s remarks about these very issues is itself an indication that “the most important thing” the church has to say to the world is not being heard.

The obvious question is, “Why not?”

Christ promised his followers that the world would reject them as it had rejected him. One reason the world does not hear the good news, as Pope Francis is intent on reminding us, is that the Father of Lies never ceases to sow discord and confusion. Sometimes the confusion arises because the world is obstinate, sinful and full of pride. Sometimes it is because the world is simply ignorant of the truth. And sometimes the world’s ignorance and sin is compounded by the impatience, pride and ignorance of Christians like us.

In the case of the recent interview, some of the confusion can be traced to Christians who, in rushing to spin the pope’s words as a decisive victory for this or that political faction, shoe-horned the pope’s words to fit narrow partisan categories, distorting it in the process. This unfortunate, if all-too-predictable distraction found a counterpart in a hyper-defensiveness that in some cases, frankly, demonstrate an insecurity unbecoming for Christian adults—as though the pope’s professing to having “never been a right-winger” (by the standards of Argentina in the 1980s, no less!) was

somehow cause for legitimate anxiety about the integrity of Catholic doctrine.

STEPHEN P. WHITE is a fellow in the Catholic Studies Program at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C.

The Call of the Spirit

BY JAMES HANVEY

Pope Francis’ confession that he is a sinner is neither ritual nor formula; it is inscribed in his daily life and actions. Yet it gives him a sense of freedom because it allows him to live always from the infinity of the Lord’s compassionate mercy and embrace. He also knows, personally, that there is here too the gift of freedom—freedom to change, freedom to live beyond the preoccupations of self, in service of the greater need and suffering we encounter in those around us and in our crucified world and planet.

And there is urgency. It is God’s own urgency that searches for us and calls us to another way of being and acting and loving: to follow Christ in his poverty and humility and in his self-surrendering gift (*Spiritual Exercises*, No. 167). But we do not find this way except by loving Christ. Nothing is more life-giving to us, to the church and to the world; nothing is more countercultural. Although there is a freshness to his words and actions, Francis has said nothing new. Yet his desire to refocus and rebalance us on the dynamic economy of God’s sav-

ing love “laboring and working in all things” is not just about style, it is about substance. In a simple, direct, personal way he is presenting us with the reality of a God who does not condemn the world but loves it more than it can believe or imagine (Jn 3:16–17). A God who can enter into the depths of our suffering is not repulsed by our woundedness or disfigurements but meets us wherever and whoever we are, heals us by bringing us ever closer to himself.

The danger of our cultural battles is that we forget the greatness and the richness of our tradition and its understanding not only of God but also of humanity. Francis is reminding us of both—the God who is always the greater love and calls us into an ever-deeper community of loving responsibility for each other and our planet. As in the *Spiritual Exercises*, so in the evangelical message of Pope Francis, we are invited to renew our response in person and as a church: “This is to ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for an intimate knowledge of the many blessings received, that filled with gratitude for all, I may in all things love and serve the Divine Majesty” (*Sp.Ex.*, No. 233).

JAMES HANVEY, S.J., a member of the British Province of the Society of Jesus, is a Fellow in Theology at Campion Hall, Oxford, England.

ON THE WEB

Additional responses to *America*’s interview with Pope Francis.
americamagazine.org/papal-responses

Our Mag in Havana

The growing influence of a new Catholic journal in Cuba

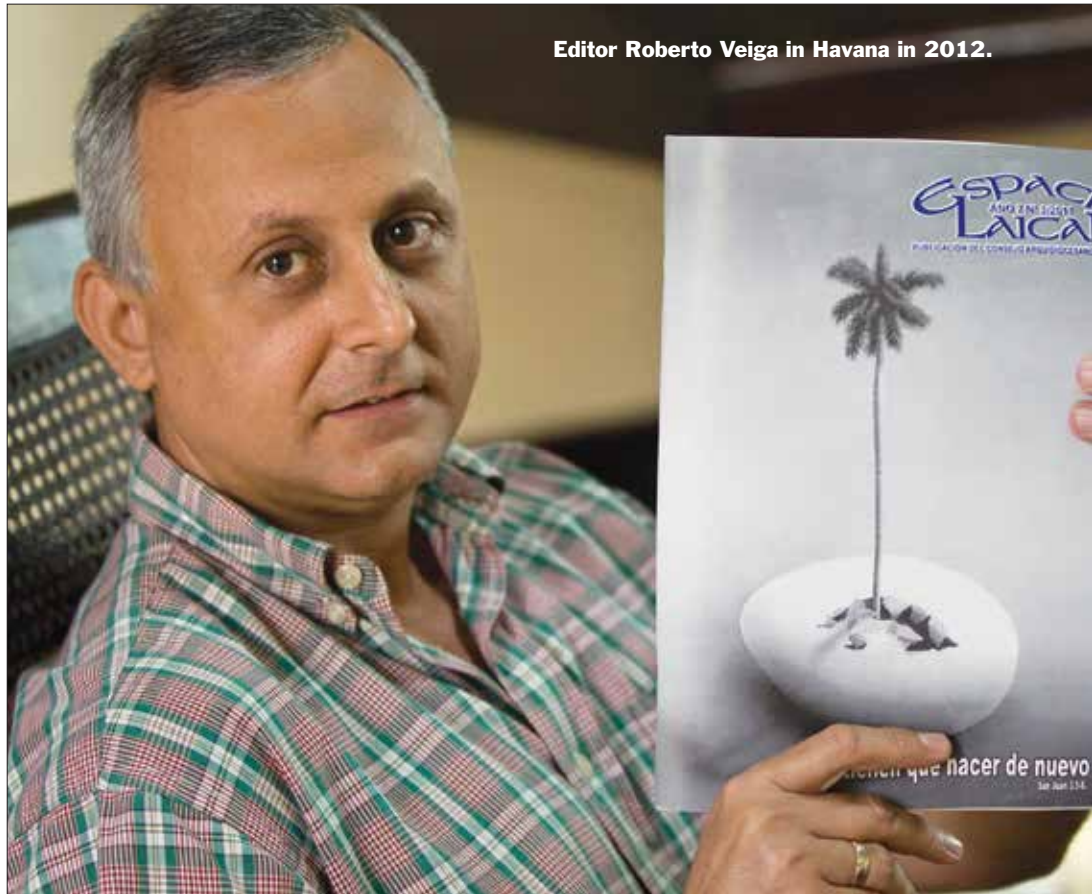
BY MARGARET E. CRAHAN

The strengthening of religions in Cuba, especially since the 1980s, is reflected in the expansion of religious media. Espacio Laical and Palabra Nueva, both publications of the Archdiocese of Havana, are the most visible and perhaps the most influential and widely disseminated, particularly among political, intellectual and cultural elites. Together with the secular journal *Temas*, Espacio Laical has been expanding the boundaries of public debate over the changes underway in Cuba. Since 2009 Espacio Laical, in particular, has played a leading role in calling for political, economic, social and cultural change with broad-based citizen participation. Its articles are disseminated through other publications beyond Havana and passed from hand to hand.

While Espacio Laical and *America* exist in very different contexts, there are some intriguing similarities. Both are committed to critical analysis of contemporary issues from diverse viewpoints. Both root their stances in Catholic theology and social doctrine. Neither has been timid about tackling controversial issues in their respective societies. In the case of *America*, for example, condemning racism in the United States began in the 1930s, while Espacio Laical has questioned the hypercentralization of political decision-making in Cuba. Both have considerable influence with political and intellectual elites, while being accessible to the general reader. And each has from time to time generated controversy.

Espacio Laical has benefited from the fact that Cuba

MARGARET E. CRAHAN is a senior research scholar at the Institute of Latin American Studies of Columbia University in New York.



Editor Roberto Veiga in Havana in 2012.

is a nation of readers. It is also a country of strong opinions, as well as a society that relishes debate. Historically, Cubans consumed newspapers, magazines and pamphlets in great quantities and employed their contents to best others in arguments ranging from politics to baseball. That remains true today. Since its founding in 2005 to the present, Espacio Laical has moved from more devotional and theological content to analyses of current political, economic, social and cultural issues. As it has developed, it has increasingly included secular voices, as well as some from outside Cuba, particularly Cuban Americans. The latter reflects the commitment of the Catholic Church in Cuba to serve as a bridge for Cubans on the island and abroad in promoting dialogue and reconciliation.

In 2010 Espacio Laical published 4,000 copies of each number; its editors estimate that each one was read by five to seven persons. However, much of its readership is by

way of its Web site (www.espaciolaical.org). Add to this the fact that recent surveys indicate that approximately 75 to 85 percent of all Cubans believe in the divine, if not in a specific god; religions have considerable potential to exercise influence within Cuban society and occupy more public space.



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A Voice for Lay Catholics

Espacio Laical promotes the insertion of lay Catholics in evangelizing the island and assisting in the amelioration of societal problems. It consciously tries to reach out to the general public and in recent years has attempted to stimulate more discussion and debate among the population in general in an effort to increase political participation and overcome passivity among the citizenry. This has encouraged both individuals and groups, as well as religions, to occupy more political space and animate civil society.

The first issue of Espacio Laical in 2005 contained articles that reflected its evangelizing purpose. Of the 16 articles, nine dealt directly and seven somewhat peripherally with religious themes. In the January-March 2013 issue, the lead article focused on proposals for recasting the official press in Cuba. The stated objective was to rethink the role of the media in the broader context of the changes currently underway in Cuba.

The remainder of the issue included some 20 articles, 12 of which focused on political, economic and social issues. Several articles focused on economic issues, including one that emphasized new developments in terms of *cuenta propismo*, that is, non-state sector enterprises.

The same issue contained two articles on the role of the Cuban armed forces by the lay editors Roberto Veiga and Lenier González that have generated considerable reaction. Veiga asserted that the Revolutionary Armed Forces, known as the FAR, had an important role to play in the transformation of Cuba currently underway, just as churches did, among others. According to Veiga, the churches' role is to elevate the spirituality of the society and promote fraternity, while intellectuals have the task of aiding the *pueblo* in dreaming of a better country. The state, he felt, ought to position itself as a moderator and guarantor of diversity, and other countries should accompany Cuba as it resolves its economic problems. These are rooted largely in heavy dependence on food and manufactured imports, which contribute to an imbalance in trade and foreign debt, inflation and overdependence of the economy on services.

In this respect, Veiga conceived of the FAR as one of the fundamental pillars that would guarantee national order, given the country's institutional and juridical weakness as it became more participatory and less hierarchical politically. Furthermore, he argued for a military that ultimately would be under civilian control, but for the present would retain a degree of autonomy and economic self-sufficiency, as well as social influence. His colleague Lenier González predicted that 200 years from now the two institutions likely to survive in Cuba would be the Catholic Church and the FAR.

Assessing Cuba's current situation, Mr. González argued that the greatest challenge facing President Raúl Castro was reforming the Cuban Communist Party and facilitating the transition of the country to a two-party political system with a loyal opposition. This, he argued, was a prerequisite for negotiating with the United States, as well as for preserving the social accomplishments of the revolution. Furthermore, the stability provided by the FAR during a period of transition could also facilitate the insertion of Cuba into the global economy and the inter-American system. Given the existing role of the FAR in governing, guaranteeing national security, as well as managing some sectors of the economy, Mr. González asserted that the military could help eliminate the existing tension between the enormous concentration of power in the state and a republican civil polity.

In particular, the author perceived the military as having a role in facilitating institutional reform and an open, inclusive national dialogue. In this process Mr. González saw dialogue with the Cuban diaspora as essential. He concluded: "The Armed Forces, like the Catholic Church, have the patriotic and moral responsibility to watch over and facilitate the best

of Cuba's possible futures. Their biggest challenge consists in going beyond their particular institutional interests and constituting themselves as servants of the interests of the nation."

Church, State and Media

A major development in Espacio Laical's trajectory was the analysis of Cuba's mass media in the first issue of 2013. Gathering together a diverse group of experts, including the political scientist Esteban Morales, the award-winning journalist Luis Sexto, the researcher Jorge Gómez Barada, the journalist Justo Planas, the sociologist Aurelio Alonso and the BBC correspondent in Cuba, Fernando Raysberg, the editors asked them to evaluate the role of the mass media in Cuba, including its strengths and weaknesses. Criticisms were wide-ranging, as were recommendations for improving or transforming the press.

Among the most frequent comments were that the official press was more of an apologist for the government than a monitor. Even when the media were critical, it was felt by some of the panelists that they did so in a selective manner, leaving aside many issues and failing to examine the causes of problems. According to Esteban Morales there was a tendency to affix blame for problems on junior officials rather than senior officials. Furthermore, it was felt that rather than providing information, the media tended to hide or obscure it. Hence, the role of the media in promoting accountability, particularly on the part of officialdom, was not being realized.


Luis Sexto asserted that, by and large, ministries and government enterprises were unwilling to provide information, in spite of a 2007 resolution of the Politburo of the Cuban Communist Party that journalists should have ample access. He was also preoccupied by what he styled as the lack among younger journalists of analytical capacity, compounded by their lack of experience. Justo Planas focused on his background as a revolutionary in reporting on the centralization of the state, vertical governance and ideological homogeneity, which, he felt, had contributed to a non-pluralistic press. This made it less flexible and tolerant than the cultural realm or academia. Models imported from the Soviet Union, he asserted, had inculcated structural deficiencies that made the media ineffective and anachronistic. Mr. Gómez did not, however, feel that the Cuban media were always weak, but rather that they became so in the 1980s and 1990s. He concluded, "The Cuban press does not believe that there exist multiple truths, it believes in only one Truth."

Aurelio Alonso, a noted sociologist and specialist on religion, felt that the Cuban media was characterized by disinformation, vertical administration, fear of external influences, including the Communist Party, and self-censorship. Esteban

Morales picked up on some of these comments, arguing that media policy was made largely by the political and administrative apparatuses and not journalists. This tended to distort not only coverage of Cuba, but also international coverage. He also felt that political elites tended to underestimate the public's capacity to analyze and be informed through alternative sources, including their relatives abroad, tourists and the Internet.

Luis Sexto opined that there really was not a single government policy regarding the media, and there should be one that reflected reality in all its diversity and that the role of the media was to inform in an objective, systematic and transparent fashion. This openness required abandoning self-censorship, mediocrity, bureaucratic language, rhetoric, triumphalism and banality, as the Communist Party had recently urged. The realization of this was, however, challenging. Jorge Gómez Barata chimed in that the situation was made more complex by ideological exclusivity and the existence of an official discourse that was visible in the press. What was needed, he asserted, were policies that were efficacious, coherent and compatible with the exigencies of the time. Freedom of the press was also essential.

The consequences of a controlled press were deemed by Esteban Morales to include the poor quality of the information transmitted to the public and the weakening of the role of the media in Cuban society. Luis Sexto noted that this was not the case with respect to Espacio Laical. Rather, he felt, it was distinguished by measured and balanced reporting. There was consensus that the media should assist society in dealing with problems in order to secure a better future. In this respect, Cuba needs a press that reflects the desire for social justice and national autonomy. The alternative press, including the religious media and social media, had a critical role to play, but an effective secular media was even more important. Hence, the official media needed to be reformed and rooted more firmly in civil society. It was concluded that better media would make for improved socialism. A media-wide debate between the Espacio Laical and the official media would be interesting.

Clearly Espacio Laical is increasingly stimulating broad-based discussions particularly of political and socioeconomic issues. Tackling the role of the Cuban armed forces and the official media demonstrated a determination to confront major issues in a very direct fashion. By doing so, it has generated considerable debate and some criticism. Overall, however, political and intellectual elites have been attentive, conceding that Espacio Laical is raising issues that the mass media are not. As a consequence, the publication is occupying more political space than other actors in civil society. Whether a religious publication will continue to have influence as more opportunities open up for secular actors in Cuban society is the question. 

ON THE WEB

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BOOKS & CULTURE

FILM | JOHN P. MCCARTHY

MULTIPLE RESTRAINTS

Steve McQueen's '12 Years a Slave'

In 1841 Solomon Northup (Chiwetel Ejiofor), a black violinist living in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., with his wife and children, was invited by two white performers to join them on a lucrative circus tour. It was a trap, however, and Northup was kidnapped and given a new identity: Platt Hamilton, runaway Georgia slave. Thus begins the titular experience of **12 Years a Slave**, a film based on a true story from antebellum America. Northup is sold to William Ford of Louisiana (Benedict Cumberbatch), a relatively compassionate man. But after clashing with an overseer on Ford's sugarcane plantation, he is sent to the cotton estate of Edwin Epps

(Michael Fassbender). Epps is sadistic and fixated on his young slave mistress Patsy (Lupita Nyong'o).

The depraved mentality Solomon is up against can be described as viciousness bordering on the psychotic. Epps is the most egregious example, but most every slave owner in the film seems to relish being cruel. One former overseer, who is made to pick cotton alongside Epps's slaves, thinks so many whites in the slave milieu are unhinged or dissolute because "no man can whip another daily without tearing himself apart." Identities on both sides are torn asunder. Solomon gradually decides he must adopt a submissive demeanor, alter his

manner of speech and stifle his talents and intellect in order to survive. Having determined it is fruitless to fight back or attempt an escape, he looks for a chance to send word home.

The film astonishes because it is so wrenching yet unsentimental, so devastating yet sober, so harrowing yet beautiful. But be forewarned: even knowing that Solomon's odyssey ends eventually, it is hard to find joy in this unsettling work.

Sean Bobbitt, who photographed director Steve McQueen's previous movies, "Hunger" and "Shame," delivers evocative imagery throughout this carefully calibrated film. Based on the book Northup published in 1853 about his ordeal, it forcefully portrays the barbarity and perverse logic behind antebellum slavery. It examines the institution without reaching for a rhetorical whip, moral cudgel or anything designed to assuage ethical or aesthetic sensibilities.

Benedict Cumberbatch and Chiwetel Ejiofor in "12 Years a Slave"



The most incredible aspect of Northup's story is that he lived to tell it. One pivotal sequence is so devastating you wonder how anyone could have survived it. Solomon faces an agonizing moral quandary that, if treated in an exploitative way, would repel; instead it invites reflection.

McQueen eschews the gratuitously graphic without flinching from the disturbing subject matter. As a rule, the faces of those being brutalized are not shown while they're being beaten. This isn't a cop-out, particularly since ghastly sound effects and other visuals trigger ample empathetic immediacy. Rather, this absence of faces signifies the slaves' lack of humanity in the eyes of their owners. It also emphasizes for the viewer that what is being lacerated is not the victim's entire self. The characters' souls, something essential, remain intact. That said, Patsey gets whipped and the fiendish Mistress Epps (Sarah Paulson) disfigures her twice, suggesting that in her pitiable case physical and spiritual tor-

ment are indivisible.

Epps's neighbor, Shaw, evidently sublimates his guilt by womanizing. His wife (Alfre Woodard) was once his slave, and she mentors Patsey. In one of the movie's lightest scenes, she says turning a blind eye to her husband's infidelity is a small price to pay for living in the manor house and being labor-exempt. She's not very convincing, however, and you sense her cheery mask comes with unseen shackles.

McQueen's restrained, pictorial style contrasts with Quentin Tarantino's revenge fantasy "Django Unchained," about a freed slave who exacts bloody revenge on slaveholders circa 1858. Tarantino delights in crafting cartoonish, pop-culture-infused mayhem, and his protagonists meet violence with violence. In "Hunger" and "Shame," McQueen presented arty images of extreme physical distress, namely, starvation and sex addiction. Here he goes further, successfully using corporeal damage to access a more complex level of meaning. And he does so without holding up Solomon's saga as emblematic of the history of slavery.

The dialogue and period accents sound stilted at first, but the authenticity of John Ridley's script comes through—in part because it is free of anachronistic usages or torrents of four-letter words (see "Django Unchained"). There are numerous stunning edits and juxtapositions of imagery, but no symbol is allowed to carry too much weight. For example, Solomon's use of berry juice as ink is a vivid reminder of his literacy yet not a substitute for his blood. Interstitial shots of the landscape provide context for, and respite from, the human suffering without romanticizing nature. And Bobbitt's exquisite cinematography never strains to manipulate darkness and light.

Ejiofor's low-key, naturalistic acting mode is ideal for conveying Northup's self-control and intelligence. And Fassbender avoids turning the malevo-

lent Epps into a one-note nemesis. The performance that doesn't seem to fit is Brad Pitt's cameo as the abolitionist carpenter Samuel Bass. Not only does Pitt resemble an exile from reality TV's "Amish Mafia," Bass's arrival at the plantation and pointed queries seem too convenient and quaint. Before predicting a day of reckoning for the nation and slaveholders, he asks Epps, "In the eyes

of God what's the difference between white and black?"

God is invoked at other key junctures. Mistress Shaw

says the Lord will mete out justice to slave owners someday. And Patsey tells Solomon God will forgive him if he helps her kill herself. When he refuses, she scoffs at the idea that God could be among them in such a woeful place. For his part, Solomon does not spend time mulling theology. He puts his hope in himself and the law. Deliverance in this world is possible if he can prove his rightful legal status. Still, his focus and stoicism do not render him immune to Christianity's promise. At his lowest ebb, he joins in singing a spiritual, seemingly for the first time. Perhaps his effort not to succumb to self-pity, despair or anger needs the boost of a communal lament.

At the film's muted conclusion, Solomon tells his family, "I have had a difficult time." His modesty and understatement are echoed in the movie's measured tone. We are never asked to view his plight as worse than that of his fellow slaves who have never known freedom, and there is no emphasis on the superficial, material advantages of freedom. The qualities that enabled Solomon to endure and overcome are mirrored in McQueen's steely artistic vision, one that resists cushioning the pain or celebrating it with voyeuristic masochism.

JOHN P. MCCARTHY has written about theater, film and television for *The Journal News*, *Variety*, *Boxoffice* and *Catholic News Service*.

ON THE WEB

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Sitting

I don't know, never know
why this sudden joy swell,
the sea wall of self falls
and a tide of stars pours
over and through me.

Please take my blood,
make a serum, inoculate
me for when this passes
and I again fear, certain
that wonder cannot be.

CLIFFORD PAUL FETTERS

Clifford Paul Feters has poems published or forthcoming in The Tampa Review, The Oxford American, The New York Review of Books and many others. He lives in Miami with his wife, Debra Dean.

LEAD US NOT INTO CLERICALISM

Next month I turn 30. While that might seem like an old age to me as I approach the milestone, most people are quick to remind me of how young a friar and priest I still am. That statement of fact is often, but not always, accompanied by some well-meaning remark by a parishioner after Mass or an audience member after a talk suggesting that I'm not like other "young priests" they know.

What generally follows that sort of comment is an expression of concern about the perceived unapproachable or pretentious character of so many of the newly ordained. They appear to be more concerned about titles, clerical attire, fancy vestments, distance between themselves and their parishioners, and they focus more on what makes them distinctive than on their vocation to wash the feet of others (Jn 13:14–17), to lead with humility and to show the compassionate face of God to all.

What concerns people, in other words, is clericalism.

What I hear in these moments is not so much a compliment or praise for me as the worry people have for the future of ministry. As St. Francis cautioned his brothers, I realize that anything good that comes from my encounters in ministry is God's work, and the only things I can truly take "credit" for are my weaknesses and sinfulness (Admonition V). And, trust me, there are plenty of both in my own life. At the heart of this encounter is the intuitive recognition that we are all sinners, yet we all have equal dignity as the baptized, and that those ordained to the ministerial priesthood should serve their sisters and brothers on our

DANIEL P. HORAN, O.F.M., is the author of several books, including the forthcoming *The Last Words of Jesus: A Meditation on Love and Suffering*.

journey of faith.

While I know many good and humble religious and diocesan priests, I've encountered far too many clergy who, for whatever reason, feel they are above, better or more special than others. Pope Francis also recognizes this and spoke critically about it in the impromptu interview he gave during his return trip from World Youth Day.

Catholic News Service reported the pope's words: "I think this is a time for mercy," particularly a time when the church must go out of its way to be merciful, given the "not-so-beautiful witness of some priests" and "the problem of clericalism, for example, which have left so many wounds, so many wounded. The church, which is mother, must go and heal those wounds."

Pope Francis names this the culture of clericalism, which maims and distorts the body of Christ, wounding those who seek God's mercy but instead encounter human self-centeredness.

In an interview published in *America* (9/30), Pope Francis suggested ministers could help heal these wounds with mercy. He said: "The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you. And the ministers of the church must be ministers of mercy above all."

St. Francis of Assisi is often remembered for having had a special reverence for priests, a characteristic that appears frequently in his writings. But he also had a particular vision for how the

brothers in his community, ordained or not, would live in the world. His instruction seems as timely as ever in light of the persistence of clericalism.

In his *Earlier Rule* St. Francis says, "Let no one be called 'prior,' but let everyone in general be called a lesser brother." He also wrote in Admonition XIX:

Blessed is the servant who does not consider himself any better when he is praised and exalted by people than when he is considered worthless, simple, and looked down upon, for what a person is before God, that he is and no more. Woe to that religious who has been placed in a high position by others and [who] does not want to come down by his own will. Blessed is that servant who is not placed in a high position by his own will and always desired to be under the feet of others.

Too many clergy feel they are above laity, better or more special than others.



All members of the clergy, not just Franciscans, should be challenged by these words.

Eight months into Pope Francis' pontificate, I sense that he is challenging the whole church, but especially its ordained members, to a similar way of living. His call for humbler and more generous priests is a call to work against a culture of clericalism. It is a call for priests and bishops, young and old, to remember that their baptism is what matters most.

CAMUS AT WAR

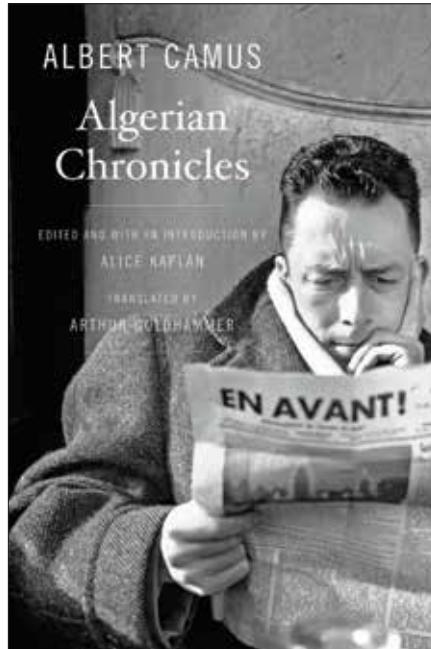
ALGERIAN CHRONICLES

By Albert Camus,
 Edited By Alice Kaplan
 Translated By Arthur Goldhammer
 Belknap Press. 240p \$21.95

This short book makes available for the first time in English a series of articles in French compiled in 1958 by Albert Camus from his writings on Algeria from 1939 to 1958. Camus was born and raised in Algeria, a *pied noir*, a member of the minority European community, his family of humble background. After the world-wide movement toward decolonization gained steam in the 1940s and '50s, Camus saw his native land torn apart during the bloody and destabilizing Algerian war, beginning in 1954 and ending with independence from France in 1962. It was a complex conflict characterized by guerilla warfare, terrorism against civilians, the use of torture on both sides, reprisals and counterterrorism operations by the French Army. These articles chronicle his attempts over 20 years to influence the powerful forces at play, and his anguish at being powerless in the face of intransigence is palpable.

It comes as some surprise that Camus was not in favor of Algerian independence, as were so many in France, as Jean-Paul Sartre and others. Yet he knew that colonization with its injustices must end. His was a middle way, a federated Algeria maintaining close ties to France. For Algeria at that time had a population of nine million of which approximately eight million were Arabo-Berber and one million were European, mostly French *pied noirs*, and in the midst of such bloodshed, Camus feared for the fate of this minority in a newly independent Islamic state. But his position was un-

acceptable both to those who wanted to continue colonization with more repressive measures and to those who wanted to cut ties with Algeria completely. He saw the French who simply favored full independence as using the *pied noirs* as 'expiatory victims' for



French colonialism. "If you read certain newspapers, you get the impression that Algeria is a land of a million whip-wielding, cigar-chomping colonists driving around in Cadillacs," whereas 80 percent of the French settlers were workers and small business people trying to make a living.

What does Camus say in this book? It is divided into five sets of articles arranged in chronological order beginning with "The Misery of Kabylia" written for the Alger Republicain, a left-wing daily paper in 1939, and "Crisis in Algeria," articles published in Combat in May 1945. For both sets of articles, Camus travelled extensively, visiting

cities and villages. His purpose was to give "voice to the voiceless," and he treats unemployment, lack of schools and plain destitution.

Though moved by these descriptions, I was frustrated by the lack of context, for they are newspaper articles written over 70 years ago. To be told that the daily wage is seven francs for 10 hours of work leaves one with a vague notion that this is an unjust wage, but the lack of the context of purchasing power lessens for us today the power of the author's journalism. The same is true for a number of "common sense" solutions offered by this journalist for the misery of Kabylia, a region in the north of Algeria suffering from famine. If 70 years from today, people were to read the "common sense" solutions offered in The Detroit Free Press by a journalist of 2013 to the broken schools in the city of Detroit, what would they make of it? To the audience that may have only the vaguest notion of Detroit (and most Anglophone readers today have never even heard of Kabylia), the absence of context would hinder the impact of the writing.

Still, the author's moral indignation at the humanly intolerable situation does manage to shine through. Because the harvest and rainfall were uncertain in Algeria, the French administration had set up reserves of grain. But in World War II, these reserves were shipped to the German forces in France, and the Algerians were left at the mercy of the rainfall and spotty harvests, with famine as a result. He saw the results of the poor rainfall:

"The plow tears at the flaky, powdery soil incapable of holding the sown seed. The harvest expected for this season

will be worse than the last, which was disastrous."

In the writing from the time of the Algerian war in the 1950's, Camus

ON THE WEB

The Catholic Book Club discusses *Enon* by Paul Harding.
americamagazine.org/cbc

becomes more desperate: "Believe me when I tell you that Algeria is where I hurt at this moment, as others feel pain in their lungs." Camus calls for both sides, the French government and the freedom fighters, to admit past mistakes, denounce the atrocities against civilians on both sides and seek a just compromise. "The massacres of Guelma and Sétif have provoked deep indignation and revulsion in the French of Algeria. The subsequent re-

pression [by the French] has sown fear and hostility in the Arab masses. In this climate, the likelihood that a firm but democratic policy can succeed has diminished." Neither side listened to Camus then, but that does not mean that we should not listen to him today: engaged, informed, humane and anguished.

MARK HENNINGER, S.J., a philosophy professor at Georgetown University, has traveled in North Africa.

CAROLYN OSIEK

WHICH JESUS IS OURS?

CHRISTIAN BEGINNINGS From Nazareth to Nicaea

By Geza Vermes
Yale University Press. 228p \$30

Voltaire remarked that all Christology is somehow autobiographical. Geza Vermes, born into a Hungarian Jewish family converted to Christianity, political refugee, Catholic priest who later returned to the Judaism of his ancestors, first professor of Jewish studies at Oxford, died on May 8, 2013, at the age of 88. To my knowledge, this book, begun in 2008, finished in 2011 and published in 2013, was his last. Among biblical scholars, Vermes was well known for his work on the Jewish context and characteristics of Jesus and his teaching. He demonstrated that there is nothing attributed to Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels that cannot be found somewhere in Jewish sources earlier than or contemporary with Jesus.

Vermes's writings on Jesus over the years have consistently portrayed him as a charismatic leader in the prophetic tradition. The present book continues that line, following Max Weber's understanding of the charismatic figure as one who commands authority by his actions, which in the case of Jesus are healing, exorcism and resuscita-

tion. Vermes begins with a chapter on what he calls the "charismatic Judaism" of the biblical prophets through the Essenes of Qumran, seen as healers, to near-contemporaries of Jesus with spiritual power attributed to them, like Hanina ben Dosa. His concluding remark to this chapter sums up much of Vermes's thinking: Without an understanding of charismatic Judaism, we cannot understand the rise of Christianity.

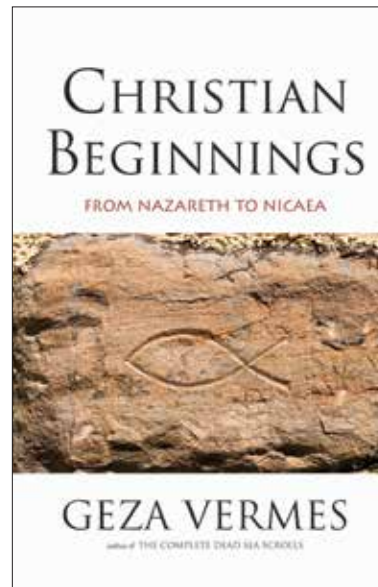
The next chapter on the charismatic Jesus is Vermes at his best. To the healing, exorcism and resurrection characteristic of the charismatic leader, Jesus adds special attention to the poor and children along with a sense of eschatological urgency. The fact that there is not a single exorcism in the Gospel of John becomes a cogent criterion against its general historical reliability. Subsequent chapters take up the development of faith in Jesus beyond Jesus himself. The first generation's religion is identical with

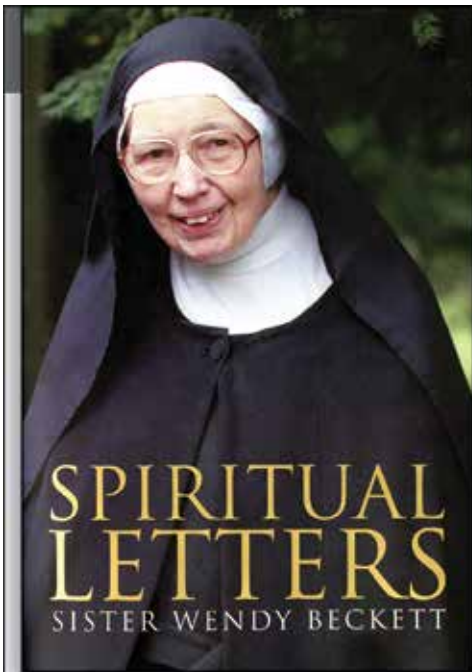
that of Jesus. The "primitive church" (an expression not often used anymore in English language scholarship) confirmed by its own healings, exorcisms and *glossolalia* that its charismatic authority continued beyond Jesus, as witnessed in Paul and Acts. Their principal beliefs, the kingdom of God, the crucified/glorified Messiah and the *parousia* held until the mid-second century, when other strains brought in from philosophy altered the terrain. Along the way, Paul's gospel is based on a crucified and exalted Christ accessed through baptism and Eucharist. Vermes drops a quiet bomb with the remark that the "mystical significance" of the eucharistic meal comes not directly from the Synoptic Gospels but from Paul, mediated to Matthew and Mark through Luke, Paul's disciple. The implied theory of Lukan priority in the Synoptic relationship is one hardly considered elsewhere and taken no further here.

Vermes then moves out of his comfort zone to survey early Christian literature beyond the New Testament. The so-called Apostolic Fathers, the miscellaneous collection written mostly in the early second century, are considered individually but without much enthusiasm except for the Didache, the most strongly Jewish document, where the "hypocrites" who fast on

alternate days are probably those who wish to remain with Pharisaic observance, and the community meal does not yet have the sacrificial significance that it was acquiring elsewhere. For Vermes, the Didache is "the first and last expression of Judaeo-Christianity after the New Testament."

By contrast, Ignatius of Antioch,





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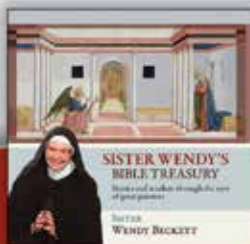
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bishop, martyr and letter writer on the way to his death in Rome, makes clear assertions of the divinity and at the same time the physical reality of Jesus and is adamant against the practice of Judaism. Thus begins the trajectory of early Christian theology in which the legitimacy of Judaism is assailed and the figure of Christ is more and more exalted, in inverse proportion. The Letter of Barnabas attacks the heart of Judaism by arguing that Jewish observances were never meant to be practiced but rather interpreted allegorically. Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis and Irenaeus were key in the development of Christological understanding, Justin being the first to introduce Hellenistic philosophy into biblical interpretation. Tertullian's innovative Trinitarian theology moved Christian theology forward in significant ways and is well handled here, as is Origen.

And so it comes to Nicaea in 325. Vermes argues that all Christology prior to the council was subordinationist, that is, even with full affirmations of Christ's divinity, it was understood with Jn 14:28 that "the Father is greater than I," rather than complete equality of being between Father and Son. Nicaea and Athanasius after it introduce a new element. From there it is a short distance to the compromise formula of Chalcedon in 451, with its assertion of full humanity and full divinity in Christ. The problem is, how does that work? Karl Rahner, S.J., said that "crypto-monophysism," that is, belief that Jesus is either human or divine but not both together, has always dominated Christian thought. Vermes solves the dilemma by suggesting that the whole Christological development was an aberration from the original charismatic Jesus. Aberration or development? Each community of believers in Jesus gives its own answer.

Some of the advertising for this book calls it "brilliant." I wouldn't go

that far. The scholarship is not new; in fact, it is rather traditional. The book is certainly a learned and well-articulated compendium of early Christian theological history up to Nicaea, from the point of view of one who placed himself deliberately outside it but nevertheless knew it well. I can think of ways in which he could have pressed his point further, for example the charismatic authority of Ignatius that underlay his authority as bishop. He could also have made much more of Montanism,

the influential mid-second-century charismatic and prophetic revival that eventually included Tertullian, instead of following the traditional dismissive disdain communicated by its enemies. He makes no distinction between ancient Israel and Second Temple Judaism and does not include in his arc the Hellenistic Judaism of scholars like Philo, who was integrating Platonism into his thinking a century before Christians like Justin began to do so. He laments the defeat of Arian

Christology, but makes no mention of its widespread success in the evangelization of northern Europe. Much scholarship has happened in recent years with which Vermes seems not to have connected. Nevertheless, this is a good summary of how we got from Nazareth to Nicaea.

CAROLYN OSIEK, R.S.C.J., is the Charles Fischer Catholic Professor Emerita at Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University. She is now archivist for the Society of the Sacred Heart, United States-Canada Province.

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Tired of Sin

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), OCT. 27, 2013

Readings: Sir 35:12–18; Ps 34:2–23; 2 Tm 4:6–18; Lk 18:9–14

“O God, be merciful to me a sinner” (Lk 18:13)

Sin is attractive. I have watched a lot of television shows in my life and a lot more commercials, and the one thing I know for certain is that sin is fun, often accompanied by happy young women and men, and there are no, absolutely no, consequences for bad behavior! If you want to be justified in your pathologies, let the pleasure bleed out from the TV screen and wash over you. You will be greeted by an audacity of entitlement for whatever behavior you engage in, secure in the confidence of one who knows that there are no repercussions. This is sin that no longer has the good sense to know what it is.

This experience is not precisely comparable to that of the pharisee in Jesus’ story of the righteous tax collector because the pharisee in the story still had the good moral sense to recognize the reality of sin and the need to honor God. He prayed: “God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.” There is one parallel, though, and that is his blindness to his own sins. Sin was something others did, and he had tired of their sins; but since he did not acknowledge sin in himself, he remained self-satisfied, happy and justified.

This ancient scenario also makes clear that it is not fair to blame Madison Avenue for our sins, our sense of entitlement or our self-righteousness. The attractions of sin, I have

it on good authority, are not original to our age. Madison Avenue and the TV networks might commodify our fallen natures and sell them back to us as entertainment, but the vast majority of us conspire with the advertisers and producers in our own downfall. If the media whisper in our ear, they only whisper lies that we delight to repeat to ourselves.

In fact, it is television that has recently put on display for us the effects of sin in as blunt a fashion as possible in the person of Walter White. The main character of the hit series “Breaking Bad” continued to tell himself that what he was doing was for the care of his family, even as he left behind a meth empire and numerous dead bodies and lost souls. But Walter White could not manage the damage of sin, and as his twisted empire crumbled, his family ruined or dead, the reality is presented to us starkly: sin is our attempt to meet our own twisted needs, which from the beginning are perversely turned away from God.

Yet Walter White only did on a larger scale what we all do when we turn away from God. He first convinced himself there was no sin and that, even if there were, it was justified. Jesus offers for our consideration a tax collector, crying out to heaven, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” Jesus tells us that the tax collector “went down to his home justified rather than the other,” the pharisee. This is the only occur-

rence of the verb *dikaioō*, to justify or make righteous, in all of Luke’s Gospel. It is a perfect participle, which means it might be translated “having been made righteous.” Why is this sinner justified? “All who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.” To move from self-exaltation to humility to justification, you need to acknowledge your sin and you need to get tired of your sin. You need to get sick of the excuses, the lies and the entitlement; you need to come



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Imagine yourself listening to the tax collector cry out to God. What sins do you need to bring to God and let go of?

home to God.

We tire of sin when we recognize we are intended for more and when we feel God’s love burning through the lies we tell ourselves. God does not need a Madison Avenue ad agency presenting his pitch: “Tired of sin? Want to get rid of it? You keep scrubbing and scrubbing but those stubborn, persistent stains won’t go? Don’t despair, there’s a God who cares.” All God needs is recognition on the part of the sinner that she is loved. In the presence of God’s love, the reality that sin cannot abide becomes gloriously apparent. This is when the cry emerges, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” The best part of all? God will be.

JOHN W. MARTENS

JOHN W. MARTENS is an associate professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn.

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