

# America



THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC REVIEW

DEC. 1, 2014 \$3.50

## What Would Francis Do?

A CATHOLIC STRATEGY  
FOR SUSTAINABILITY

GARY GARDNER



From Eden to  
Gethsemane

PETER J. VAGHI

# OF MANY THINGS

**W**hat do you get when you take a handful to a dozen of the most energetic and inspired students from almost every Jesuit high school or college in the country and bring them together for one weekend? You get the “Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice,” an annual event held this year from Nov. 15 to 17 in the Washington, D.C., area. If you could bottle the energy from that weekend, and give it in small doses to apathetic Catholics across the country, it would feel like Pentecost every day in the United States.

The Teach-In is an outgrowth of a gathering that had been associated with the School of the Americas Watch, itself a response to outrage over the death of six Jesuits and their companions martyred in El Salvador on Nov. 16, 1989. Nineteen of the 26 soldiers implicated in the murders were trained at the U.S. Army’s School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Ga. By the mid-1990s, Jesuit high schools and colleges were sending students to participate in the S.O.A. Watch on a weekend in November near that date. From 1998 to 2009, a Teach-In was held to educate students in Catholic social teaching. Finally, in 2010, the Teach-In relocated to Washington, D.C., so students could engage in advocacy with legislators on Capitol Hill.

There were many things to inspire a Jesuit priest this year. Among them galvanizing speakers like Ismael Moreno Coto, S.J., a Honduran Jesuit who spoke to the students in Spanish, with the help of a student translator. Padre Melo, as he is known, a human-rights activist in Honduras, directs Radio Progreso, a radio station committed to social change, which was shut down by the military around the time of the June 2009 coup, and has been occupied several times since.

In his deep, resonant Spanish, Padre Melo addressed the 1,600 students gathered in a hotel ballroom on the

very day of the 25th anniversary of the martyrdoms, saying, “The memory of the martyrs is a thorn in our conscience!”

It was a powerful moment for many in the immense room, and I saw several people wipe away tears. I was one of them. The martyrdom of the Jesuits and their companions occurred when I was a second-year Jesuit novice, and it affected me profoundly. Father Melo’s words brought me back to that day in 1989 and helped me to renew my commitment to social justice.

But something else moved me just as deeply: the students. It’s hard to describe how exciting it is to meet hundreds of students alive with the love of Christ and inspired by Ignatian spirituality. Because I was a speaker, I had the privilege of having many students coming up to me in the hallways after my talks to speak to me. And I was inspired by their infectious joy, their delightful enthusiasm, their terrific sense of humor and their boundless curiosity. Simply that so many had traveled so far was a sign of their faith.

Despite some sleep deprivation, all the students were energetic. All were interested in meeting students from other schools—and swapping school T-shirts. And all were passionate about social justice. Too often in past decades social justice has been termed a “1980s question.” But the call to care for the poor, as well as to address the structures that keep them poor, is something that each of these young men and young women travelled many, many miles to hear. This year, according to Chris Kerr, the executive director of the Ignatian Solidarity Network, which runs the weekend, over 90 institutions were represented—including some schools not in the Jesuit family—in the United States, Canada, Mexico and El Salvador.

Worried about the church? Then next year come to the Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice. And get a taste of the Spirit. **JAMES MARTIN, S.J.**

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*Cover:* A wooden figure of St. Francis of Assisi in the yard of the energy-efficient straw-bale house built by the Sisters of St. Francis of Tiffin in Ohio. CNS photo/Chaz Muth

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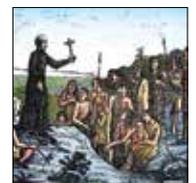
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## ON THE WEB

Raymond A. Schroth, S.J., writes on the **Jesuit suppression and restoration**, and John Anderson reviews the film "**Foxcatcher.**" Full digital highlights on page 23 and at [americamagazine.org/webfeatures](http://americamagazine.org/webfeatures).



### AIDS Today

The panic over the remote threat of a widespread Ebola outbreak in the United States has invited comparisons with the hysteria, quarantines and stigmatization of patients and health care workers brought on by the H.I.V./AIDS crisis. The veteran AIDS activist Gregg Gonsalves wrote in an article for *The New England Journal of Medicine* online on Nov. 5, “History is repeating itself, as the irrational, punitive measures deployed in the AIDS epidemic 30 years ago are revived.” And he insists that while health and government officials have plenty to learn from the missteps of the 1980s, AIDS is not yet history.

Today H.I.V. remains the world’s leading infectious killer. Last year, 1.5 million people, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa, died of AIDS-related causes, according to the World Health Organization. While the availability of antiretroviral therapy has expanded greatly in recent years, allowing those with H.I.V. to live longer, healthier lives, almost 22 million people still lack access to this therapy. The singer Elton John recently noted in a *New York Times* op-ed that in the United States, awareness of H.I.V. among groups with high rates of infection is distressingly low. Roughly 12 percent of gay and bisexual men are H.I.V. positive, but a Kaiser Family Foundation study found only a third of that population knew infections were on the rise and a majority were “not concerned” about becoming infected.

Of course H.I.V./AIDS is not a problem only for the LGBT community, any more than Ebola is a concern only for West Africans. Dec. 1, World AIDS Day, comes as a reminder that in our ever-more-connected society, threats to human health cannot be contained by borders—and neither should our compassion and generosity for those in need.

### Killing Bin Laden—Again

The death of Osama bin Laden in an early morning raid by a Navy SEAL team on May 2, 2011, provoked a variety of reactions: a sense of satisfaction for revenge for the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001; regret that bin Laden had not been brought to trial; and a reminder that every person’s death is a tragedy. Those emotions have returned thanks to unseemly, competing accounts of exactly what happened in that Pakistani compound.

In *No Easy Day*, Matt Bissonette, using the pen name Mark Owen, describes how the assault team’s point man first shot bin Laden in the head; then he and another man found him “twitching and convulsing” and finished him off. Today he faces a court judgment to forfeit \$4.5 million in royalties for failing to put the book through the proper security review

at the Pentagon. And now the former Navy SEAL Robert O’Neill claims he is the one who confronted bin Laden in his room holding one of his wives and shot him twice in the head, then shot him again. Mr. O’Neill’s accounts have included colorful details: God put him on earth to do this mission; he shot him the third time “for good luck”; and bin Laden’s “brains were spilling out on his face.” His former commander says Mr. O’Neill did not play “a singular role” in the mission.

To kill a prisoner when arrest is possible (as some suspect was the case here) violates the natural law, even if military practice condones it. To brag about it publicly degrades the braggart, his comrades and the presumably just cause for which a war is fought. Perhaps the closest Mr. O’Neill has come to the truth was during an interview with *Esquire* when he stated: “Is this the best thing I’ve ever done, or the worst?”

### Crossroads in Mexico

After an investigation that has dragged on for months, the Mexican government on Nov. 7 offered a grim finding on the fate of 43 missing students that it apparently hopes will put an end to a national uproar. Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam reports that the students, who disappeared in southern Mexico in September, were abducted by police on the orders of a local mayor, then turned over to a local drug gang, which executed them, burned their bodies and tossed the charred remains into a river. Mr. Murillo attempted to cut off further questions about this sordid tale with a dismissive, “Enough, I’m tired.”

The remark infuriated ordinary Mexicans, who are indeed far more tired than Mr. Murillo, tired of government corruption and of the violence that has been a plague across the land. After years enduring a war on drugs that after eight years generated more than 106,000 deaths—98 percent of which have gone unpunished—Mexicans could be forgiven if they had become inured to the nation’s violence. But this latest outrage has broken something wide open in Mexican society. Increasingly passionate demonstrations suggest that average citizens are no longer going to tolerate the rot within Mexico’s police, military and government.

President Enrique Peña Nieto met with the parents of the missing young people in October and pledged to continue the investigation “wherever [it] leads.” But now he has troubles of his own and is struggling to explain why his \$8 million home is registered to a company associated with a Chinese-led consortium that was awarded a no-bid \$3.7 billion contract in November to build a high speed rail link. Mexican protesters have their work cut out for them.

# The Tyranny of Talk

In Oscar Wilde's play "Lady Windermere's Fan," the character Cecil Graham explains to Lord Windermere that he never talks scandal, only gossip.

"What is the difference between scandal and gossip?" Lord Windermere asks.

"Oh, gossip is charming!" Graham replies. "History is merely gossip. But scandal is gossip made tedious by morality."

It is one of the small miracles of Pope Francis' pontificate that he rarely makes morality seem tedious. Even when he talks bluntly about our human flaws—and the pope is nothing if not blunt—he does so in a way that engages rather than alienates his audience. Listening to Pope Francis, you want to be a better Christian, not because you feel guilty, but because you want to rise to the occasion and accept his invitation to follow the Christian path.

Consider the pope's remarks on, well, gossip. Francis has rarely been more plainspoken than when talking about the "terrorism of gossip." Over the 18 months of his pontificate, he has railed against that evil on at least four occasions. In September he went so far as to say that those who judge or speak badly about others are "Christian murderers."

"It's so rotten, gossip," he said in February. "At the beginning, it seems to be something enjoyable and fun, like a piece of candy. But at the end, it fills the heart with bitterness and also poisons us."

It is a harsh judgment, but one that resonates at a time when social media and apps like Snapchat can make gossip go viral—and visual. The verbal bullying of young people, which has periodically attracted widespread attention following tragic teen suicides, is really just gossip by another name. For the pope, there is no difference between scandal and gossip. In fact, gossip may be more insidious because it disguises itself as idle, some would say harmless chatter. What harm can come from talking about someone else when he or she will never find out?

Plenty: "Those who live judging their neighbor, speaking ill of their neighbor, are hypocrites, because they lack the strength and the courage to look to their own shortcomings." For Pope Francis gossip is not only harmful because it tears down our fellow human beings, but because it diverts our attention away from what is most important: our own Christian behavior.

The pope knows of what he speaks. When Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio was elected pope, some of his fellow Jesuits

greeted the announcement with wariness because of reports of his authoritarian behavior as provincial in Argentina. It turns out that information was 40 years old; in his interview in **America** (9/30/13), the pope said that he learned from his mistakes: "It was my authoritarian way of making decisions that created problems." As Thomas J. Reese, S.J., wrote in *The National Catholic Reporter*, "That some Jesuits never recognized this conversion and failed to embrace him as our brother is our sin."

It is a sin the pope intends to confront head on. It does not seem mere coincidence that he brought up the matter recently in his remarks to superiors of men's religious orders in Italy. "Please, don't let the terrorism of gossip exist among you. Throw it out. Let there be fraternity. And if you have something against your brother, tell him to his face. Sometimes it might end in fisticuffs. That's not a problem. It's always better than the terrorism of gossip."

Gossip, as the pope sees it, is a handy tool for the devil—another one of the leitmotifs of his speeches. For him the devil is not a symbol or metaphor but a real force, "whose greatest achievement in these times," Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio wrote in 2010, "may be making people believe he does not exist." Pointing to the power of gossip is one way the pope is pointing to the devil at work.

Any discussion of gossip is incomplete without an examination of our own sins. The secular media are often chastised because of their appetite for the salacious, but the Catholic media are sometimes guilty of engaging in gossip too. Catholic blogs that rail, sometimes anonymously, against their fellow believers are especially culpable. But so are Catholic publications, including at times **America**, that seize upon opportunities to chronicle the missteps of their critics.

What, then, is the alternative? "I tell you the truth," Pope Francis said in February. "I am convinced that if each one of us would purposely avoid gossip, at the end, we would become a saint! It's a beautiful path!"

It may not be the easiest path to walk for those of us who enjoy the odd bit of juicy information about our neighbor. But if we trust in Jesus, and "[lay] aside...all evil speakings" (1 Pt 2:1), the fleeting pleasures of gossip will give way to the enduring witness of charity.



## REPLY ALL

### Family Revelation

Re “Go in Peace” (Editorial, 11/10): St. Pope John Paul II, in “Familiaris Consortio,” states that “The Christian family is a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason too it can and should be called ‘the domestic Church’” (No. 58). Given that statement, what, then, does the Christian family reveal about ecclesial communion that the church needs to hear and take on board? I hope that in the time before the next synod more couples and families will speak out on their authentic experience, reveal to our church leaders what they know about ecclesial communion and demonstrate the ecclesial communion they realize in their homes and families.

For too long, we have tried to define the reality of church and apply that to families. It is time to look at the revelation and realization of Christian families, and for the church to take seriously what their experience teaches. There needs to be two-way listening to and sharing of what God is revealing, not just trying to make families fit a clerical model of church.

RAY TEMMERMAN  
*Online Comment*

### The Spirit Moves

“When Spirit and Anatomy Don’t Match” (11/3), by Judith Valente, is a terrific piece on ministry to transgender people as the “next moral frontier” for churches. It is the perfect example of why **America** is very good indeed. I don’t want to be lectured and hectored and sermonated and homilified when I read a stimulating magazine; and I want more than mere information and news and data.

I want informed ideas. I want to be startled and moved. I want to be shown new angles on things. I want light where I did not realize there was such a chance at light. This piece is a very good example of that—how easy it would be to estab-

lish camps about this, and lecture each other, and insist on this and that, from rights to wrong; but how very much better to witness, to report the shivering real, to suggest that there are ways to find the love of the mercy here, as everywhere, if only we look harder. Lovely work.

I am impressed with the piece; but I want to be sure to say I am impressed with the decisions that led to its appearance. Such decisions are how a fine magazine is made.

BRIAN DOYLE  
*Portland, Ore.*

### Economic Education

In light of Bishop Robert W. McElroy’s enlightening article, “Market Assumptions” (10/27), on Pope Francis’ challenge to income inequality, I would like to draw attention to Bernard Lonergan’s “Macroeconomic Dynamics: An Essay in Circulation Analysis.” He explains why a “free market” cannot be considered “natural.” The natural dynamics of a developing economy involve two waves: one when the production sector is expanding while the consumption sector holds steady; the other, vice versa.

Practically speaking, expanding production requires investing, while a consumption expansion requires spending. To keep the wave dynamic moving, total investments should roughly equal total wages in the long run. While economic inequality is typically measured by income disparity, to move toward equality requires educated choices on what to do with excess, uncommitted funds.

It would go a long way toward meeting the pope’s challenge if the church would apply its teaching mission toward educating the public on the best use of corporate net profits and personal disposable incomes to align with changes in the economy.

TAD DUNNE  
*Royal Oak, Mich.*

### Turn Back the Vote

A reader asks why cutting down voting times in Ohio is considered discrim-

inatory (Reply All, 10/27). The disputed week of early voting is an “overlap week,” in which voters can register and vote at the same time. During Mr. Obama’s first run for president, many of us in Ohio, in the spirit of increasing voter turnout, worked to register more African-Americans, day workers, homebound individuals and college-age kids. Many people who had not previously registered voted during this week, as did other motivated voters. We also worked to secure weekend voting so that day workers and the poor would be able to vote without missing work. Opponents of Sunday voting argued it cost too much, but many churchgoers can be transported by bus on Sundays, encouraging voting by those who have no other means of transportation. It is for these reasons that we feel erasing a high voter turnout week and the weekend vote just before Election Day smacks of an effort to reduce the voting among some working poor Americans.

ELAINE BERNINGER  
*Cleves, Ohio*

### Limits of Commons

As Nathan Schneider writes in “Commons Sense” (10/20), we all need to be aware of the environment and how our actions affect nature, today and into the future. Of course, nature itself includes some powerful and destructive forces that an open and charitable sharing of the commons will not deter. That’s what is so confusing and misguided about a demonstration like Flood Wall Street. As Mr. Schneider states, “While commoning might coexist with a market or state, it is neither.” And as he does not say, we need a commons, we need a market and we need a state.

We need a market (Wall Street, and its counterparts around the world) to do what Thomas Aquinas and the popes have acknowledged cannot be accomplished in and by the commons—the stewardship, preservation and prioritization of property in ways

that promote the common good. A person, whether wealthy or poor, can gather and chew the bark of a wild aspen tree to alleviate a headache or thin the blood. Commoning will get you that. But if we seek the convenience and reliability of an easy-to-swallow pill with precisely 325 milligrams of aspirin, we need Wall Street. Gathering the investors who will risk their savings (already taxed and not spent in some instantly gratifying pleasure) to build the plant, secure the raw materials and hire the workers who will make and ship those pills, is the work of Wall Street. So it is with a thousand other conveniences and necessities, including many that serve the poor. Protesting against an individual corporation for some actual offense against the commons may make sense. Protesting a market does not.

JOSEPH J. DUNN  
*Online Comment*

### Climate Complexities

“Commons Sense” (10/20), by Nathan Schneider, seems to capture only one side of the issue. The march on climate change certainly drew the attention of many nations, including China and India, two of the major polluters in the world. The industrialization of China and India has raised the standard of living of the poor and indigent in each country. Are not the poor in China and India our brothers and sisters in Christ as well? The issue is how to balance care for the poor with care for the environment. In the United States, we have regulations from the Environmental Protection Agency that will effectively eliminate coal-fired electric plants and thus contribute to a cleaner environment. In the meantime, out-of-work coal miners are wondering where they will get their next meal. Beware of simplistic answers to complex issues.

KEN BALASKOVITS  
*Park Ridge, Ill.*

### Federal Action

Representative Paul Ryan tells us in “Preferential Options” (10/13) that

### STATUS UPDATE

Readers respond to “On the Way to Healing,” by Jon Sobrino, S.J., and “Truth, Then Justice,” by Luke Hansen, S.J. The articles marked the 25th anniversary of the martyrdom of six Jesuits and their lay companions in El Salvador.

In *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Orbis Books, 2008), Father Sobrino writes poignantly about his Jesuit brother Ignacio Ellacuría, the theologian and university president killed with the others in 1989: “When Ellacuría ‘took hold of the reality’ of the Third World, he grasped it in an important way as a ‘crucified people’.... Ellacuría said that the crucified people are one of the main features of our time, not merely something factual that we may consider, but something central

that must be considered, without which we do not have a full grasp of reality.” Being Catholic can be tricky.  
 BETH CIOFFOLETTI

Just this morning I was reading about Uruguay and the granting of impunity to military torturers in 1986 and how that clemency made democratization difficult after the dictatorship. Thanks for the article by Luke Hansen, S.J. It breaks my heart that El Salvador still suffers so much violence—and that we are deporting innocent migrants back to El Salvador, where they may be murdered. These are innocent mothers, fathers and children. U.S. practices helped to begin the cycle of violence, so U.S. practices should protect the people and promote democratization.

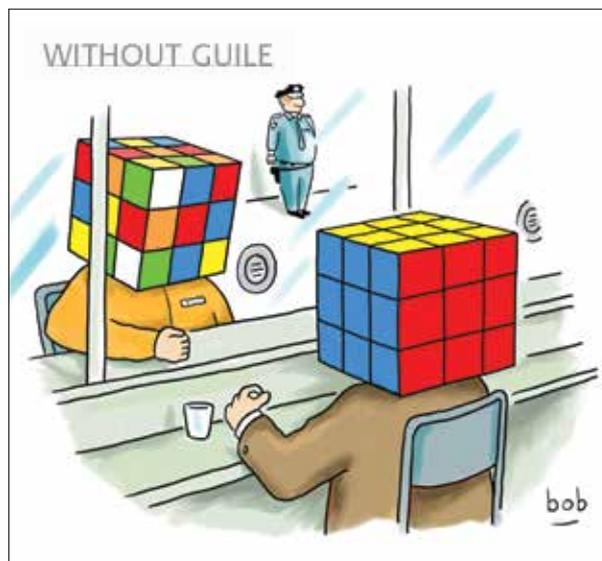
RACHEL JENNINGS

a healthy economy protects the most vulnerable. Yet his party is doing the utmost to limit the right to vote of the most vulnerable. He tells us we take care of people in need because the whole country will benefit. How can the country benefit when the high rate of black incarceration prevents blacks from being considered for jobs when they become available? What kind of family can you have if the father is in jail?

Mr. Ryan tells us that “Washington is disorganized and dysfunctional and is deepening the divide. Let the states try different ways of providing aid.” The only state that did something about providing health care to the uninsured was Massachusetts until Washington picked up the ball with the Affordable Care Act—which many states and Mr. Ryan’s party are do-

ing their best to stymie. I would like to see the federal government enact Medicare for all, stop giving corporations the rights of people (yet few of the liabilities), protect social security, subsidize child care and ensure educational opportunities for everyone. The government is us. Government is not the enemy. Its faults lie in ourselves, but its strengths are many.

OWEN REYNOLDS  
*Goshen, N.Y.*



CARTOON: BOB ECKSTEIN

## IMMIGRATION

### Obama Readies Executive Order; Some in Congress Prepare for Fight

Obama administration moves on immigration were drawing attention and pre-emptive opposition from Republican lawmakers, who will soon control Congress when the lame duck session ends in January. President Barack Obama was poised in mid-November to unveil a series of executive actions on immigration that will shield from deportation as many as five or six million immigrants now living in the United States without documentation. House Speaker John A. Boehner, Republican of Ohio, called the president's plans "executive amnesty" and said the Republican-controlled House would fight the president "tooth and nail if he continues down this path."

In an unscheduled address on Nov. 11 during the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' annual meeting in Baltimore, Auxiliary Bishop Eusebio Elizondo of Seattle, chairman of the bishops' migration committee, said the conference would continue to work with both parties to pass the long-stalled comprehensive immigration reform package. But, Bishop Elizondo added, given the urgency of the immigration crisis and the recent electoral gains by Republicans who have resisted earlier reform efforts, "it would be derelict not to support administrative actions...which would provide immigrants and their families legal protection.

"We are not guided by the latest headlines but by the human tragedies that we see every day in our parishes and programs, where families are torn apart by enforcement actions especially," he said.

As President Obama readied the executive orders expected to halt deportations on Nov. 14, Vice President Joe Biden was meeting with leaders of three Central American states at the InterAmerican Development Bank in Washington. The vice president announced a new plan to stem the flow of young people northward to the U.S. border. Biden said that beginning in December, the United States will offer refugee status to some undocumented youths from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Parents legally residing in the United States can request refugee status for children left behind in Central America who are threatened by the region's out-of-control gang and drug-cartel related violence. The plan is a stop-gap measure to respond to the humanitarian crisis at the U.S. border.

As many as 70,000 young people, often traveling unaccompanied and

some as young as 5, have crowded the border this year, seeking to be reunited with parents and other family members in the United States. The Obama administration hopes that allowing children to be registered outside the United States for refugee status might discourage those dangerous sojourns. Central American children who meet the requirements will be part of a quota of 4,000 people from Latin America receiving refugee status each fiscal year, U.S. officials said.

The vice president also announced a new economic investment plan intended to create new employment opportunities in Central America and contribute to an end of the violence plaguing the region. Catholic Relief Services cheered these scaled up investments in Central America, a commitment that should be meaningful over the long term. But as the humanitarian



crisis persists at the border, a C.R.S. statement released on Nov. 14 urged that the administration "significantly augment the protection response, especially to vulnerable children, in the short-term."

"The announcement for a long-term strategic investment in Central America is critical to address the root causes of the economic, social, and political crises in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala," said Bill O'Keefe, vice president for Government Relations and Advocacy for Catholic Relief Services. "For far too long, children and youth have borne the brunt of these crises."

But "too often, so-called economic development has not reached the poor and marginalized," O'Keefe said. "Economic success in Central America will be measured in job creation, educational improvements and school attendance, and strengthening of families."



LATIN AMERICA

## Survey Shows Church Decline

**I**s the “Francis effect” slowing the diminishment of Latin America’s Catholic population? A new survey from the Pew Research Center suggests cause for hope, but reports it is too soon to tell.

Latin America is home to more than 425 million Catholics—nearly 40 percent of the world’s total Catholic population—and the global church now has a Latin American pope for the first time in its history. Yet identification with Catholicism has declined throughout the region. Historical data suggest that for most of the 20th century, from 1900 through the 1960s, at least 90 percent of Latin America’s population was Catholic. Today, Pew

reports, only 69 percent of adults across the region identify as Catholic.

The Catholic Church’s status in Latin America has drawn more attention since Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina was elected pope in March 2013. According to the report, “While it is too soon to know whether [Pope] Francis can stop or reverse the church’s losses in the region, the new survey finds that people who are currently Catholic overwhelmingly view Francis favorably and consider his papacy a major change for the church.”

The report cautions, however, that former Catholics are more skeptical. Only in Argentina and Uruguay do majorities of ex-Catholics express a favorable view of the pope. Pew reports: “In every other country in the survey, no more than roughly half of ex-Catholics view Francis favorably, and relatively few see his papacy as a major change for the Catholic Church. Many say it is too soon to have an opinion about the pope.”

In nearly every country Pew surveyed, the Catholic Church has experienced net losses from religious switching, as many Latin Americans have joined evangelical Protestant churches or rejected organized religion altogether. Evangelicals have pulled people away from parishes and into their church pews often by promoting what those converting would consider more attractive ways of worshipping the Lord, an emphasis on morality and solutions for their earthly afflictions—mostly poverty related, said Andrew Chesnut, re-

ligious studies professor at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Some Central American countries and Uruguay now have almost as many Protestants or religiously unaffiliated people as Catholics in their populations. If the trend continues, “even Brazil, home to the largest Catholic population on earth, will no longer have a Catholic majority by 2030,” said Chesnut, author of a book on evangelicals in Brazil.

Some 65 percent of Protestants in Latin America belong to evangelical congregations. “Christianity in Latin America is thoroughly ‘Pentecostalized,’ with 70 percent of Protestants and 40 percent of Catholics identifying as charismatic,” Chesnut said. “If it weren’t for Charismatic Renewal, Catholic decline probably would have been even greater.”

According to the report, many of the major patterns of Latin American Catholic Church decline mirror trends found among U.S. Hispanics. The U.S. Hispanic population (now approximately 54.1 million people) is larger than the total population of all but two Latin American countries—Brazil



**HEADING UP OR DOWN? A Way of the Cross procession in Gonçalves, Brazil. Home to the largest Catholic population on earth, Brazil will no longer have a Catholic majority by 2030.**

(195 million) and Mexico (113 million).

Nearly a quarter of Hispanic adults in the United States were raised Catholic but have since left the faith (24 percent), while just 2 percent of U.S. Hispanics have converted to Catholicism after being raised in another religious tradition or with no affiliation—a net drop of 22 percentage points, according to Pew.

## Vatican to Speed Up Abuse Appeals

Pope Francis has established a special body within the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to speed up the process of hearing and ruling on appeals filed by priests laicized or otherwise disciplined in sexual abuse or other serious cases. Federico Lombardi, S.J., the Vatican spokesperson, told reporters on Nov. 11 that the members of the doctrinal congregation had been examining an average of four or five appeals, mostly in sexual abuse cases, at each of their monthly meetings. “Because of the number of appeals and the need to guarantee a more rapid examination of them,” Pope Francis has instituted a “college” within the congregation to judge cases involving priests. A case involving a bishop accused of abuse or other serious crimes would continue to be examined and judged by the entire membership of the doctrinal congregation during one of its regular monthly meetings.

## Progress on Ebola

Catholic Relief Services committed an additional \$1.5 million to programs aimed at countering Ebola in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea in November. The money is being used to train health workers, ensure safe and dignified burials, develop and implement prevention awareness campaigns,

## NEWS BRIEFS

Commenting on the **deaths of 13 young mothers** at government-run sterilization camps in India’s central Chhattisgarh State on Nov. 12, Archbishop Prakash Mallavarapu said the guilty should be punished, but “the systemic faults behind this tragedy must be exposed and corrected.” • Drawing on the teachings of Pope Francis, the theme of the **2015 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering** on Feb. 7 to 10 in Washington, D.C., will be “To Go Forth: Encountering Christ in the Heart of the World.” • Work is set to begin on Nov. 17 for the **addition of three showers**, commissioned by Pope Francis, for use by homeless people in an existing lavatory block for tourists in the area under St. Peter’s colonnades. • Catholic and Muslim leaders and scholars, concluding a forum at the Vatican on Nov. 13, urged dialogue to promote greater respect and understanding and **condemned all acts of violence** committed in the name of religion. • Archbishop Santiago Garcia Aracil of Mérida-Badajoz, Spain, has rejected as “libelous” claims in a **letter from 50 unnamed clergy** to the papal nuncio, accusing him of living an “excessive, ostentatious, scandalous and undesirable” lifestyle.



**Recovering from botched sterilizations**

maintain local Catholic health facilities and provide food to those in need. Speaking from Senegal on Nov. 7, Michael Stulman, the agency’s regional information officer, said, “There has been progress in all three countries, but there is a lot more to do.” In Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, the epidemic has killed almost 5,000 people out of more than 13,000 reported cases, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A total of 22 cases have been identified in Mali, Senegal and Nigeria.

## Focus on World’s Poor

As world leaders prepared to meet in Australia on Nov. 15-16 to continue looking at ways to improve the global economy, Pope Francis asked them “not to forget that many lives are at stake” behind their discussions and decisions.

The measure of success of the Group of 20 heavily industrialized and emerging-market countries will be found not in statistics but in “real improvements in the living conditions of poorer families and the reduction of all forms of unacceptable inequality,” the pope said. The pope’s message to Prime Minister Tony Abbott of Australia, host of the G-20 summit, was released on Nov. 11 at the Vatican. “Throughout the world, the G-20 countries included, there are far too many women and men suffering from severe malnutrition, a rise in the number of the unemployed, an extremely high percentage of young people without work and an increase in social exclusion which can lead to criminal activity and even the recruitment of terrorists,” the papal message said.

From CNS, RNS and other sources.

## The Public Protector Needs Protection

South Africa's Parliamentary portfolio committee on justice and correctional service heard that the Office of the Public Protector, the constitutionally created watchdog on public affairs oversight, was insolvent. According to reports, the office's assets were valued at just under R1 million (roughly U.S. \$100,000) with debts accrued around R40 million (about U.S. \$4 million). The public protector advocate, Thuli Madonsela, told Parliament that her office simply did not have sufficient funds to carry out its task, which involves the investigation of numerous cases of alleged bad governance and corruption.

Given that South Africa's corruption rating has moved, according to Transparency International, from 25th least corrupt country in 1995 to around 72nd in less than 20 years, the importance of the Public Protector's role seems obvious; it would also seem true to suggest that it should have a lot of work to do, which would require a bigger budget. The Office of Public Protector is one of a number of so-called Chapter 9 institutions (after Chapter 9 of the last Constitution) set up to promote good governance, fight corruption and promote human rights. These include the Independent Electoral Commission, the Human Rights Commission, the Commission on Gender Equality and the Office of the Public Protector. Funded by the state, they are tasked with oversight of government itself and defense of the Bill of Rights.

**ANTHONY EGAN, S.J.**, a member of the Jesuit Institute South Africa, is one of *America's* Johannesburg, South Africa, correspondents.

Under the leadership of Thuli Madonsela, a lawyer and former political activist, the Public Protector Office has taken about 40,000 cases. The most recent high profile investigation was the use of R246 million (about U.S. \$24.6 million) of public funds to upgrade the private home of South Africa's President Jacob Zuma. For raising questions about using funds for renovations that had nothing to do with

What better move than to starve the office of funds — making it unable to function?

presidential security, Ms. Madonsela was attacked by Zuma supporters and members the ruling African National Congress—some even calling her a C.I.A. spy.

The response of A.N.C. members of Parliament on Oct. 22 seems to follow a pattern. The committee chairperson, Mathole Motshekga, called the Public Protector's Office "overbloomed" and alleged that Madonsela had failed to manage its finances. Other A.N.C. members used the opportunity to call Madonsela's leadership "undemocratic," a regular refrain whenever Madonsela has questioned waste or misuse of public funds. Given the recent revelations of what has been called "Nkandla-gate" (after the rural village in Kwazulu Natal Province, the site of Zuma's home), these allegations seem somewhat ironic to say the least.

Madonsela has been appointed to her post for a fixed seven-year term, with widespread powers of investiga-

tion and reporting, powers she has used zealously and without fear or favor. Short of parliamentary impeachment, which would have to be legally grounded, she cannot be removed from office. Nor, it seems, will personal attacks on her character sway her.

The Machiavelli in me suggests that this new skirmish between the public protector and the A.N.C. in parliament indicates a new strategy to remove her.

Firing seems unlikely. To abolish her office would require a change to the Constitution, which would require 75 percent support in Parliament. This is unlikely. What better move could there be than to starve the office of funds—in effect bankrupt it, making it unable to function?

Note the twisted elegance of this move. On paper, the Office of the Public Protector still exists. But it would be a legal fiction, a bit like the "rotten boroughs" in the 18th- and 19th-century British parliamentary system. There is no change to the Constitution, so no 75 percent majority is needed. The state maintains its commitment on paper to Chapter 9, but without making it effective. Thuli Madonsela remains public protector in name only until she leaves office in 2016, to be replaced no doubt by a good party loyalist who will not rock the boat.

A variant strategy that we may yet see is a government bail-out of the office in return for Madonsela's resignation. Though this will not paralyze its work, it will simply speed up the process of getting a loyalist into the post. Either way, what we will see is the clever subversion of the Constitution and its intent to promote honest, effective governance in South Africa.

**ANTHONY EGAN**



# Finding Your Center

**W**hat makes for a good life? I've been asking people that recently, and I've been surprised by some of the answers. The most unexpected came from an 87-year-old lapsed Catholic, who said: "I think a good life is one where you find out who you really are. We are all so different."

A few weeks before this conversation, I had been in Boston and stopped by Still Harbor, a spirituality institute that tries to straddle the divide between the religious and secular world. Located in a former Catholic convent, Still Harbor has its roots in Christian spirituality but is purposefully unaffiliated with any faith. It's neutral space open to anyone in search of enhanced understanding of self, values, calling.

"We're trying to bridge that gap between where the church is and where the population is," said Edward M. Cardoza, the founder and director. "The population is not in most churches."

That is increasingly true. According to the Pew Center on Religion and Spirituality, the United States is becoming a more secular society. A fifth of all Americans and a third of Americans under age 30 are religiously unaffiliated. Under 10 percent during the 1970s and 1980s, the non-affiliated, or "nones," have been growing steadily since the 1990s. Most are not religious seekers looking for the right church to join. Only 10 percent of the nones report an interest in this.

The secular drift of American society was brought home to me when my god-daughter recently became en-

gaged. She attended an Episcopal elementary school and a Catholic high school before college. Her fiancé went to Catholic schools and university. They are not planning a church wedding, nor do they plan to have a priest or minister administer their vows. It will be a big wedding but not a religious one. Young people these days see marriage more as a civil institution, I was told.

But if Americans, especially young Americans, are turning away from the church, that does not mean there's no need for spiritual grounding. Indeed, it's because there is, among both the church and unchurched, that Still Harbor was founded. It offers spiritual formation to individuals and organizations seeking to discern their purpose or deepen their capacity, hosts an intentional community and offers a practicum in spiritual direction.

"We see a big emphasis on people going to college, a big emphasis on people having professional experience, but education and a job are not enough to make people feel whole and of service to the world," said Charles Howes, the center's deputy director. "The third missing component is a spiritual life or interior life to integrate the other two."

Cardoza, Jesuit-educated and a former Catholic seminarian now preparing for ordination in the Episcopal Church, notes that these days, with the liberal arts in eclipse, students can graduate from college without taking any English or philosophy classes that pose the central questions of life: What is justice? Who are you? What do you want to do? Why are you here?

The big questions of life do not go away with time. Often they become more urgent. How much does the average church help the person in the pew who is facing them? Our life choices are personal, shaped by who we are as individuals, but I'm not sure many churches acknowledge individuality, much less encourage it. *Discernment, interior life, spiritual formation, contemplation, even vocation* are words I seldom hear in church. One hears them at places like Still Harbor, but unless one goes there, would a Catholic be familiar with them?

The big questions of life do not go away with time.

The gulf between the discussions at a retreat house and those in church could lead one to suppose there are two types of Christianity: a kind of perfunctory, rote religion communicated

in churches and a deeper soulful strain reserved for the cognoscenti in seminaries, convents, monasteries and retreat centers. Would parishes benefit if they emulated more the latter? I think so. Opening a library, offering spiritual direction or classes could be more helpful to worshippers than a remodeled building or another Mass.

How do you make faith meaningful in a society growing increasingly religiously pluralistic and disengaged? I think the answer lies more in plumbing depths than skirting them.

I go back to the 87-year-old "none" who spoke of the journey of discovery we're all on. "We're all so different," she said. "No leaf is like another. Nobody has another's DNA. That to me is a God thing. Why don't we celebrate it?"

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MARGOT PATTERSON is a writer who lives in Kansas City, Mo.

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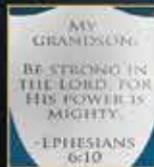
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# Conversation Stoppers

On Election eve, a Boston television station opened a half-hour newscast with a story on Chris Rock making a joke about the fatal bombings at that city's marathon in 2013. "Twenty-six miles is a long *drive*.... You finally get to the finish line, and somebody screams, 'Run!'" the stand-up comic said as host of "Saturday Night Live." George Carlin or Mel Brooks might have made a similar shock-value joke decades ago, but it provided a focal point for outrage, at least for one or two days this fall. The television reporter found random Bostonians who dutifully repeated the premise that Rock had insulted their city. An implicit point was that Rock, a New Yorker, had no right to comment on a tragedy owned by the city of Boston.

In coming up with a way to distract viewers from the next day's election, the newscast inadvertently summed up recent political campaigns. Outrage and umbrage are the tools to drive supporters to the polls, and political ads make appeals to tribalism rather than to any sense of a common good.

"He's not for you" was the tagline of an ad for Wendy Davis, the Democrat who ran for governor in Texas against the eventual winner, Greg Abbott. The same slogan was used on behalf of Michelle Nunn, the Democratic nominee for a Senate seat in Georgia, and Mitt Romney used it more specifically in his 2012 presidential campaign, in an ad describing the Affordable Care Act as a "massive new government program that's not for you."

The "you" in such pitches almost

never refers to the entire citizenry, but rather those who already feel part of an aggrieved slice of the electorate. "Not for you" is another form of inoculation against believing, or even listening to, anything the other side says.

"War on women" is another phrase used to stir up outrage. It easily caught on in a profession loaded with military metaphors ("targeting" voters, "battle-ground" states). In 2012, a fundraising email from the Democratic leader in the House, Nancy Pelosi, warned supporters: "The national media and our opponents will use our grassroots fundraising totals to measure the strength of our opposition to the Republicans' War on Women." This "war" charge now bundles up anyone who's skeptical of pay equity laws, or wants to reduce the scope of social welfare programs that

primarily benefit women and children, or wants to restrict access to abortion. All these positions can be held sincerely without any hatred toward women, but "war" is a handy way to brand half the population as not worthy of being listened to. Republicans, stung by the phrase, further trivialized military aggression this year by claiming that the Democrats are waging a "war on coal," as if environmental laws are just a pretext to throw white West Virginians out of work. Late in the campaign, Senator Mary Landrieu, Democrat of Louisiana, said to a reporter, referring to Obama's unpopularity in her region, "The South has not always been the friendliest place for African-Americans." Instead of accepting this accurate historical statement and moving on to argue

that things have changed, the state's Republican chairman called the senator's remark "insulting to me and to every other Louisianian." The effect, aided by political reporters looking for political "gaffes," was to tell Landrieu to sit down and shut up.

Also in October, a staffer for the Republican Senator Ted Cruz tweeted, "Before Obamacare, there had never been a confirmed case of Ebola in the U.S." Obama defenders have been making

sarcastic comments like this for years, but when a Republican did it, the assumption was that he was dead serious, and the uproar led to a contrite "Earlier tweet was bad joke.... Deleted." The Republican staffer had crossed partisan lines and mocked his own side, and some

Democrats rushed past confusion to arrive at blind indignation. Sit down, shut up.

The elections of 2014 brought infinite examples of political opponents talking past each other, not settling for disagreement when they could move on to righteous denunciation. As *America's* editor in chief, Matt Malone, S.J., has written, there is a financial incentive for such bitterness, with the media "producing content that pits one faction against another" (Of Many Things, 11/17). There is a place for spirited debate, but too often we ascribe the worst possible motives to people who make us feel uncomfortable or challenge our beliefs. This is not a trend that makes more open-minded citizens look forward to the next election season.

**ROBERT DAVID SULLIVAN**

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A CHURCHWIDE STRATEGY FOR A SUSTAINABLE PLANET

# Renew This World

BY GARY GARDNER

**The Sheldon Glacier is melting due to climate change off Adelaide Island, Antarctica.**

**I**n “The Joy of the Gospel,” Pope Francis thoughtfully asked for suggestions for church reform that might better meet the needs of evangelization today. I trust he is getting a strong response! As an observer at the Vatican conference Sustainable Humanity, Sustainable Nature, I would like to offer a suggestion for how the church might focus her works this century and advance the interests of the world’s poor—and the church’s mission as well.

At the meeting, hosted by the Pontifical Academies of Sciences and of Social Sciences at the Vatican last May, participants reviewed the latest sustainability “signs of the times.” The news is not good. The sustainability challenge is huge, and will require wholesale changes to

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**GARY GARDNER**, a senior fellow at the Worldwatch Institute, an environmental research organization based in Washington, D.C., is the author of *Inspiring Progress: Religions’ Contributions to Sustainable Development* (2006).

the world's economies. Because of its potentially devastating impact on the poor on all continents, the church has a strong interest in mounting a robust response this century to the challenge of sustainable development.

To appreciate the magnitude of the emerging challenge, consider first what human activities are doing to the abundant home that God has given to us:

- Biologists say we are living in the sixth period of mass extinctions in the 4.5 billion-year history of our planet and the first created by humans. Species are estimated to be going extinct at 100 to 1,000 times the natural "background" rate.

- Human activities are changing the climate. Concentrations of three key greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, have increased to levels unseen in at least 800,000 years.

- Some 87 percent of the world's oceanic fisheries are fished at or beyond capacity, according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization.

- Oceans are 26 percent more acidic than before the Industrial Revolution. Acidification is now occurring 10 to 100 times faster than at any time in the past 50 million years.

We are essentially remaking planet Earth, our only home. Such carelessness is of direct interest to the church, not only because of our obligation to protect God's creation, but because of our mandate to care tenderly for our sisters and brothers. Indeed, the human impact of environmental carelessness is direct and broad. Consider again:

- Sea level rise brought about by climate change will displace hundreds of millions of people this century and will increase the risk of violent conflict.

- Some 29 countries, home to 458 million people, were absolutely water scarce in 2011. This means they have little room to accommodate additional demand for water. By 2025 population growth will raise this number nearly four-fold, to 1.8 billion people.

- Around 805 million people worldwide are chronically hungry, yet global demand for agricultural products is projected to increase by 60 percent by 2050, even as climate change reduces crop yields at the global level by 2 percent per decade for the rest of the century.

In sum, an abused environment increasingly means a wounded human family. This makes the sustainability challenge more and more a solidarity challenge. For this reason, and because of the global scale of the challenges, redesigning economies to be sustainable while protecting the poor should

be a strategic priority for the church this century.

## The Response of the Church

One oft-repeated sentiment at the Vatican conference was that the church's voice could be pivotal in helping to address this crisis. It was fascinating and humbling to hear a group of scientists acknowledge that their cutting-edge analyses and data are not enough to prompt creation of sustainable econ-

omies. Several noted that the world needs a change of values—a transformation of hearts—that will engender solidarity with nature in service of solidarity across the human family. Of course, few institutions know more about conversion of the heart, or have more experience promoting it, than the Catholic Church.

Fortunately, the church stands before this historic challenge with an impressive

set of tools: moral authority, experience in advocating for the dispossessed, a large and diverse membership base, a global network of dioceses and parishes, influence over church and lay financial holdings and a skilled diplomatic corps, to name a few. Few institutions at the global level have such a diverse toolbox at their disposal. Skillfully employed, these assets could help convert the threat of civilizational decline into a civilizational rejuvenation in which solidarity and dignified lives for all become the standard by which human societies are evaluated. Consider the contribution the church could make in each of these areas.

## Scripture and Tradition

More than any other asset, Christian Scripture and church teaching can be used to open hearts in favor of more just and sustainable societies. After all, what explains Pope Francis' power to attract a broad base of faithful and nonbelievers alike? I believe it is his capacity to speak about values that touch every human heart, especially our common longing for justice and righteousness. Imagine tapping the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* or the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in a focused effort to build sustainable economies. Here are some areas that might be addressed:

- What do longstanding Catholic principles—of, say, the dignity of the human person, or the option for the poor—contribute to human understanding of humanity's proper relationship with the natural world? How might these insights be elevated in Catholic life and more broadly developed and communicated?

# Redesigning economies to be sustainable while protecting the poor should be a strategic priority for the church this century.

• Can the “Jubilee economics” emerging from the Book of Leviticus and the sharing and solidarity principles modeled in the Acts of the Apostles be made relevant to modern economies? What is their contribution to curbing rampant consumerism, the driver of so many sustainability challenges?

• What insights might Catholic social teaching offer to advance secular frameworks of environmental ethics such as the “contraction and convergence” proposal for addressing climate change or the principle of a right to water or food?

## A Global Network

The church’s dioceses and approximately 221,000 parishes constitute an unparalleled global network of potential cross-border solidarity and mobilization. Through social media and financial transfers, the potential for greater interactions among Catholic entities worldwide is huge, yet underdeveloped. How might this network be used to prevent or address suffering in the world today and in the process create a greater sense of solidarity and universalism in the church?

• How can the church build relations of solidarity between Catholics in wealthy parishes and those in poorer communities, within and across countries? Can inexpensive communications tools be used to create parish-to-parish ties that help to tackle major environmental and justice challenges in a united way?

• Can parishes develop and share broadly creative local ways to integrate environmental concerns into traditional Catholic teaching regarding stewardship and generosity, thereby infusing new life and commitment to parish-level implementation of Catholic Social Teaching?

• Within parishes, can social assistance and mutual aid efforts be strengthened to handle what may be a greatly increased load in the decades ahead?

Caritas Internationalis is the church’s international relief and development agency. All of its focus areas—conflict, food, development, health and migration—will be stressed by the crises created by unsustainable development, with great strain to its budget and the budgets of its 160 allied organizations. On the other hand, expanded funding of Catholic development agencies, like Caritas or its U.S. affiliate, Catholic Relief Services, and mobilization of their skills and capacities could be pivotal in mitigating problems created by environmental and related social challenges in the decades ahead. To imagine an expanded role for Caritas and its affiliates, the following questions could be helpful:

• Can the mission of Caritas and its allies be deepened through diocese-to-diocese or parish-to-parish linkages? Can they become more direct conduits of assistance in ways that benefit the marginalized while building ties of solidarity across the globe?



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• Would opportunities for direct parish-to-parish assistance make Caritas a more visible and relevant agency for Catholics worldwide, strengthening a sense of solidarity among all Catholics?

## Paying for It

Adequate financing of initiatives that show solidarity with the poor and care for the natural environment is critical. Catholics in wealthy countries—where heavy consumption produces, for example, a disproportionate share of greenhouse gases—could be challenged to engage in greater sharing with those disproportionately affected, the poor in developing countries. Building relationships of solidarity might involve consideration of questions like these:

• Amid the greatest transfer of wealth in human history (from aged parents in wealthy countries, for example, to their adult children), can the church become active in catechizing parishioners who are wrestling with the proper disposition of inherited wealth and use this wealth—valued in the tens of trillions of dollars in the United States alone by 2050—to help build more resilient societies in poor nations?

• Might the church endorse (or help to establish) investment firms that specialize in socially responsible investing and in charitable investing, with special emphasis on funding initiatives that protect the poor and the environment?

• Can the church ensure that its own investments favor

initiatives that protect the poor and the environment, perhaps through divestment of holdings of fossil fuels?

The Vatican's diplomatic corps is the oldest in the world and is highly regarded. The Secretariat of State, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue should continue to elevate the place of sustainability and human development in forums and capitals worldwide. As part of this effort, they might work to address some of these questions:

• The church should continue to advance implementation of the right to food and the right to water as basic human rights. How might church concerns about consumerism, inequality and other issues related to just and sustainable economies be given higher profile in the diplomatic life of the church?

• How might the global parish faithful, who number more than one billion, be engaged to support initiatives of the Vatican diplomatic corps? Can social media be employed to better connect parishioners with Vatican diplomatic efforts?

## Sustainability and Solidarity as Opportunity

The vision underlying these suggestions is one of a global church united and inspired by Gospel values to address unprecedented threats to human well-being. Mobilizing for the crises now unfolding is an appropriate response for the church, and would likely strengthen it on many fronts:

• The poor in developing countries would receive the assistance and justice they deserve.

• Wealthy parishioners would be nurtured and catechized into a metanoia of compassion for the suffering.

• Relationships between the church's central agencies, such as Caritas, and parishes worldwide would be strengthened.

• A vigorous response to one of the church's key competitors—consumerism—would be mounted.

• Wealthy parishioners would receive guidance regarding the proper disposition of their gifts.

• The voice of the church would be strengthened in international forums.

• Ample space for collaboration with other faiths and with secular groups would be created.

The church has much to offer to help Catholics read the signs of the times and to soften the hearts of all to respond appropriately. The sooner it is fully engaged, the greater the prospects for avoiding widespread suffering in this century—and the greater the church's own prospects for successful evangelization. Indeed, I believe the sustainability crisis is an opportunity for the church to create robust Christian communities worldwide that are rooted in solidarity and motivated by a fervor to ensure the dignity and well-being of all. 



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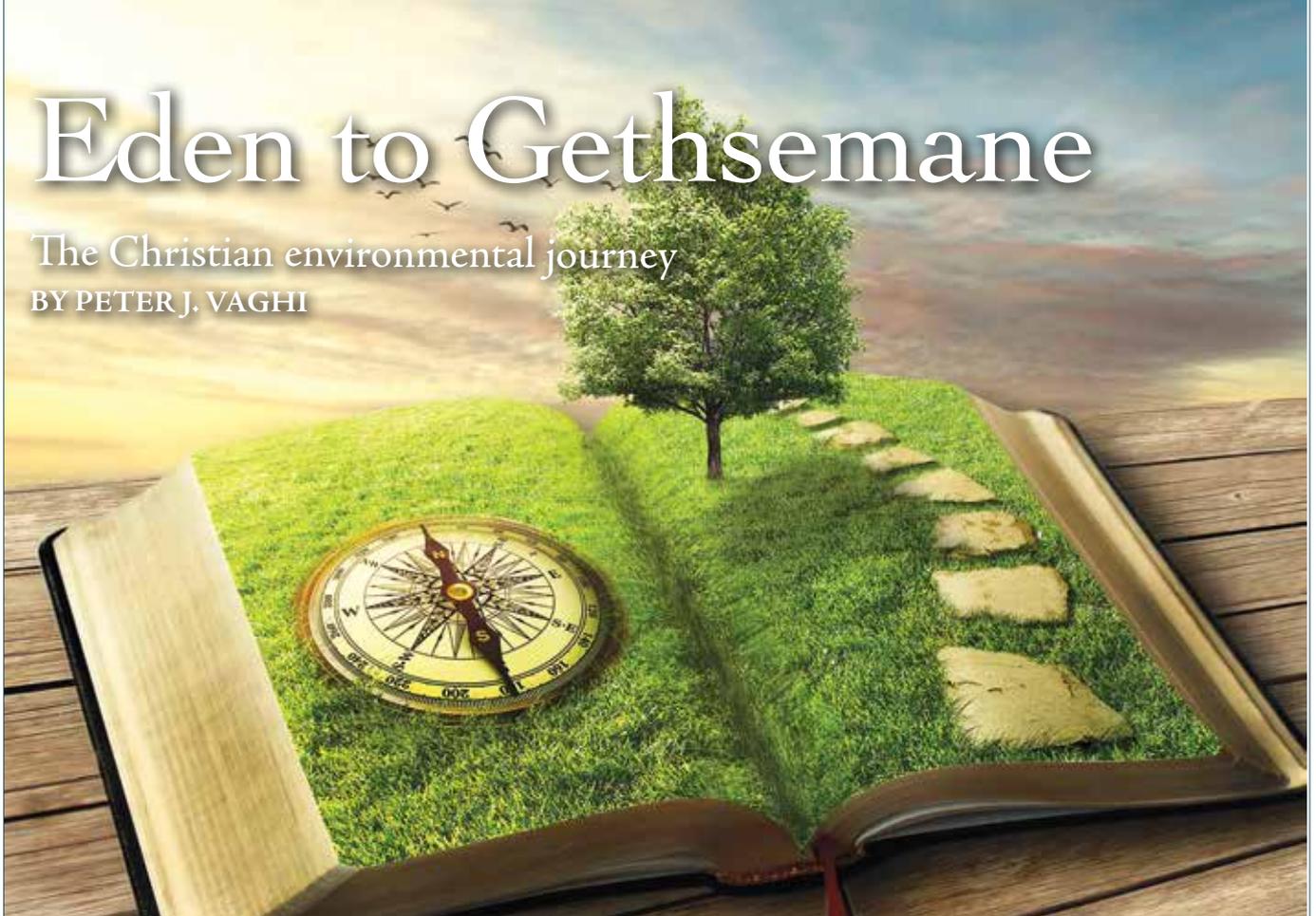
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# Eden to Gethsemane

The Christian environmental journey

BY PETER J. VAGHI



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**I**f we destroy creation, creation will destroy us!" This warning was given by Pope Francis during a talk he gave in May, in which he reminded his listeners that "creation is not a property, which we can rule over at will; or, even less, the property of only a few. Creation is a gift, it is a wonderful gift that God has given us, so that we care for it and we use it for the benefit of all, always with great respect and gratitude."

A reflection on the papacy of Pope Francis, and of his immediate predecessors, would not be complete without some reflection on creation. The church's emphasis on creation, and the care of it, is an integral part of Catholic social teaching. One of the seven themes of Catholic social teaching highlights creation as God's gift to us and thus worthy of protecting and administering wisely (*U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults*).

God is the creator and God continues to sustain creation. On the Vigil of Easter, we hear the beautiful creation story from the Book of Genesis. With regard to each created reality, "God saw that it was good." At the summit of his creation, which "was very good," God placed the man, whom God made in his own image and likeness. And he uniquely entrusted him

with "dominion" over all that he had created. St. John Paul II writes: "Man is the image of God partly through the mandate received from his Creator to subdue, to dominate, the earth. In carrying out this mandate, man, every human being, reflects the very action of the Creator of the universe" ("On Human Work," No. 4). In this sense, the man, who represents humanity, is a co-creator with God.

## Garden of Eden

As communicated in story form in Genesis, God placed limits on the use of creation to our first parents, Adam and Eve. I would suggest that this restriction not to eat from "the tree of knowledge of good and bad" was the first environmental restriction given by God to us. God continues to create, sustain and put limits on the use of his creation.

We know how the story of the garden of Eden unfolds. "The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it" (Gn 3:6). They disobeyed God, preferred themselves to him and committed the sin we have come to call "original" sin, which has had consequences for each of us ever since. As the catechism teaches: "Adam and Eve transmitted to their descendants human nature wounded by their own first sin and hence deprived of original holiness and justice; this deprivation is called 'original

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sin” (No. 417). And this took place all because they violated a restriction placed on them by God in the garden of Eden not to eat of the fruit of a tree.

Referring to this Scripture passage, St. John Paul II writes: “But [man’s] freedom is not unlimited: it must halt before the ‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil,’ for it is called to accept the moral law given by God. In fact, human freedom finds its authentic and complete fulfillment precisely in the acceptance of that law” (“The Splendor of Truth,” No. 35).

## Garden of Gethsemane

But the story does not end there. There was another garden: the garden of Gethsemane. This story is about Jesus, and how in accepting the will of his father that his cup should not pass him by, he becomes the new Adam. He undoes the sin of Adam by his death and resurrection, and “makes amends superabundantly for the disobedience of Adam” (*Catechism*, No. 411). The paschal mystery leads to life eternal. Yes, Jesus is the new Adam. And the new Adam—in his risen state outside the tomb—is taken for the gardener by Mary of Magdala (Jn 20:15). At first, the new Adam is mistaken for the old Adam, who in the Genesis story was a gardener. But the garden of Gethsemane trumps the garden of Eden. He is risen.

The effects of the Resurrection affect all of humanity and

nature as well. “So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor 5:17). “Nature, which was created in Word is, by the same Word made flesh, reconciled to God and given new peace” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, No. 454). “The whole of creation participates in the renewal flowing from the Lord’s paschal mystery, although it still awaits full liberation from corruption, ‘groaning in travail’ in expectation of giving birth to ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ that are the gift of the end of time, the fulfillment of salvation” (No. 455).

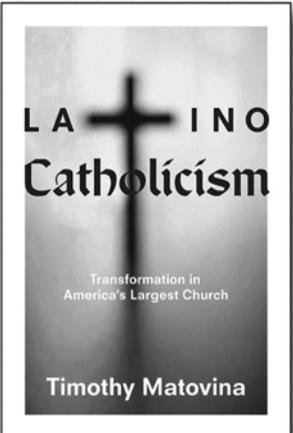
What effect does the Resurrection have on creation? My former theology teacher, Gerald O’Collins, S.J., offered this response in a personal letter to me:

In the risen Jesus, part of the created, material world has already reached its final destiny. Everything in our universe is interconnected (as science, e.g. Einstein, recognized). The glorification of matter that has already taken place in the risen Jesus must affect everything else. How concretely that takes place is very mysterious. We see, in faith, how the risen Christ is powerfully present in the sacraments (which are unthinkable without his powerful presence. Before the resurrection there could not be sacraments.) In the sacraments we have a tiny, but incredibly significant, hint of the risen Christ affecting the material world.

Pope Francis also helps us understand this great mystery of the resurrection and its transformative effect. He writes in “The Joy of the Gospel” (No. 276):

Christ’s resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force. Often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit. On razed land life breaks through, stubbornly yet invincibly. However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads. Each day in our world beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history. Values always tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed. Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelize are instruments of that power.

Two gardens! But the literary garden of Eden is trumped by the historical garden of Gethsemane. Yet the consequenc-



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es of the sin of Adam and Eve—in effect, the refusal to yield to the limit placed on them with respect to God’s creation—perdure. We call these the consequences of original sin. And they are played out in the challenges that affect us and the gift of God’s creation, the environment, and in some places can indeed be deemed a crisis. “The underlying cause... can be seen in man’s pretension of exercising unconditional dominion over things, heedless of any moral considerations which, on the contrary, must distinguish all human activity” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, No. 461). Such vision leads to a completely independent existence between man and creation, thus rupturing the relationship of God and man intended from all eternity by God. “This is why Christian culture has always recognized the creatures that surround man as also gifts of God to be nurtured and safeguarded with a sense of gratitude to the Creator” (*Compendium*, No. 464).

In the broader context, each of us, in our day, has an obligation to care for and protect the environment, this precious gift of God, bequeathed to each and every one of us and those who live after us. It is a common responsibility and challenge. With an increasingly interdependent world, the concern for the environment takes on global dimensions and has worldwide consequences.

### The Creator’s Gifts

As we have seen, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* sets forth certain principles and areas for environmental concern. At its basis, nature is seen as “a gift offered by the Creator to the human community, entrusted to the intelligence and moral responsibility of men and women” (No. 473) and to be used and administered wisely. For example, reference is made for the need to protect the heritage of forests and to promote, where necessary, adequate programs of reforestation (No. 466). The complex issue of energy resources is also highlighted, as are the rights of indigenous peoples.

More and more, there is concern about access to and the safety of clean water. The document asserts that environmental concern should not be for current challenges alone but for the future of the environment and its protection. Although the Vatican document stresses the need for international juridical expression, it states that “juridical measures by themselves are not sufficient. They must be accompanied by a growing sense of responsibility as well as an effective change of mentality and lifestyle” (No. 468).

Citing St. John Paul II in “Centesimus Annus,” the *Compendium* underscores that “an economy respectful of the environment will not have the maximization of profits as its only objective, because environmental protection cannot be assured solely on the basis of financial calculations of costs and benefits. The environment is one of those goods that

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cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces” (No. 470).

As is underscored daily in this pontificate of Pope Francis, the Vatican document emphasizes that the present environmental crisis affects in a particular way those who are the poorest in society. “Countless numbers of these poor people live in polluted suburbs of large cities, in make-shift residences or in huge complexes of crumbling and unsafe houses” (No. 482).

## New Lifestyles

There is a call in the *Compendium* for an effective change of mentality that could and should lead to the adoption of new lifestyles. “There is a need to break with the logic of mere consumption and promote forms of agricultural and industrial production that respect the order of creation and satisfy the basic human needs of all” (No. 486). Or in the words of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in “Charity in Truth” (No. 51, citing “Centessimus Annus”):

*The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa. This invites contemporary society to a serious review of its life-style, which, in many parts of the world, is prone to hedonism and consumerism, regardless of their harmful consequences. What is needed is an effective shift in mentality... “in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments.”*

Nature is not our enemy; nor is the environment hostile territory. It was created by God for us as gift and called by God a “good.” It is our home. Our attitude must always be one of gratitude for the gift of creation and for its wise usage. We are also called to care for our surroundings. The created world, after all, reveals the mystery of God, leads us to him who created the world and continues to sustain it at every second of the day. Yes, “the world presents itself before man’s eyes as evidence of God, the place where his creative, providential and redemptive power unfolds” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, No. 487).

As followers of Jesus Christ, we should always gratefully remember that the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus’ yes to the Father that led to his death and glorious resurrection, which affects all of creation, trumped the garden of Eden, the home of original sin, that refusal of our first parents to follow God’s directive to “limit” the use of creation.

The Easter mystery is Christ’s definitive victory over sin and death and it ushers in “a new heaven and a new earth.” Christ is the new Adam and we are heirs to a new earth. He has risen as he promised—alleluia! **A**

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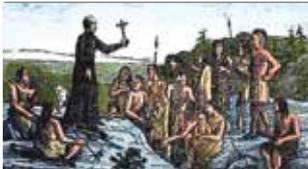
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# Francis and the Children

**O**n Nov. 8, Pope Francis signed a decree recognizing that Silvio Dissegna, a 12-year-old Italian boy who died from bone cancer on Sept. 24, 1979, had lived the Christian virtues to a heroic degree and can therefore be called venerable.

The signing of that decree may seem an insignificant event in the eyes of the world; but for the pastor-pope, who has given great attention to children and their faith life ever since 1960 in Chile, when he was studying to be a Jesuit, it was an important statement.

By that act he not only opened the door to sainthood for Silvio Dissegna, he also sent a message to the whole church, in the first place to parents, grandparents, bishops, priests, catechists and teachers, that they must give serious attention to the spiritual life of the children in their care and recognize that these “little ones” are indeed close to Jesus and can be great saints even at a tender age.

Francis was impressed by the story of Silvio, who was born in Moncalieri on July 1, 1967, in the Piedmont region of Italy, where the pope’s own family originated. Silvio was a happy boy, full of life, and wanted to be a teacher. When he was 10 years old, his mother bought him a typewriter for Christmas, and he wrote his first page to her: “Thank you mamma for bringing me into the world, for giving me life which is so beautiful! I have a great desire to live.”

His life changed dramatically, however, in early 1978. Not yet 11, he began to feel great pain in his legs. The doctors diagnosed bone cancer and offered no hope of recovery. He be-

gan then what would prove to be his Calvary with a rosary in his hand. He held onto that rosary always and often said, “I have many things to say to Jesus and to the Madonna.”

When he received confirmation in May 1978, he was already in a wheelchair. He was soon hospitalized, and there asked the chaplain to bring him holy Communion frequently. He always prayed the rosary and offered his prayers and sufferings for the pope, for missionaries, for the conversion of those far away and that all people may recognize themselves as brothers.

A great crowd attended his funeral, including many priests. Turin’s cardinal-archbishop, Giovanni Saldarini, moved by the stories of the extraordinary faith with which he bore his suffering, opened the cause for his beatification in 1995.

Silvio is but the latest example of children who were very close to Jesus and lived saintly lives that affected many people. Last August, when Pope Francis beatified 124 Korean martyrs in Seoul, one of them was a 12-year-old girl who was martyred with her family. In May 2000, John Paul II beatified two of the children of Fatima, Francisco and Jacinta. They were 9 and 7 years old respectively when they saw the first apparitions, and died at ages 11 and 9. In 1950 Pius XII canonized the Italian virgin-martyr, Maria Goretti, murdered at the age of 11. In fact, there have been many children and teenagers among the martyrs and saints, from the earliest centuries of Christianity to the present day.

As Jesuit superior and, later, as bishop in Buenos Aires, Jorge Mario

Bergoglio gave a great deal of attention to children, especially to those living in situations of poverty, suffering or difficulty, and to their faith life. Despite opposition from some senior Vatican officials, he insisted on the right of children to be baptized even if their parents were in irregular marital situations, and he reprimanded priests who refused them baptism. As pope, he has continued to insist on this.

In his homilies at first Communion and confirmation celebrations, he always speaks directly to the children. “If I talk to the children, the parents and adults always listen,” he once said. He listens to them and gets them to pray with him. And he continues to give time and shows great tenderness to children who are sick or suffering.

‘If I talk to the children, the parents and adults always listen.’

Though it received little media coverage, the recent Synod of Bishops gave attention to children in a variety of situations worldwide—from ordinary families to broken ones, from single-parent families to those of gay unions, from street children and those exploited in child labor or human trafficking to refugee and migrant children as well as orphans of war—and discussed how to help develop their faith-life in those different circumstances.

This is a big question, sure to be discussed over the next year in dioceses across the globe in preparation for the synod in October 2015. For Francis this is a very important matter that requires reflection and creative response throughout the church.

**GERARD O’CONNELL**

**GERARD O’CONNELL** is *America’s* Rome correspondent. *America’s* Vatican coverage is sponsored in part by the Jesuit communities of the United States. Twitter: @gergyorome.

# The Loneliest Choice

Puzzling through suicide's sorrowful mystery

BY RHONDA MAWHOOD LEE

**I** can no longer cope with the loneliness. At this point the future could not look any blacker.... I kept thinking I could work my way out of this horrible depression that grips me, but I can't do it. Please forgive me if I have hurt you...."

Minutes after writing these words, my mother brought her life to an end, sitting in her parked, running car until carbon monoxide overcame her. Fifty-two years old, widowed five years earlier, she had struggled with untreated depression throughout her adult life. She had first tried to kill herself at the age of 18; I remember two attempts in her 30s.

Given my mother's history, her death was not terribly surprising. But still, it was a shock for me—her only child and then in my 20s—and for other family and friends. Suicide, and the mental illness that causes it, is devastating for survivors.

Although our experience is traumatic, it is increasingly common. As of 2010, more Americans die by suicide than in car accidents. Murder grabs more headlines than suicide, but every year, twice as many people in the United States kill themselves than are murdered. And the rising rate of suicide among young veterans is gaining attention as one of the human costs of

recent wars. Every day, about 2 veterans under the age of 30 kill themselves, an increase of more than 40 percent between 2009 and 2011.

Despite the fact that suicide affects so many people, few of us are equipped to respond when we learn that someone we know has lost a loved one in

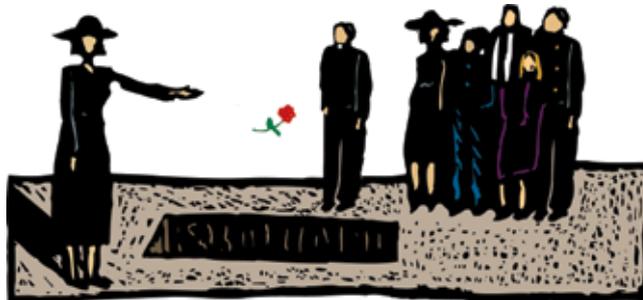
someone who has also been affected by this difficult situation, to affirm that they are not alone.

## A Complex Crisis

Experience has taught me that there is no easy way to puzzle through suicide's sorrowful mystery. If we rush to judgment or grope helplessly for suitable words, it is because we are not equipped to confront the complexity of what is both a personal and a societal crisis.

Sadly, this is as true within the church as outside it. In the face of such a grave and desperate act, even members of the clergy are sometimes at a loss for words. Because I am an ordained person who is open about being a survivor of suicide, colleagues from a variety of churches often call me when this tragedy strikes their flock. They wonder how best to respond to the family and how to preach at the funeral. They do not want to repeat the errors of the past, when the church denied the possibility of God's mercy following an act of suicide and refused to bury their bodies in consecrated ground. Nor do they want to ignore the anger and sense of betrayal that survivors often feel toward the loved one who has so suddenly and brutally torn their relationship.

Pastoral sensitivity is appropriate. But in the disorientation that accompanies a crisis, the church often underestimates what we have to offer, whether to our own family, our parish or the larger society. We can offer three



this way. When my mother died, I was surprised by the number of people who, never having met her, passed judgment on the manner of her death. Many blamed her, asking, "How could she do that to you?" Others offered a quick affirmation of her "choice" to end her life "on her own terms."

These responses were well meant, but as I struggled with conflicting emotions of grief, compassion and anger, both seemed too simple. More helpful were a quiet "I'm so sorry; I'll pray for you," or even an honest, "I don't know what to say." Occasionally someone would share that they, too, had lost a loved one to suicide. I always accepted that gift gratefully, in the spirit of mutual vulnerability in which it was offered. And I have passed it on. Whenever I meet someone who is grieving over a suicide, whether recent or long past, I always identify myself as

### THE REV. RHONDA MAWHOOD LEE

is Canon for Regional Ministry with the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina. She is the author of *Through With Kings and Armies: The Marriage of George and Jean Edwards* (Cascade).

things that the church already provides to the world every day: We tell the truth about the reality of human sin, and about God's mercy embodied in Jesus Christ. We pray. And we offer compassionate presence.

We will not give comfort and hope to survivors of suicide by pretending that the act of physical self-annihilation is anything less than shocking. It is more faithful to affirm the truth as we know it. First, we can acknowledge that suicide is a sin. It violates God's commandment not to kill, and it rips the web of relationships that sustains us all. And then we must be equally clear that suicide is usually a misguided attempt to end desperate suffering caused by mental illness or trauma: the kind of suffering that permeates my mother's final note. Above all, we must affirm that God's compassion is boundless, stretching far beyond human imagination.

As we proclaim Christian truth in the face of suicide, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a helpful resource. It notes that "voluntary co-operation in suicide is contrary to the moral law," so that it is inappropriate for Christians to assist in suicide or what is euphemistically termed "euthanasia." When someone takes his or her own life, however, "grave psychological disturbances" or other mitigating factors "can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide." We no longer assume that persons who kill themselves are condemned to eternal separation from God. As the catechism puts it, "By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance." The salvation of all sinners—not just people who commit suicide, but each of us—is in God's hands.

### Healing by God's Love

The hope that death would not have the final word over life seemed very distant when my mother died 20 years ago. Although I had been baptized as

an infant, I had not attended church in years, and some old, unhealed wound had separated my mother from the Presbyterian church of her childhood. Whatever comfort she may have received from my father's Catholic church when he died of cancer five years earlier had not drawn her into its fold. Unwilling to seek treatment for her depression—a paralysis that is itself a symptom of the disease—she lived at its mercy, like one possessed by a demon. At her death, the demon seemed to have won their long-raging battle.

But as I grieved, God's power to bring life out of death became clear. He led me to faithful people who expressed the hope that the catechism declares. The first of those witnesses was a Baptist pastor, an acquaintance of my mother who offered to officiate at her funeral. Pastor Andrew modeled the skills that clergy hope to demonstrate in a crisis: compassionate and attentive listening, loving truthfulness and a deep ability to articulate his trust in the resurrection. Although I did not yet share that trust, Andrew and I agreed that it was important to be open about the circumstances of my mother's death, both to help mourners sort through our complicated feelings and to raise awareness about depression's fatal potential.

In his funeral address, Andrew told both the complex truth of my mother's life—her generous self-giving nature and the dark moods that had made her lash out at others and herself—and the pure truth of God's love. He reminded the congregation of the Christian hope, affirmed by Paul, that "neither death, nor life...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Andrew expressed his own trust that deadly depression was included in the ancient list of foes over which Christ would ultimately be victorious.

Andrew was not the only Christian

truth-teller whose faith in God and compassion for fellow sinners, sustained me as I mourned. About a year after my mother's death, I asked Father Ray, a Jesuit in my neighborhood, to say a Mass for her. He did not know me well and had never met my mother, but he immediately agreed. When I told him how she had died, his response was both practical and compassionate: "We all need prayer, and in this life our job is to pray and leave the rest up to God."

The faith and kindness of those two faithful pastors nudged me toward the Gospel. For the first time since childhood, I began to pray, to attend church and to read Scripture. There, I discovered that all the pain and joy of the human story is contained in, and transformed by, the story of God's love for us. In Psalm 88, the Bible's most unrelentingly bleak prayer of lament, I found unexpected resonance with what I knew of my mother's experience. The psalmist cries: "Why do you reject my soul, Lord,/ and hide your face from me?/ I have been mortally afflicted since youth;/ I have borne your terrors and I am made numb." My mother's suicide note unknowingly echoed this prayer and its final line, "My only friend is darkness."

That heart-wrenching lament gave me a paradoxical hope. If Psalm 88 was included within the sacred stories of God's loving dealings with humankind, I dared to hope that the Lord had heard my mother's cries and those of others like her. Eventually, I learned to trust in him who had turned to the psalms as he died in agony—"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"—and then had been raised.

### Praying for Those Who Hurt

As I grew in faith, I began to pray daily for my parents and all the dead, especially those who had died by violence; and for all who were contemplating harming themselves or another. Several years ago, I learned that one of

the Christians I most admire, Dorothy Day, had also prayed daily for those who commit suicide. Dorothy trusted the advice her own pastor had given her a year into her life as a Catholic, after a teenage friend had killed himself.

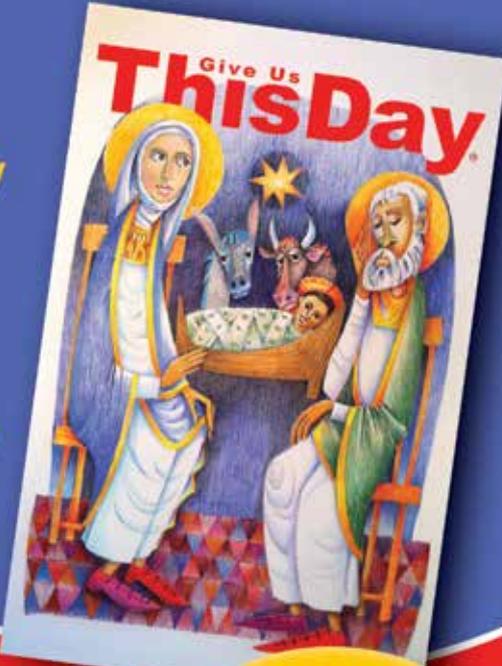
“There is no time with God,” Dorothy’s priest had said, “and all the prayers you will say in the future for this unhappy boy will have meant that God gave him the choice at the moment of death, to choose light instead of darkness, good, not evil, indeed the Supreme Good.” At that time, Dorothy had lost 10 friends to suicide. Those deaths, and her ever-present concern that people with nowhere to turn might seek a final exit from their despair, shaped Dorothy’s life of unceasing hospitality.

In my own small ways, I try to emulate her compassionate presence, listening to those who drop by my office, or stop me on a street corner, seeking a listening ear. Sometimes, being mindfully present to people in pain means asking the difficult, yet often liberating, question: “Have you been thinking about harming yourself?” A couple of times, I have called 911 and accompanied a suicidal person to the hospital. As I know from my mother’s experience, interrupting a suicide plan does not guarantee the person will live out their natural life. But I always pray that they will.

As I pray, and as I work with people in distress, I often think of Dorothy Day and her priest, and of Pastor Andrew and Father Ray. In their own ways, they embodied the hope that the church can offer to those who grieve, and to those who struggle to hold onto life. Each of them told the truth about the mental anguish that stalks so many, and about God’s love for us all. That is the first step both in the prevention of suicide and in the healing of those it already has hurt. Offering our prayers and presence is the next step, taken in the hope that all God’s beloved people will live life to the fullest with him and each other, in this world and the next. ■

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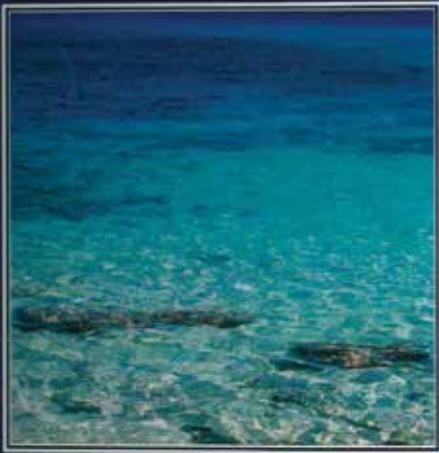
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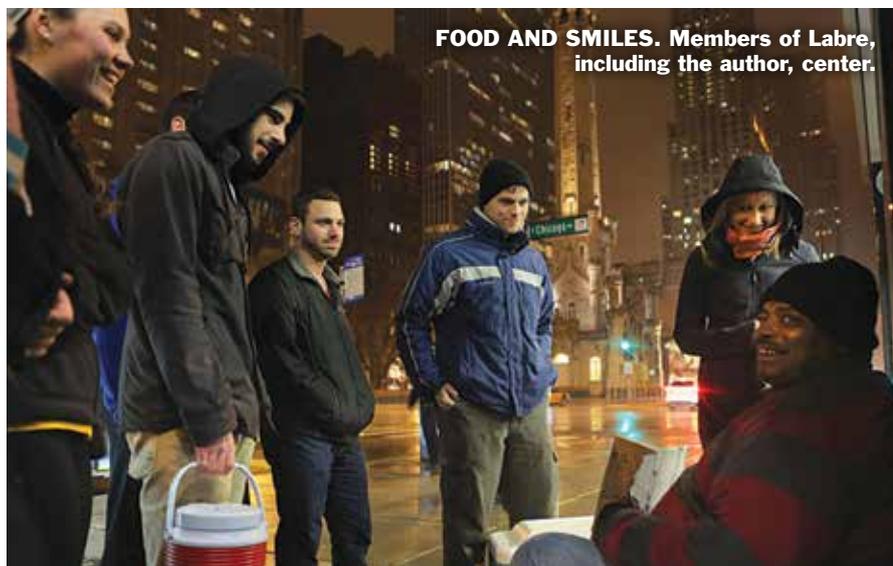
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# Hot Dog Hospitality

Seeking solidarity on the streets of Chicago

BY MICHAEL CONWAY



**FOOD AND SMILES.** Members of Labre, including the author, center.

PHOTO BY HEATHER EIDSON. COURTESY OF LABRE AND THE AUTHOR

**M**y paternal grandmother, Ruth, was the incarnation of hospitality for me throughout my childhood. As a perpetually hungry growing boy—eager for every fat, carb and casserole laced with cream of mushroom soup I could get my hands on—I developed a deep appreciation for Ruth’s talent for feeding the masses. Meals were always prepared with the possibility of unexpected guests in mind. Families with newborns could expect a steady stream of dinners for weeks. If Ruth learned of someone’s special fondness for a treat, that person could expect the craving to be soon satisfied from her kitchen. Starting when I was 8 years old, Ruth always checked to make sure I had

enough bacon. I always had more than plenty.

Ruth died somewhat suddenly during my first week at college. Already homesick, adding grief to the emotional mix made for a difficult first month, marked by bouts of melancholy and tears. One day I alluded to these struggles while talking with my orientation leader, who also worked the front desk at my dorm. He listened sympathetically and then asked if I would like to participate in a program he led called Labre. Though I did not see it at the time, I now realize that he had invited me to cope with the sorrow of losing my grandmother by paying forward her greatest gift: hospitality.

Labre is a student-led ministry to the homeless based at the downtown campus of Loyola University Chicago. In the spirit of its namesake, St. Benedict Joseph Labre, who in the 18th century took up the life of a beggar and shared all he had with the

poor, students involved with the group seek to build solidarity and relationships with the homeless people on and around Michigan Ave. Food is prepared ahead of time and transported in wheeled coolers to be distributed to people living on the street.

But hospitality requires more than simply giving away food. Meals serve as a gateway to conversation and as a means of removing the veil of invisibility that social stigma often casts over homeless men and women. Labre’s strength lies in its comfort with what its mission is—and what it is not. It is essentially a ministry of mobile hospitality that seeks to ensure that the basic human dignity of a marginalized segment of the population is seen, heard and protected. Volunteers know that their humble offering will not end homelessness; but they also know that recognizing the humanity of each homeless person is the necessary first step in that mission.

Labre’s task is difficult. It is not simply a series of corporal acts of mercy at various spots along the streets of Chicago. Solidarity requires entering into the experiences of the people we meet, and these experiences are gritty, sometimes painful and often marked by various forms of ugliness. Some people exude optimism in defiance of their circumstances; others are understandably sullen and depressed. Jesus’ exhortation, “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me,” consistently strikes me as a greater challenge every time I encounter someone on the streets who describes losing a family member, or

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**MICHAEL CONWAY** recently earned degrees in history and political science from Loyola University Chicago, where he participated in Labre Ministry for four years. He graduated in 2010 from St. Xavier High School in Cincinnati, Ohio.

experiencing a debilitating injury, an addiction or some other horror that jars me from my own comfortable life.

It is not easy to encounter and embrace all who constitute the “least.” Unless I am running into someone I have met before, I still find the initial introduction awkward. We respectfully approach the individual—usually distinguished by a collection cup, a cardboard sign, battered shoes or a heap of blankets—trying to convey a friendly, unobtrusive presence. After an initial greeting, I typically ask the individual if he or she is hungry in an effort to transcend the economic divide—anyone can be hungry. Any preferred combination of hot dogs, granola bars and fruit is placed in a plastic bag and offered. Sometimes we have basic toiletry items or fresh socks, which are highly treasured.

As this exchange takes place, the conversation begins—starting with typical pleasantries and moving into the types of questions and answers that have surely dominated dinner party small talk from time immemorial. Every relationship begins from this same point. With those people we see repeatedly, these exchanges grow easier and cover a broader range of more personal topics.

But not all conversations lead to memorable fellowship or dynamic repartee. Some people we see once and never again. For every jovial encounter with someone just happy to talk, there is an uncomfortable, stilted conversation about the weather with a reticent person who can be any combination of tired, disheartened and embittered. It is from this reality that we learn that solidarity requires much more than empathy. To fully embrace the experiences of the homeless, solidarity requires surrender.

By acknowledging the limits of two hot dogs and a banana in the fight against extreme poverty—while offering them again and again anyway—Labre shows its strength. Surrendering to these limits is not a sign of weakness

but an acceptance of the ultimate necessity for God in events and contingencies totally out of our control. It is easy to see the divine in a beautiful sunset, but it takes a measure of surrender to find God in cold and hunger. When I listen to a woman speak about suffering abuse from her husband, or a father’s struggle to consistently feed his children, I feel both a profound need to fix everything afflicting the streets of Chicago and an overwhelming sense of inadequacy in the face of these tragedies.

Just when I am prepared to work myself into a fatalist tizzy, I turn to the cooler. I surrender to God that which is beyond my control in order to direct my focus toward being present to the experience of the person in front of me. In the surrender, we find liberation. The food, the conversation, the moments of silence and the gusts of wind are all afforded grace because we get out of our own heads and allow God to fill the space.

The enormous, brightly lit buildings of Michigan Ave. flank our route, and their opulence blinds many passers-by to the huddled figures beneath the display windows. These buildings have always reminded me of the walls of the

Red Sea that lined the Israelites’ march to liberation from Egypt. Carting the cooler, we too walk intentionally, in search of freedom. We seek liberation to see God truly in all things and the ability to accept our own limits. We seek liberation from the need to fix and control so that we can better share in the stories of the people we meet.

My grandmother Ruth was a figure of liberation in her kitchen. She felt free enough to experiment constantly with new dishes and to offer whatever she had in whatever quantity was available to all guests—expected or not. She would chuckle at humorous stories, nod sympathetically to complaints and listen attentively while unassumingly pushing the food toward your plate. Above all, she listened without feeling the need to interrupt with an opinion, to offer a quick fix to a problem or even to ask many clarifying questions. She let the words and stories hang in the moment, unafraid of the uncontrollable, offering what she always had—food and a smile. This metaphorical Promised Land that was realized in Ruth’s kitchen and continues to be made manifest in Labre, holds the key to solidarity. We do what we can and offer up what we cannot. ▲

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FILM | KERRY WEBER

## LAWS OF ATTRACTION

*Love and loss in 'The Theory of Everything'*

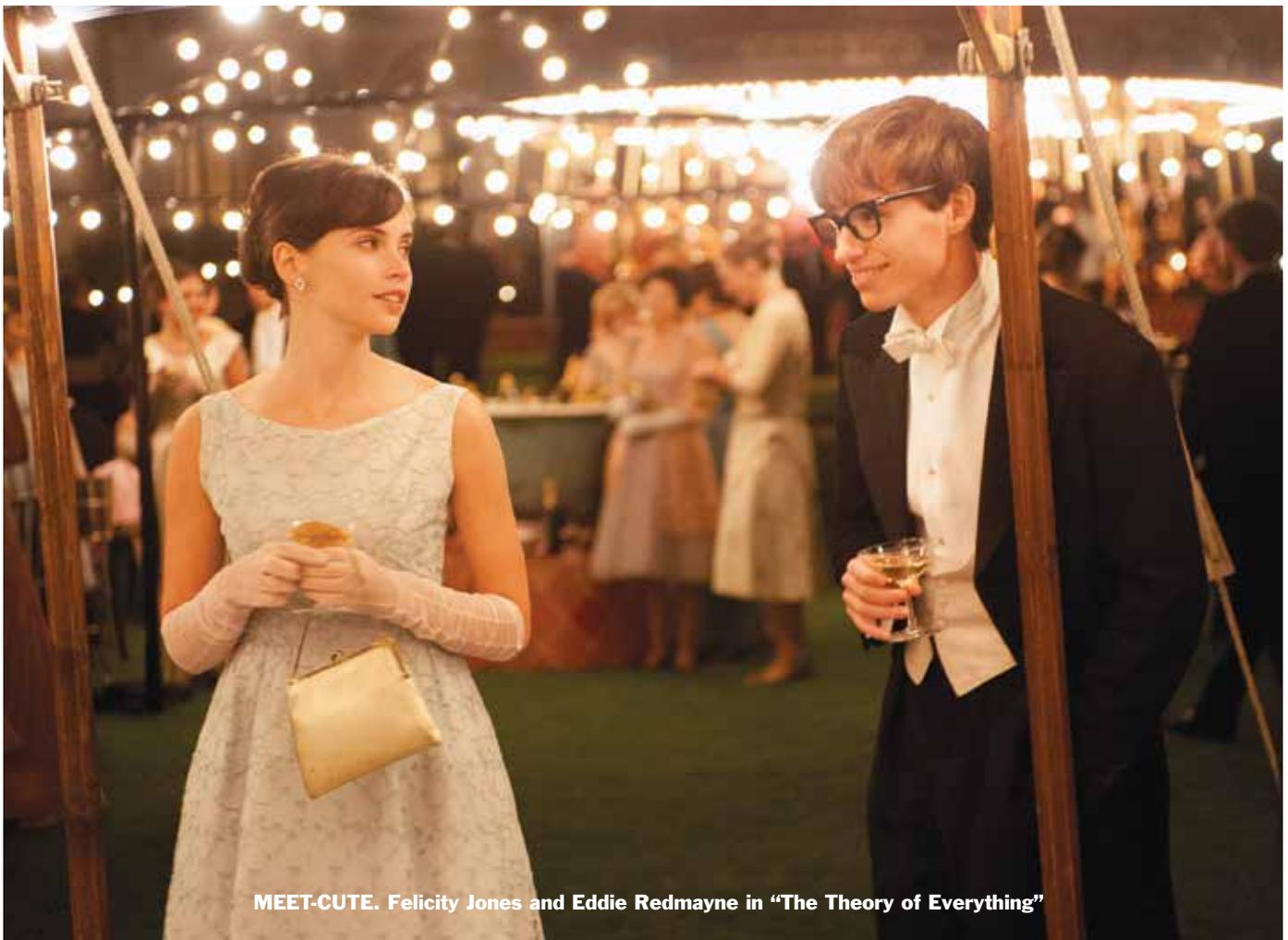
**T**he struggle to form and sustain relationships is a universal experience. The struggle to understand the existence of black holes, less so. So it makes sense that **The Theory of Everything**, a new biopic about Stephen Hawking, the physicist and cosmologist, puts more focus on his love life than on the scientific theories that made him famous.

The romantic early scenes of the film suggest cosmic forces may be at work in uniting the young Hawking, an atheist and budding scientist (Eddie Redmayne) with a young arts student and Anglican believer, Jane Wilde (Felicity Jones) at a party at Cambridge University. The two talk for hours, and the wits of both are revealed through their banter. Hawking describes cos-

mology as a “religion for intelligent atheists,” adding quite seriously that his aim is to find “one single equation that explains everything in the universe.”

It is easy to imagine that this intermingling of faith and physics will drive or divide the couple. But viewers hoping to find a deeper conversation about either science or religion will be disappointed. The quick scenes in churches and classrooms offer superficial treatment of these subjects and of the characters’ motives. The film’s attempts to place the story of the couple’s love and suffering into context are more deliberate, but ultimately unsatisfying.

We first encounter Hawking at



MEET-CUTE. Felicity Jones and Eddie Redmayne in “The Theory of Everything”

PHOTO: LIAM DANIEL/FOCUS FEATURES

Cambridge University in the early 1960s in the midst of beautiful images of English gardens and university lawns, all in a muted palette that provides a vintage feel. But this idyllic mood fades as the symptoms of Hawking's poor health begin—the shaky handwriting, a spilled coffee, a violent fall. He is diagnosed with a motor neuron disease that doctors say will cripple his body and trap his mind. Watching Redmayne's physical transformation throughout the film is breathtaking. His efforts to portray Hawking's diminishing physical abilities are convincing and commendable. He conveys great emotion and intellect in the smallest of gestures, the lift of an eyebrow or roll of the eye.

"Theory" depicts Hawking, at 21, being given two years to live and falling into a depression before being pulled back from the edge by Jane, who loves him forward with great intensity through Jones's performance. The two soon marry, but they continue to struggle with the effects of the disease on their relationship, and their seemingly storybook romance becomes increasingly fraught. Even Hawking's huge commercial success and increasing fame—his book, *A Brief History of Time*, has sold more than 10 million copies—has a dark side. It is not just illness but ego that begins to drive the couple apart, and both seek refuge elsewhere.

"Theory" is based on *Travelling to Infinity: My Life With Stephen*, Jane Hawking's revised memoir about her marriage. The original version of the memoir contained greater detail about the darker side of their relationship, but much of that remains vague or unspoken in the film. Although we see Hawking continue to impress the world with his commitment to communicating through various assisted devices, viewers are left wondering exactly what is motivating his choices throughout.

Still, "Theory" offers much to think about in the context of current events. The film's depiction of bodily suffering and degenerative illness offers timely

context as discussions of assisted suicide continue across the country. And the film's realistic and respectful depictions of such physical struggles offer a glimpse into the lives of individuals facing such illnesses as well as of the family members who serve as caretakers.

In recent years Stephen Hawking has publicly stated his support for assisted suicide, even while his very existence remains a testament to the ways life surprises us and the amazing ways in which human beings choose to persevere in the face of suffering and uncertainty. The man once given two years to live has lived for more than five decades. In the film, the Hawking character acknowledges the value of this perseverance. Through a communication device, he tells an audience: "There should be no boundaries to human endeavor. However bad life may seem, while there is life there is hope."

Arriving on the heels of the Synod of Bishops gathering in Rome that brought family struggles to the fore, the film's depictions of the stressors on a modern marriage, although not fully fleshed out, provide food for thought as the church considers its best pastoral response to couples who are struggling with whether to love, leave, stay, suffer or express solidarity. In their closing document, the synod fathers wrote that "within the family are joys and trials, deep love and relationships which, at times, can be wounded."

"Theory" can provide talking points for discussing such hurts. The film depicts characters persisting, hoping and believing—though they

may not know in what. They try to make order of chaos, to make their relationships make sense. Yet their efforts simply prove that any theory about an individual that fails to account for the depth and complexity of human beings will result in a picture that ultimately feels incomplete. Love, it turns out, is not an exact science.

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**KERRY WEBER** is the managing editor of *America*. Twitter: @Kerry\_Weber.

## L'HEURE BLEUE

Hour of approach, hour of silence.

The brother sets down his axe in the woods.

The sister sets down her glasses on the table  
and waits in the moment before prayer

that throbs from the tolling of the bell.

Shadows swallow shadows in the frigid air.

Hour of departure.

Ledgers toted, windows shuttered.

Late heading homeward, children  
do not stop to play on the walk.

The wind stills, the sun

in the brief moment before it sets

catches a row of white houses in its flare.

From under the hedges, the heart of the firs,  
darkness rises—the blue hour.

Time stops for breath, breathes.

Ovens are lit, then streetlamps, porches.

It starts to snow. It will snow all night.

### DIANE VREULS

**Diane Vreuls** has published a novel, a collection of short stories, a children's book and a poetry chapbook, as well as work in *The Chariton Review*, *Commonweal* and *The New Yorker*. She lives in Oberlin, Ohio.

## A COMMON CORE—OF HYSTERIA?

It has been mocked by David Letterman and Steven Colbert. On Twitter, the comedian Louis C. K. complains that his kids used to love math, but now “it makes them cry.” Tea Party conservatives have pummeled it as another menacing tentacle of a vast left-wing conspiracy to “big-brother” America. It’s America’s “Common Core,” elbowing its way into a crowded field of frontrunners among things-to-get-obsessed-about.

Most of us have already endured our fair share of parental rants on Facebook timelines and comical Instagram snaps of inscrutable “common core” math. In truth there are probably few parents of first- through fifth-graders who have not spent a decent amount of evening downtime in fruitless attempts to translate this newest math into something close to what they remember from their own school days.

Unless of course you happen to be parents who grew up in Asia, because the math formulas and questions generating so much hostility and suspicion on the Internet and Fox News reports are not actually Common Core math. What many parents are grappling with is an alternative system of teaching math, hugely successful in Asia, that emphasizes comprehension over memorization. But the persistent outrage over the math curriculum has propelled one of the fundamental misunderstandings about Common Core. It is not a curriculum at all. Common Core is a set of minimum standards that emphasize critical thinking and provide detailed outlines of the reading and math skills students should have mastered at each grade level. The idea is to help unify not how or what kids are taught, but basic, predictable levels of attainment and

comprehension. It is not in fact a federal take-over of local school curriculum.

But adopting Common Core—as 46 states have done since 2010—has meant that school districts have profoundly changed their teaching curriculum. Many districts have opted to use this somewhat baffling style of math instruction, at least to us old-timey survivors of “fundamentals” rote learning. They have not been forced by the federal government, as some routinely and erroneously insist, to use a form of Jedi math instruction designed to make parents feel foolish.

The backlash to Common Core has been a political propellant in the Republican mid-term sweep, and a number of red states are now entertaining legislative repeals of the initiative. Presidential hopefuls like Senator Ted Cruz with an eye on 2016 have already put Common Core rhetorically to use energizing their presumptive bases.

Why all the anger and suspicion over Common Core? Primarily, there appears to be something in the republican DNA of the United States that activates when anything government-ish assumes—or even only appears to assume—new responsibilities.

When many otherwise reasonable people seem perfectly willing to believe that Barack Obama, the nation’s first Muslim president, is conspiring to smuggle Ebola and a new generation of Democratic voters over the border from Mexico, there are apparently no government-associated initiatives that are not

going to be met with some degree of froth and craziness. The auto-hysterics of contemporary mass media haven’t helped. Common Core has been irresistible to Internet channels and cable and radio talk show hosts who peddle paranoia to boost ratings and ad sales.

But the Common Core initiative has at times been its own worst enemy.

The sudden shift to Common Core-friendly curriculum came as a shock to the national system; many teachers complain they haven’t been adequately trained in new curricula; and the initiative’s own Genesis story—emerging from a murk of Gates Foundation grants, U.S. Chamber of Commerce endorsements and a hurried O.K. from the National Governors Association, does little to soothe the conspiracy-minded. Efforts by the Obama administration to accelerate

the adoption of Common Core did not help either.

Common Core creates baselines that should be helpful for gauging real improvements in national educational performance and should contribute to developing best practices for all states to emulate toward improving public education. But with the cultural and political winds shifting against it, the initiative may not be around long enough to establish those testable standards. In the end, wounded by its incautious launch and unable to overcome America’s paranoid style, this latest grand experiment may join the waste heap of other “great new ideas” to fix the perpetually reformed U.S. education system.

Schools  
have not  
been forced  
to use  
Jedi math  
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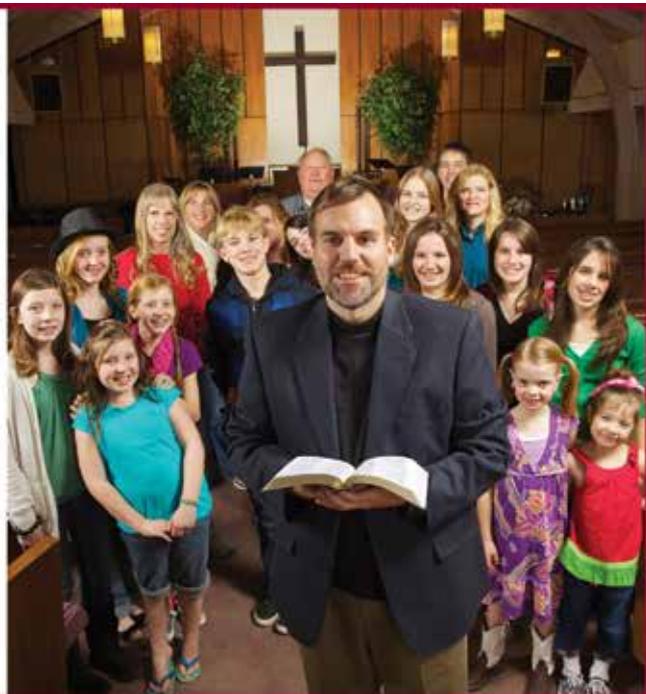
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America

## LIVING ON THE EDGE

*Religious Women: Past, Present, Future?*

### AMERICAN SAINT

#### The Life of Elizabeth Seton

By Joan Barthel  
St. Martin's Press. 282p \$26.99

### RELIGIOUS LIFE AT THE CROSSROADS

#### A School for Mystics and Prophets

By Amy Hereford, C.S.J.  
Orbis Books. 206p \$20

### VESSEL OF CLAY

#### The Inspirational Journey of Sister Carla

By Jacqueline Hansen Maggiore  
University of Scranton Press. 171p \$18

### FLUENT IN FAITH

#### The Gift of Mary McCormick

By Donald J. Mueller & Jacqueline Hansen Maggiore  
Marquette University Press. 181p \$15

### DEDICATED TO GOD

#### An Oral History of Cloistered Nuns

By Abbie Reese  
Oxford University Press. 272p \$34

The study of Catholic women religious is “hot.” Academic and non-academic writers, documentary filmmakers and the media are producing and publishing materials in record numbers highlighting the lives and work of American Catholic sisters/nuns. Even funding agencies and foundations are beginning to open their pockets (just slightly) to support academics and independent scholars who are pursuing the many narratives that trace the historical and contemporary lives and activities of Catholic sisters both in the United States and abroad. Women religious themselves are publishing in ever growing numbers, pro-

viding memoirs, scholarly analyses and multi-disciplinary assessments of religious life.

The five books reviewed here offer five portraits, slices of religious life as experienced by Catholic sisters (apostolic and contemplative) and one laywoman. Each narrative provides snapshots of time, place and circumstance. Each book uses a different lens to describe, analyze and understand what motivates each story. Finally, the authors and ultimately their readers understand that there is not one formula or path to religious life. The roads vary as much as the individuals who choose to make the journeys.

Of these five books, two are more thought-provoking. Although the women religious discussed are separated by almost two centuries, *American Saint* and *Religious Life at the Crossroads* describe, and in some cases analyze, religious life while providing bookends of experience for Catholic women religious in the changing historical and cultural milieu of American culture. In 1803 Elizabeth Bayley Seton, an Episcopalian, set her course for a new direction in life. With her gravely ill husband, she sailed to Italy hoping to revive his health. When she returned to her native New York the following year as a widow, she converted to Catholicism and faced the task of providing for her five children. In *American Saint*, Joan Barthel traces the life of Seton through letters and records, with particular detail about Seton's personal struggles as she built a new life as a single mother and a Catholic aspiring to religious life. After struggle and religious discrimination in New York, Seton moved her family to Baltimore in 1808 to open a school for girls. In 1809 she founded the first

order of American nuns and ultimately one of the largest, the Sisters of Charity. In 1975 Elizabeth Seton was canonized as the first native-born saint of the United States.

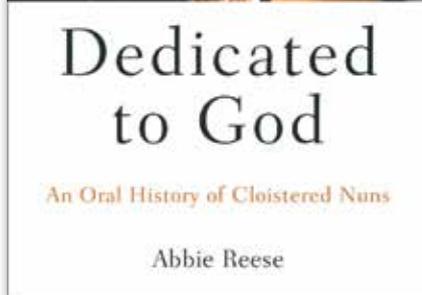
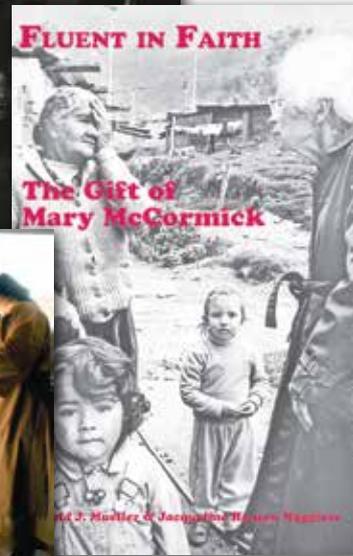
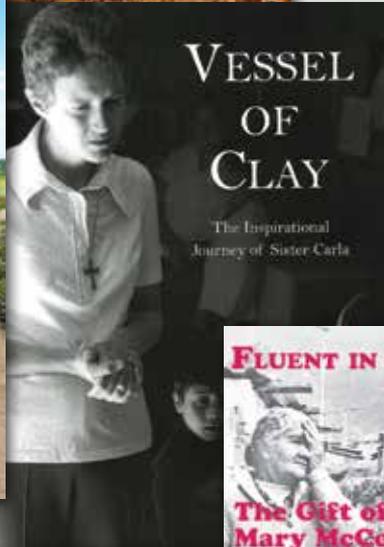
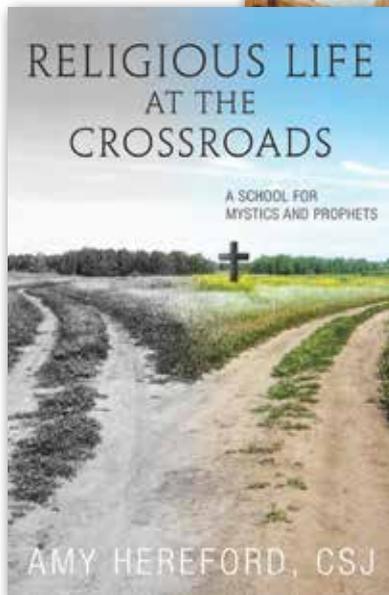
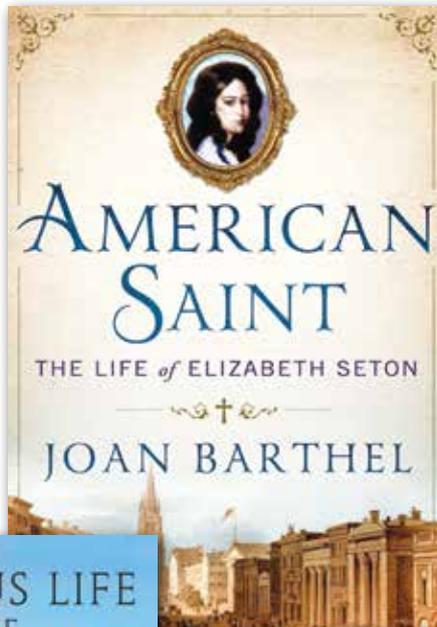
Barthel's book is at its best describing Seton's personal struggles as a widow and mother of five, who chose to embrace Catholic religious life in a strongly Protestant America, suspicious of anything Catholic and bound by gender parameters and limitations within church and state. Using extensive primary documents, particularly correspondence, Barthel documents Seton's angst, both spiritual and personal, as she deals with ill, sometimes wayward children, who must adjust to their mother's very unconventional choices.

Likewise, Seton seeks clerical affirmation and approval even as she chafes at hierarchical and patriarchal structures that make her life's aspirations more difficult. Although these personal struggles are important to the narrative, I wished the author would have gone further to provide the reader with a larger cultural context for Seton's life and work. We are told much about the anti-Catholic sentiment in antebellum America, which was at time virulent; but Elizabeth Seton also lived in a world where all women who chose to make unconventional choices and aspired to leadership, regardless of religion, were buffeted with religious and civil laws that maintained their dependency through religious, economic, political, social and legal institutions.

Two hundred years after the struggles of Elizabeth Seton, women religious are still working and struggling—ironically with some of the same issues that bedeviled their 19th century counterpart. *Religious Life at the Crossroad* is the 21st-century analysis of the present and future of religious life. Written by Amy Hereford, C.S.J., an attorney and canonist, the book traces religious life from its past “marked by courage and creativity in the face of adversity as

well as by heroism and zeal." Hereford attempts to chart a course into the future by understanding the historical and present characteristics of religious life through the context of the time. Her self-appointed task was to use the ideas, social media conversations and visions of her "minority cohort" (younger women religious) to imagine "the future of religious life in the next fifty years." The author takes a linear approach to her topic as she moves from the earliest forms of religious life, beginning with the desert mothers and fathers and moving through the Second Vatican Council renewal period. Using theological communities, including Dietrich Bonhoeffer's New Monasticism, Brother Roger and the Taizé Community and Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement, she looks for "seeds of newness" and re-imagines the vows, community life and mission in the context of the 21st century.

The strength of this book lies in Hereford's approach to the topic. Rather than just speak from present-day realities, she places religious life into context. In the last section she describes newer concepts of governance, networking and formation, describing religious life as a "school for prophets and mystics"—a radical Christian community that "inspired, attracted, and sustained the religious of every age." Paraphrasing Sister Mary Luke Tobin, a sister of Loretto and one of 23 women who attended Vatican II, Hereford writes, "There will come a time when some of us will



go one way and others will go another, each group remaining true to its call and living its truth." Hereford's insight and interpretations provide opportunities for thought-provoking analysis, particularly about how culture helps determine what religious life looks like and what it could be.

Between the chronological book-ends of *American Saint* and *Religious Life at the Crossroads*, three other books provide 20th-century profiles that expand thinking on religious life and offer dramatic alternatives. In *Vessel of Clay*, Jacqueline Hansen Maggiore explores the life of the Maryknoll sister Carla Piette, who joined religious life in 1958 after growing up in Wisconsin. Piette's work in Latin America came during the height of the Catholic Church's presence in Central and South America. Using correspondence and interviews, Maggiore describes Carla's work in Chile, where she served for 15 years

before her untimely death in a flash flood in El Salvador, where she had recently been missioned. Piette drowned saving the life of Sister Ita Ford, one of four religious women raped and murdered in El Salvador three months later in 1980.

Jacqueline Maggiore joined Donald J. Mueller to write the story of another Catholic woman working in Latin America a decade later. "Wife, widow, single mother" Mary McCormick was the inspiration for *Fluent in Faith*. After her husband's early death, McCormick, a laywom-

an, joined Papal Volunteers for Latin America and moved with her daughters to Bogota, Colombia. Using interviews and other primary documents, the authors describe McCormick as never really mastering the language but never reluctant to take on issues of poverty, education and compassion as she worked with Colombian families, particularly women and children, from 1968 to 1994.

Abbie Reese takes on a different challenge in *Dedicated to God: An Oral History of Cloistered Nuns*. Reese gains the trust and respect of the Poor Clare Colettine Order of the Corpus Christi Monastery in Rockford, Ill. Rejecting modern life, these 20 sisters live outside the mainstream “taking vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and enclosure.” Over a six-year period, the author interviews sisters who volunteer to share their thoughts, aspirations, reflections and spirituality amid their daily lives of prayer, gardening, baking

and manual labor. They are dependent upon benefactors for food and monetary donations. The author’s sensitivity and patience allowed her unprecedented access to a group of religious women who are often misunderstood by most 21st-century Americans, if not completely incomprehensible to them.

As I read these five books I found their differences are many, and it is easy to focus on the differences. The time periods of the stories span the early 19th century to the 21st century. One is written about an important 19th-century foundress of a large religious order in the United States, two others address the late 20th-century global social justice work and sacrifices of two women working in Latin America, one a religious—one a laywoman, another delves into the lives and oral histories of a contemporary, contemplative order and one provides scholarly and personal analysis of the future of religious life “at the crossroads,” asking the question

“where have we been, and where do we go from here?”

So, where do we go from here? I cannot but think of the current struggles and tensions between the Vatican and contemporary women religious. From Elizabeth Seton to 21st-century women religious, the tensions are implicit, if not explicit, in the struggle over who defines concepts of gender, autonomy and leadership within women’s communities. Despite the differences among the religious women and their stories, represented in these books, a defining thread seems to run through the variety of subjects, time periods and themes discussed by the authors. The women and religious communities depicted were all listening to a “call” that some of us do not “hear,” a call that even the Vatican at times refuses to hear or validate except to label it “heresy.”

The most recent impasse between the Vatican and women religious is simply the latest incarnation of the



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dissonance between male clerics and sisters. American women religious have been important “players” in most of the defining moments in the struggle for social justice and human rights in this nation and around the world. And they have been speaking publicly about their experiences and their vision, pushing the church, nation and global society to promote and defend human rights. **America** and *The National Catholic Reporter*, among other media outlets, have given voice to the sisters’ words and experiences, giving them larger audiences. In 1965 **America** published an essay by Rosemary Flanigan, C.S.J., one of the first six sisters to protest publicly in Selma, Ala., during the civil rights era. She wrote that a “nationwide fervor” erupted when sisters were seen in photographs published by major news outlets. Labeled a “disgrace” by a southern bishop, sisters were verbally attacked by some clerics and laity who labeled their actions “harmful” to the church. In 1993 Mary Heather Mackinnon, a Notre Dame sister, wrote in the N.C.R. that religious life needs to “re-envision itself within a new social and cultural paradigm that is challenging traditional understandings of anthropology, economics, politics, ethnics, education, religion and spirituality.” More recently Ilia Delio, a Franciscan sister, spoke to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious about “Religious Life on the Edge of the Universe.”

Beginning with the story of Elizabeth Seton and moving to Amy Hereford’s thought-provoking road map to the future, religious life has often embraced the “edge.” These women made nontraditional choices, and, in many cases, countercultural decisions about their lives and the expression of their faith. Although most chose vowed lives, they came to that from a variety of ages, backgrounds and perspectives. All valued community and mission as they defined it at a particular time and for a given purpose. All gave powerful witness for others through words and

actions, and all were empowered by their choices. Finally, all gave years of their lives by working toward the realization of their dreams, striving to find meaning in the context of the imperfect world they inhabited.

Whether the Vatican acknowledges it or not, women religious are leading the church into the future. Religious life has been vital for 16 centuries, re-defining itself—not often but at pivotal points in time. Religious women have served the church best when living in the mainstream, speaking truth to power and challenging the status quo—religious or secular. As Tom Fox wrote in a recent article in NCR: “These women pride themselves on living and working at the frontiers, pushing the boundaries, seeking ways to serve the church,

often before others recognize the need.” As long as women religious are willing to be the “prophets and mystics” described by Amy Hereford, religious life will continue. Demographically smaller yes, but more importantly—if women religious continue to be willing to “live on the edge,” they will retain a vitality and energy that cannot be contained by parochial or patriarchal traditions of church or secular society. The church needs the gifts that women religious give, and religious life will survive, albeit in new forms. Sixteen centuries of church history tell us that and provide the impetus and courage for the future.

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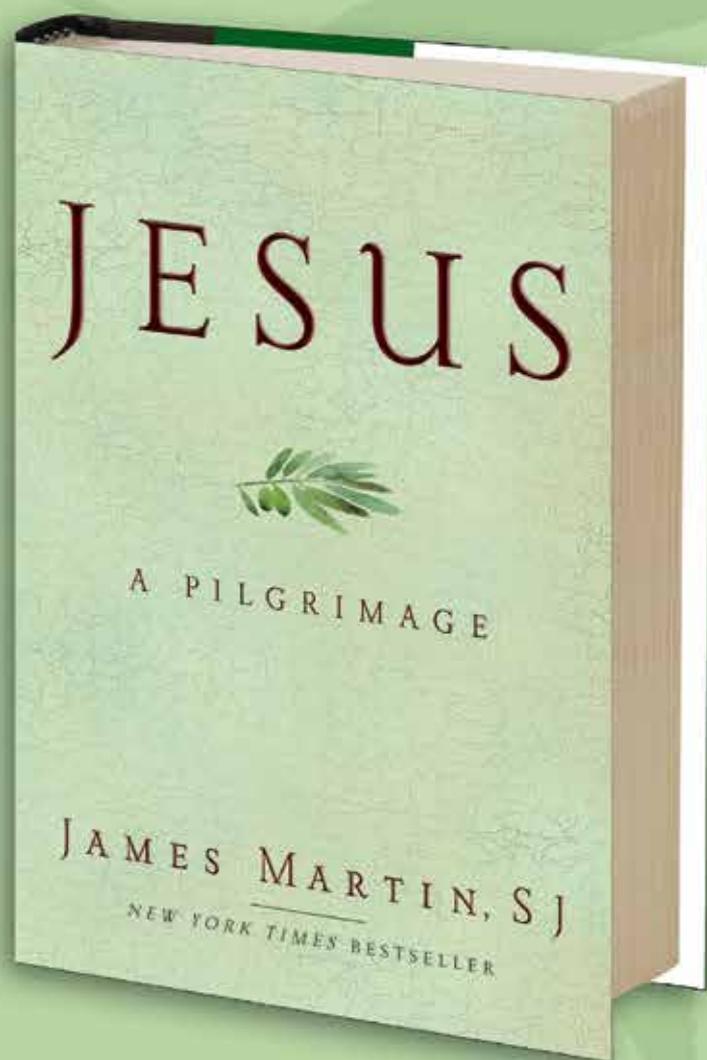
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**America** (ISSN 0002-7049) is published weekly (except for 13 combined issues: Jan. 6-13, 20-27, April 28-May 5, May 26-June 2, June 9-16, 23-30, July 7-14, 21-28, Aug. 4-11, 18-25, Sept. 1-8, Dec. 8-15, 22-29) by America Press Inc., 106 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019. Periodical postage is paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices. Circulation: (800) 627-9533. Subscription: United States, \$56 per year; add U.S. \$30 postage and GST (#13 18707 19) for Canada; or add U.S. \$56 per year for international priority airmail. Postmaster: Send address changes to: America, P.O. Box 293159, Kettering, OH 45429.

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# The Comfort of Hope

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT (B), DEC. 7, 2014

Readings: Is 40:1–11; Ps 85:9–14; 2 Pt 3:8–14; Mk 1:1–8

“Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God” (Is 40:1)

What comfort is there in waiting? Comfort is usually not found standing in line at the D.M.V. or waiting for an appointment at the doctor’s office as the minutes tick away. Then you simply hope, as frustration builds, that you can get out as quickly as possible and get on with your life.

This sort of ordinary, everyday hope has to do with desires and wishes that come and go and quickly pass. These everyday hopes can be more significant than this daily drudgery, too, regarding long-term hopes for sports teams, for work and for family. These are things in which we invest our lives and dream dreams about accomplishments and fulfilment, but these hopes often have to do with “hoping for” something.

But there is another kind of waiting that brings deeper comfort because it is based upon more fundamental hope, a “hoping in” something. Fundamental hope does not have to do with “having” or “acquiring,” but is focused on the welfare of people and our hope of salvation. Josef Pieper spoke of fundamental hope as arising when everyday hopes withered and blew away. “Out of the loss of common, everyday hope true hope arises,” wrote Pieper in *Hope and History*. This is the hope of the martyrs, which persists when all human hopes have been vanquished.

This fundamental hope, grounded in the being of the living God of Israel, led Isaiah to call out, “Comfort,

O comfort my people, says your God.” What is the comfort that Isaiah is to offer to God’s people? It is the promise of God himself, who will act in the future for his people: “See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.” This promise grounds the fundamental hope of a people who must wait for it in faithfulness. This is hope in the comfort of God.

Isaiah promises that hope will not disappoint, and we are assured that “surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.” The Gospel of Mark recalls the words of the prophet Isaiah, seeing the fulfillment of this hope in “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”

The hope of the early Christians was that Jesus would indeed enact the hopes of Isaiah, establishing the kingdom of never-ending peace and righteousness, the end of waiting in exile banished. When the kingdom was not established in the way the early Christians had hoped, but through the death and resurrection of Jesus

Christ, the disciples did not abandon Jesus or his promises but relied upon a more fundamental hope: the truthfulness and faithfulness of God to do what God had promised in a time that is not our own and does not adhere to human schedules or calculations.

In 2 Peter we read “that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not want-



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How do find comfort in hope at Advent?

ing any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.” This fundamental hope gives us comfort because it is beyond the hopes that disappoint; it is not a “thing” we want or “stuff” we think we need, but the more fundamental reality that gives us deep comfort: Jesus will return and in the returning of Jesus our deepest needs are met. Our waiting is not the absence of hope, or hope dissipating in a dreary waiting room, or dreams that do not come to fruition. It is the comfort of the living God, who comes to us when ordinary hopes disappear and who is coming to us even now. And the joy of this hope gives comfort even in the waiting.

JOHN W. MARTENS

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DECEMBER  
13<sup>th</sup>  
2014

**PROGRAM FOR THE DAY:**

- 9:15AM **Registration and Coffee Social**
- 10:00 **Mass – Feast of St. John of the Cross**  
Most Rev. John O'Hara, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of New York
- 11:15 **Opening Session – The Mission of the Catholic Journalist Today**  
*Welcome:* Rev. Msgr. Peter Vaccari, Rector, St. Joseph's Seminary and College  
*Opening Remarks:* Matt Malone, S.J., Editor in Chief, *America*  
**Perspective on Mission:**  
Jeanette Demelo – Editor in Chief, *National Catholic Register*  
Meinrad Scherer-Emunds – Executive Editor, *U.S. Catholic*  
Paul Baumann – Editor, *Commonweal*  
R.R. Reno – Editor, *First Things*
- 1:00PM **Lunch** – Courtesy of Saint Joseph's Seminary and College
- 2:00 **Panel Discussion – Reflections on Morning Presentations**  
*Panelists:*  
Jeanette Demelo – Editor in Chief, *National Catholic Register*  
Meinrad Scherer-Emunds – Executive Editor, *U.S. Catholic*  
Paul Baumann – Editor, *Commonweal*  
R.R. Reno – Editor, *First Things*  
Matt Malone, S.J. – Editor in Chief, *America*  
*Moderator:* James Martin, S.J., Editor at Large, *America*
- 3:00 **Coffee Break**
- 3:15 **Plenary Session with Audience Participants**
- 4:30 **Closing Reception** – Courtesy of Saint Joseph's Seminary and College

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