

America



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Europe's Broken Vision

THE MEANING OF THE UKRAINE CRISIS

ANTOINE ARJAKOVSKY

Books on
the Bible

JOHN C. ENDRES AND
JEAN-FRANÇOIS RACINE

The work of John Courtney Murray, S.J., once an associate editor of this review, continues to dominate political theology in the United States. Most students of Father Murray turn first to *We Hold These Truths*, Murray's most accomplished and well-known articulation of his principal thesis: that Catholicism and American democracy are essentially compatible "because the contents of [the American public] consensus—the ethical and political principles drawn from the tradition of natural law—approve themselves to the Catholic intelligence and conscience."

Father Murray viewed "the fact that the American political community was organized in an era when the tradition of natural law and natural rights was still vigorous" as nothing less than providential. This is because the natural law tradition, according to Murray, is a neutral theo-philosophical language, one in which we are all fluent by virtue of our human nature. Thus the language of natural law should be the lingua franca of political philosophy in a pluralist society.

Yet there have been challenges to Murray's appropriation of natural law. Jean Porter, for example, has critiqued Murray's predominantly neo-scholastic reading of natural law. But none other than Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, both as pope and as a working theologian, has also commented on the relationship of the natural law tradition to political theology. According to Benedict, we may not need natural law to articulate a doctrine of human rights because "it is, of course, possible for the contemporary consciousness to be content with the inherent obviousness of these values." Benedict would not deny that there are objective philosophical and moral principles at work in such claims; he just wonders, as a practical matter, whether such principles must be explicit.

But Benedict has also expressed mild skepticism about the general explanatory power of the natural law tradition:

"Unfortunately, this instrument has become blunt," he has said. Benedict believes that when considering the natural law tradition in a political context, one must account for the fact that, among modern thinkers, it is an open question whether "there might exist a rationality of nature and, hence, a rational law for man and for his existence in the world."

I would add that part of the reason why natural law theory is effectively a "blunt instrument" is that it has been detached from its theological presuppositions in the misguided and vain hope of rendering it more "credible" in the officially agnostic public square. True, Father Murray believed that the natural law is theoretically inseparable from its theological presuppositions. But what Father Murray and his followers failed to appreciate fully is the extent to which natural law theory and its theological presuppositions are truly inseparable in practice. For the natural law to be genuinely intelligible, credible and liveable, then, it must be appropriated in the context of love, in the context of a living relationship with the lawgiver who is loving creator. Without love, the law is reduced to its bare ethical content, which cannot sustain an authentically human calculus.

It is naïve to think that we can devise a common moral framework simply by giving theoretical lip service to the divine. Attempts to apply reason without faith, says Benedict, are also unhistorical, for the state is not self-justifying but receives "its basic [philosophical] support from outside: not from a mere reason that is inadequate in the moral realm, but from a reason that has come to maturity in the historical form of faith." Accordingly, "the real problem that confronts us today," writes Benedict, "is reason's blindness to the entire nonmaterial dimension of reality."

In other words, it may be time to start king for a new lingua franca.

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Cover: The ceiling of a damaged church in
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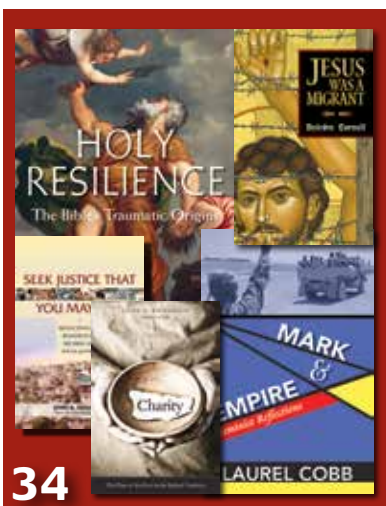
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ON THE WEB

Amy-Jill Levine, right, talks about her book *Short Stories by Jesus* on "America This Week." Plus, the Catholic Book Club discusses *Christ, Actually*, by James Carroll. Full digital highlights on page 13 and at americamagazine.org/webfeatures.



Sitting Down With Iran

In an open letter to senior leadership in Congress dated Jan. 13, Bishop Oscar Cantú, chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, made the case for patience in the ongoing nuclear negotiations with Iran. He also wisely urged “avoidance of any measures that might jeopardize the prospects for a diplomatic solution that can advance peace in the region.”

Unfortunately, just such an ill-advised measure was put forward by Senate leaders on March 9 in a letter to Iranian leadership warning that any deal with the United States could be undone when President Obama leaves office. The letter was a reckless gesture, but we hope it will not derail the negotiations. Iran’s religious leaders remain committed to the talks, and the P5-plus-1 team of negotiators is still hoping to reach the framework of an agreement before the deadline on March 31.

There is no valid path forward other than negotiation. As Secretary of State John Kerry said, “Folks, simply demanding that Iran capitulate is not a plan.” Critics worry that the current proposal, which reportedly would allow inspections, limit Iran’s capacity to produce nuclear fuel and force them to surrender fuel stockpiles in exchange for the lifting of sanctions, would expire in 10 or 15 years. Yes, Iran could start compiling weapons again at that time. But a lot could happen before then, too. The campaign for nuclear nonproliferation will progress only if negotiators stay the course. Patience is not a word one associates with U.S. foreign policy, but in this case it is a virtue to be embraced.

Early Life Support

When it comes to closing the opportunity and achievement gaps for children born into poverty, research shows that the earlier the intervention comes, the better. That is the theory behind Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting, “one of the most innovative government programs you’ve probably never heard of,” according to the Brookings Institution. The federal program, implemented as part of the Affordable Care Act of 2010, provides grants to states to expand home visits by nurses, social workers and parent educators to low-income pregnant mothers to help them create more nurturing environments in the vital first years of childhood. Absent Congressional action, however, funding for the program will end on March 31.

That would be a shame. Few government programs can boast the kind of clinically proven results achieved by the best home visiting programs. Randomized controlled trials have found quality programs reduce child neglect and abuse as well as mortality rates for infants and mothers. And the positive effects can last for years. The program has also been found to reduce participating families’ later dependence on government welfare.

In his budget for fiscal year 2016, President Obama requested \$500 million to support home visiting programs and \$15 billion over the next 10 years. Studies show that such an investment in infant and maternal well-being would be more than recouped by cost savings down the road. The Catholic Church teaches that life starts at conception. So should our generous support for expecting mothers living in poverty.

Gasoline on the Fire?

After the grisly executions of Kenji Goto and Haruna Yukawa by Islamic State militants, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told Japan that he would “make the terrorists pay the price.” Not exactly surprising political rhetoric, especially considering the circumstances. But coming from the leader of a nation whose modern constitution was conceived with the idea of turning it back from some of the military outrages of its own recent past, the comment was noted with concern.

Mr. Abe has already taken steps to unravel Japan’s post-war pacifism; in July, he pushed through new legislation that allows Japan to join allies in a collective response to mutual threats. That move sidestepped the intent of the 1947 Constitution’s Article 9, which renounces war “as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.”

Article 9 also commits Japan to maintain its military at a purely defensive level. Having reduced the article’s tactical grip, is Mr. Abe considering re-establishing Japan as a regional military power? Japan’s defense budget, though dwarfed by China’s spending, reached a record 4.98 trillion yen (\$42 billion) in 2015.

The United States has encouraged Mr. Abe’s martial impulses with an eye on China and North Korea—perhaps unwisely. The imprudent militarist strain that is a part of the psyche of every nation state is a cultural charcoal that may require very little to be breathed into deadly fire. Mr. Abe is fanning the flame. A world that has yet to figure out how to bless its few peacemakers will be diminished, if not endangered, if he succeeds.

A Space for Women



Catholic women from around the world recently shared their stories of faith and service during an observance of International Women’s Day at the Vatican. The event, called Voices of Faith, took place on March 8, during Women’s History Month, and was notable for its open dialogue about the status of women in the church today. It is also an important and necessary initiative in light of recent statistics from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate that suggest that women, who traditionally have reported being spiritual in higher numbers than men, are increasingly moving away not only from formal association with religion but from spirituality in general.

For some women, a lack of interest in the church results, in part, from the feeling that their voices are not heard or represented within the visible structures of the church. For example, while women serve the church in myriad ways, there remains a lack of leadership roles for women at the Vatican. Women do valuable day-to-day work needed to keep the Vatican running, but few are in positions of power or authority. Only two women serve as under secretaries, the highest ranking position to which women have been appointed in the Curia. In 2014, the total number of women employed by the Vatican was 371, up from 194 a decade earlier, according to Gudrun Sailer, a journalist at Vatican Radio. She is among the 41 percent of women working at the Vatican who have university degrees and work in professional positions like archivists and department heads. This is certainly a welcome trend.

Catholic women who succeed in other parts of their lives often see no outlet for their leadership skills within church structures. This can result in women choosing to devote their energy elsewhere. When this occurs, the church loses the perspectives and strengths of these women. Yet during the Voices of Faith meeting, Sailer pointed out that greater opportunities for women in the church does not mean simply replicating secular structures. “It’s about recognizing, realizing that excluding women from the church [does] not conform to the Gospel,” she said.

This sentiment was echoed during the Pontifical Council for Culture’s assembly on women, whose working paper urged the engagement of women “in full collaboration and integration with the male component.” This full collaboration is crucial if the church hopes to continue to attract and keep women active in the faith. Pope Francis, consistent with the centuries-long teaching of the church, has stated that “the reservation of the priesthood to males, as a sign of Christ the spouse who gives himself in the Eucharist, is not a ques-

tion open to discussion.” It remains the case, however, that there are many leadership roles in the church that either do not or should not require priestly ordination. Accordingly, our church must create a more inviting, empathetic space that recognizes the contributions that women have made and continue to make to the church and society. Some of those efforts might include:

Attention to language. What we say and how we say it matter. Inclusive language in church documents and in liturgies is a small but welcoming gesture. The church could also choose more readings about women for the Lectionary. In addition, providing greater opportunities for lay people to preach would provide a greater variety of perspectives on the word and a wider look into the ways in which we experience God.

Lift up the work already being done. Pope Francis has voiced support for women in theology. And while the new theology of women encouraged by Francis certainly can be developed further, the church cannot ignore the rich theology that already exists.

Provide guidance and opportunity. We must explicitly tell young women that they matter, that they have a voice and that their voices will be heard. And then we must act. We must help young women to envision how their gifts and talents might be expressed in leadership roles in the church and connect them with mentors who can guide these efforts. More roles for women in Roman and diocesan curias would be a good start.

Think globally. The church must work for the inclusion of women not only within church structures but within our larger society as well. We must also recognize that the challenges facing Catholic women in developed nations can be very different from those in less developed nations. A report produced by No Ceilings, an effort by the Clinton Foundation to advance the status of women around the world, recently highlighted the fact that in many countries women still lack the right to vote and face forced marriages, a lack of education and unsafe conditions for preparing food.

Meet people where they are. The church at every level must be willing to listen to the frustrations of all who feel alienated and be willing to accompany them in their spiritual journey. Open channels of discussion and greater inclusion of all people mean more room for dialogue and for the experience of true encounter that so many people—men and women alike—seek today.

REPLY ALL

Vigilant Justice

Re “Listening in Ferguson,” by J. Augustine Wetta, O.S.B. (3/9): The Ferguson incident began with the policeman verbally attacking Michael Brown and his companion, shouting at them with rough language. Would it not be better if law officers always chose courtesy over dominance? Would not this one simple change lead to better overall community relations?

The author speaks with one white police officer who hates having to respond to calls driven by racial stereotypes. But did this Officer Lutz ever apologize to the people he makes “feel like dirt” because of the 911 call of some bigot? Does he have to enter the jewelry store or could he not sit outside in the patrol car until the customers leave, then go inside to assure the manager that he was there keeping an eye on his store. Can we not find alternative ways to provide security without giving the impression that some are

presumed guilty instead of innocent?

Police officers can keep their suspicions out of their behavior and treat all courteously, constantly reminding themselves that the majority of every social and ethnic group are law-abiding. Cannot law and order be kept through constant vigilance without constant demonstrations of dominance?

TOM POELKER
Online Comment

Open Fire

I don’t know when I have read in any respectable publication a poem so disgusting as “They Build a Hogan in Coal Canyon, Arizona,” by Stella Jeng Guillory (3/2).

JUSTUS GEORGE LAWLER
St. Charles, Ill.

Not Guilty

Without doubt, “Examining Our Social Sins,” by Danial P. Horan, O.F.M. (3/2), is well intentioned. But I would suggest the article is both misguided and misleading. We are an increasingly divided

people. Perhaps it is because commentary on social sins is constantly pitting one group against another.

First Father Horan states that those of us who are white need to recognize the unfair privileges from which we benefit. Why is walking down the street without harassment “unfair”? Why is the possibility of a decent education in responsible, safe schools unfair? Are these privileges? I see them rather as goals for all citizens, against which we can measure our society. If some citizens don’t have these possibilities, then with a resounding yes we need to correct that. In the words of Pope Francis (as quoted in Gerard O’Connell’s column in the same issue), we must “obey the call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the peripheries in need of the light of the Gospel.” I do not hear accusation or charges of guilt in those words.

Father Horan slips right into the current sociological trap of analysis: whites against blacks, rich against poor, men against women and on and on. What good press and righteous indignation we can muster! A sacred silence, giving us time for a little reflection, is now labeled apathy. But what happened to our Gospel message of not rushing to judgment and loving our so-named enemy, even while caring for the poor and marginalized?

R. GERARD FADER
Royal Oak, Mich.

Defending Distraction

“On Paying Attention,” by John J. Conley, S.J. (3/2), was great until the last sentence: “Perhaps distraction at prayer is a serious sin after all.” Distractions can be a means to deeper attentiveness and prayer. By being aware of them and by looking past them, they become not sins but part of the landscape in which God is the center and focus.

(REV.) JOE ROMANO
Livonia, Mich.

Political Games

Although sports can be oversold and

f STATUS UPDATE

Readers respond to “All the Angels and Saints,” by Bishop Edward K. Braxton (3/9).

In my third grade Sunday school class last weekend, a child asked what Jesus looked like. I said we don’t know, but he probably looked more like some of the children than others. We played a hot-cold game until one of the Hispanic children guessed that his skin was “tanner.” It was just a few minutes in a class focused on the Transfiguration, but after class I heard one of my Hispanic girls excitedly tell her mom, “Jesus looked like me!”

ADRIENNE KELLER

While I agree with the conclusion, I found the approach of the article distasteful. It is possibly because God has given these Irish American chil-

dren whose unions produced grandchildren of color. Bishop Braxton, this country already is one of mixed race. Pretending it is a white enclave does little to move the issue forward.

JOHN WHALEN

I love the Jesuits. They directed me in the Long Retreat, which irrevocably changed my heart. I love **America**, which has so many fantastic and thoughtful articles each week. But I have a bone to pick with you. This short article is a good one, but I see so few articles by African-American authors in these pages. The illustration is a good one, but I see so few black people on your covers. Surely “this least Society” does not suffer from a lack of creative thinking. How can this problem be ameliorated?

KIM B. MALLET

today we need more cooperation and less competition, there is wisdom in “Good Sports,” by Rabbi Martin Siegel (2/23). As the author has observed, sports as well as religion require communal self-transcendence and rules. In our competitive culture, finance and politics are the other major arenas of competition. Unlike sports, however, the rules in finance and politics are at times ill defined, unfair or not enforced. Furthermore, breaking the rules in finance and politics can be considerably more consequential. Improper banking transactions caused many innocent people to lose their homes, while improper funding of political elections is undermining the foundations of our democracy. Consequently, our financiers and politicians should learn from sports that fair rules and communal self-transcendence are essential for the welfare of people and the survival of the democratic system.

GEORGE J. KROL
Enfield, Conn.

Prison Reformed

Re “Prison Addiction,” by Bishop Denis J. Madden (2/23): I know better than most that prison is not a fun place to be, having spent 12 years in maximum security prisons and local jails, but it is the only effective way we have as a society to isolate the criminal from the often innocent victims of crime. Each arrest was, for me, just another step in my criminal career of theft. Only after becoming Catholic did the final remnants of the predatory and self-centered criminality that had informed my life gush out of me.

Criminal justice policy sways between the liberal rehabilitative approach and the conservative policing, sentencing and incarceration approach. Right now society appears to be swinging back toward rehabilitation, but it is my hope that we can develop and keep only those programs that are rigorously evaluated and proven successful, while retaining the incarceration strategies

that have already proven their success in reducing crime. Reformed criminals who work with other inmates to help them get on the right path are valuable assets, which are still too rarely utilized.

DAVID H. LUKENBILL
Sacramento, Calif.

All Saints?

The church should minimize or do away with canonizing imperfect saints, and maybe, just maybe, it should re-examine all the lives of saints and pull out from the list those who do not meet strict criteria. I think many more Catholics will welcome transparency and truth rather than having all those saints of dubious character. Let's start with the personalities involved in the Council of Nicaea and all the popes canonized just for being popes.

That we make a distinction between “Saints” and saints every year around All Saints Day and All Souls Day just highlights the very hierarchical thinking in the Catholic Church to this day. And this mind-set does not apply just to the clergy but to the laity as well, humbled to the point of submission, not knowing that we are now all called to be holy and the pyramid has been inverted.

MONSERRAT WASHBURN
Online Comment

Children First

Right off the bat, the source of the “pastoral dilemma” in cases of divorce and remarriage can be seen in Monsignor Garrity's analysis. The article began by trying to demonstrate the difficulty in ascertaining the invalidity of a marriage that on the outside seemed valid. Immediately afterward we are told how painful it is for people to relive a “failed marriage” when applying for an annulment, a process that is supposed to find there was never a marriage to begin with. A wiser man might have said “failed relationship.”

Further, I cannot help but lament that some elderly pastors, molded by a different time and circumstance, are removed from the reality of the present generation, wherein the backlash against divorce is enormous. There is a generation of youths who feel they were trivialized and humiliated by parents who forced them to suffer through divorce and remarriage (often more than once). The children are dependent on their parents and have little or no political power. Where is the pastoral tear-jerking over these suffering souls who feel alone and trapped in the world?

TIMOTHY VICKERY
Online Comment



CARTOON: HARLEY SCHWADRON

VATICAN

Pope Francis Declares A Jubilee Year of Mercy'

In a surprising and far-reaching decision, Pope Francis announced an extraordinary holy year, a Jubilee of Mercy, that will extend from Dec. 8, 2015, to Nov. 20, 2016, and will involve the Catholic Church throughout the world. He broke the news during a penitential celebration in St. Peter's Basilica on the evening of March 13, the second anniversary of his election as bishop of Rome.

The surprise announcement was greeted with warm applause. Pope Francis said he is "convinced that the whole church can find in this jubilee the joy of rediscovering and making fruitful the mercy of God, with which we are all called to give consolation to every man and every woman of our time."

Pope Francis will open this 30th jubilee in the history of the church on the 50th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council and just over a month after the closing of the October gathering of the Synod of Bishops on the Family.

A jubilee year is a great religious event that originated in Judaism and was linked to universal pardons and reconciliation. As the Book of Leviticus tells us (25:8-13), it was celebrated every 50 years; slaves and prisoners were freed, debts were forgiven and God's mercy was made more manifest. The church revived that tradition in the year 1300 under Pope Boniface VIII. Since then there have been 29 jubilees, or holy years.

Francis has been called the pope of mercy ever since his election on March 13, 2013. He has frequently proclaimed to the world the God of mercy, who wants to save people, not to condemn them. It was the central theme of his first Mass for the public in the Church of Sant' Anna in the Vatican on March 17, 2013, and of his midday talk to the almost half million people who gathered in and around St Peter's Square that same day, when he praised Cardinal Walter Kasper's book on the topic of mercy. It is a theme that has surfaced again and again in his talks and homilies throughout the past two years.

"I believe that this is the season of mercy," Francis told journalists on the flight back from Rio de Janeiro, July 28, 2013. "The church is a mother: she has to go out to heal those who are hurting, with mercy," he stated. "If the Lord never tires of forgiving, we have no other choice than this: first of all, to care for those who are hurting."

Pope Francis insisted on the need

to show mercy in his homily to the new cardinals on Feb. 15, when he concelebrated Mass with them in St. Peter's Basilica. He recalled then that "the church's way, from the time of the Council of Jerusalem, has always been the way of Jesus, the way of mercy and reinstatement.

"The way of the church is not to con-

demn anyone for eternity," Pope Francis said. "It is to pour out the balm of God's mercy on all those who ask for it with a sincere heart."

He expressed the same concept even more succinctly in a letter commemorating the centenary of the Catholic University of Argentina in Buenos Aires in March, when he wrote: "Mercy

JUBILEE! Pope Francis announces a Holy Year of Mercy during a Lenten penance service in St. Peter's Basilica on March 13.



is not just a pastoral attitude; it is the very substance of the Gospel message.”

Now he is taking this message a step further, with his decision to proclaim a jubilee year. The Vatican said he will issue the bull formally proclaiming

the jubilee on the Second Sunday of Easter, also known as Divine Mercy Sunday, April 12, and place it on the front of the Holy Door in St Peter’s Basilica.

GERARD O’CONNELL

MIDDLE EAST

Global Initiative Sought for Protection of Christians

In a joint statement, representatives of more than 60 countries have recognized that Christians are particularly endangered in the Middle East, and they called on the international community to reaffirm the human right to freedom of religion. The violence carried out by terrorist groups “creates the risk of complete disappearance for the Christians” in the region, they said.

The statement, submitted to the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva on March 13, was sponsored by the delegations of the Holy See, Lebanon and Russia. The United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, Iraq and Israel were among the 63 signatories.

Ongoing conflicts in the region have been “disastrous for the entire population” and have “seriously threatened” the existence of “many religious communities,” the statement said. People continue to fall victim “to barbaric acts of violence” and “churches and ancient shrines of all religions have been destroyed.”

The statement then zeroed in on the Christian situation. “Christians are now especially affected,” said the statement. “These days even their survival is in question.

“There are more and more reasons

to fear seriously for the future of the Christian communities that have more than 2,000 years of existence in this region, where Christianity has its full place and began its long history,” the statement said.

The signatories called on the international community to support the human rights of Christians and other religious and ethnic communities in the Middle East and to work toward building “a culture of peaceful coexistence.”

“A future without the different com-



LIVING STONES—HAMMERED. Church leaders implore a global response as state of Christian communities in Middle East reaches a crisis point.

munities in the Middle East will run the risk of new forms of violence, exclusion and the absence of peace and development,” they warned.

Discussing the statement, the Holy See’s representative to U.N. agencies in Geneva, Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, acknowledged the complexity of the region but stressed the importance of focusing the international community

on the suffering of Christians and other minority groups. Islam, he argued, must not be used as an ideological excuse for violence against vulnerable communities.

According to Archbishop Tomasi, the initiative has already prompted the French government to call for a special session of the U.N. Security Council to deal with the problems of Christians in the Middle East. At this meeting, scheduled for March 27, Archbishop Tomasi said the French foreign minister will speak to the Security Council in New York on the need to defend Christians in the region. Archbishop Tomasi said he hopes that raising global public awareness of the plight of Christians in the Middle East “will encourage local authorities and the international community to support their right to remain and prosper in the land of their ancestors.”

Just days after the statement was released, it became clear that Christian communities were imperiled beyond Middle Eastern states when suicide bombers struck two churches—one Catholic and one Protestant—in Lahore, Pakistan, on March 15. The twin attacks took place during packed Sunday services in Youhanabad, one of Lahore’s largest Christian neighborhoods; 14 people were killed and scores were wounded. Street disorders quickly flared, and angry mobs seized two men believed to be involved in the attack; according to local media reports, one of them was burned alive.

Pope Francis quickly condemned the suicide bombings. “Our brothers’ and sisters’ blood is shed only because they are Christians. As I assure you of my prayers for the victims and their families, I ask the Lord, I beseech the Lord, source of all good, for the gift of peace and harmony to this country.”

Concluding his appeal, Pope Francis prayed “that this persecution against Christians, which the world tries to hide, might end, and that there be peace.”

Romero Beatification

The beatification of El Salvador’s martyred Archbishop Óscar Romero will take place during a ceremony in El Salvador on May 23, the day before Pentecost Sunday. The date was announced on March 11 by Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, postulator of Romero’s cause for sainthood, in El Salvador. According to a report in *Avvenire*, the weekly newspaper of the Italian bishops’ conference, the announcement came on the eve of another significant anniversary, that of the assassination on March 12, 1977, of the Salvadoran Rutilio Grande, S.J., three years before the death of Romero. The cause for the canonization of this early victim of repression by the Salvadoran military will parallel Romero’s cause, according to Archbishop Paglia. He told reporters in El Salvador that a “close bond” unites Romero and Grande from a “theological and pastoral perspective,” because “it is impossible to understand Romero without understanding Rutilio Grande.” According to the report, Pope Francis met Grande once in the 1970s, though they did not talk together. Pope Francis described him as a priest who “left the center to go to the peripheries,” a model that has become a familiar refrain of his pontificate.

Kidnapped in Syria

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul has been unable to confirm the number of its members abducted in Syria, nor where they are being held. The society announced on its website on March 4 that “several colleagues,” along

NEWS BRIEFS

Bishop John C. Wester of Salt Lake City, chairman of the U.S. bishops’ Committee on Communications, surprised America’s church correspondent **Mary Ann Walsh, R.S.M.**, with the prestigious St. Francis de Sales Award from the Catholic Press Association in Albany on March 12. • On March 12 a human rights group reported at least 500 confirmed cases of Christian and Hindu **girls kidnapped** by Muslims and forced to marry over the past 18 months in Pakistan. • Faith-based investors cheered PNC Financial Services’ decision in early March to **cease financing coal-mining firms’** major mountaintop removal ventures in Appalachia. • Jean Vanier, an advocate for people with developmental disabilities who helped create L’Arche, an international network of residential communities, was **awarded the \$1.7 million Templeton Prize** on March 11. • The Brussels-based International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity, or Cidse, an international consortium of Catholic aid agencies, charged on March 9 that European businesses **were causing suffering and death** by importing minerals from the world’s conflict regions.



Wester and Walsh

with “women and children,” were kidnapped in the province of Hassakeh in northeastern Syria on Feb. 28 and March 1. “We’re waiting for news,” said Helene Afriat, communications officer for the International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Paris on March 13. “The surrounding villages have been evacuated, the people have fled, communication is very difficult and we have not been able to establish contact with our volunteers and correspondents working locally,” Afriat said. “The people who reported these recent kidnappings were unable to give us more precise details.” She said it is likely that those abducted—all local Christians—might not have made their society membership known, so as not to “aggravate their already dramatic situation.”

Brookings on Abortion

A study released by the Brookings

Institution in Washington finds that single women whose income is 400 percent of the federal poverty line or higher are nearly four times as likely to opt for an abortion when faced with an unplanned pregnancy. The findings contradict earlier statements by the Guttmacher Institute, which reports that women with family incomes at or above 200 percent of the poverty line have abortions at about half the national rate. The Brookings paper, released in February, reports that single women who make four times the federal poverty level have an abortion rate of 31.9 percent while those at or below the line have a rate of only 8.6 percent. The authors cite a sociological study that states “a baby—even when unplanned—is a great source of fulfillment in low-income communities.”

From CNS, RNS and other sources.

The Post-Chavista Era in Venezuela

Things could not be worse in Venezuela. No, actually, they could be—and probably will be.

Despite its prodigious oil wealth, Venezuela is heading over a financial cliff, and it is heading there faster thanks to the plunging price of crude oil. The socialist revolution founded by the late Hugo Chávez, once the populist patron of Latin America, is now a corrupt and mismanaged economic basket case best known for hyperinflation and crippling shortages of basic consumer goods.

Venezuela's violent crime is the worst in South America. And the political scene looks just as scary. Chávez's inept and authoritarian successor, President Nicolás Maduro, is watching antigovernment protests rise as his approval rating tanks. He loudly blames it all on a U.S. "war" against him and on opposition leaders who increasingly find themselves behind bars these days on kangaroo-court sedition charges.

Last month, during demonstrations in the Andean city of San Cristóbal, a 14-year-old student was fatally shot by police. Maduro condemned the killing, but it occurred just weeks after his government gave security forces an O.K. to use deadly force against protesters if they feel "threatened."

Given that unholy mess, you would think *la revolución's* days are numbered. But that is far from certain—and not just because the Maduro regime is cracking down on its opponents.

The fact is, those largely middle- and upper-class opponents can be just as incompetent at winning over Venezuelans as Maduro is at governing them. And that is especially true when it comes to the revolution's working-class base in the barrios—folks who so far are not convinced that the opposition is a reliable alternative.

That cohort still remains at least tepidly loyal to Maduro and the

Chávez's successor
is watching
antigovernment
protests rise.

Chavistas, as the socialist party is known. And that keeps Venezuela's polarized political math just enough in the socialists' favor to keep them in power.

But in Miami, home to the largest Venezuelan expatriate community in the United States, the anti-Chavista diaspora may finally be figuring out how to build bridges to their country's masses. The expats, known as "Doralzuelans" because most live in the suburb of Doral just west of Miami, were shocked last year when antigovernment protests in Venezuela left 43 people dead but did little to bring poorer Venezuelans to the opposition side.

Some of those Doralzuelans did a little soul-searching and realized two things. First, while things may be tough for the poor in Venezuela today, they were in many respects tougher before Chávez came to power in 1999 and brought bodegas, schools, clinics and

potable water to their slums. Second, the opposition and its affluent image still remind Venezuela's poor of their pre-Chávez world.

One result of that epiphany is a Catholic-based expatriate charity group called Programa de Ayuda Humanitaria para Venezuela (Humanitarian Aid Program for Venezuela). Run out of a Doral strip mall, Ayuda started last year as a project to get medical supplies to injured opposition activists.

But Ayuda leaders, like the group's co-founder, Marisol Dieguez, quickly saw there was potential for a broader outreach. "It was obvious that the same shortages affecting the students and demonstrators we were trying to help was afflicting everyone else in Venezuela, especially the poor," says Dieguez.

Those scarcities are indeed dire. The Venezuelan Association of Hospitals and Clinics says 78 percent of the items the medical sector there needs to function effectively are in seriously short stock.

As a result, Ayuda now sends large donated shipments of everything from syringes to EKG machines to baby cribs into Venezuela, mostly to medical institutions that serve the indigent. Dieguez says the most frequent requests are for pediatric needs.

"I just got an email from Caracas," she says, "asking us if we can find infant tracheotomy instruments."

Dieguez is an outspoken Chavista opponent. But she says one of the gratifying facets of Ayuda's work is being involved in something with Venezuela that has "nothing to do with anyone's political affiliation."

There is obviously nothing political about making sure a baby gets an emergency tracheotomy. But it does help Venezuela's opposition appear to be a bit more part of the poor's post-Chávez world.

TIM PADGETT



Seduced by ISIS

Every day our attention is caught by stories in the news. Usually, the thoughts they occasion are fleeting. Sometimes the impression is more long lasting and they linger for days. One such story for me is that of the three schoolgirls in Britain who on Feb. 17 left their comfortable middle-class lives to fly off to Turkey and from there make their way to Syria to join the Islamic State. The three girls, two of them age 15 and another 16, are classmates, described as good students, well integrated into their society and showing no previous signs of extremism.

There's a novel here, a dramatic one. I hope it won't become the tragic novel I fear it might, but I can't help wondering what lies ahead for these girls. Marriage to a young jihadi, or combat. Almost inevitably, hardship. And if they don't get killed in Syria, will they face charges if they return to Britain? All this because they were young, impressionable and intrepid. Given the Islamic State's many brutal acts, it is difficult for me to fathom its appeal, but judging from the number of young foreign recruits flocking to join the group, it has it. Masters of media, the I.S. is said to put out compelling propaganda videos, has 50,000 Twitter accounts and presents itself as offering opportunities for all who want to enroll. Analysts say any number of factors drive recruits; there is no one path to jihadism. Many of those who join the I.S. are religiously ignorant and not particularly pious, which doesn't mean the dream of re-establishing the caliphate doesn't

resonate with them nonetheless.

I suppose 900 years ago people joined the Crusades out of a similarly wide range of motives: a love of adventure, a wish to see the world or to escape one's situation at home, a desire to take part in a great cause, to do something important, lack of good alternatives, religious idealism. Religious Zionists planting Jewish settlements on the West Bank to redeem the land are following in the footsteps of the Crusaders. The Islamic State is so extreme, its practices so far from mainstream Islam, that it beggars belief to think its leaders are sincerely religious. But they don't have to be to succeed. Two states were created on the basis of religion in the 20th century. Pakistan was established as a state for Muslims after the partition of India in 1947; Israel as a state for Jews, both secular and religious, in 1948.

Religion has become something to be deplored today, especially Islam. "What's the matter with Islam?" has become a rallying cry, especially by those who know little about the religion or about the politics in the countries where Muslims live. But while religion plays an important role in motivating and recruiting Muslims to jihadi groups like the Islamic State, the chief drivers of Islamic terrorism lie outside religion, in grievances shared widely across society. Undemocratic regimes that refuse to share power, lack of opportunities, Western foreign policy and feelings of disenfranchisement from the societies in which Muslims live fuel extremism. So too

can a longing for meaning, a desire for excitement and a need to belong.

Analysts who study jihadis say there is no reliable socio-demographic profile. Some are troubled young people; others are those who would enjoy good prospects in their home countries if they stayed put. Researchers at Queen Mary University of London found most jihadis from England are highly educated, from financially secure families and spoke

English at home. The French newspaper *Le Monde* reported that a quarter of the French jihadis in Syria come from a non-Muslim background. Whether native or foreign-born, the great majority of jihadis are radicalized today not by someone they know or by an imam in a mosque but over the

What lies ahead for these girls: marriage, combat, hardship?

Internet, which Peter Neumann, director of The International Center for the Study of Radicalization, calls "the most powerful tool that ever existed for promoting ideas—good ideas and bad ideas."

How will Shamima, Kadiza and Amira fare in the Islamic State? There's a great bildungsroman to be written about their experiences if they survive them. Theirs is the face of innocent youth running into a war few of us comprehend. They humanize what otherwise strikes us as alien, horrifying and barbaric. We marvel at their illusions, their idealism, their recklessness. Leaving childhood behind, they have stepped boldly into their future, and we fear for them.

MARGOT PATTERSON

MARGOT PATTERSON is the author of *Islam Considered: A Christian Perspective*.

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Showdown in Ukraine

A path to peace and Europe's future

BY ANTOINE ARJAKOVSKY

The undeclared war between Russia and Ukraine cannot be contained in the same way other recent Russian expansionist conflicts—Transnistria since 1990 and South Ossetia and Abkhazia since 2008—have been isolated. Unlike these contested regions, Ukraine is a much more significant country, with a population of 45 million. A conflict between the largest country in the world and the largest country of Europe cannot pass unnoticed. Moreover, the Russia-Ukraine conflict concerns all countries of the world, because international law has been openly violated by the annexation of Crimea.

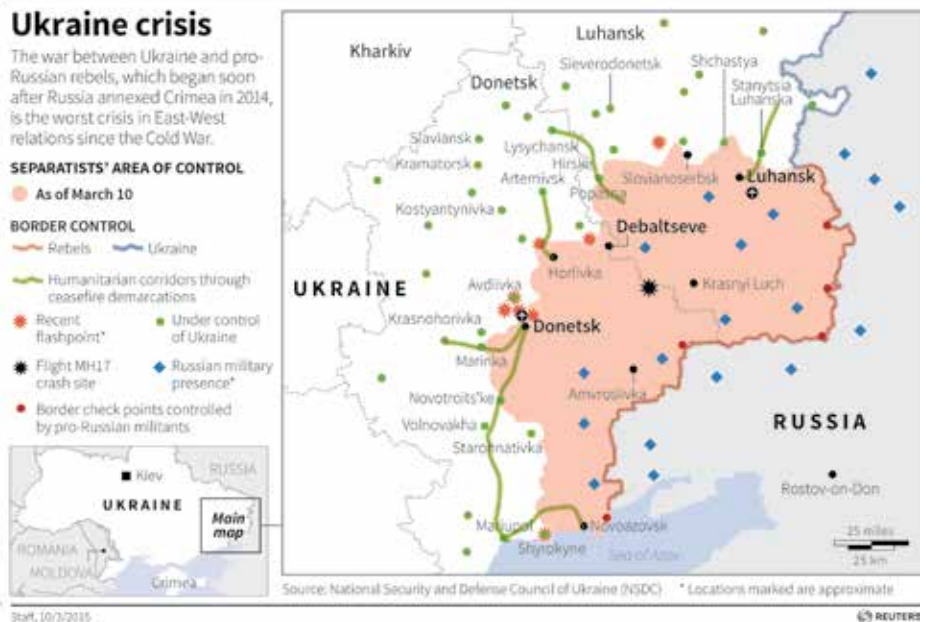
A global consensus may finally understand that the very future of the European model is being threatened by the destabilization of Ukraine. In a violently anti-American speech given in October 2014 at Sochi, President Putin did not hide the fact that other conflicts will follow everywhere “Russian interests” are at stake, beginning, of course, with the regions bordering Russia. Indeed, since September 2014, the Baltic countries, Poland and even Sweden have already endured provocations from Russia. These military feints should be taken seriously. In her excellent book *Putin's Kleptocracy*, Karen Dawisha describes how Russia has become a mafia state grounded in terror. The recent murder of the opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, gunned down on a bridge in Moscow near the Kremlin on Feb. 27, only seems to confirm her analysis.

Mr. Putin's Intentions

Western democracies will not be able to find a way to peace in this conflict unless they take seriously the challenges posed

by the new reactionary elite taking shape in Russia and even in parts of Western Europe, sociopolitical clusters that can become radical in their rejection of the core values of modern civilization—freedom of conscience, participatory democracy and human dignity. Mr. Putin does not just challenge international law by annexing Crimea and invading Ukraine's Donbass region; he undermines the philosophical foundation of contemporary international law.

In many of his interventions, he seeks to demonstrate that his only philosophy is that might makes right. It turns out



that in many Western departments of political science, that is exactly what is taught. Everyone knows that for Thomas Hobbes the modern state exists only as it can curb the violence inherent to human beings and between religions, and political science students today hear the liberal dogma of John Rawls's separation between the righteous and the good, but they are unable to quote Nikolai Berdyaev or Michael Sandel, who argue that a just society cannot separate individual virtue and social peace.

This path to a just society is possible only through the recognition of common values together with the organization of inter-convictional and interfaith dialogues at all levels of society. Only in this way will the pluralist Western world free

ANTOINE ARJAKOVSKY, founding director of the Institute of Ecumenical Studies, Lviv, Ukraine, is the research director of the Collège des Bernardins, Paris, France, and author of *Russia-Ukraine: From War to Peace? The English version of this book can be downloaded at <http://bit.ly/1vZ5DBx>.*



IDENTITY CRISIS. Ukrainian armed forces ride on armored personnel carriers near Debaltseve, Ukraine, Feb. 12.

itself from the cancer of nihilism that Mr. Putin promotes today. If Western democracies do not reconsider the question of their values, the necessary pedagogy of virtues and the spiritual foundations of their constitutional systems, they could let themselves be led into the black holes of secularism—that is, radical individualism and reckless populism.

It is clear that violence in our world is only growing year by year. The summer of 2014 was marked not only by the Russia-Ukraine war but also by the resurgence of open warfare between Israel and the Palestinian Hamas in Gaza by the increasing conflict between Sunni and Shiite states in the Near East, by the entry of the United States along with an important coalition of states in the war against the Islamic State and by a number of other conflicts elsewhere in the world.

Everything is happening as if the elites of the planet had not learned the principal lesson of the fever of ideologies in the 20th century. For the last 25 years, the discourse of the elites has been content to affirm that political power must be separated from religious power in order to construct a lawful state. That premise is not false, but it is insufficient.

In fact the origins of the deadly ideologies of the 20th century can be found in the effective exclusion (although not always declared) by the modern state of the religious aspirations of peoples and in the censure by the power of the university of the interpretation of these aspirations offered by theological entities. (In France theology and religious studies are generally banned from universities). The self-licensed critics of theological-political rationality, intellectuals both in France and in the United States, prefer to invent new beliefs such as “the end of history,” which will come about with the triumph of democratic consensus. New prophets announce the time of a post-Christian secular order.

Nationalist Dead-Enders

Europe can help Ukraine and Russia emerge from their mutual crisis by encouraging new national identities that detour around the violent dead-end of extreme nationalism. But it can be such a guide only if it is able to recreate a secure and confident sense of its own identity, and it cannot do that without first acknowledging the Christian heritage buried within European identity, Christianity’s historic contribution to crafting that identity and the sustaining, invigorating role Christianity still offers European culture.

Fortunately, there are signs of a political-theological renewal. The Rev. Armand Puig i Tàrrach, dean at the Faculty of Theology of Catalonia in Barcelona and a member of the Community of Sant’Egidio, has said: “The process of globalization should take into account a fundamental difference between ‘strategic’ peace and ‘preventive’ peace. Peace cannot be the fruit of a globalization which links everything to economic calculations; it should become a ‘preventive’ peace within a globalization which seriously envisages the dream of a world peace and the end of all wars.” It cannot remain, he says, “a notion of peace which limits itself [merely] to...an absence of conflict.”

According to this theologian, global order will not endure “unless justice is globalized.” And peace, “the great gift of God,” is derived from justice, especially in a world where powerful interests can neglect the needs of the poor and politically powerless. Father Puig suggests that state ministers of peace should be created to bring about preventive peace alongside the ministers of defense, who are responsible for strategic peace.

This lack of connection between dialectical reasoning on the one hand, which produces a strategy of checks and bal-

ances, and open reasoning on the other, which understands authentic peace as a spiritual gift, has marked the reflection of the philosophical current known as radical orthodoxy. The English philosopher and theologian John Milbank rediscovered the Christian vision of the relational being from a meditation on the three persons of the Trinity. His participative ontology is based on the contingency of the created world, on the fact that this creation is fully realized only in God and on the idea of the unity in the difference. This is why only Christianity can go beyond the contradictions of classical thinking about *polis* and *oikos*, *polis* and *psyche* or unity and difference.

Thus, if the international community wants to attain an order of justice and peace without having to fully “convert” to Christian dogma, it must rediscover the meaning Christianity has given to the notion of peace. For that it must free itself from stale theologies that confuse the merciful Pantocrator with Jupiter or reduce the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to a great watchmaker. It will then find an understanding of the Creator as a just God who acts in the world in the service of a just order. This involves serious work on the theology of politics.

The Rediscovery Of Europe

At a colloquium in October 2014, at the College of the Bernardins on “The Ukraine and Europe: New Challenges,” The Rev. Philippe Capelle-Dumont, president of the French Catholic Academy, spoke in this spirit. He believes the Russian people are torn between two visions, equally mythical and wrong-headed. One presses an understanding of Russia as a “utopic” state, the inevitable outcome of modern European history and the progress of historical materialism; the other vision is radically nostalgic, harkening back to an imagined trans-European unity awaiting rediscovery.

That is why, according to Father Capelle, contemporary Russian leaders seek to revive ancient myths such as “pan-Slavism” and the “Slavic brotherhood” or the “Third Rome,” “myths which have absolutely nothing to do with present historical reality, but whose activation reveals the deep fear of seeing a Ukraine which is not just autonomous, but powerful.” Today Ukraine is defining itself as a bicultural, bilingual and ecumenical nation state—precisely the opposite of how Russians imagine a nation state should be (one territory, one language, one religion).

The crisis between Russia and Ukraine reflects a rejection by the Ukrainians of Russian radical nationalism “and

a tenacious struggle against its destructive effects.” Ukraine can create its own sustainable paradigm of otherness, a “paradigm which is both the cornerstone of democracies and their point of vulnerability. Cornerstone because it offers a speech which is both differentiated and regulated; vulnerability because it can provoke an insane cultural fragmentation.”

Father Capelle adds, “It is here that the European experience and tradition, which is precisely a spiritual experience and tradition of otherness, has a historical and ethical responsibility towards Ukraine.” He concludes that the European nations, simultaneously marked by Christian culture and less and less faithful to that Christian heritage, should first undertake a project of self-criticism. They might then find

themselves on the wide road of a European renaissance.

A European “self-examination” should lead to a period of optimism and self-confidence founded on what is perhaps Europe’s greatest 20th-century cultural achievement, what Martin Luther King Jr. and Gaston Fessard, S.J., called personalism. It is a doctrine grounded in the defense of human dignity, on the natural rights of human beings but also on the responsibilities of each person in society. A new narrative of Europe has to be told by multiple voices in an open, plural and democratic manner, but with the clear consciousness that there is truly a European identity. This identity is founded on common values inspired by Christian revelation, from *habeas corpus* of 1215 through the dissident movements of more recent times.

Andrei Zubov, the great Russian historian, banned from the Institute for International Relations of Moscow after he publicly denounced the annexation of Crimea by Putin in March 2014, said there is a wide distance between the Russian and the Western understanding of civil society—the relationship between nation, state and the individual. In Zubov’s eyes, in the 1930s “Europe thought of the nation as an organism, but after 1945, Western Europe arrived at a completely different idea of the nation. From the person seen as a cell in the national organism, the Europeans arrived at the vision of the person as the central value of the national body. This mentality, absolutely new and different, enabled the construction of the new democratic Europe.” It offered an escape from the historical complex of inferiority, paranoia and revenge that drove Europe into two world wars and accepted the spiritual potential of openness to others, mutual support and cooperation.

It is important to help the people of Ukraine and Russia to understand that otherness is not contradictory to identity, to remember that the church is both one and diverse.

The Ukrainian End Game

The most striking aspect of the post-Soviet collective consciousness is the absence of a political sense of a common good, the absence of a sense of mutual responsibilities. Now the political stakes are formidable—a question of restoring to Ukrainians and Russians of the 21st century a consciousness of their political responsibilities as citizens and the hope that they can, each in its own place, contribute to transforming society towards more decency and justice.

In European history it has been the church and the philosophers inspired by Christian doctrine, from Jean Bodin to Emmanuel Kant, that defined this consciousness of responsibility, this idea that rights are not only given, they also create mutual obligations for human beings created in the image of God. But the Orthodox churches in Russia and Ukraine are themselves in conflict. This is why an ecumenical mission aimed at helping these churches find new ways to deal with modernity becomes necessary.

It is important today to help the people of Ukraine and Russia to understand that otherness is not contradictory to identity, to remember that the church is both one and diverse. That understanding would help the Orthodox Church play a leading role in the restoration of democracy in Russia and Ukraine while actively promoting unity among Christians.

The church has not yet built the kingdom, but it has a mission that tends toward it. Every act of justice is essential to its accomplishment. The church asks every man and every woman to participate in the coming of the kingdom of God on earth in the spirit of the Gospel and of the reconciled ecclesial tradition.

Perhaps deploying a restored vision of a Christian narrative can help in this task of creating an identity within Europe for Ukraine and Russia. In being faithful to the baptism of the Rus and the heritage of the holy princes Boris and Gleb, the sons of Vladimir I, the Russians and Ukrainians of today might be able to work toward peace. We know that these two princes freely accepted upon themselves the violence that racked the ruling family in the 11th century in order to make peace and public welfare possible.

But the political heritage of Boris and Gleb is not of passivity in the face of evil. The kind of peace expressed by the holy princes Boris and Gleb is, on the contrary, that each one should assume his own responsibilities at the risk of his own life. Public power has meaning and legitimacy only in the measure to which it places itself—risking all—at the service of peace and justice. The murdered Boris Nemtsov, a liberal politician who defied Mr. Putin's war in Ukraine, and the late Rev. Gleb Yakunin, a Russian priest and dissident who died on Christmas Day last year, have done their part. It is now the responsibility of their spiritual children on the international level to continue their common task. ■

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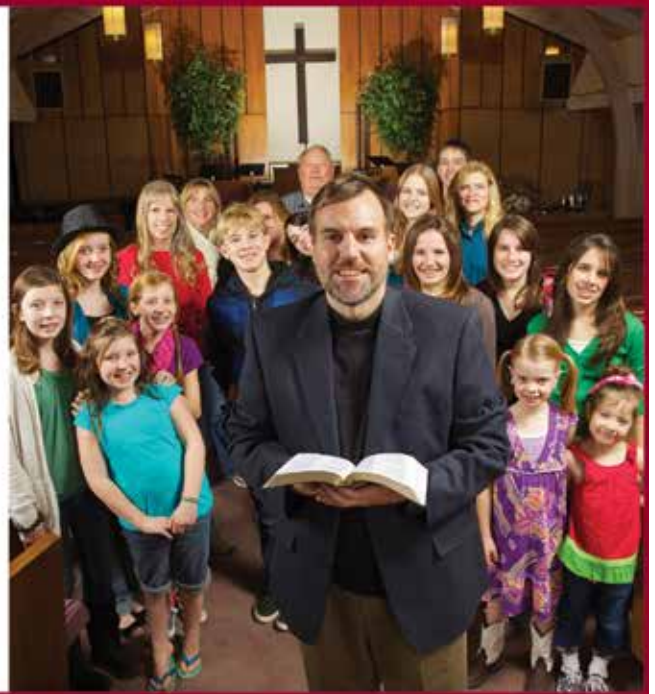
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WEIGHT





The Wisdom Of Oz

Taking the long way home

BY WILLIAM J. O'MALLEY

I have long puzzled over the ruby slippers in “The Wizard of Oz,” an archetype of childhood and transformation. When Dorothy’s house lands on the Wicked Witch and Glinda shows up, these slippers are magically transferred to Dorothy. It would seem that she now possesses her transport back to Kansas. Why then doesn’t Glinda tell Dorothy that all she needs to do is to click her heels and say, “There’s no place like home?”

Well, for one thing, there would be no story, would there? And the story is the point. Dorothy is not ready to move into the next stage of her life until she has discovered—not proven—that she already has the virtues her three pals seem to lack: courage, intelligence and love. It is not a test from some sadistic teacher to ratify her worth, but an occasion for her to prove to herself that she is ready to take on life in a new way. Only by rising to new challenges can we lose our fears of inadequacy. We find confidence by acting confident.

When Dorothy has surmounted her challenges, she can be allowed in on the secret: All along, the magic in the slippers has been Dorothy! We ourselves create the magic that can transport us to the next stage of our journeys. Now, as

we age, we too are offered a new, parallel vocation: rediscover after a lifetime of challenges that old enchantment that still stands in our own shoes.

Like Dorothy moving into the whole new country of adulthood—sharing her newfound self in an entirely new way—our natural deceleration now invites us to fuse all the disparate elements of our lives and their insights, forging them into a newly owned, unique personal wisdom. Jesus keeps envisioning the master who returns from trips asking his servants for a tally of what they have made of his trust. Now, the tally of your having lived is you.

Once we acquiesce to two facts, we grown-ups can find an invitation to new life, locked in the jaws of a dilemma. First, we must make peace with the inevitability of diminishing and dying, sooner rather than later. Second, we must keep recalling the fact that we never merited to be here in the first place. Both insights intensify appreciation of true value—value only those of us lucky to last this long can fully appreciate. The core of the Gospel is resurrection, starting over.

But those two facts—both inexorable and easily ignored—can also leech out the zest in our living, till nothing is left but iron resignation. You have surely seen it. However, resilient folks grab hold of death and life—two contrary poles of a magnet—and reignite a whole new force: the in-

WILLIAM J. O'MALLEY, S.J., teaches theology at Seattle University. His latest book is *You'll Never Be Younger (Orbis)*.

domitable human spirit that transcends both. With a bit of resolve, we can become like children again. We can find the magic that is still there, brightness inside the unpromising, though it involves ignoring superficial things like cellulite, wrinkles and paunches. The essential—the soul—is always there. And immortal. Unlike the surfaces, you do have final control of that because it is the essence of you.

Grasping the gratuity of life and inevitability of death, I rarely wake up grouchy. I do not think: “Oh, God, *another* day!” I think: “Oh, God! Another *day!*” Many worthier than I did not wake up. I did. What am I going to do with this

day? Realizing every day is a gift you did nothing to deserve makes an honorable person appreciative. And vigilant. Forget Death catching me with sin on my soul—let Death never catch me bored!

It is all in the attitude. If you go out looking for problems or difficult people, it is amazing how many you find. But when we view the world through Christ’s eyes—the ones that penetrate the trivial surfaces—we become astonished as the real souls emerge, true selves who yearn for the same things: to be found, to be understood, even loved. Annie Dillard captures it in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*:


The world is fairly studded and strewn with pennies cast broadside by a generous hand. But—and this is the point—who gets excited by a mere penny? But if you cultivate a healthy poverty and simplicity, so that finding a penny will literally make your day, then, since the world is in fact planted in pennies, you have with your poverty bought a lifetime of days.

Now from a longer perspective, I look back at my biggest setbacks—humiliating grades, condescension, being dropped—and I find sour old Nietzsche was right. Every one made me stronger, forged a deeper leaden keel that lets me weather storms that founder flat-bottom boats. I discovered how shallow my ideas had been, about love, sex, death, success, character. I discover meaning. I now treasure how lucky I have been to have those times I was forced to find a reason to keep going. They are how God and I became good friends. Before, we were only acquaintances.

The Pursuit of Wisdom

Like Dorothy’s journey, ours lead to a better self-understanding and, hopefully, to wisdom. But what does “wisdom” mean? I suspect it consists precisely in having discovered the brightness, the enchantment inside everything we have encountered all our lives. St. Ignatius Loyola called it “finding God in all things.” We are meant to extract all the infectious goodness inside the unpromising, even the detestable, then process that into the sort of good that we can

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What will make us, at least “in the going,” fulfilled? The resolve to keep asking questions—without hankering for definitive answers, grateful we will never run out of *terrae incognitas*. Success is also rooted in attentive awareness for clues in the faces of those around us, alert as a new mother to unspoken signals. That continual sensitizing of the mind and heart is demanding, often without palpable rewards. It can be fatiguing. But it sure beats dying before we are dead.

This is the time to be sure that my life is not simply a story of what happened to me. Rather, it is a time to break through the surfaces under which God was hiding all along. I have found romance inside the commonplace, the gold in Rumpelstiltskin’s straw, the enchanted princesses and princes inside all the scullery girls and froggy boys, and within myself a peer of the realm of Christ.

St. Paul compacted the contents of “wisdom” as well as anyone when he described the fruits of the Holy Spirit—dead giveaways of God’s presence in a life: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, decency, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5:22-23). Those essentials are all invisible, known only in their effects—like the oak in the acorn, Beethoven in his embryo, the spark of God in your own soul. The years have assuredly swerved our understandings of those virtues from what they were when we were Dorothy’s age.

Love has little to do with palpitations, light-years from the need-based love that ate at us when we first pulled away from family validation. Genuine love sits at the opposite end of the spectrum from the slavery of teen infatuations. It is a blank check to be used anytime, no matter how inconvenient. We offer that even to God. It takes years to learn. It is Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Joy shows itself most clearly and paradoxically in hard times. Joy cannot be sought in itself, but arises only as a by-product of other endeavors. Like the legitimate pride in saying, “By God, I did my best today.” It blossoms automatically in a soul headed in the right direction, a grateful “victim” of God’s grace. It is Robin Williams’s character in “Dead Poets’ Society,” when he’s fired and his boys jump onto their desks saying, “O Captain, my Captain.”

Peace is the serenity that comes from having it all together, from wholeness. Surely it is not the peace the world gives, the unbotheredness in Caribbean ads. Rather, it is the confidence of the tightrope walker, those who defuse bombs, terminal ward nurses; not lack of challenges but self-possession standing up to them. It is the two Aussie soldiers in “Breaker Morant,” joining hands to face the firing squad.

Patience comes from having a reason to keep going. It is what Viktor Frankl means in *Man’s Search for Meaning*: a profound sense of purpose—an anchor in a truth outside

oneself which gives substance to the resolve not to quit. It is Thomas More in “A Man for All Seasons.”

Kindness is the will to yield even to those who tax your patience, even when they find your caring cruel. Like all these virtues, it holds no hope of a return. Charity can be faked; kindness cannot. It is Burger, the psychiatrist in Judith Guest’s novel *Ordinary People*.

Decency is often rendered “goodness,” which is unhelpfully vague. Decency means doing what is fitting, right, just. The best word is *dependable*. It is Gary Cooper in “High Noon.”


Faithfulness adds the dimension of watchfulness, attentiveness, a vigilance beyond just being there for someone like an emergency phone number. It is Sam Gamgee in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Modesty is closer to unpretentiousness than meekness, which has prissy connotations. It has little to do with brash clothing; it is even less worried by sexual temptations than by narcissism. It is Melanie Wilkes in *Gone With the Wind*.

Self-control accepts responsibility. It has little to do with the whip-and-chair of the animal tamer we recall from childhood. Now it is honest, adult acceptance not only of one’s weaknesses but of one’s strengths. It is Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Note that none of these virtues has ever been captured in any catechism. We who claim to live an adult Christian life are these lessons—in the way we carry ourselves. ▲

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Making Room for Women

When Pope Francis wrote in “The Joy of the Gospel” that “we need to create broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church” and that “the presence of women must be guaranteed” also “in the various settings where important decisions are made,” he raised expectations that women would soon be able to make an even more significant contribution to the life of the Catholic Church.

That magisterial text, published on Nov. 24, is the programmatic document of his pontificate. He feels strongly about all he has written there, including the section on women (No. 103). Since then, he has often reaffirmed “the need” to give “a greater role to women in the church,” including in decision-making.

His words have raised hopes among women, and some impatience. They sparked an interesting, constructive debate at the second annual Voices of Faith meeting of women, held in the Vatican on March 8.

I shall draw on that meeting here as I examine the roles women currently hold in the Vatican and what they might occupy in the future. But before addressing this, I think it is important to emphasize that Francis’ words and thinking extend far beyond the Vatican to include the local churches.

Certainly, if he were to appoint women to decision-making roles in the Vatican, this would be of enormous symbolic significance and could inspire and encourage bishops worldwide to

do likewise in their local churches.

Women began working in the Vatican in large numbers only after the Second Vatican Council. Today 762 women work there (20 percent of the workforce), Gudrun Sailer, an Austrian journalist at Vatican Radio, told the Voices of Faith gathering.

The Vatican City State Governorate, which includes the museums, supermarket and post office, employs 371 women. Most of these jobs do not require a university degree.

Another 391 women work for the Holy See (18 percent of the workforce). Forty-one percent of these have university degrees and serve in professional positions (like heads of offices, archivists, historians, journalists). Two are under secretaries, but no woman holds a higher post; the higher positions are reserved for clerics, usually bishops or cardinals.

Sailer, author of two books on women in the Vatican, argues that if women are to access higher positions, changes are needed in canon law and in the prevailing mentality.

Cardinal Reinhard Marx addressed this in his interview with *America* (2/16). He said: “The de-clericalization of power is very important in the Roman Curia and the administrations of dioceses. We must look at canon law and reflect theologically to see what roles necessarily require priests; and then *all* the other roles, in the widest sense possible, must be open for lay people, men and women, but especially women. In the administration of the Vatican, it is not necessary that clerics guide all the congregations, councils

and departments.”

Pope Francis touched on this subject in his interview with *La Nación* in December 2014, speaking about reform of the Roman Curia. While the head of a congregation should be a cardinal, he said, it is not necessary for the secretary to be a bishop. If he were to decide that henceforth secretaries do not need to be bishops, this could open the possibility that women and lay men could be appointed to such positions.

Besides a revision of canon law, Sailer believes a change in mentality could open a totally new situation. If Francis took the lead, she said, “We could have 10 or 20 under secretaries or even secretaries in the next two to three years.” She meant women.

Currently both secretary and most under secretary positions in the Roman Curia are filled by clerics; these office holders would have to be reassigned if the posts were opened to women or laymen. That could not happen overnight.

In fact, things are changing, slowly but surely, at the Vatican under the pope’s impetus. The 17-member Council for the Protection of Minors, headed by Cardinal Sean O’Malley, has eight women and nine men. The 30-member International Theological Commission now has five women, the biggest number ever. And one pontifical university has a woman rector for the first time. As Cardinal Marx rightly observed, “Great things begin with small steps.”

GERARD O’CONNELL

If women are to access higher positions, changes are needed.

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: @gerryorome.

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Lifting Veronica's Veil

Meditations on a courageous disciple

BY SILAS HENDERSON

Despite various attempts over the centuries to give her a personal story, there is no evidence that she was a historical figure. She has never been included in any official list of Catholic saints; and although she is commemorated on July 12 in the Orthodox churches, there has never been a universally observed feast day for her in the Western church.

And yet there she is: Veronica. The story of Veronica is depicted on the walls of countless churches throughout the world, and it is a fixture in the prayer of Christians, particularly during Lent.

Praying the Stations of the Cross has always been, for me, as much a discipline as an act of devotion. Like the rosary, I recognize that “making the stations” is a way to reflect on the life of Jesus in a particularly physical way. Over the years I have become increasingly drawn to the sixth station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus. There is an intimacy and compassion in that act that seems to push a sort of pause button in the litany of pain that is the Passion.

Each of the synoptic Gospels recounts the story of the woman, afflicted for many years by a “flow of blood,” who was cured by touching Jesus’ cloak (see Mt 9:18–26; Mk 5:25–34 and Lk 8:43–48). A fourth-century text, the “Acts of Pilate,” calls this woman Bernice and tells how she went

to Rome, curing the emperor Tiberius through an image of Christ that she had painted out of gratitude for her healing; when she died, the cloth was entrusted to the care of Pope St.



“Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus,” by Virgil Cantini, at the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, D.C.

Clement I. Around the same time, St. Eusebius of Caesarea recounted in his *Ecclesiastical History* (vii.8) another tale of gratitude:

The woman with a hemorrhage, who as we learn from the holy gospels was cured of her trouble by our Savior, was stated to have come from [Caesarea Philippi]. Her house was pointed out in the city, and a wonderful memorial of the benefit the Savior conferred

upon her was still there. On a tall stone base at the gates of her house stood a bronze statue of a woman, resting on one knee and resembling a suppliant with arms outstretched. Facing this was another of the same material, an upright figure of a man with a double cloak neatly draped over his shoulders and his hand stretching out to the woman.... This statue, which was said to resemble the features of Jesus, was still there in my own time, so that I saw it with my own eyes when I resided in the city.

In the Western tradition, Bernice, the woman cured of the flow of blood and whose name has long been associated with an image of Christ, has come to be known as Veronica, the woman of the sixth station of the Way of the Cross who took pity on Jesus, wiping the blood and sweat from his face as he made his way to Calvary. This legend was likely a medieval creation intended to explain and support the provenance of images of Jesus kept in various churches throughout Europe. The most important of these is the relic, kept in St. Peter’s Basilica, which has come to be known as Veronica’s Veil. Many scholars have proposed that the name Veronica is a composite of two words: *vera* (Latin for “true”) and *eikon* (Greek for “image”). Although the name is thought to be a play on the title given to the “true image” of Christ depicted on various pieces of cloth, I think it is a beautifully fitting title for this woman, who is herself a true im-

SILAS HENDERSON, managing editor of *Abbey Press Publications and Deacon Digest Magazine*, is the author of numerous reflections on prayer and spirituality. He blogs at www.fromseason2season.blogspot.com.

age of Christian discipleship.

Luke tells us that many women accompanied Jesus during his ministry and as he carried his cross. It does not seem unreasonable that one of these courageous women, perhaps even the woman cured of the flow of blood, would have stepped forward to show Jesus some kindness as he walked to his execution. Perhaps on that Friday, the day Jesus died, one of his followers put his teachings into practice and reached out in compassion to show a dying man that there were still those who cared for him.

I find myself challenged and comforted by the idea of Veronica being the woman cured of the flow of blood. Grateful for the gift of a renewed life, she expressed her gratitude and love in an act of courage, compassion and faith. Pushing her way through the crowd, prompted by love, she recognized beneath the blood and gore the

presence of the Christ she loved and in whom she had believed. On Good Friday, as we recall the great gift that God has given us, Veronica's act is a powerful reminder that we are called to be people of compassion. A meditation for the sixth station, composed by Cardinal Angelo Comastri, archpriest of St. Peter's Basilica, stirs the faithful to follow Veronica to the margins:

*A woman steps out of the crowd,
keeping alight the lamp of our hu-
manity,
...and wipes his Face
and finds his Face!*

*How many people today have no
face!
How many people are relegated
to the margins of life,
exiled, forsaken,
by an apathy that kills the apa-
thetic.*

*Only those afire with love are truly
alive,
those who bend low before Christ
who suffers
and awaits us in those who are suf-
fering: today!*

*Today! For tomorrow will be too
late!*

For those of us who profess to be followers of Jesus, Veronica's Good Friday faith is a challenge to look at the world around us, and those in it, with the eyes of faith. Veronica's act of compassion becomes an example of Christian charity that is an amazing anticipation of the self-offering of Jesus, represented only a handful of steps later. As I continue my own journey of faith, I am grateful for the gift of her witness, whatever the origins of Veronica's story might be. For now, for this Lent, that is enough.

Transformed from Within

One priest's struggle with compulsive eating

BY RYAN ROONEY

These days, when I light a candle at the base of the make-shift shrine in my sitting room, I feel at peace. I haven't always felt this way. A year and a half ago, I would have been sitting down in a room of similar size but crowded with food wrappers and neglected dirty laundry. I probably would have been wolfing down a carton of Chinese food and binge-watching endless episodes of a Netflix drama. I was 200 pounds heavier, stressed, depressed, unsure about my future in the priesthood. My body was slowly shutting down, and I

was inching closer toward being unable to dress myself. Today my life is a much different story.

I knew that I had a problem long before I was willing to accept help. That moment came in September 2013, when I was called into the bishop's office for a meeting about my health. Getting called to the bishop's office as a young priest is hard. I am 29 years old and the youngest priest of my diocese. When I was ordained at 26, I was a motivated and zealous curate, and I was eager to begin ministry and to try to touch the lives of people like me. So when I sat down in the bishop's office, it was hard to hear that I had a problem, but I also knew that I was at a potential turning point.

For a long time I felt sure I was called to be a priest, but I increasingly felt doubt. Facing my problems head on didn't help. I grew up poor. My dad left my family when I was 4, leaving my mom to raise me and my sister. We had no child support and subsisted on government assistance and whatever income my mom could manage, often from multiple part-time jobs. My mom sacrificed much bringing us up, including taking on school loans so that I could attend a private boarding school in my hometown of Northfield, Mass., as a day student.

I was well educated and was determined to make millions after graduating from an Ivy league school. Instead, God knocked me off my high horse

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when I went on a youth group retreat and first felt moved by the Holy Spirit. I knew my life would change dramatically when the first thoughts of joining the priesthood entered my 14-year-old mind.

This singular focus guided me through a significant knee injury and a diagnosis of Hodgkin's lymphoma in my neck just before graduating from high school. I felt that if God was calling me to be a priest, everything would turn out fine. Slowly I gained my strength back after four months of chemotherapy and radiation and entered college at the Franciscan University of Steubenville.

A Constant Fight

While at Steubenville, I formed deep spiritual foundations and many friendships. But it also was the place where my weight ballooned to 388 pounds, which at the time was the heaviest weight of my adult life. I made several attempts to keep my weight under control. I started working out. I tried eating healthier. I could lose about 20 pounds, but then it would come back. I would binge on hot wings at a local college hangout, deciding that I could just start again after an upcoming exam or some other excuse.

During my junior year, my grandmother died, and I had to go home and face the fact that I had no nice clothes to wear. I had to go to the big-and-tall section of a store, which at the time didn't have much in the way of fashion. The picture of me wearing that 4X Hawaiian shirt still haunts me. I graduated from college in much the same shape—although commencement-gown black is somewhat slimming.

Looking at my graduation photos, I felt embarrassed, but I was excited for the road ahead. I was accepted into seminary and motivated to continue towards the priesthood. My weight was increasingly a visual problem, but I saw my vocation as something different, something otherworldly. Even though I was in a program of formation in college, my

weight had never been flagged as what seminary authorities would call a "formation issue."

About a half a year into seminary, with the aid of friends and faculty, I began the initial work of accepting my part in the struggle with my weight. I began a program with a dietician. I had to do weekly check-ins with my seminary advisor to offer updates on my weight. I drank meal-replacement shakes, sweat-



ed to workout DVDs and gave up junk food, soda and alcohol. I lost 70 pounds in about four months. I continued to lose weight and maintained it for two years. It looked like I had things under control.

My last year of seminary brought my first real-world experience of ordained ministry. I drove an hour and a half each weekend during my deaconate year to my assignment in western Massachusetts. I began to eat on the run. I encountered a lot of stress as I tried to balance work with the study in seminary. The weight started to come back. Getting used to being a minister was really all I was thinking about at the time. My prayer life from seminary was still strong, though some of the daily routine at the seminary felt tedious.

When I was ordained a priest, I was assigned to the parish I had served as a deacon. While I was initially very happy and zealous, my relationship with my pastor was not very strong, and the stress

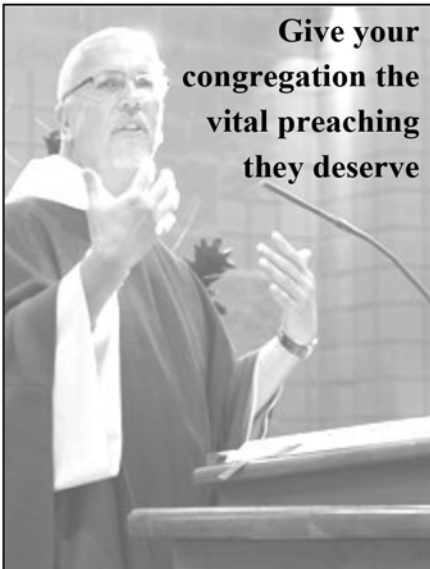
started to take its toll. In addition to regular parish duties, I was suddenly responsible for the needs of our Hispanic community, the adult Christian initiation program, a budding youth group and maintaining office hours at our parochial high school. I loved the parish, but I never quite felt at home, even in the rectory. Ironically, that is where I isolated myself. I made efforts to get back to a gym, but a back injury and some

personal issues convinced me to give up. The weight continued to pile on. I asked to be moved, but that would not happen for another six months. I was depressed. I was dying.

I prayed for help, I asked for help, but nothing seemed to be materializing. I felt angry with God but also realized that this anger was not doing anyone much good, especially since my job was to help people to love God. I entered counseling to deal with the stress. My established prayer life became nearly nonexistent. My academic strengths could no longer hide the fact that I was profoundly unhappy and needed a dramatic change.

A New Life

I began working at a new parish in April 2013, ministering in an inner-city parish with very little money and lots of need. I poured myself out with my new pastor, who was a good friend to me. Despite being happy to be in a new place, I could not keep my weight under control. I



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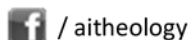
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weighed 464 pounds. In September of that year, after seeing that my health was not improving, my bishop asked me to enter the Damascus Program, a compulsive eating treatment program for clergy and male religious at Guest House in Rochester, Minn.

I accepted this request, and when I arrived in Minnesota I hit the ground running. The real game changer for me was finding other people who were going through the same thing. I suddenly was living with other priests and religious who were caught in the midst of addictions. I found a 12-step program. I got a sponsor, made friends, went to lectures in our program, participated in truly valuable counseling and group therapy and started swimming and working out at the gym. I accepted and surrendered to the fact that I had a food addiction.

Although our food was prepared for us, I needed to start to learn what a portion was and what my body really needed. I had to change my entire environment and behaviors and prepare for what my life would be when I returned. I received cognitive behavioral therapy, and I started telling myself that the little things I could do to make changes were better than nothing at all. I began to log all of my food with a popular app from MyFitnessPal.com. I used a wristband fitness tracker. I started seeing dramatic results in the gym.

It wasn't easy. Stress was increasing back home. I didn't know where the Lord would take me. I didn't even know if I would be returning to ministry. I saw others return for their second or third stay at the treatment center. I grew to understand the reality of addiction. I at least had one thing: I knew that I could die if I let this newfound way of life go. I could not accept, after all I had been through, that this would be the way I would go. This motivated me to turn to God more than ever.

My spiritual life, which had largely left me, was steadily coming back. I wanted to pray again. The brothers no-

ticed it in my Masses. There was a new visible energy in my eyes. People remarked that I looked comfortable with myself. I felt as though for the first time in my life I could be truly honest with the Lord about every single issue that lay hidden in my soul.

Another blessing was that I finally felt that I could be open about this with other people experiencing addictions. Twelve-step programs talk about a “spiritual awakening,” and this is what occurred in me. I could be utterly powerless over food and the circumstances of life, but I knew that God and my support network were the power over them. This was not some abstract theological concept. There was a real higher power behind this change.

After five months in Minnesota, I had lost 102 pounds. I returned to my diocese healthier and happier than I had been at any time in my priesthood. I celebrated three years since ordination just after my 29th birthday. My eating habits and workouts have not been perfect since my return, but I have worked through my mistakes and leaned on my support system. God has been good to me. Since returning, I moved into a new parish and established a healthy pattern of rectory life. I started to blog about my journey. Through training weekly and a daily regimen of diet and exercise I have lost 200 pounds. Sharing my personal story has given me the chance to participate in a new ministry within the ministry of the priesthood. I have had the chance to speak with others about God's power to transform us from within.

I know that God is the power that enables me to live my recovery one day at a time. Over and over again, I tell myself: *Just for today I do not need to overeat. I can keep to my new eating habits. I can call upon a support network if stress gets the worst of me.* Writing this story is part of my recovery. I am a priest with an addiction, but I am also a priest in recovery and with a great reason for hope. **A**

Padre's Portrait

Through suffering we are made to be saints.

BY COURTNEY SAPONARO

Among the ever-growing pile of books in my room is a small compilation of quotations from the great St. Pio of Pietrelcina, often called Padre Pio. It is meant for daily meditation during Lent, but I find myself flipping through its pages at every season of the year, looking for something fitting for whatever my current situation may be. There are profound quotes about loving God and struggling to find him and, more than anything else, about the intense suffering St. Pio endured during his life.

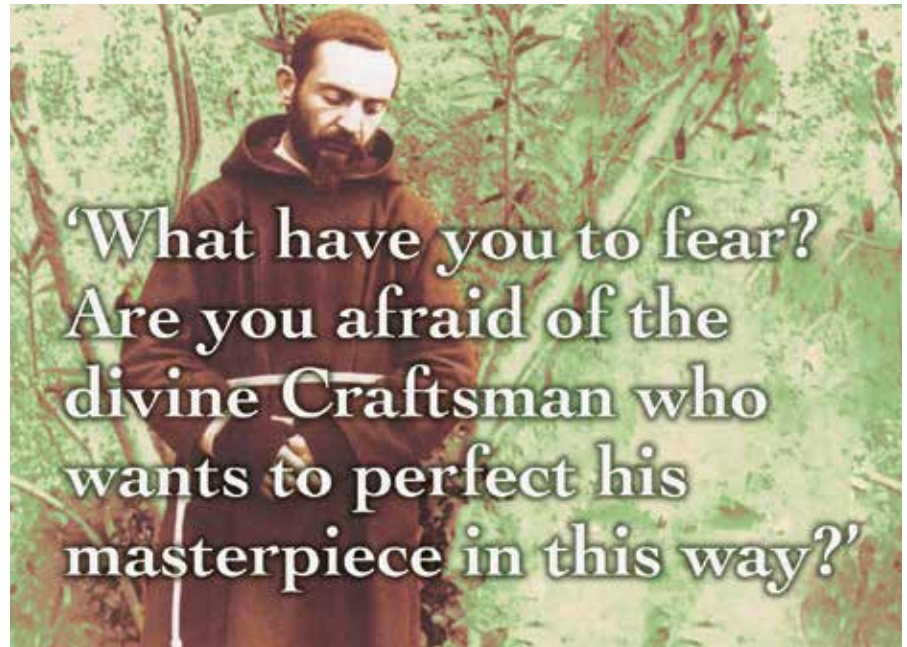
Just as many people my age learned about their faith from their families, I was first introduced to St. Pio because my father had taken up a devotion to him—he, too, began to read the great saint's writings and hung a framed portrait of him over his bed. But this is where my story branches off from most others. I did not grow up going to Mass every Sunday (or ever) or praying the rosary every night (or ever). Religion was something other families did, but it was never a part of my upbringing, and maybe it never would have been had my father not been diagnosed with terminal cancer when I was 10.

As time went by and his condition worsened, he realized that he needed to return to the faith he had grown up with. And so it happened that in January 2007 he went to a Sunday Mass for the first time in years. I went with him, for the first time ever, and

though I have no profound, instantaneous conversion story to tell, there was something there that my 11-year-old self recognized as worth holding on to. By the end of that year, I had been baptized and made my first Communion.

That turned out to be the last year

sort of consolation in the midst of his pain. And I myself have found comfort in knowing that he had rediscovered closeness to those in heaven who experienced pain like his, both physically and spiritually. And it was out of this suffering that my own faith was



of my father's life. He died the following January. It was hard on all of us. The faith I had just barely begun to develop was what sustained me throughout those difficult first few months, but at the same time, it made the situation even more difficult, because now I was the only practicing Catholic in the family. The Padre Pio portrait disappeared, and I often found myself attending Mass alone.

My father suffered more than I will ever know, but I can only hope that my newfound faith offered him some

born—this faith that has given me a life I might never have known otherwise.

Early on, I learned that we were all given life through Jesus' death on Good Friday, but I never understood what exactly that meant. It was not until about halfway through high school that the Passion took on anything more than a surface-level meaning for me. I was in eucharistic adoration late at night on a retreat with my youth group, idly staring at the crucifix behind the altar, when I was struck with what I would

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like to think was a direct response from God. I did not see the heavens open up or hear God's voice; it was just a thought that popped into my head, and I realized it was not my own. It asked me, "Do you think I liked being up here on this cross?"

Of course, when I told the rest of my youth group they joked that I was the only person they knew to be sassed by Jesus. But the question has remained in my thoughts ever since. For the first time, I considered the notion that Jesus did not relish the idea of being put to death. He was reluctant, even afraid, to die in such an excruciating way. It struck me, thinking about this, that even God incarnate was not immune to pain. He knows what it is like to suffer—and so when we suffer, our suffering has the potential to bring us closer to God.

"The problem of suffering," as it has been called, is a tricky one, and I know there are a lot of people who turn away from belief in God because of it. They

wonder, and I wonder, and maybe we all wonder: If God really cares about us, why does he let bad things happen?

Is there an answer? I don't know. I struggle with this question probably more than anything else in my faith. At one point in high school, when I was in a difficult place for reasons I can't even remember now, my youth minister told me the word *suffer* comes from the same root as "to allow." Of course, this does not mean that we cannot be upset when terrible things happen that cause us or others to suffer. But if we look at suffering in this way, we can "allow" it because it strengthens us, just as a training athlete allows his or her body to work to the point of pain, knowing that the end result will be worth it because he or she will be made stronger.

And this brings me back to my friend Padre Pio. Here is a man who knew suffering. He dealt with various physical illnesses throughout his life. He was afflicted by terrible spiritual attacks, the kind that sound like they

came straight out of a horror movie. But he suffered through this because he was able to see the end result.


This is the quotation for Day 19 of my book:

You complain because the same trials are constantly returning. But look here...what have you to fear? Are you afraid of the divine Craftsman who wants to perfect his masterpiece in this way? Would you like to come from the hands of such a magnificent Artist as a mere sketch and no more?

What does this tell me? It tells me that I am a work in progress and that God is making a masterpiece out of me. And it tells me that in order to become what I am created to be, I will have to suffer. But I have learned not to run away from suffering. I will not pretend that I enjoy it or that I never complain about the crosses I have to carry. But over these past eight or so years of my life, I have learned to look past the pain of my own personal Good Fridays and see the joy that is in store for me when I will finally become more like God.

While I was home for Christmas recently, my mother came into my room to put some blankets away in my closet, and in her search for a place to put them she found on the very top shelf the old portrait of Padre Pio that used to hang above my parents' bed. We had not seen it in years. I figured it was still around the house somewhere, but I had no idea how near to me it had been all along.

And what does this tell me? It tells me that even in the most difficult times in our life, when it seems that God and even our loved ones are inaccessible, they are never as far from us as we may think. In fact, we may find out later that they were there with us, guiding us through our suffering the whole time, helping us become the saints we are called to be. ▲



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Ionesco Again

My life with Eugene Ionesco has been an odd one. I saw my first Ionesco play as a high school student. "The Bald Soprano" featured utter linguistic confusion as two couples, the Smiths and the Martins, traded non sequiturs in the Smiths' prim living room. Miraculously, the director had squared the confusion by casting two pairs of identical twins as the leads. As the curtain fell, I had no idea what I had just seen. I only knew that this was different from the usual Arthur Miller staged at our local community theaters.

When I was studying theology in Paris, I directed a school production of "Vacation," a short Ionesco play about provincial tourists loose on the Right Bank. They quickly fall into the sewers, plunge out of a window in the Louvre and take a wrong turn at Notre Dame, ending up 480 miles south in Marseilles. I always remember the farce as tinged with tragedy. The three actors in the cast all fell seriously ill afterward; one actress unexpectedly died on the operating table.

And then I met Ionesco in person. In 1981 the new Socialist government of France announced that it would fund abortion under the national health care plan. Abortion had been legal in France since 1975, but the previous government had treated it as an evil tolerated in cases of distress, not as a right or an entitlement. *Laissez-les-vivre*, France's leading pro-life organization, had organized a protest demonstration near the National

Assembly in Paris. As we stood in the drizzle, I noticed a paunchy, balding, diminutive man across from me in a large raincoat. It was Ionesco. He briefly took the microphone and said words to the effect that this is what we've come to, that we shouldn't be silent and that the only causes worth fighting for are the lost ones. He handed the microphone back, pulled up his coat collar and sauntered out into the rain. When I returned to the Bibliothèque Nationale, I discovered "The Inalienable Right to Life," Ionesco's 1975 essay lambasting the growing European movement to exempt the incurably ill and the unborn child from the legal ban on homicide.

I encountered Ionesco again this spring when Loyola Maryland's dramatics society staged a production of his 1959 play "Rhinoceros." The plot is simplicity itself. In a small French provincial town, the residents are turning into rhinoceroses, one by one. By the end of the play, one man, Berenger, refuses to join the rampaging herd. At its original opening, left-wing critics claimed that the play was a critique of fascism; right-wing critics argued that it condemned communism. Suspicious of all political utopias, Ionesco rejected the efforts at a partisan recuperation of the drama.

With the Cold War behind us, the philosophical steel of "Rhinoceros" seems clearer. The alcoholic anti-hero Berenger confronts a series of modern creeds that have destroyed the dignity of the human person. His friend Jean is a thoroughgoing naturalist. There is no difference between humans and

other animals. "I'm sick of moral standards! Morality is against Nature! The law of the jungle suits me just fine!" The hyperlogical Dudard is a relativist. "Morality is a matter of opinion. Who can say where the normal stops and the abnormal begins?" Berenger's girlfriend, "Daisy," is a social conformist. The majority determines what is right. "We must be sensible. We must adapt ourselves and try to get along with the rhinoceroses. They look happy." Before each of these characters turns into a rhinoceros, each had already made a theoretical surrender of his or her humanity. The human soul had disappeared long before the bellowing transmutation.

At the play's conclusion, Berenger stands alone. "I'm the last man left. I'm staying that way until the end. I'm not capitulating!" Ionesco never hid the fact that Berenger, the decrepit anti-hero who haunts his later plays, was an autobiographical mask.

Berenger/Ionesco seems to have walked off the pages of Henri de Lubac's *Drama of Atheist Humanism*. He cannot explain why we must resist the growing loss of our humanity. He cannot appeal to God as the source and end of the soul. He can only shout that we must resist. In the rain with a gaggle of dispirited demonstrators, he can only urge us to refuse the allure of our new culture of death. It is a moral imperative, not the prospect of political victory, that galvanizes the long resistance. The absurd has become the pellucid.

I always remember the farce as tinged with tragedy.

JOHN J. CONLEY

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TELEVISION | PAUL JOHNSTON

WHAT LOVE CAN OVERCOME

Life and loss in 'Call the Midwife'

Surfing through today's popular television series—"Game of Thrones," "Boardwalk Empire," "The Walking Dead," "Sons of Anarchy"—one is met with a litany of ridiculously masculine men. It is as if the goal of every critically acclaimed series is to make Ernest Hemingway and Norman Mailer look like wimps. *Call the Midwife* is a welcome deviation from this trend. Now in its fourth season on PBS, "Call the Midwife" is first and foremost a series about women. The majority of its scenes are of

women with other women, around dining tables, in a prenatal clinic, at prayer and at dances. And, most crucial to this series, around beds where women give birth.

"Call the Midwife" centers on Nonnatus House, a community of Anglican nuns who serve the women of Poplar—a working-class neighborhood of London's East End in the 1950s—as nurses and midwives. Assisting them are four young women who are not religious but who are in residency, including Jenny, the fictional

counterpart of Jennifer Worth, upon whose bestselling memoir the series is based.

Nonnatus House functions as a small community within a larger community. The viewer comes to know the nuns, nurses and the people of Poplar through the stories of the area's many expectant mothers. Each episode presents a host of challenges—poverty, single motherhood, breech births, birth defects, infant and maternal mortality, large families with many children, strained marriages, spousal abuse, venereal disease, prostitution—often evoking richer meanings through their juxtaposition. Pregnancy and childbirth are not glamorized but dealt with in realistic, often clinical detail. The gritty depiction of pain sets "Midwife" apart from many of today's often bru-



ON CALL. Sister Evangelina (Pam Ferris), Patsy (Emerald Fennell) and Sister Winifred (Victoria Yeates)

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tal entertainments, which for all their violence rarely portray physical pain realistically.

The range of roles for women in "Call the Midwife" is also noteworthy. Not only are the female characters represented by women of all ages, but they represent a variety of personalities, physiques and emotional or moral makeups. And each of these characters is accorded dignity, even those who are essentially comic figures.

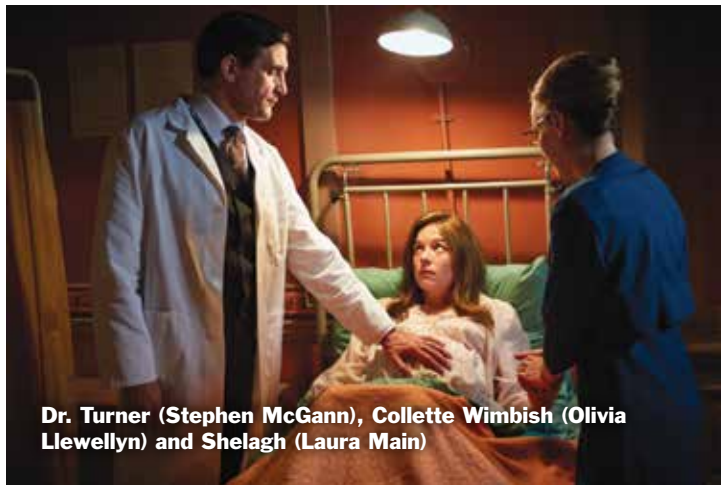
Like the nurses, the nuns combine the serious and the comic and are presented with care and warmth. Religious life is presented seriously and humbly, not as an elite calling but as a different, beautiful way of living out God's love in the world. The nuns are shown in prayer, sometimes with the unbelieving Jenny looking on, in such a way that the viewer, like Jenny, wishes to be with them. In a scene of grief, when one of Jenny's fellow nurses holds in her arms the dead baby of a distraught mother and bitter father, not knowing what to say or do, Sister Julienne steps forward to say a prayer that brings, if not consolation, then at least a temporary haven.

But the presentation of the nuns is never unrealistically benign. There are tensions and animosities—what one nurse calls the "war of wimples"—just as there are in any community of human beings.

Even less idyllic is the larger community of Poplar. Pettiness, meanness, prejudice—all can be found among the women who come to the prenatal clinic. Many women face domestic abuse. Fathers are sometimes loving, but not always. Though in some episodes men are the villains, "Call the Midwife" does not go out of its way to make this so.

Contrast creates dismay in one episode that features a woman on an abortionist's table. The tableau is the same

as the scenes of delivery—a pregnant woman on her back, two women tending to her—but the instruments and the intent are so different, destroying life rather than enabling it, that the visceral horror of the scene goes even deeper than the physical suffering visited upon the desperate woman. The



Dr. Turner (Stephen McGann), Collette Wimbish (Olivia Llewellyn) and Shelagh (Laura Main)

husband of the woman undergoing the abortion had counseled against it, and the care of their children falls to him when the abortion is botched.

When in another episode a baby boy is born with deformities, it is the mother who turns her back on the child, while the father looks for some way to provide for him. And the three recurring males in the series are positive characters: a bobby who represents the benign face of the law and is a suitor of one of the nurses; the convent's handyman, a comic character who nevertheless lends support to the work of the house; and a world-weary, cigarette-smoking doctor who attends to medical emergencies beyond the training of the nuns and nurses and who advocates to the powers that be on behalf of the Poplar poor.

Enabling life in even the most difficult circumstances is the central theme of "Midwife." The circumstances of Poplar are dire, and the outcomes are not always happy. As Dr. Turner agonizes over the paperwork for a crib death, one of the nuns asks him if there is anything she can get him. "Your

faith," he replies. "It's at times like this I wish I had one." The nun responds, "It's at times like this I wish it made a difference."

What the secular and religious worlds share, though, is love. "We must see what love can do," Sister Julienne tells Jenny in the face of a case that appears hopeless. Episode after episode, "Call the Midwife" is a study of what love can overcome and achieve. The series itself seems a labor of love, from the detail of the sets and costumes to the obvious care that goes into the sharp writing. The acting is uniformly superb, and the cinematography always excellent, becoming near-miraculous in the delivery scenes, where the emergence of the newborns is so convincingly rendered that the viewer cannot help but wonder how it is done.

In fact, the thoughtful images of "Call the Midwife" carry the series' richest meanings. At the opening of the first season's Christmas special, Jenny is briefly shown washing the figurine of the baby Jesus that is to be part of the Nonnatus House crèche. The figurine is life-size, evoking not just the infant Christ but all the babies we see Jenny and her associates bring forth from the wombs of their mothers. A more sustained image—repeated in every episode so as to become the central image of the series—is that of the midwives, heads cocked, listening at one end of a wooden pinard horn to the heartbeat of the babies in the womb. The other end of the device is pressed to the mothers' swollen bellies. The pinard is the visible connection between the baby and the midwife, revealing the new life within that yearns to come out.

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MANY VOICES, ONE SPIRIT

We have selected books which represent emerging approaches in biblical studies, including the use of models from trauma studies, diaspora studies and migration studies. One thing leading to another, attention to trauma and to migration raises issues of social justice and poverty. Since in many societies, women often suffer from discrimination and poverty, we have also included books that give space to the perspectives of female interpreters, that speak of women in biblical times and in the contemporary world, that pay attention to the issues of social justice, poverty and the use of wealth.

David M. Carr's **Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins** (Yale University Press) offers an intriguing reading of the Bible as the product of reflection on a series of disastrous experiences in the life of the people of Israel and Judea and then early Jewish and Christian communities. Carr shows us how the Bible as we know it derives from traditions born in the wake of a never-ending series of traumas, and then reread, reshaped and reinterpreted in the shadow of the Babylonian exile, the Hellenistic crisis and the crucifixion of Jesus.

Carr examines ways that trauma influences memory and the ability to retell a story by drawing on personal experiences of physical catastrophe and contemporary studies on the impact of trauma on life. His retelling of Israel's history moves quickly and engages the reader, who is taught to wonder how and why the biblical writers articulated the journey as they did. Accustomed to reading many Old Testament texts from the perspective of the Babylonian exiles, with Carr's coaxing we imagine how the traditions about Abraham and Moses proved so therapeutic to the generation of the exile. This book brings together new modes of biblical

research and the assistance of trauma studies, with contemporary studies like the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder, to plumb the depths of our life crises and our Scriptures, as they commune with each other.

Juliana M. Claassens's **Mourner, Mother, Midwife** (Westminster John Knox) is a reflection on diverse metaphors for God in the Old Testament Scriptures. Critical of the dominant paradigm of a liberator-warrior God full of violence and bloodshed, Claassens strives to uncover marginal, alternative divine imagery in the Old Testament. She chooses three images located in three different text clusters, Jeremiah, Deutero-Isaiah and Psalms: God as mourner, mother and midwife. The central argument of the book focuses on questions of the authority of divine tears as a paradoxical hope, the presence of a mother as compassion and the acting of the midwife as a continuous protest for life. The interest of uncovering these images is located in the question of the relevance of divine imagery in the survival of trauma in exile, in Auschwitz, in the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001.

The discourse pays special attention to questions of healing and possibilities of hope in situations of profound pain. In this discourse the creative argument in the biblical elaboration includes references to medical arguments from people like Rachel Naomi Remen or, in its pedagogical expertise, Paulo Freire. Claassens's book is an important one for any person interested in reflecting on God imagery from a female perspective and/or from the perspective of people who experience deep suffering and pain, since it ties current political, educational and religious questions to biblical reflection.

Deirdre Cornell's **Jesus Was a Migrant** (Orbis) is a collection of 16

reflections on Scriptures inspired by the author's experience with migrants and with the phenomenon of migration. Cornell's reflections allow migration stories that abound in biblical narratives to surface: Adam and Eve emigrating from Eden, Abraham leaving his native town, Joseph's forced migration to Egypt, the Exodus, the exile to Babylon, the Holy Family traveling to Bethlehem and to Egypt, the spread of Christianity in Acts accomplished through migratory movements. These episodes provide interpretive frameworks when telling about stories of contemporary migrants whom Cornell and her husband encountered. Cornell's texts also flesh out biblical stories by giving them a contemporary human face.

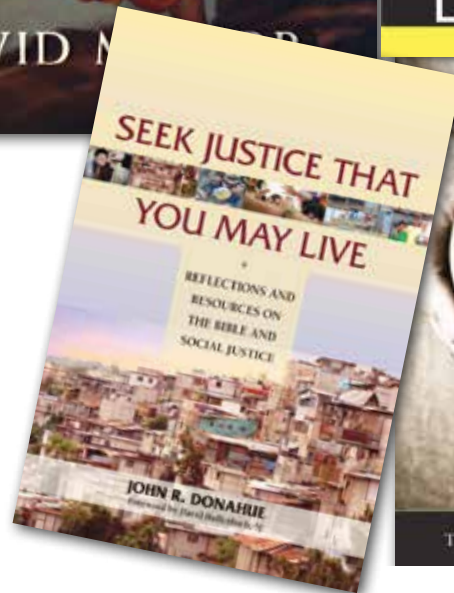
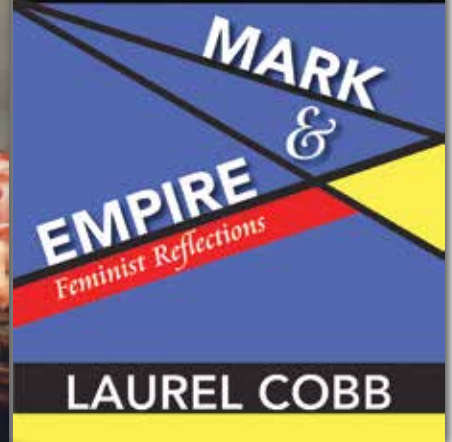
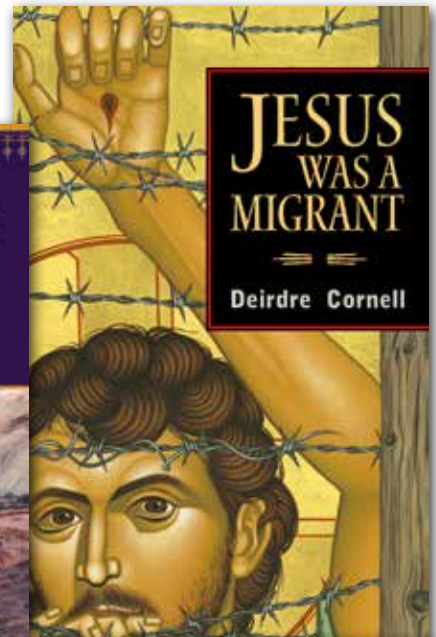
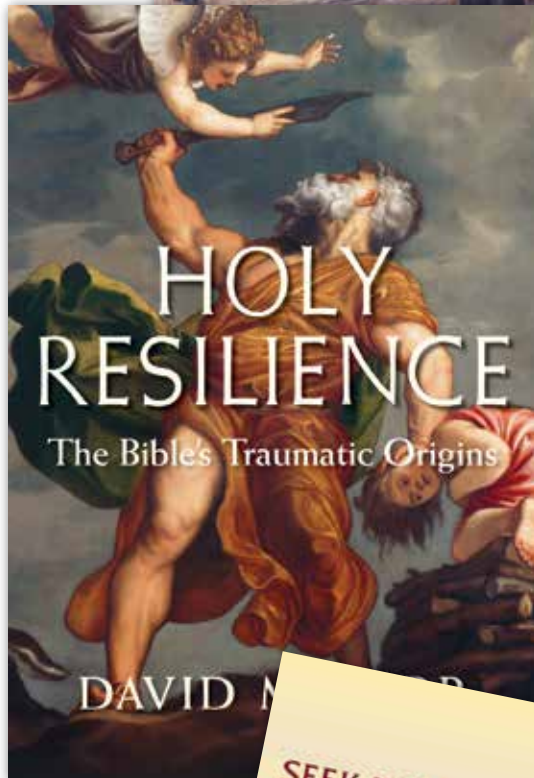
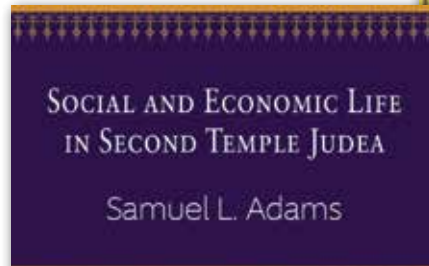
This is a book that can appeal to most North Americans, who were migrants themselves at some point of their family history or who have dealt with migrants. Not only does it tell of contemporary stories of migrants from Latin America, but it also reflects on stories of migration in the 19th and 20th centuries from territories like Ireland, Italy and Eastern Europe. It also includes major figures whose lives were touched by migration and/or migrants: Pierre Toussaint, John Neumann, Frances Cabrini, Dorothy Day, Cesar Chavez and Teresa of Calcutta.

What difference does it make to take seriously that Paul was a Jew from the Diaspora? Ronald Charles, in **Paul and the Politics of Diaspora** (Fortress), argues that it makes a huge difference. Paul's identity as a Diaspora Jew would have been a central element of his life, mission, social relationships and interpretation of Christ. The book explores how Jews from the Diaspora negotiated their identity. For this purpose, Charles uses other Jewish texts,

including the *Letter of Aristeas* and Flavius Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities*, to gather data and feed his reflection. He also uses Homi K. Bhabha's work on hybridity as an interpretive lense. Next, Charles focuses on three issues found in Paul's letters to explore how Paul's identity as a Diaspora Jew would have played out, namely, the conflict at Antioch in Galatians, his dealings with the Galatians and his collection project for the church of Jerusalem. Charles's study is thought-provoking. It forces us to rethink some issues that are often conceptualized solely in theological terms, without attention to cultural dimensions. In a global church, where many members navigate several cultures and move among various cultural worlds, this book is relevant by showing an early example of a major figure of early Christianity negotiating cultural identities.

Seek Justice That You May Live: Reflections and Resources on The Bible and Social Justice (Paulist), by John R. Donahue, S.J., offers to the public the crowning work of a 40-year passion for the biblical heritage as it can engage the practice of social justice. Author of many articles on social justice and the Bible and biblical consultant for the U.S. Catholic bishops' committee that prepared the 1986 pastoral letter, "Economic Justice for All," Father Donahue has brought together all these previous studies in a learned but accessible volume on nine biblical themes (creation and exodus; covenant and law; prophetic voices; psalms; wisdom and apocalyptic justice; Jesus, prophet of God's reign; Matthew and James; Luke-Acts; Pauline writings; Johannine writings). For each of them he provides background in biblical studies, significant aspects for social justice and excellent bibliographies for further study and reading. A concluding chapter ("From

Text to Life") provides wise counsel on ways of engaging, appropriating and sharing the fruits of these Scriptures in



preaching and all aspects of the life of the church. This book provides rich material for continuing study and reflection on Scripture in this era of Pope Francis, who bids us to attend unceasingly to the actual lives and situations of the poor in our world.

Gary A. Anderson's **Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition** (Yale University Press) offers readers a biblical follow-up to his 2009 study of *Sin: A History*. As in the earlier work, he brings together incisive and fresh exegetical practice with examples of the historical reception of a biblical notion, all in a writing style that is accessible and occasionally conversational. This examination of the Jewish and Christian practice of almsgiving distinguishes itself by its theological orientation, i.e., what does it say about the identity of God and those who worship God, and charity itself as an act with "a deeply sacramental character"?

At the same time, Anderson has an uncanny ability to uncover a deeper significance in seldom-studied topics like giving loans, providing guarantees for the poor and fasting for petition rather than contrition. He brings the teaching of the books of Tobit and Sirach on almsgiving to the fore in a book that also probes deeply into many of the theological differences between Catholic and Reformation theology on issues like almsgiving and purgatory. Through a host of examples, Anderson demonstrates how the treatment of the poor manifests what a community believes about God, itself as a worshipping body, other human beings and the kingdom of God. This book is as challenging as it is satisfying.

Sheila McGinn, Lai Ling Elizabeth Ngan and Ahida Calderón Pilarski have edited a collection of essays entitled **By Bread Alone: The Bible through the Eyes of the Hungry** (Fortress). This collaborative work originates from the Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics Task Force of the

Catholic Biblical Association of America. Kathleen O'Connor's presidential address at the 2009 annual meeting of this society introduced the concept of hermeneutics of hunger, which fed the reflection of these biblical scholars. As a whole, the volume aims to help contemporary first-world readers see and hear, in biblical texts and in the present world, those who hunger either physically or spiritually. These 10 essays, written by both seasoned and younger biblical scholars, touch on the books of Genesis, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Sirach, Mark, Luke and Thomas; 1 Corinthians and 2 Thessalonians. In some cases, they began as a communal exegesis done by the members of the group. All these essays keep an eye on the socioeconomic contexts of those who hunger in biblical texts and in present situations. *By Bread Alone* does not argue that only food is sufficient for biblical understanding of salvation. Rather, it corrects some distortions of the biblical message that claim that the poor need only the Gospel but no bread for the journey.

The Writings and Later Wisdom Books (SBL Press), an important collection of essays in the series *The Bible and Women*, of the Society of Biblical Literature, has just appeared, edited by Christl M. Maier and Nuria Calduch-Benages. It brings to our attention the work of 13 women and one male scholar, many of them not widely known on the North American scene. All the essays appear in English, divided into four categories: (1) the living conditions of women (lives of women in postexilic era; gender perspectives and names in Chronicles); (2) images of women ("good" and "bad") in Israel's Wisdom tradition (personified wisdom, good and evil women in Proverbs and Job, valorization of women in Qoheleth and good and bad wives in Ben Sira); (3) women's voices and female metaphors in poetic texts (Psalms, Psalms of Lament,

Lamentations, Song of Songs and iconographic representations); and (4) ambivalent role models: women in narrative texts (especially Ruth, Esther and Susanna). These essays greatly expand the range of questions raised by women and feminist scholars about the Writings and late Wisdom books, and the volume could prove an excellent supplement in a course on these books of the Bible.

Samuel L. Adams's **Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea** (Westminster John Knox) explores a neglected field of study while making a subtle yet powerful argument that we cannot easily separate the economic from the religious aspects of the biblical text. No previous study has focused attention on the economic and social conditions of the people of Judea during the era that extends from the end of the Babylonian exile to the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 68 C.E. In five chapters Adams explores important topics: family life and marriage; the status of women and children; work and financial exchanges; taxation and the role of the state; and the ethics of wealth and poverty.

This book offers rich documentation about the roles and status of women and children, wives and widows, marriage and family during this era, which ended with the Jesus movement. Adams argues that we cannot rely on knowledge about these matters from the time of Israel before the Exile; he accomplishes this by examination of numerous later written sources (biblical, post-biblical, apocryphal, etc) and also the information about this era yielded by archaeological excavations. On the last page of the book he asserts that "God stands on the side of the most vulnerable members of the society, even becoming their advocate." What he asserts he has amply demonstrated in this excellent book.

As Katherine Bain's **Women's Socioeconomic Status and Religious**

Leadership in Asia Minor: In the First Two Centuries C.E. (Fortress) reminds us, the writing of history tends to articulate and to legitimate present situations. The socioeconomic conditions of women is one of these situations: Around the world, women experience socioeconomic discrimination based on their gender, to which one should add racial, class, age, religion, sexual preference and ethnicity. Her historical inquiry focuses on religious women (either pagan, Jew or Christian) in western Turkey (Asia Minor) during the first two centuries of the common era. She considers wealthy women, either married or widows, slaves and freedwomen. Her study is original in two regards: first, it examines iconography and inscriptions in addition to texts (e.g., Paul's Letter to the Romans, Ignatius of Antioch's letters, the Acts of Thecla, Xenophon's *Economics*); second, it considers gender as a fluid category constructed by her various sources in relation with wealth, ethnicity and marital and legal status. Hence, she

finds that if certain sources advocate for women a married condition and subordination to a male leader (e.g., Ignatius of Antioch's letters), other sources (e.g., inscriptions) indicate that women, wealthy and freed, could exercise leadership roles in virtue of their socioeconomic means, by which they exercised patronage of religious organizations.

Laurel K. Cobb, **Mark and Empire: Feminist Reflections** (Orbis, with a foreword by Ched Meyers). Trained in social work, public administration and theology, Cobb has served as a social worker and as a public health/social welfare specialist in 35 countries for 30 years. This experience nourishes her commentary on the Gospel of Mark, which opens with three chapters that describe the social conditions of first-century Palestine within the framework of the Roman Empire and the social conditions faced by those who live in today's global American empire. These chapters clearly describe the various types of power exercised by imperial regimes through the centuries:

ideological, economic, political and military. While the book comments on each section of Mark and is solidly rooted in the text of the Gospel, it interweaves that text with a description of situations the author encountered in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the United States. Several of these situations portray women, who often end up being the weakest and the most powerless, along with children. Cobb's commentary therefore allows the social agenda of Mark to resonate more strongly as it brings it closer to us.

Leif E. Vaage's **Borderline Exegesis** (Pennsylvania State Univ. Press) consists of four core essays that take their impetus from the author's time in Lima, Peru, as an instructor of biblical studies. Each essay deals with a book of the Bible—Job, Matthew, James and Revelation—from an approach called "borderline exegesis," which explores neglected details or under-explored facts. Vaage's work is exegetical. It uses conventional methods of modern academic historical criticism, which can

THE PAINTINGS OF ROUAULT

O Holy Spirit
we did not know
how strong you are
in our dull age
until we saw your colors
apple reds, transparent greens,
blue of truth,
laid upon the figurines
deep embossed in halos,
Gospel figures,

hooded, cloaked,
upon the road
or standing by a city doorway
drawn in heavy blackened brush
against the Holy skies
below refulgent light.

O blush of Love,
there never was a pink
like that on Pierette

and there we learned of human
dawns,
for there was our expression,
there were mysteries,
the Kingdom come
to Modern poverty,
returning spirit,
deeper colors,
coming to redeem
humanity.

WEBSTER YOUNG

Webster Young has been a writer on music for the *National Catholic Register*, the *Catholic Herald* and *Newsday*. He is a published neo-classical composer and lyricist. Website: WebsterYoungLinks.com.

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remind us that biblical texts display the traces of earlier lives and aspirations that produced them. Not always an easy read, the book takes the reader to an elevation point from which to see interpretive possibilities that can make a real difference in our vision of the world. It is especially effective at weaving together biblical exegesis and contemporary social issues with a touch of poetry. It is highly creative, taking a different approach to each of the biblical books under examination: social perceptions when dealing with Job, economy when dealing with Matthew, self-control and wisdom when dealing with James and utopia when it comes to Revelation.

We end this tour with Mark D. Mathews's **Riches, Poverty, and the Faithful: Perspectives on Wealth in the Second Temple Period and the Apocalypse of John** (Cambridge Univ. Press), which focuses on the last book of the Christian biblical canon, i.e., Revelation. While volumes on wealth and poverty in the New Testament abound, there have been up to now no full-scale treatments of this topic in Revelation, in spite of a significant section on wealth and poverty in Revelation 2-3; 4-6. Mathews's scholarly monograph corrects this lacuna. It puts Revelation in conversation with Jewish apocalyptic texts of the same period (like the Epistle of Enoch) on issues of wealth and poverty. This comparison allows the author to perceive that Revelation shares the views, if not the traditions, of these documents. Revelation views the pursuit of wealth as a quest for false security in a time of tribulation, when the only enduring acquisition is the mark of Satan. By contrast, those who remain loyal to the Lamb may at first be poor, but will receive riches of gold and jewels in the new Jerusalem.

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An Empty Tomb

EASTER (B), APRIL 5, 2015

Readings: Acts 10:34–43; Ps 118:1–23; 1 Cor 5:6–8; Jn 20:1–9

For as yet they did not understand the Scripture (Jn 20:9)

All the Gospels recall that on the second morning after Jesus was laid in the tomb, Mary Magdalene and other women were the first to arrive at the tomb to care for Jesus' body, but his body was not in the tomb. It would be a strange account to concoct. Why? James Dunn says in *Jesus Remembered*, "As is well known, in Middle Eastern society of the time women were not regarded as reliable witnesses: a woman's testimony in court was heavily discounted. And any report that Mary had formerly been demon-possessed (Luke 8.2) would hardly add credibility to any story attributed to her in particular. Why then attribute such testimony to women—unless that was what was remembered as being the case?"

The account of Mary Magdalene as the first witness of the empty tomb was born of a powerful, consistent oral tradition among the earliest disciples. This is not the oral tradition of rote memorization, the sort that memorizes parables, prayers, teachings and laws, which was also part of first-century Judaism. This is autobiographical memory, in which stories of personal experience are passed on, often colored by the emotional interpretation of those who experienced the events, which shapes the details recalled in the passing on of the accounts. All of those present remember and recount that Mary was there first.

According to John's Gospel, "On the

first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb."

The absence of the body does not necessarily mean that Jesus was raised. There are more ordinary explanations that come to mind: the disciples went to the wrong tomb and the body was somewhere else; they lied about the missing body; or someone stole the body and hid it.

Yet if Jesus' body had been available, it makes sense that those who opposed the teaching of Jesus' resurrection would have found it, or produced it had they stolen it, to the derision and embarrassment of the disciples. If the body had indeed been taken by Jesus' disciples or they had gone to the wrong tomb, the reality of Jesus' body itself would have come to light and the location of his dead body would have put an end to the claims of resurrection. Indeed, his tomb might have become a pilgrimage site, a place of veneration of a great teacher and prophet killed by the Roman authorities.

In John's Gospel, Mary Magdalene reports the empty tomb to Peter and

the other disciple. The two of them run to the tomb; "Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead."

The juxtaposition here captures the initial confusion of the empty tomb. The other disciple, also known as the beloved disciple, "saw and believed," while Peter and Mary "did not understand the Scripture, that he had to rise from the dead."

The beloved disciple alone initially recognizes the spiritual meaning of the empty tomb, but his understanding will soon be the foundation of the



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Run to Jesus' tomb with Mary Magdalene. What do you think when you find the tomb empty?

whole church, spurred by later encounters with the risen Lord. The resurrection of Jesus became the central message of the new community of disciples.

The early Christians knew that "they put him to death by hanging him on a tree" and they knew where Jesus' dead body was laid. When Mary Magdalene and the other disciples encountered the empty tomb, it became the first piece of evidence that "God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses." Later, these witnesses would eat and drink "with him after he rose from the dead." Only one last task remained: to bear witness that the empty tomb, the end of Jesus' story, was just the beginning.

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