

America

The background of the cover is a photograph of a grand, ornate interior space, likely a cathedral or a government building. In the foreground, a priest in a black cassock with a magenta sash stands on the left, gesturing with his hands raised. To his right, a man in a dark blue suit stands in profile, looking upwards. The background is filled with intricate architectural details and a large, colorful mural depicting a religious scene.

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Faith and Foreign Affairs

CREATING A NEW ROLE FOR
RELIGION ON THE WORLD STAGE

JOHN KERRY

'George Bush's Message to Michael," I recall, was the headline that blared across two whole pages of The Boston Herald on Aug. 19, 1988. The Herald had chosen to print in its entirety the speech that Vice President George Bush had delivered the night before in New Orleans, accepting the Republican nomination for president. In Massachusetts in 1988, no one was in doubt about who Michael was: the Bay State's own Gov. Michael Dukakis, the Democratic nominee.

Mr. Bush's speech, expertly crafted by the veteran speechwriters Peggy Noonan and Craig Smith, is best remembered for "Read my lips: no new taxes," a promise President Bush would later break in order to balance the federal budget. But first-runner up for best-remembered phrase lies in his remarks on the importance of civil society: "This is America," he said. "The Knights of Columbus, the Grange, Hadassah, the Disabled American Veterans, the Order of Ahepa, the Business and Professional Women of America, the union hall, the Bible study group, LULAC, 'Holy Name'—a brilliant diversity spread like stars, like a thousand points of light in a broad and peaceful sky."

That phrase, "a thousand points of light," was much satirized and derided by critics. But unfairly so. Mr. Bush was onto something: While government has a role to play in the pursuit of the common good, our charitable and voluntary associations are similarly indispensable, and those who have a religious worldview have historically led the way. In this, Vice President Bush was aligned with the thinking of John Courtney Murray, S.J., who viewed civil society as an ascending world of social organizations that, along with government, form a coherent, cohesive whole.

But in the contemporary United States, it would be more accurate to say that such an arrangement *was* America.

As William T. Cavanaugh has observed, Father Murray's vision of civil society has been inverted. "The rise of the state," says Cavanaugh, "is the history of the atrophy of such [intermediate] associations." In an important sense, American political history is not a tale of the triumph of individual autonomy over the authoritarian state; it is rather a tale of the triumph of the state over the individual, through the progressive absorption of the intermediate associations of civil society. Cavanaugh's evidence includes "the exponential and continuous growth of the state" in the postwar period, "in the progressive enervation of intermediate associations," as documented by Robert Bella, Robert Putnam and others; and "the symbiosis of the state and the corporation that signals the collapse of the separation between politics and economics."

Yet politicians on both sides of the aisle have started to acknowledge the importance of those intermediate associations and are attempting to reverse the trend. Mr. Bush's son, George W., during his tenure as president, created the first White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. President Obama has a similarly styled initiative, and in this issue of **America**, the first to feature a cover story by a sitting secretary of state, John Kerry writes about the new Office of Religion and Global Affairs, a testament to Mr. Kerry's belief in the power of religion to effect meaningful, positive change, sometimes in partnership with government agencies but more often on its own.

Perhaps we can say that a revival of sorts is in the works, or a least a growing recognition of the importance of the third sector and its religious actors in providing for the common good. Perhaps we are a step closer to retrieving what Mr. Bush called in his acceptance speech "a better America...an endless enduring dream and a thousand points of light."

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Cover: U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry tours the "Sala Regia," the "royal room" of the Vatican, Jan. 14 with Msgr. Jose Bettencourt, the Holy See's head of protocol. CNS photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais, pool via Reuters

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ON THE WEB

Robert P. Maloney, C.M., offers 15 tips on **how to pray** in "Never Lose Heart," and **Jennifer Fulwiler** talks about raising a Catholic family. Full digital highlights on page 28 and at americamagazine.org/webfeatures.



A Papal Push in Colombia

The Vatican played a quiet but decisive role in jump-starting the ongoing normalization of relations between the United States and Cuba, and negotiators for the rebels of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, commonly known as FARC, clearly took note. Perhaps concerned about the possibility of a breakdown in their own peace talks, negotiators for the rebel group suggested that the pope meet with FARC officials during his visit to Cuba in September.

There have been positive developments in the long peace negotiations between FARC and the Colombian government, which began in Havana in 2012. FARC officials recently extended indefinitely a unilateral ceasefire, and Colombia's Conflict Analysis Resource Center reports that the intensity of the civil war has dropped to its lowest level in more than 40 years. But it would be a mistake to believe that a successful conclusion to the negotiations is guaranteed.

Archbishop Luis Castro Quiroga of Colombia told local media that he was hopeful a "small meeting" with the pope in support of the peace process might be arranged. Vatican officials, however, dismissed the possibility. According to Archbishop Castro, Pope Francis has proposed that an observer from the Holy See attend the Havana negotiations. This would be a good initial step, but a more personal gesture may be warranted as negotiations enter this critical stage. While other crises have driven it from the headlines, Colombia's civil war continues to be devastating. As the conflict enters its fifth decade, somewhere in the vicinity of 250,000 people—80 percent of them civilians—have died and five million have been driven from their homes. It would be a historic tragedy if negotiations falter now so close to a comprehensive conclusion.

New Face of Heroin Abuse

On Aug. 17, a 26-year-old mother was found unconscious, her daughter strapped in a stroller beside her, in a Walgreens bathroom stall. The Washington Post reports she was one of the 25 people to overdose on heroin in just two days in the Rust Belt community of Washington, Pa. First responders were able to revive her with a fast-acting antidote, but three others that weekend were not so lucky.

This is the new face of the heroin epidemic, which in 2013 took more than 8,200 lives. Though historically associated disproportionately with poor and black inner-city teenagers, today the average heroin user is a white, middle-class suburbanite in his or her mid-20s who moved to the drug after getting hooked on prescription painkillers. The Obama administration responded in late August with a \$5

million effort to combat the trafficking and use of heroin. Michael Botticelli, director of National Drug Control Policy, says the plan focuses on overdose prevention and access to recovery support services and will enhance coordination between public health and law enforcement officials in five high-intensity drug trafficking areas, ranging from Maine to Tennessee.

This initiative is a wise one but, given the need, underfunded. Notably absent, fortunately, are the "tough on crime" rhetoric and policies that characterized this country's response to previous drug waves—heroin in the 1960s, crack cocaine in the '70s and '80s. Is today's softer touch a reflection of lessons learned from the failed war on drugs—or of the race and class of those affected? Whatever the answer, which is probably a combination of the two, we now know that the lives and communities destroyed by addiction need more recovery beds, not jail cells.

Russia at the Border

Before attending a NATO summit in Wales in early September 2014, President Obama first visited Estonia. This was a clear statement to neighboring Russia that the United States was committed to Estonia and the other NATO states bordering Russia: What was happening in Ukraine must not happen here. Days later, Eston Kohver, an officer in Estonia's security service, was captured by Russian officers in a remote border area and charged with espionage, trafficking in weapons and illegally crossing the border.

Estonia "investigated the scene" and reported that the evidence clearly showed Kohver had been in Estonian territory. His arrest was seen at least partly as a Russian response to President Obama's visit and to NATO. About a quarter of Estonia's population is of Russian descent, so it has particularly good reason to keep an eye on its eastern neighbor. It was the Russian population inside Ukraine that gave Moscow a pretext to occupy and annex parts of Ukraine.

On Aug. 19, 2015, a Russian court sentenced Kohver to 15 years in prison. Four days later Andrzej Duda, in his first foreign trip as president of Poland, which also has a border with Russia, visited Estonia. He and the president of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, discussed the relationship between their countries. They share economic issues and, of course, security concerns. Both countries have called on NATO for permanent military bases on their eastern borders. Estonia has also announced plans to build a fence along the land border. It will have barbed wire and cameras to help prevent incidents like the abduction of Eston Kohver. But it would not stop a Russian tank.

Worked Over

Describing her desire to be successful in Amazon's high-intensity workplace culture, Dina Vaccari, who worked there from 2008 to 2014, compared it to an addiction: "It was like a drug that we could get self-worth from." A number of former employees spoke with *The New York Times* for a report published on Aug. 15 that examined Amazon's management practices. They described the work environment as being nearly brutal in its focus on rigorous measurement of performance, constant improvement through competition and critique, and a disturbing lack of patience or compassion for colleagues dealing with family and medical issues.

Jeff Bezos, the company's chief executive officer, said the article did not "describe the Amazon I know" and that "anyone working in a company that is really like the one described... would be crazy to stay." In other words, that kind of workplace is not worth working at, for self-worth or any other goal.

While they have different accounts of the reality at Amazon, both Mr. Bezos and the ex-employees agree implicitly that work must contribute to human flourishing, not only to the bottom line of a corporate balance sheet. Pope Francis, reiterating this fundamental claim of Catholic social teaching, reminds us in "Laudato Si'": "Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment" (No. 128).

Our economic culture and our consumerism are making it ever more difficult to value work and workers in any terms other than raw productivity or the "cost of labor." And, as we might expect and ought to pay attention to, the burdens of this limited perspective fall more often and more heavily on the poor and the working class than on white-collar "knowledge workers." While Amazon's office culture was the focus of the recent *Times* article, their warehouse employees are measured and monitored to achieve similarly demanding performance, though in their case the relevant metric is boxes packed per hour.

Similar approaches to labor can be seen throughout the increasingly misnamed sharing economy. Uber, for example, currently faces legal challenges from some of its drivers, who argue that they should be classified as full-time employees. Uber argues in response that many of its contractors value the flexibility to set their own hours; what goes unsaid is that their flexibility and Uber's avoidance of the extra costs of having real employees may be two sides of the same coin.

This appears, in hindsight, to be an inevitable outcome

of the intersection of consumer convenience and technology companies funded by modern finance. We want our Uber rides when we want them, predictably, safely and cheaply; we want our Amazon Prime purchases delivered almost before we finish clicking "Buy Now."



In order to achieve these prodigious feats of consumer satisfaction, companies need to tightly control and manage their workforces. Uber cannot function without drivers on the clock and centrally coordinated; Amazon cannot shave another 50 cents off the price of a book or a day off a delivery time unless its workers are performing optimally, achieving great productivity at very low operational cost. Under this logic, Amazon and Uber have an obvious ultimate goal: warehouse robots and self-driving cars. Why employ humans at all when they are primarily an extra cost of doing business? As Pope Francis cautioned in "Laudato Si'": "The orientation of the economy has favored a kind of technological progress in which the costs of production are reduced by laying off workers and replacing them with machines" (No. 128).

Economists are very good at quantifying the cost of labor, but we struggle greatly to talk about its worth. Because of the outsized and exclusive priority given to profit, we will continue to struggle both with the exploitation of low-wage workers and, even at the highest levels of compensation, with the pressure to chase productivity, efficiency and growth at the cost of actual happiness.

There are some hopeful signs. Local and state-level initiatives to raise the minimum wage to a living wage can help to put a floor underneath the profit-maximizing drive to pay employees as little as possible. Increasing the earned income tax credit and raising the national minimum wage to an appropriate level would help set a national baseline for income that reflects the dignity of work. Archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami, chair of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, supported the living wage initiatives in his 2015 Labor Day statement and called us to examine our consciences regarding our "choices about the clothes we wear, food we eat, and things we buy—most of which is unaffordable to the very workers who make it." We also need to examine as a society how corporations connect labor to profit and seek models that value the human worth of work rather than its productivity alone.

REPLY ALL

Separate Issues

Re “Selling the Unborn,” (Editorial, 8/17): The tragedy of abortion is a mother finding herself in a situation where she decides ending the life of her child is her best option. “Pro-life” is a euphemism for taking this hugely personal and difficult decision and placing it in the legal system, as if a judge could bring more knowledge and wisdom to this decision than a mother, her doctor and whatever religious counsel she seeks.

The law establishing that the fetuses resulting from this decision can be used under legal controls in the search for cures to disease is a separate matter, a bringing of some good from the tragedy of a mother finding the end of her child’s life is her best decision. Let us not confuse the tragedy of abortion

with the hope of medical research. We as Christians should, of all people, best see the possibility of good coming from tragedy, a resurrection following crucifixion.

PETER CASTALDI
Online Comment

Not a Solution

Other comments on “Selling the Unborn” show little relationship to reality. “Between a woman, her doctor and her God” is nice slogan, but it is not what happens. The woman goes not to her family physician or to a minister but to an abortionist, whom she does not see until she is on the table and with whom she is unlikely to have any discussion. Since the vast majority of abortions have social or economic causes, solutions can be found. Indeed, they are provided by pregnancy resource centers every day. Women need love and sup-

port, not abortion. Killing is never an answer, and the death of a child is never just a “difficult decision.” It should be unthinkable to take a child’s life to ease the parents’ problems—a permanent “solution” to a temporary problem—especially when it isn’t even the child but other factors that are truly the issue.

LOIS KERSCHEN
Online Comment

Reality Check

Re Of Many Things (8/3): Father Malone’s response to statements about bishops is long overdue and to the point. If one reads Father Malone’s writing and substitutes “Republicans” for “bishops,” the fundamental points still apply. I would urge Father Malone to “meet a lot of Republicans” and also realize that perceptions do not always align with reality.

KEN BALASKOVITS
Park Ridge, Ill.

f STATUS UPDATE

Readers respond to “Surviving in America,” by Tom Deignan (8/17).

My grandparents were Polish. I was baptized in a Polish-speaking church in 1946. My grandmother, a citizen for decades, spoke what was called broken English. She never really learned the language. Two of her sons served in World War II; Dad served in the Army Air Corps. People have created a myth about past assimilation. Immigrant children learned English then, as they do today. I am fortunate to live in a neighborhood rich in diverse cultures. The parents and grandparents struggle with English; the children do not. The immigrants I encounter work hard, which is the only “handout” they want, and the only handout my grandparents wanted. Nothing has changed!

BOB ASHDOWN

In my grandmother’s time, there was a conscious effort to assimilate and become more “American.” Today it

seems like that is a dirty word and the focus is more on identity politics at the expense of a common, shared society.

JEREMIAH WOOLSEY

When my Irish-speaking great-grandmother came to the United States, the first thing she did was learn how to speak German—the language of her new home city, Cincinnati, Ohio—then English.

MARY EILEEN HOMA

This is a very problematic article. The issues pertaining to the history of Hispanics in this country and migration do not perfectly match up with European immigration. If **America** is serious about discussing Latinos and immigration, get a Latino expert on immigration to write about it. Otherwise all the pictures of Hispanics you post, however much they are meant to humanize us, simply keep us as the voiceless, abstract “other.”

MIKE MENDEZ

Women in Chains

Nicholas Sawicki’s fine, fact-filled article, “Today’s Slaves” (8/3), elucidates this global crime and Pope Francis’ wisdom regarding this human trafficking. As Mr. Sawicki notes, more than half the victims (53 percent) are exploited sexually, and almost half the victims (49 percent) are women. From childhood up, trafficked females are routinely raped, tortured and brutalized.

I suggest this is caused not only by poverty and greed but also by the global perception that women are inferior, dispensable. The perception is both overt (“Women are buffaloes. Men are humans,” is a traditional Thai proverb) and covert (the continuing income inequality of women in the United States). In our church, too, gender bias keeps women in an inferior status. Pope Francis says women will never be ordained. And the world listens.

FRANCINE DEMPSEY, C.S.J.
Albany, N.Y.

Flannery’s Holy Work

As an admirer of Flannery O’Connor,

I was saddened to read about her struggle with the tension between her “desire to be a successful writer and to be spiritually committed,” described in “Far Away From God,” by Susan Srigley (7/6). I don’t know of anyone whose labors have been a greater imitation of God the creator than O’Connor through her literary masterpieces. Why have Christians failed to see that being created in God’s image makes us agents of the continuing work of creation and that therefore our work, whatever it is, is holy?

DONALD ROHMER
Muenster, Tex.

Revisiting the Catechism

I was disappointed for Daniel P. Horan, O.F.M., when I read in his column, “Never Justifiable” (6/22), that he found the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to be “primarily a summary instruction manual of church teachings for catechists.” I wondered: Had he ever given it the opportunity to be more than that?

In 2005 I decided to read the catechism from cover to cover. Over the course of the year, I assigned myself three to five pages each day, determined to read patiently and prayerfully (which was key). I was pleasantly surprised to find myself reading well past five pages on many an evening because it was just too good to put down. And when I got to the back cover I found the catechism to be far more meaningful and uplifting as a whole than any collection of its parts. If Father Horan, or anyone else reading this letter, has not yet given this a try, I heartily recommend it. Perhaps they too can gain a whole new appreciation for the catechism by doing so.

RONALD BONESTEEL
Overland Park, Kan.

Mad World

Re “Nuclear Dud” (Editorial, 6/22): President John F. Kennedy stated, “Every man, woman and child lives

under a nuclear sword of Damocles, hanging by the slenderest of threads, capable of being cut at any moment by accident or miscalculation or by madness.” On Jan. 25, 1995, the United States launched a multistage rocket off the coast of Norway to study the northern lights. Russia had previously been notified, but the message was not passed up the chain of command. Russian radar picked up the launch of our missile, and they prepared to launch a counterattack. President Boris Yeltsin had five minutes to decide whether he should launch a nuclear attack against the United States. If he had followed their military protocol, he should have launched the attack. For some reason, he did not. “The weapons of war must be abolished before they abolish us,” said President Kennedy. If we forget history, we will repeat it.

(REV.) RICH BRODERICK
Delmar, N.Y.

Sowing the Word

Re “The Kingdom Unusual,” by John W. Martens (6/8): The Scripture scholar C. H. Dodd famously defined the parable: “At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.” It seems like seeds, plants and trees are the most ordinary of things, especially a mustard shrub. But as Mr. Martens notes, it is eminently useful for birds to nest. Here the birds represent Gentiles, so the crucifixion of Jesus—one of thousands of executions during that era—becomes the crucible for the unleashing of the Holy Spirit, which

incorporates Gentiles onto the tree of Judaism, a complete surprise to the early church.

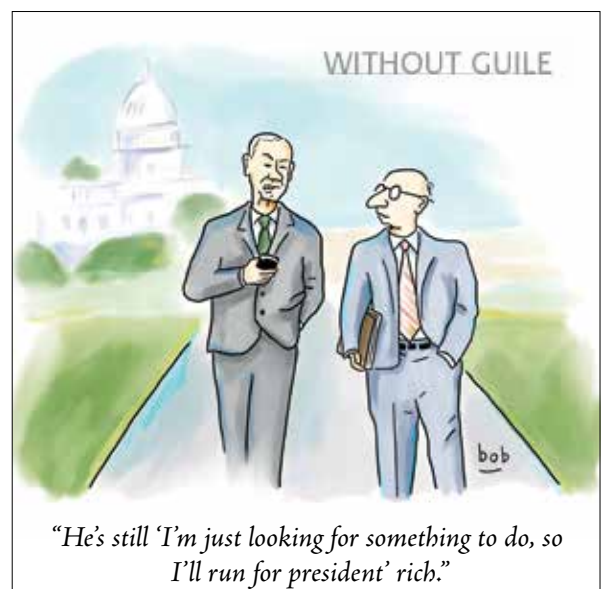
That said, another author noted that by using parables rather than rigidly defined dogmas, Jesus gave the Holy Spirit room to move in and through his parabolic words through the various eras and cultures in which his word has been sown.

(REV.) MIKE LYDON
Online Comment

Rethinking Mission

In “Company Men” (5/11), William J. Byron, S.J., calls for the preservation of “mission and identity” at Jesuit institutions of higher learning. How about “accessibility and affordability”? Catholic colleges and universities are among the most expensive in the country (Georgetown is about \$46,000 per year and Catholic University is \$40,000, excluding room and board, of course). The smaller ones have bottom lines that are more tuition-driven than investment-driven. They need to keep raising tuition just to stay in business. College needs to be affordable, and a Catholic college should be affordable to those who need it. It’s time they rethink their social mission as something other than a playground for America’s upper class.

CHRISTOPHER RATTO
Online Comment



CARTOON: BOB ECKSTEIN

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

PUERTO RICO

Amid Accelerating Debt Crisis, Church Calls for Jubilee

As Puerto Rico's government marches on toward a critical financial deadline regarding its \$72 billion "unpayable" debt, there are hopes for a jubilee of the kind espoused in Scripture.

Church leaders, like Archbishop Roberto González Nieves of San Juan, have offered diverse opinions about the effects of the crisis. His recent column in *Time* magazine was tinged with pastoral, political and solidarity overtones.

"The Bible itself provides us with a concept that seems perfect for the situation our island now finds itself in: the jubilee," he wrote, citing a passage from Leviticus that speaks of debt forgiveness. "The jubilee is meant to prevent the poor from becoming too poor and serves as an economic clean slate that mirrors the forgiveness and new beginning proclaimed in the Gospels."

Eric LeCompte, executive director of the Washington-based Jubilee USA Network was in Puerto Rico in mid-August working with church, political, business and organized labor leaders to develop a solution to the financial crisis which "invests in people" and ends deep spending cuts in education, health care and employment.

It is an idea that the Catholic Church in Puerto Rico welcomes. "I applaud the Jubilee USA Network, which is fighting for debt forgiveness for Puerto Rico and working to bring about a global jubilee—debt relief in times of crisis," wrote Archbishop González, "but also long-term structures that prevent the next crisis."

The archbishop cited "mismanagement, bad luck and [Puerto Rico's] unique colonial status as neither a sovereign country nor a U.S. state" as the root causes of the financial woes.

Most of Puerto Rico's debt is owed to "vulture funds," companies that assume risks presented by unstable debtors by buying the debts for pennies on the dollar. These secondary financial markets commonly operate privately and are usually based in fiscally safe-haven countries and push the debtor entities to repay what they owe in full.

Aug. 30 was the deadline Puerto Rico faced to present a fiscal readjustment plan for the next five years based on recommendations from the International Monetary Fund. The date is a step ahead of several crucial end-of-September economic compli-

cations: empty coffers for public medical insurance plans and water and electric power utilities, plus federal funding cuts to Medicare and other programs.

Gov. Alejandro García Padilla appeared on local television on June 28 saying:

"The debt cannot be paid. There is no other option. I would love to have an easier option. It is not politics, it is math."

After the sudden scramble his message caused in financial sectors, his first proposal was to consider the possibility of structuring a local bankruptcy system. Although federal courts have expressly denied the so-called "creole" bankruptcy's constitutionality, Puerto Rico continues to pursue that avenue.

There is a growing push in Washington to pass legislation supporting it, but Congress has rejected the idea, opting to wait for the recov-



ery plan before it even considers allowing bankruptcy.

Several prominent economists, however, have argued that accepting bankruptcy will not solve the "real causes" of the crisis, such as the island's political status, innate sociological idiosyncrasies and outdated economic procedures. Many align with Pope Francis' tying the world economic crisis to "unfettered capitalism" and defining it as "the failure of global capitalism to create fairness, equity and dignified livelihoods for the poor."

Nevertheless, Archbishop González supports the bankruptcy plan. "Although not a perfect solution, bankruptcy protection would provide a fairer, transparent system for resolving Puerto Rico's debt burden and creating the fiscal space we need to grow our economy and serve our people," he said.

From CNS, RNS and other sources.

CLOSED FOR BUSINESS. Puerto Rico gets closer to a deadline for its \$72 billion “unpayable” debt.



UNITED KINGDOM

Labour Picks a New Leader

The British Labour Party has long been marked by factionalism and splits, entryism and intrigue. The center and the right have it too, but they hide it better. With Labour, it is visible and endemic.

It has happened again, as Labour tries to drag itself back from disaster after the Parliamentary general election of May 2015. Then, the Tories under David Cameron won enough seats to collect the keys to Number 10 Downing Street and form the first Conservative Party government since 1992. Labour, under Ed Miliband, suffered electoral casualties, as did the smaller Liberal Democrats who, having spent the previous five years as junior partners in a Tory-led coalition, lost al-

most all their seats.

Numerically, the Labour collapse was not so calamitous—except in Scotland, where they were wiped out by the resurgent Scottish National Party, whose resilience after losing the independence referendum in 2014 defied all predictions other than their own. Miliband’s Labour managed to increase their overall popular vote slightly—more than the Tory vote share rose—but suffered a net loss of parliamentary seats, winning 30.4 percent and 232 seats. This is the smallest number of seats held by Labour since 1987. Miliband lost. He had to go.

Whereas the Liberal Democrats, whose leader, Nick Clegg, resigned after being deputy prime minister to Cameron in the coalition, contrived to elect his successor without public attention, Labour has tried to regroup out in the open. Splits and divisions have been there for all to see as the lengthy leadership battle raged. The biggest talking point thus far (a winner will be formally declared on Sept. 12) is the remarkable popularity of Jeremy Corbyn, a veteran of the party’s left. His brand of outwardly hard socialist policies is preferable, according to some, to winning back power.

Corbyn’s three leadership competitors, the M.P.s Andy Burnham, Yvette Cooper and Liz Kendall, all come from the center-right, “Blairite” wing of the party. They compare his rise with that of the former leader Michael Foot, whose cerebral and passionate advocacy of a left-leaning platform led to electoral catastrophe for Labour in 1983. Yet Corbyn, who initially struggled to

get enough signatures for nomination, has surged ahead, remaining popular with the rank and file. At various times in recent weeks, his opponents have uneasily held hands, attempting to persuade the party membership away from Corbyn, but he has continued to attract support, mainly from the unions and the young. Specific policy lines have been featured in the campaign but have been secondary to the question whether Labour can ever return to Downing Street, or will it henceforth be a powerless party of protest.

There have been allegations that non-party members, including even some Tories, might have taken out Labour Party memberships in order to cast a vote for Corbyn, ensuring the party’s non-electability. Corbyn’s opponents demanded extra checks for infiltration; Corbyn denied the possibility. Right on cue, the hashtag #LabourPurge began trending on Twitter.

The leadership battle has reflected the continuing anti-austerity feeling in many countries, including the United Kingdom. Greece’s travails have in re-

cent weeks been the most prominent as Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras called a general election, precipitating an immediate split in his radical left Syriza party. Those who repudiate that country’s debtor-imposed austerity broke away. Although the British Labour Party has always managed, barely, to hold its unity, there must now be some concern that the



Corbyn-inspired resurgent left might similarly, and permanently, split the party.

DAVID STEWART, S.J.

Ten Years After Katrina

On Aug. 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina buried one of the world's most iconic cities in a flood of biblical proportions. More than 1,800 people lost their lives. "It was like a war zone. No sign of life," said the now-retired archbishop of New Orleans, Alfred C. Hughes. Across the region, 200,000 homes were destroyed or heavily damaged. Dozens of public, private and Catholic schools closed forever. But in the midst of the devastation, the Catholic Church jump-started the city's initial recovery by opening up as many Catholic schools as quickly as possible. These schools accepted all students, including those who had attended public schools, and did not charge tuition. The current archbishop of New Orleans, Gregory M. Aymond, who came back to his hometown as archbishop in 2009, sees God's blessings everywhere he looks: "He was walking in the floodwaters. He was in the attic. He was in the Superdome. [H]e didn't abandon us." Speaking on "America This Week" on Aug. 26, Mayor Mitch Landrieu of New Orleans said the city "is a great story of resurrection and redemption...of people coming together to help each other out." He commends the "tremendous progress" the city has made, but adds that there is still "a long way to go."

Labor Deal

A new labor agreement between the Archdiocese of San Francisco and the union representing teachers at the four archdiocesan high schools states that Catholic teaching must remain paramount in the classroom and that teachers are accountable for personal conduct that could negatively affect their ability to serve the Catholic mission. The deal ends 10 months of bargaining marked by strong resistance from some teach-

NEWS BRIEFS

When **Archbishop Blase J. Cupich** of Chicago received the pallium, a symbol of his unity with the pope and brother bishops, at a special Mass on Aug. 23, he asked the entire church to join him in seeking out lost sheep. • The Diocese of St. Augustine will join the city of St. Augustine, Fla., in **celebrating the 450th anniversary** of the first permanent settlement of European origin in what became the continental United States on Sept. 8. • In Syria, the Islamic State demolished the **1,500-year-old Saint Elian monastery** and beheaded a renowned 81-year-old archaeologist who sought to protect antiquities in the town of Palmyra. • The Vatican has given its backing to the naming of a central square in Rome after **Martin Luther**, who was excommunicated by Pope Leo X nearly 500 years ago. • According to the United Nations, nearly 4,500 people, including many civilians, have been **killed in Yemen** since March in the conflict between forces loyal to President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and Houthi rebels. • **Josef Wesolowski**, former archbishop and nuncio to the Dominican Republic, died on Aug. 28, in the Vatican residence where he was awaiting trial on charges of child sexual abuse and possession of child pornography.



Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine

ers, who argued that the archdiocese's proposals to strengthen the schools' Catholic mission could threaten their job security and lead to intrusions into their private lives. John Piderit, S.J., archdiocesan vicar for administration and moderator of the diocesan curia, said the overall impact of the agreement is to clarify Catholic identity, especially in the Bay Area, where ideas may be confused, adding, "We expect people not to compromise in Catholic teaching in word and in action."

Court Approves Stay For Little Sisters

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit on Aug. 21 said that while the Little Sisters of the Poor and fellow plaintiffs appeal its July ruling against them, they need not comply with the mandate to provide

contraceptive coverage or follow procedures to hand off that responsibility to others. The court ruled in July that the Little Sisters are not substantially burdened by the process set out by the Department of Health and Human Services by which they can avoid requirements to provide contraceptive coverage to employees as mandated by the Affordable Care Act. All of the circuit court decisions have come since the Supreme Court's June 2014 ruling that the owners of the Hobby Lobby craft store chain and similarly situated, closely held, for-profit companies are entitled to be exempt from the contraceptive requirement. The 100-word order of the circuit court granted the stay requested by the Little Sisters, Southern Nazarene University and Reaching Souls International, pending the Supreme Court's consideration of their petitions for appeal.

People of the Book

One evening in July, a couple of hundred people gathered in a dark San Diego hotel ballroom for an awards ceremony. At the front of the pop-up tables, a fold-out stage sported a podium that could be quickly wheeled to the next event. A pull-down screen behind sat at the ready to display slides of winners and a commemoration of the deceased.

Meanwhile, overweight older men in Hawaiian shirts mingled at the cash bar with young women in interesting glasses and the occasional sleek-suited up-and-comer, while bland saxophone-heavy public-domain music strained in the background. The presentations for the evening were just as odd an assortment, from the middle-aged artist with a sweet Texas twang who fielded a phone call from a complaining teenage daughter in the midst of his presentation to the actor Edward James Olmos impeccably pronouncing an endless series of Japanese names.

Truly, only an L.A. funeral could account for such a crazy assortment of characters. But the people in this room and their colleagues had in recent years earned billions of dollars for their companies (and in a few cases done rather well for themselves, too). Among their works are some of the most internationally well-known (and in some cases beloved) stories ever written. In fact, just a few hundred yards from this dingy half-empty ballroom, over 100,000 people had gathered from around the world to celebrate their artistry.

No mainstream press covered these

awards; few would even know these artists' names, or that of Will Eisner, for whom the comic book industry's yearly awards in comic book excellence are named.

In 1978 Eisner, who was best known in the 1940s and '50s as the creator of "The Spirit" comic strip, which ran as a newspaper series, wrote and drew the first graphic novel, an extraordinary set of short stories set in the tenements of

So many stories we see today on the big screen were tales our parents read to us at night.

New York, called *A Contract With God*. In the title story, a man proposes a deal with God, believing that if he promises to be good, God will always take care of him. All goes well—until it doesn't. Eisner revealed decades later that the story was his attempt to express the rage and grief he felt over the death of his teenage daughter. He went on to write a number of other equally powerful stories about being human.

The comic book industry uses his name to honor its greatest creations. But on this particular night, the overwhelming majority of the winners are nowhere to be found, and those who are present have none of the polish of their Hollywood counterparts. Shannon Watters, whose cartoony "Lumberjanes" comic book about a group of girl scouts who encounter supernatural phenomenon won two major awards, was so overwhelmed she couldn't quite stop crying; other winners were shy to the point of prac-

tically running off the stage.

But instead of diminishing the moment, all this awkwardness reveals something important and special. At its foundation the comic book business is a community not of shiny-toothed actors and movie execs but of quirky and deeply vulnerable artists who are trying to uncover what it means to be human in word balloons and pencil drawings.

And while for Hollywood "Spider-Man" may be just a property to be scrutinized, "The Avengers" a franchise over which to gush while its actors get stalked by TMZ.com, before all that these and so many other stories we see today on the big screen were tales our parents read to us at night, lands and characters we dreamed of amid nightlights and glow-in-the-dark-starred ceilings.

Wandering through the teeming halls of the San Diego Comic Con next door, you see it in people's eyes as they come upon someone dressed as their favorite character. It's not the verisimilitude of costume that grabs them, but that sense of being transported into stories that have spoken to them, worlds not simply of entertainment but of meaning.

"The deep places in our lives—places of resistance and embrace—are not ultimately reached by instruction," writes the theologian Walter Brueggemann. "Those places of resistance and embrace are reached only by stories, by images, metaphors and phrases that line out the world differently, apart from our fear and hurt."

In this cheap, half-empty ballroom, the creators of the next generations of those stories sip watered-down drinks and wait for the awards show to end. It's not that they don't want the validation. It's just that there are characters whispering in their heads, calling them back to unexpected countries of grace and truth. **JIM McDERMOTT**

JIM McDERMOTT, S.J., a screenwriter, is *America's* Los Angeles correspondent. Twitter: @PopCulturPriest.



Is the Shroud Genuine?

Two years ago an Italian scientist published a book entitled *The Mystery of the Shroud*, an examination of the authenticity of the Shroud of Turin, the cloth that many believe to be the burial cloth of Jesus mentioned in the Gospels. This book asserted that contrary to scientific studies from the late 1980s, the 14-foot piece of linen cloth, which is stored in an underground vault in the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist in Turin, dates not from medieval times but from the time of Christ. *Il Mistero Della Sindone*, by Giulio Fanti, a professor of mechanical engineering at the University of Padua, dates the cloth between 300 B.C. and A.D. 400, a period that includes the dates of Jesus' death and resurrection. Professor Fanti's tests focused mainly on the rate of decomposition of linen threads over time.

Arguments over the shroud, in front of which Pope Francis prayed during his visit to Turin this June, probably began when it was first displayed in the late 14th century. In fact, the most compelling argument against its authenticity is that relatively late date. Where was it before that? Why would such a precious religious artifact be absent from the historical record? Wouldn't something so important to believers have been the object of popular devotion long before the 14th century?

On the other hand, the arguments in favor of its authenticity are strong too. To begin with, the image of the brutalized man on the shroud (who bears holes in his hands and feet, a gash in his side, the marks of scourging on his back, pinprick wounds on his forehead and has longish arms and an

attenuated torso—all consistent with crucifixion) is a perfect photonegative. Even if it was a medieval forgery, how could forgers have known about negatives? Moreover, how could they have concocted an image that appears in three dimensions when analyzed by contemporary scientists?

Other compelling proofs: the peculiar weave of the linen dates to the time of Jesus; and, believe it or not, the pollen and dust found on the shroud (some around the knees of the man) are native to Jerusalem.

And so on. For those who believe in the shroud's authenticity, every new confirmation confirms. For those who don't believe, every possible doubt (particularly critiques of the science behind the investigations) encourages disbelief and eye-rolling dismissals. As the saying goes, "For those without faith, no explanation is sufficient. For those with faith, no explanation is necessary." (Speaking of authenticity, that quotation is either from a character in *The Song of Bernadette*, Franz Werfel's novel about the Marian apparitions in Lourdes, or from an even loftier source, St. Thomas Aquinas.)

I'm not saying that people who doubt the shroud's authenticity are faithless. Needless to say, it's not essential to believe in the Shroud of Turin to be a good Catholic. Rather, most of us have a "confirmation bias," which inclines us to give greater weight to arguments that prove what we already believe.

I tend to believe things that are still unproven. Why? Because religious legends have a funny way of being proven true. My favorite example is the story

of the Pool of Bethesda.

According to Chapter Five of the Gospel of John, Jesus, while visiting Jerusalem, heals a paralyzed man beside a pool "which has five porticoes." Until the 19th century, many scholars believed there was no such pool. The pool in the story was, some believed, an "allegorical" pool, or the entire story was fabricated and added to the Gospel later. Some believed that the idea of the five porticoes was an allegorical

representation of the five books of Moses or a "construct of the imagination," as Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., says in his commentary on the Gospel of John.

At the turn of the 20th century, however, excavations in Jerusalem uncovered not simply a pool but, as the archaeologists gradually cut

into the rock, the foundations for colonnaded walkways or porticoes—five of them, exactly as John had described.

So I give these things the benefit of the doubt. My general reaction is, "Who knows?" My faith does not depend on the shroud's authenticity, but neither am I eager to disprove it. If I get to heaven (a big if), and Jesus says, "That was a clever forgery by some lucky medieval artists," I'll say, "O.K." But if Jesus says, "That was indeed my shroud," I'll say, "O.K." Frankly, if Jesus says anything to me, I'll say, "O.K."

For now, I'll revere the shroud not simply as an object of faith (that's the somewhat weaker stance: it's important because people think it's important) but as something else: the possibility of something great, something remarkable, even something holy.

Religious legends have a funny way of being proven true.

JAMES MARTIN, S.J., is editor at large of *America*. His novel *The Abbey* will be published in October.

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Religion and Diplomacy

Toward a better understanding of religion and global affairs

BY JOHN KERRY

One of the most interesting challenges we face in global diplomacy today is the need to fully understand and engage the great impact that a wide range of religious traditions have on foreign affairs. I often say that if I headed back to college today, I would major in comparative religions rather than political science. That is because religious actors and institutions are playing an influential role in every region of the world and on nearly every issue central to U.S. foreign policy.

In June, Pope Francis' historic encyclical "Laudato Si'" helped advocate for global measures to combat climate change. Religious advocacy groups have long raised awareness about famine and human rights violations abroad; Buddhist nuns in Nepal play a crucial role in natural disaster recovery efforts; and religious organizations have been essential to providing humanitarian support to Syrian refugees.

On matters as diverse as how to drive economic growth, rein in corruption, combat terrorism, mitigate conflict, advance women's rights and promote public health, religious beliefs shape the views of publics and change-makers near and far.

Religion is a multivalent force, not reducible to good religion and bad religion. Still, we must take seriously those instances when actors seek to justify violence through religion. Rather than talking about building a school, creating a community or providing health care, these actors sometimes promote destruction—occasionally, sadly, in the guise of religion.

In the Central African Republic, militia groups, some of which are Christian and Muslim, are engaged in a bloody conflict. Religious minorities in Burma, including the Rohingya—a Muslim community—are subject to hate speech and controversial legislation that threatens religious freedom. In the Middle East and Africa, terror networks like ISIL and Boko Haram justify violent acts with religious arguments. Major European cities are also struggling to cope with the aftermath of terror attacks amid strong

evidence of anti-Semitism, radicalization and anti-Muslim sentiment.

As secretary of state for the past two-and-a-half years, and before that as a senator for 29 years and also as a presidential candidate, I have met with religious leaders all across the world. I have also met with people of all religious traditions, life philosophies and belief systems. That experience has only reaffirmed my belief that there is much more that unites us, and should unite us, than divides us.

Amid the diversity of the world's religions, there are common denominators; many are tied together by the Golden Rule. They share fundamental concerns about the human condition, poverty, human relationships and our responsibilities to each other. Many people talk about how we draw strength from the example of our religious communities—but too few actually translate those words into actions or policies. Leaders in public life need to recognize that in a world where people of all religious traditions are migrating and mingling like never before, we ignore the global impact of religion at our peril.

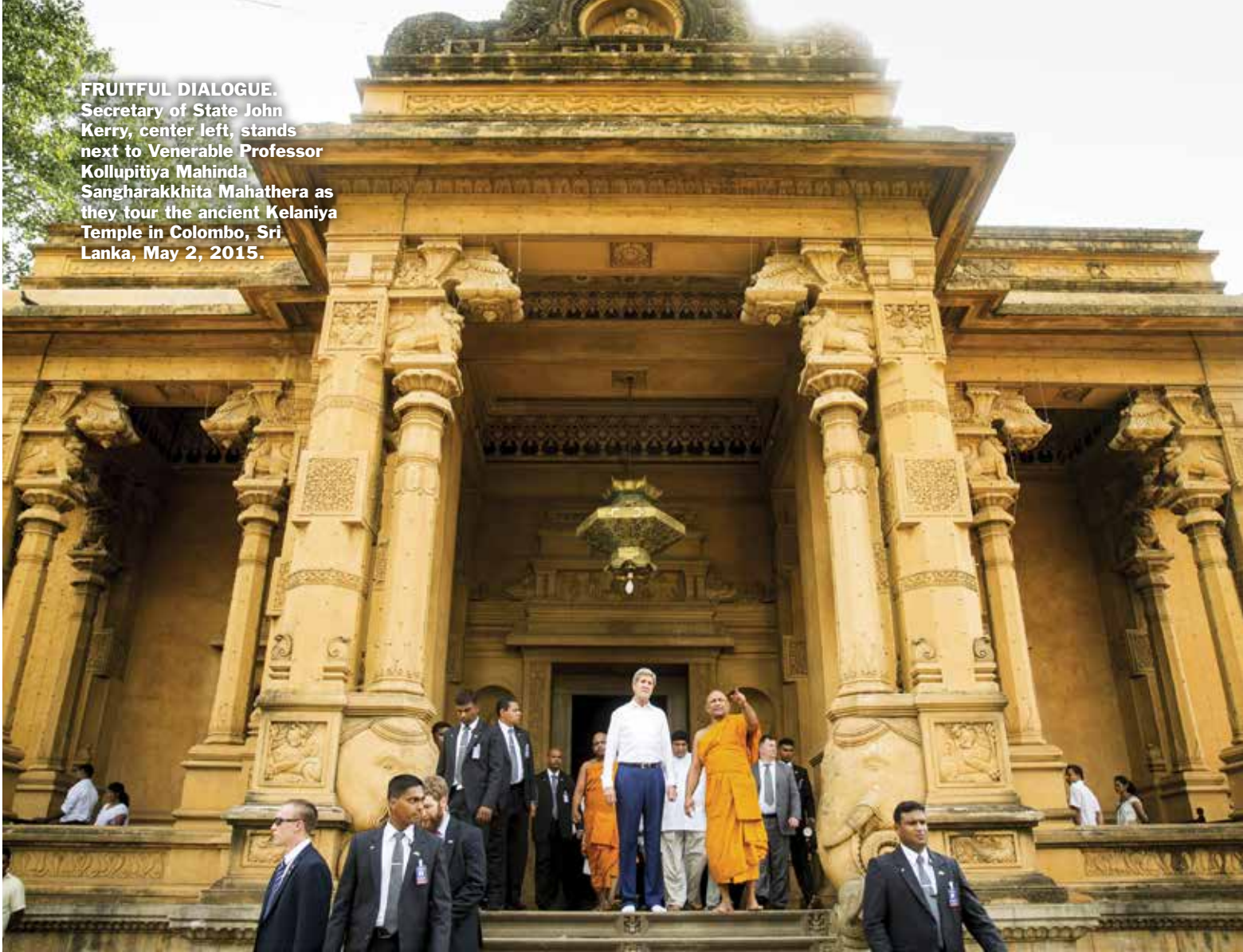
In a world where people of all religious traditions are migrating and mingling like never before, we ignore the global impact of religion at our peril.

A New Approach

It is not enough just to talk about better dialogue. We have to act to meet this need. That is why in 2013 I announced the creation of the Office of Religion and Global Affairs at the State Department, which helps to implement President Obama's U.S. Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement. Its mission is clear: to expand our understanding of religious dynamics and engagement with religious actors. The office is led by Shaun Casey, a former professor of Christian Ethics at Wesley Theological Seminary, who is one of the country's leading thinkers on religion in public life. As U.S. special representative for reli-

JOHN KERRY, former Democratic senator from Massachusetts, is the 68th U.S. secretary of state.

FRUITFUL DIALOGUE.
Secretary of State John Kerry, center left, stands next to Venerable Professor Kollupitiya Mahinda Sangharakkhita Mahathera as they tour the ancient Kelaniya Temple in Colombo, Sri Lanka, May 2, 2015.



gion and global affairs, he is charged with growing our ability to reach out to more communities and to create greater understanding among peoples and countries.

The new office's mission is multifaceted. First, it provides me with high-level advice on policy matters as they relate to religion. In many countries around the globe, a comprehensive look at almost any policy area requires attention to religious dynamics. Second, it works with U.S. embassies and consulates to improve their capacity to assess religious dynamics and engage religious actors. We want foreign service officers to know how to work effectively with local religious individuals and groups. Finally, it serves as an initial point of contact for organizations and people interested in discussing foreign policy issues related to religion.

That final charge revolves around an important skill in diplomacy: listening. We regularly meet with religious leaders and religiously based organizations, listening to their thoughts and suggestions in order to work with them on matters of significance to both sides. These religious actors and organizations are key players in their countries, holding

influence at both local and national levels. Although just two years old, the office has already met with over 1,000 religious leaders from five continents and a range of religious traditions. Indeed, engagement is a two-way street and our foreign policy will be better informed by hearing what they have to say.

In creating the office, I encouraged strategic collaboration by consolidating multiple offices that already handled religion-related topics. For example, Ira Forman, the special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism, now works alongside Shaarik Zafar, the special representative to Muslim communities, and Arsalan Suleman, the acting special envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. While their special mandates remain unchanged, their diplomatic experiences will be better shared and their insights more effectively implemented.

The Office of Religion and Global Affairs is adding value on some of the most difficult international challenges that our country faces. One is the fight against climate change, a priority for the Obama administration and an issue that

has long been important to me. It is also an area in which we have strong partners in the religious community. Even before Pope Francis issued his encyclical, organizations across the religious spectrum raised the banner against global warming. We have worked with many religiously based groups to advance the fight, including those preparing to participate in the U.N. Climate Change Summit in Paris later this year. Importantly, the office has ensured that leaders of these groups have been able to meet and exchange views with department officials on topics such as the Green Climate Fund.

The office is also leading engagement with communities abroad on a regular basis. Just a few months ago, Shaarik Zafar led a delegation of American Muslims to Jakarta to talk about ways Indonesia and the United States can address shared challenges. They discussed how best to take advantage of opportunities to collaborate in areas like increased trade and investment, and made a renewed commitment to the values of tolerance, pluralism and democracy. The visit was typical of our outreach efforts to build people-to-people ties, spread key messages and strengthen relationships with local civil society institutions.

Understanding Religion's Complexity

I understand that there may be concerns about the U.S. government engaging religion in this way. Some may worry

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we will mistakenly see religious influences when only political and social ones exist, or we will overstep the separation of church and state laid out in the First Amendment. While these concerns are serious, and we think about them daily, the goal is to make sure we approach religion with a critical and sophisticated analytical lens.

State Department lawyers have already drawn up clear and practical guidelines to help officers serving overseas identify what is and is not allowed by the First Amendment's establishment clause. We must be careful to not overemphasize the role of religion and to properly understand its intersection with political, economic and other factors.

We are also providing resources to support our diplomats' engagement with religious actors. The office is designing, developing and implementing training modules for a broad range of State Department officials—from ambassadors to new foreign service officers—on fundamental issues related to religion and foreign policy. These interactive materials and creative teaching methodologies will increase the knowledge of the department's officers serving overseas. The courses will help officers think about the complex issues surrounding religious actors, religious dynamics and American interests in a comprehensive framework designed to support our foreign policy goals.

These efforts are complemented by our work defending religious freedom around the globe. The ambassador at large for international religious freedom, David Saperstein, and the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, have long been successful at protecting religious minorities and raising alarms about religious oppression. The office works to execute its Congressional mandate to monitor, report on and promote the human right of religious freedom across the globe. With these two offices, I am proud to say that the United States is better able than ever before to engage with religious communities and ideas from South America to the Middle East to Asia.

In early 2014, I had the honor of traveling with President Obama to Rome to meet His Holiness Pope Francis. Visiting the first Jesuit pope as the U.S. secretary of state was an experience that I never could have imagined when I was an altar boy 60 years ago. The moment was both personally thrilling and an embodiment of the deep connection between religion and America's foreign affairs.

Today, we are approaching religious actors and groups in a new way. The State Department understands the central role that religion plays in the lives of billions across the globe, and we know engagement can open a world of possibilities. The challenging array of foreign policy issues we face today demands that we recognize a fundamental truth: Our foreign policy needs a more sophisticated approach to religion. ▲

Our Armed Society

The common good is the first victim of America's gun culture.

BY FIRMIN DEBRABANDER

Among the so-called advanced societies of the world, only in the United States are there regular scenes of gun violence and suffering like that witnessed in July in Lafayette, La., after an apparently unbalanced middle-aged man fired off 20 rounds in a movie theater, killing two and injuring nine, or like the even more devastating spectacle that engulfed Charleston, S.C., the month before that when a hate-filled young man began a murderous rampage inside a historic African-American church, killing nine people during a Bible study.

And in the month just before that in Waco, Tex., on May 17, a dispute among biker gangs erupted into an epic gun battle outside a chain restaurant in a suburban shopping center. A witness likened it to a war zone, with “maybe 30 guns being fired in the parking lot, maybe 100 rounds”; fam-

ilies with small children were forced to scatter for cover. In the end, that violence left nine people dead and 18 injured. Authorities collected more than 100 guns from the brawling bikers. Amid reports of other bikers pouring in to Waco to take up the battle, the city was locked down. People were afraid to leave their homes.

This is what passes for normal life in our armed society—enjoying the “freedom” that the National Rifle Association promises as the number of civilian firearms in the United States soars and easy access to guns continues. The gun rights movement has made sure of this. The N.R.A. has fought universal background checks for prospective buyers and uses its political power to limit the ability of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to regulate gun dealers and track illegal guns and guns used in crimes.

The gun rights movement's solution to gun violence is more guns—always more guns. Its supporters argue that we must ensure that the “good guys” among us are well armed, as Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president and chief executive

FIRMIN DEBRABANDER is a professor of philosophy at the Maryland Institute College of Art and the author of *Do Guns Make Us Free?* (Yale University Press).

STAND YOUR GROUND? Chris Williams holds a firearm as he attends a rally against Initiative 594 at the state capitol in Olympia, Wash., Dec. 13, 2014.



REUTERS/JASON REDMOND

officer of the N.R.A., memorably put it, and we must expand the number of public venues where guns can be legally carried. After the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., where 20 first-graders were killed, the N.R.A. recommended placing armed guards in every school in the nation and training and arming teachers and staff. Many school districts obliged.

Since the shooting in 2007 at Virginia Tech, where a gunman killed 32 people, the gun rights movement has persuaded legislators in nine states to allow students and faculty with appropriate permits to carry their weapons on public university campuses. Ten more states are considering similar legislation this year. It seems the very notion of gun-free zones is endangered. In April 2014 Georgia passed a controversial law—a so-called guns-everywhere statute—allowing residents to bring firearms into bars and restaurants, airports and government buildings.

The 'Shoot First' Society

In a lesser known and heralded policy position, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has called for stronger gun control. The bishops released an impassioned plea to lawmakers shortly after Sandy Hook, urging them to support bills that would make guns safer and restrict easy access to firearms. But American Catholics have not embraced gun control as a central tenet of their parish social justice agendas. This must change.

The gun rights ideology, which says we need ever more guns to deal with the threat of violence, that we must expand the number of public places where people may carry weapons and that we must legally protect people who use firearms, is opposed to the message of the Gospel and Catholic social teaching. The radical agenda of the contemporary gun rights movement undermines the very basis of civil society, reducing community members to atomistic, alienated individuals and contradicts the Catholic doctrine of the common good.

The gun rights movement is busy creating a shoot-first society. This is the upshot of so-called stand-your-ground legislation, now on the books in more than 20 states. Stand your ground is the logical, legalistic extension of our armed society; it effectively emboldens gun owners to use their weapons in public. Indeed, what good is owning and carrying a gun for self-protection if you are not also legally protected in using it?

Stand your ground was invoked in the case of the retired

police officer Curtis Reeves after he shot an unarmed man he argued with in a Tampa movie theater in January 2014. The victim had allegedly thrown popcorn in Reeves's face. His lawyer said Reeves did not know his assailant's only weapon was popcorn; in the darkened theater, he feared his opponent was better armed.

Fair enough. In a stand-your-ground society, it makes sense to suspect and fear your neighbor. You do not know what weapons he may have, how he might use them and over what complaint, no matter how trifling. What if he decides, like George Zimmerman, who in 2012 confronted and killed an unarmed teenager, Trayvon Martin, that you look suspicious, and he picks a fight with you? The law effectively can offer legal cover to shooters who, fearing for their personal safety, feel

justified in using deadly force in self-defense. Ironically, of course, that is precisely the feeling they are more likely to have thanks to stand-your-ground ordinances.

The armed society obstructs our ability to fulfill the church's teaching and work for the common good, a foundational concept in Catholic social teaching. St. Thomas Aquinas affirmed that we are political by nature and that the aim of the political community is to advance this common good. The personal success and welfare of each individual is bound up with it, and people cannot hope to advance individual goals without accepting and contributing to it; but the common good is not the mere accumulation of individual goods. As the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* puts it: "The human person cannot find fulfillment in himself...apart from the fact that he exists 'with' others and 'for' others. This truth does not simply require that he live with others at various levels of social life, but that he seek unceasingly—in actual practice...the good...found in existing forms of social life."

Cooperation and interaction are necessary conditions of this social life, the compendium affirms. But stand-your-ground laws drive people apart; they sow and then validate mutual mistrust.

America's profusion of arms makes us instinctively wary of reaching out to others, even in acts of charity. It becomes impossible to "seek the good of others as though it were one's own good," as the church urges, because an armed society opposes the primary and requisite identification with others. In a stand-your-ground world, other people are a source of fear—a source of danger. I have to worry about even minor misunderstandings, should my actions and outreach be interpreted as a threat.

America's profusion of arms makes us instinctively wary of reaching out to others, even in acts of charity.

A Deadly Force

Busy making guns a fixture in public spaces, the gun rights movement ironically compels a radical retreat from the public sphere. Guns are inherently isolating. A gun indeed communicates; it communicates a threat. This is its nature, and gun rights proponents admit as much when they proudly assert that the weapon on one's hip serves as a warning—a warning of deadly force.

This is a disincentive to look for Christ in others, as the Gospel urges us to do—as Jesus' disciples discovered on the road to Emmaus, when they invited a stranger to dinner and discovered he was the risen Christ. Jesus tells us that we encounter him in others when we reach out to them and serve them, when we extend the bonds of love. Jesus is found precisely in a rich, open public life. What is more, he urges us to reach out to those we would be least inclined to engage because we fear them or disdain them, or suspect them. "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me," Jesus tells us.

A favorite saying of the gun rights movement is that "an armed society is a polite society." That is, guns sprinkled liberally throughout a community will effectively scare people straight. People will behave lest they insult or offend gun owners, and God help any prospective criminals. But I imagine it otherwise: an armed society is distinctly uncomfortable, treacherous and electric. The gun rights recipe for peace sounds more like a constant tense and tenuous stand-off between warring parties. It is no prescription for lasting social peace and security.

Guns by their nature frustrate discourse; they chasten speech. If you should spy an armed citizen on a street corner, you are not more likely to walk up to greet him unannounced, but less so. Most people will hurry the other way. Gun rights proponents will object at this point, saying that if or when guns are a regular feature of everyday life—in other words, a commonplace—they will not hinder conversation. Perhaps. But this does not change the fact that guns certainly do not invite conversation and interpersonal contact. Guns are mutually alienating.

The theologian Jacques Maritain suggested how an armed society violates natural law. "Each one of us has need of others for his material, intellectual and moral life," Maritain explained in *The Rights of Man and Natural Law*, "but also because of the radical generosity inscribed within the very being of the person, because of that openness to the communications of intelligence and love which is the nature of the spirit and which demands an entrance into relationship with other persons." Of our nature, we are outwardly directed, driven and disposed. We cannot live without others; we require their contribution and interaction. On our own, we are incomplete. The church teaches that we must work in and with a political community advancing the common good in



Justice and the family

Finding Our Way Together Dialogue and the Synod on the Family

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1

Bradford Hinze, Ph.D.
Karl Rahner Chair in Theology • Fordham University

Justice Across Borders Immigration and "Family Values"

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13

Kristin Heyer, Ph.D.
Professor of Theology • Boston College

Who Am I to Judge? Ministering with LGBTQ Catholics

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20

Rev. Bryan Massingale, S.T.D.
Professor of Theology • Marquette University

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Justice in the Home Cultivating Love and Solidarity

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27

Julie Hanlon Rubio, Ph.D.
Professor of Christian Ethics • St. Louis University

JACK & MARY JANE BREEN
— chair in —
CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

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For more information visit
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order to perfect our nature.

Mr. LaPierre declares that supporting the gun lobby's agenda "is a massive declaration of individual rights." To be sure, gun-rights absolutism demands nothing short of radical individualism, sliding into a dangerous and foolhardy, and ultimately destructive, insistence upon self-determination and self-sufficiency. Mr. LaPierre is prone to listing the many hostile forces that oppose individuals in society, beginning with the government, which "can't or *won't*, protect you.... Only you can protect you!"

To gun owners, he declares, "We are on our own!"

Seeking Security

But an individual cannot ensure his security on his own for long. Real security rests on the integrity of society at large, which is contingent on the cooperation of others and, in a democracy, the rule of law. The N.R.A. touts gun ownership as the best way to protect your private property, your person and your family. But in a society without the rule of law and its recognition by others, your property is hopelessly imperiled, no matter how great your arsenal.

The gun rights movement willfully, at times happily, ignores the rule of law, but the rule of law is what ensures the seamless functioning of modern democratic societies. Everyone can go about their business because they assume their neighbors recognize and respect the rule of law. They share the conviction

that invisible, tacitly accepted and understood laws govern society and that everyone will behave accordingly and predictably. If, by contrast, good behavior must be ensured at the barrel of a gun, as gun rights proponents maintain, then all bets are off; I can assume nothing about anyone else's behavior. Needless to say, it fundamentally changes my everyday life and makes it impossible to pursue ordinary business.

"In the world that surrounds us," Mr. LaPierre told the 2014 Conservative Political Action Committee convention, "there are terrorists and home invaders and drug cartels and car-jackers and knock-out gamers and rapers [sic], haters, campus killers, airport killers, shopping mall killers, road rage killers, and killers who scheme to destroy our country with massive storms of violence against our power grids, or vicious waves of chemicals or disease that could collapse the society that sustains us all." The implication is clear: The rule of law is quite nearly vanished; civil society is on the brink, if not already destroyed in parts of the country.

These are no harmless, idle pronouncements. In the hands of the gun rights movement, they become a self-fulfilling prophecy. A proliferation of guns in society, increasingly prevalent in public spaces and used in stand-your-ground states to neutralize imagined threats, undermines the conviction that the rule of law still pertains. People who have no gun start to think they too should be armed—and ready to use their weapon. That erodes the rule of law even more. In short, the gun rights movement creates the world it warns us of—where differences are decided by gunfire, as in Waco.

To that extent, Mr. LaPierre gives up on humanity; he would reduce us to our mere physical being, engrossed in selfish, material concerns. "In this uncertain world, surrounded by lies and corruption," he told the crowd at the convention, "there is no greater freedom than the right to survive, to protect our families with all the rifles, shotguns and handguns we want."

The church maintains far higher aspirations. "The human being is a person, not just an individual," the compendium tells us, and "does not find complete self-fulfillment until he moves beyond the mentality of needs and enters into that of gratuitousness and gift, which fully corresponds to his essence and community vocation."

Political society is not an end in itself, according to the church. We have a higher destiny, an ultimate end in Christ. But we cannot hope to attain that end, Aquinas knew well, unless we inhabit a society that promotes the fullest development of the human person in all its capacities and encourages and makes possible outreach and service.

We require such personal preparation to invite grace, and this is achieved in a political society devoted to pursuing the common good. The common good demands that we resist the radical agenda of the gun rights movement and work to bring peace to this armed society. **A**

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Dear Pope Francis

Letters, with love, from young Catholic women

BY ELIZABETH GROPPE

‘Dear Pope Francis....’ Thus began many of the letters that were carefully placed in a blue binder in preparation for transcontinental travel to Rome. Others opened with the salutation: “Your Holiness,” “Most Holy Reverend Pope Francis,” “Querido Papa Francesco,” “Queridísimo Santo Padre” or “Caro Papa.” Some arrived on letterhead bearing the name of a Catholic school, while others were handwritten on polka-dot notecards or rainbow-colored paper.

The letters, in all their colorful variety, appeared in the mailbox of the Saint Mary’s College Center for Spirituality in response to an invitation issued to millennial women by peers at this Catholic women’s college in Notre Dame, Ind. The initiative was inspired by the article “A Lost Generation?” published in *America* in 2012 by the sociologist Patricia Wittberg, S.C. One-third of millennial women baptized into the Catholic Church in the United States, she wrote, no longer find a spiritual home in Catholicism. Millennial men have left the church too—but not to the same degree, possibly making this the first generation in the history of Western Christianity in which fewer women are active in the Catholic faith than their male peers.

The disaffiliation from the Catholic Church of so many young women is a loss both to the church and to those who have departed. The church is without the gifts and charisms that these young women could contribute to the life and mission of the body of Christ, and they, in turn, are without the sacramental, liturgical and corporate life that could be the church’s gift to them. Moreover, the loss of so many millennial women bodes ill for the future of the Catholic Church in the United States. Traditionally, Sister Wittberg notes, women have taken primary responsibility for handing on the faith to their daughters and sons. If young women continue to leave Catholicism, she cautions, the church will likely lose not only these young women but also the following generation of their children.

What could students active in campus ministry at a Catholic women’s college do in response to this? Moved by Pope Francis’ humility and evangelical joy, they decided to

write to the pope and wagered that other young women (ages 15–30) might be inspired to do likewise. In an invitation published in *America* and circulated through the Catholic Campus Ministry Association, they invited their peers to join them in sharing their love for the Catholic tradition and ideas that could contribute to the church’s outreach to young women. Two hundred and twenty-five Catholic women from 16 high schools, colleges and universities responded. They wrote of the significance of the Catholic faith in their lives, challenges they face as young women in our culture and means to enhance ecclesial outreach to their generation.



Body of Christ and Sacrament of Love

The letters penned to Pope Francis give voice to the beauty, truth and goodness that young women find in the Catholic tradition. “On the day of my confirmation,” wrote Kate, “I was sure I was a Catholic. As I sat in my pew with my older sister (who was my sponsor), I looked up and was so touched by the beauty of the church and the wonderful music that I almost cried. I truly felt God’s love and was inspired to carry out my duties as a Catholic.” Haley composed the poem “My Church, My Home” that expresses the strength she finds through Eucharistic communion in the body of Christ. “The church,” shared Anna, “offers salvation in Christ, forgiveness, and most of all love. Not the type of love society wants, but a genuine love.... We need strong Catholic women to speak out today, and tomorrow and the next day.”

The young writers speak of the church as a family that reaches out with compassion to others. They cherish the moral and spiritual formation they have received, the church’s defense of life and human dignity, the Catholic social tradition and the work of justice and peace-making. “I find the church’s focus on the poor inspirational,” wrote the university student Mary Jane, “and it has motivated me to use my knowledge to serve others. I hope to graduate in nutrition and work in a third-world country making a difference.” Many of the letters came from Catholic high schools and colleges for women. “I am fortunate to go to a Catholic women’s school,” wrote Emma, “where empowering young women to go out in the world as confident leaders is a major objective. More girls and women need this opportunity.”

ELIZABETH GROPPE is an associate professor of theology at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. She coordinated this project as interim director of the Center for Spirituality at Saint Mary’s College, Notre Dame, Ind. Letters are cited with permission of the authors, some of whom have identical first names, and some of whom have chosen pseudonyms.



READING MATERIAL. Saint Mary's College President Carol Ann Mooney, left, and Saint Mary's student Kristen Millar, center. President Mooney is holding a binder with all the letters addressed to Pope Francis.

Challenges Facing Young Women

The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith, the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops affirmed in 2012, includes among its aims outreach to baptized Catholics who “have drifted from the church and Christian practice.” This drifting, Pope Francis explains in “The Joy of the Gospel,” takes place amid the crisis of communal commitment that is evident in secularism, relativism, vast global economic inequality and the violence that this spawns, an economy that treats human beings as disposable commodities, the globalization of indifference, the abrogation of religious freedom and the weakening of family bonds. In this context, he continues, youth often feel “a general sense of disorientation, especially in the periods of adolescence and young adulthood.”

It is evident in the letters to Pope Francis that some of the consequences of the crisis of communal commitment have gendered dimensions. Economic inequalities in the United States, for example, are keenly felt in many women's lives. “Women are still discriminated against in the workforce,” writes Grace. According to the National Committee on Pay Equity, a wage gap in the median incomes of men and women persists. Moreover, families headed by a single adult are more likely to be headed by a woman, and almost 31 percent of households headed by a single woman were living below the poverty line in 2012. The United States is also one of

the few Western nations that does not mandate paid maternity leave for women who work outside the home. “It tore me apart to leave my seven-week-old son in day care with a stranger,” writes Teresa. “But without my income we cannot pay the bills.”

Salient in letters from high school and college women are the challenges posed by media culture and sexual mores. The music, movies, magazines, television and websites that fill the lives of youth today routinely sexualize women. Sexualization ascribes value only to physical sexual attractiveness and objectifies a human person as a thing for another's use. “Women,” Anna explains to Pope Francis, “are objectified in all the social media—turn our bodies into beer cans or have us sit half-naked on cars.” Jordan writes of popular music lyrics: “We are spoken of as property that men can just reuse and throw out again whenever they feel like it. I just don't understand why we are thought of in this way by the media, when we for generations have been the people to care for others and run the families.” Claudia reiterates: “Women are called bad names in songs.”

In a process that psychologists describe as “self-objectification,” the sexualized media teach girls to think of their bodies as objects of the desires of others. A study by the American Psychological Association found that the consequences for girls and young women include impediments to the ability to concentrate and impaired mental performance,

the undermining of confidence in one's own body, feelings of shame or anxiety, eating disorders harmful to physical health, low self-esteem, depression and the internalization of the presumption that women are sexual objects and that physical attractiveness is the center of a woman's value. "Today's media culture," Emma writes to Pope Francis, "makes it difficult for me to accept myself as God's good creation made in the divine image and likeness. Strong social pressure puts to the test my morals and standards. As a woman, I face degrading expectations, as if my purpose were to please men. In these situations, I sometimes find myself questioning: where is God in all this?"

Media images establish ideals of female beauty based entirely on physical appearance that are impossible to achieve and undermine young women's sense of their God-given goodness. Phrases like "20 pounds lighter," "the glow look," "look younger in a week," are words pounded into women's heads," Kelli explains to Pope Francis. "Appearance is all that matters in the world of the Internet and media. We forget that we are all made in the image of God." Grace shares: "I once struggled with body image. My struggle felt like it lasted forever. The

urge to become someone who I was not was so strong.... I would see girls and compare myself to them, usually beating myself up for not looking as pretty or skinny as them. The amount of self-hate I had for myself was so terrible." The attempt to emulate media models, Ashley adds, can lead to the eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia or to consequences even more tragic: "We are constantly pressured by each other and the rest of society to fit an unachievable description of perfection. Too many girls have been driven to self-harm, starvation, or even suicide because of the emotional torture they experience. This epidemic needs to stop."

The media's sexualization of human personhood no doubt contributes to the hook-up culture at many colleges and universities. The term "hooking up" refers to a sexual encounter of two persons who may be only briefly acquaint-

ed and anticipate no future relationship. "Today women are expected to adhere to the party stereotype," Kaitlyn explains to Pope Francis. "What this means is that women are expected to dress a certain way to get a man's attention. Men on college campuses feel entitled to sex. I am writing to you as a 21-year-old, college senior, who has watched many women degrade themselves to fit in and feel loved and accepted at parties. I want women to feel

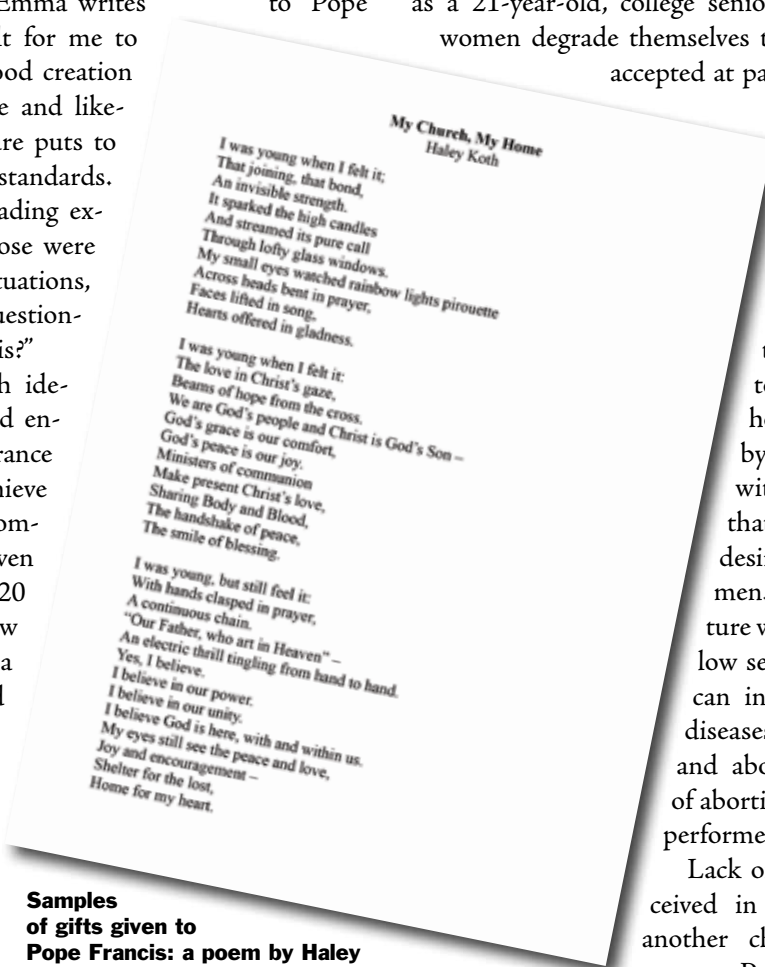
the love of Jesus Christ."

Lisa writes: "I am so sad to see so many of my friends giving in to the hook-up culture because they don't recognize their own worth.... We need you to remind young men how to treat us with respect." The hook-up culture is enabled by alcohol, and interviews with college students indicate that it fulfills the heart's true desires of neither women nor men. Studies correlate this culture with depression, sadness and low self-esteem. Its consequences can include sexually transmitted diseases, unintended pregnancies and abortions. Forty-four percent of abortions in the United States are performed on college-age women.

Lack of support for children conceived in difficult circumstances is another challenge for some young women. Project Rachel, the Catholic Church's ministry to women who suffer grief and depression after losing children through abortion, reports that

the women they serve were told by boyfriends or husbands that "they weren't ready for fatherhood." Lucy writes to Pope Francis on behalf of women in such circumstances: "What of mothers who were pressured to have an abortion and instead choose life? What can be done to help and support them and their children?"

Many of the letters lament the sexual violence endemic in our culture. "We shouldn't have to feel scared to walk out into our own neighborhoods," Kirsten writes to the pope, "but we have heard and experienced stories about the sexual harassment, all the violence." According to one study, 83 percent of girls in secondary schools experienced sexual harassment from peers. According to federal statistics, one in five women in the United States have been the victim of rape or attempted rape. Among the women reporting rape to the



Samples of gifts given to Pope Francis: a poem by Haley Koth, now a graduate of Saint Mary's, and, opposite, an inkprint by Megan Hastings, mission director with Saint Paul's Outreach.

National Women's Study, 22.2 percent were between 18 and 24 years old when the rape occurred, 32.3 percent were between the ages of 11 and 17, and 29.3 percent were under 11 years old. Research indicates that sexual violence has a devastating impact on both emotional and physical health.

Working Together

It the midst of a culture in which “the line between right and wrong is nearly erased” (Anna) and “no one has any respect for each other” (Julia), Catholic parishes are described in some of the letters as places in which young women find shelter, acceptance, strength and hope. “My parish,” Emma shares, “is my safe haven, my escape from situations that threaten my moral standing. The church is my source to reach God.... I always leave Mass refreshed and ready to face the world the way God would want me to. I thank the Catholic Church for being there when I need it so desperately.” Colleen writes: “I love the church for being a symbol of hope amid a broken world. I also love the church because it is made up of broken people seeking peace and moving toward perfection.... I find sustenance in the gift of the Eucharist and am comforted and made more whole by the sacramental nature of the church.”

The young women welcome Pope Francis' call in “The Joy of the Gospel” for “a more incisive female presence in the church” and their proposals in this regard include greater participation by women in visible lay ecclesial ministries and lay leadership. “We bring many special gifts to the church,” writes Julia, “such as love, happiness, and energy!” To enhance the church's outreach to young women, they recommend mentoring programs for young women (and young men), programs in which youth can support one another in living a Catholic sexual ethic when there is intense peer pressure to do otherwise, homilies that speak to the experiences of young women and affirm their God-given dignity, religious formation that uplifts female role models in Scripture and tradition, ministries of healing for survivors of sexual assault and support groups for mothers and other young women. “Everyone and everything around us tends to push

us down,” writes Anya. “We need the leaders of our community to build us back up again.”

The young writers offer constructive proposals for the evangelization of our culture, including a national Catholic initiative for reform of the media, a Catholic social media platform, a Catholic campaign for stronger national standards for maternity and paternity leave, church initiatives to reduce the levels of sexual violence in our society and an “image and likeness” line of fashionable clothing for young Catholic women that is not too tight or revealing, to name a few of their ideas. The authors are young leaders ready to act. “We must reach people through activities and communities that give them joy and purpose,” writes Colleen. “We are a generation who is so enthusiastic to do something meaningful; we simply need to be asked.”

Pope Francis personally received the bundle of letters together with multiple pieces of artwork and a liturgical stole hand-stitched by the students of Saint Ursula Academy in Cincinnati, Ohio. These gifts were presented in a general audience with Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Carol Ann Mooney, Saint Mary's College president, Kristen Millar, a Saint Mary's student, and Grace Urankar, a 2014 alumna. “We

are a diverse group,” Grace explained to Pope Francis, “with many experiences, hopes, dreams, failures, losses, but with so, so much love. It is not out of hurt, fear or distress that I approach you. Rather, I only want to express to you the great love I have known and received. I hope you will continue to encourage us all to love more fully, more openly and more radically than ever before.”

Although the letters were written for the pope, the voices of the young women call all of us to engage constructively the realities they describe. “I sincerely thank you, Pope Francis, for your role in the Catholic Church,” Jordan's letter concludes. “You inspire teenage women every day. We hope the Catholic Church hears our petitions concerning women in our society, and if you have time please write back. Pope Francis, I know we can do this. Imagine what we can do if we all work together.”



Religious Life Reimagined

Looking for opportunity in a misunderstood vocation crisis

BY SEÁN D. SAMMON

Lack of imagination and fear of innovation on the part of the church as a whole are two elements obstructing the renewal of contemporary religious life, for every baptized Catholic has a role to play in the task of reimagining this way of living. In declaring 2015 a year dedicated to consecrated life and challenging men and women religious to “wake up the world,” Pope Francis was speaking to the church’s hierarchy and its lay men and women as well.

Faced with fewer vocations and an aging membership, many believers appear to have forgotten the history of consecrated life and the Holy Spirit’s role in the work of its renewal. Religious life has passed through far more difficult days than the present. During the years just after the French Revolution, for instance, not only was its future in question; so too was the church’s.

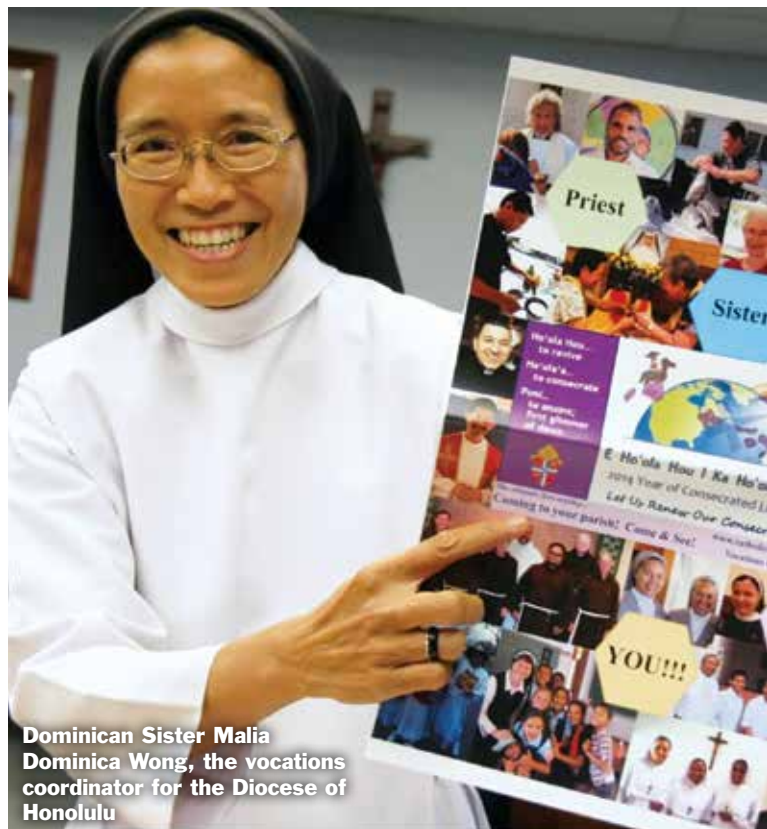
Just before the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church resembled a pyramid, with the clergy, men and women religious and the laity occupying the structure’s top, middle and bottom tiers respectively. The council’s unequivocal statement that all Christians, clergy and laity alike, are baptized into the one mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God and its imminence put an end to that view of the church.

This shift in understanding moved religious life from being within the hierarchical church to its rightful place within the charismatic church, helping to clarify its nature and purpose. Never intended to be an ecclesiastical workforce, sisters, religious priests and brothers are meant to be the church’s living memory of what it can be, longs to be and must be. Their job is to continually remind the larger body about its true nature.

Crisis Past and Present

Tempted to wring our hands about the current state of religious life, it is helpful to remember that religious congregations experience crises at each stage in their development. During their early years most groups face three: in leadership, direction and legitimacy. As they swell in numbers and spread out geographically they confront another: maintaining unity in the midst of rapid growth.

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Dominican Sister Malia Dominica Wong, the vocations coordinator for the Diocese of Honolulu

By the time territorial expansion slows down, the congregation usually has moved into a stable phase. Success marks its undertakings; members are held in high esteem. Having accumulated considerable human and financial resources, the group as a whole often begins to forget the reasons for which it came into existence; members behave as if everything depended upon their efforts alone.

At the onset of the council, many religious congregations found themselves in just such a place. Boasting more members than at any other time in their history and applicants aplenty, the vast majority of men and women religious believed that renewal meant ever increasing numbers, bigger and better institutions, and greater respect and prestige.

Instead, a period of surprising change ensued. Membership began to decrease through departures and the lack of new recruits; familiar ways of living and interacting were put aside; long-standing institutional commitments were abandoned. The groups’ service to the church became haphazard.

CNS PHOTO/DARLENE DELA CRUZ, HAWAII CATHOLIC HERALD

As congregations grew smaller in size and older in age, with fewer candidates entering and their place and purpose in the church less clear, a number of groups began to wonder if their way of life was dying. It may come as a surprise to some to hear it said that this is exactly where religious life should be today in the process of renewal. Like it or not,



Like it or not, breakdown and disintegration appear to be the means God uses to prepare congregations for deep and thorough transformation.

breakdown and disintegration appear to be the means God uses to prepare congregations and their members for deep and thorough transformation.

As they began to renew their congregations, were men and women religious naïve about the cost of change? Probably. To begin with, many believed that if change were necessary and explained clearly, everything would proceed in an orderly manner. But planned change can be as disruptive as unplanned change. It unsettles our lives and often leaves us feeling disoriented. Also, many men and women religious failed to realize that change would take place on several levels: the level of consecrated life itself, the level of individual congregations and the level of the individual within each congregation.

So, we must ask: Is there reason to be optimistic today about the future of religious life? To answer that question, we must admit that it is foolhardy to believe that all the church's various forms of consecrated life will renew themselves in the same manner or arrive at the same outcome.

The members of its monastic, mendicant and apostolic expressions trace their origins back to specific times in history that were fraught with unique challenges. They also hold fast to different understandings about community life and mission.

Religious congregations today face three possible outcomes as they labor to renew themselves: extinction, minimal survival and renewal. Some congregations have served their purpose in the church and will cease to exist. Others will continue but with a significantly reduced membership.

Still others will renew themselves. To do so, they must first be courageous in responding to the real challenges facing our world and church today; second, have a membership willing to allow itself the experience of personal and congregational conversion; and third, rediscover the spirit of their founding charism.

Signs of Renewal

In recent years, a number of lay men and women have claimed as their own the charism of one or another religious congregation. Neither pseudo-religious nor substitutes hired to cover a shortfall of vowed members in congregational ministries, they are sharers in the group's charism and co-responsible for its ministry. As such, these lay partners have an essential role to play in redefining consecrated life for the 21st century.

Today many lay partners are bound to a particular congregation through the group's works. Serving alongside men and women religious, they too struggle to identify those characteristic features that distinguish their efforts from those of other congregations. A parish or university founded in the Franciscan tradition should be able to distinguish itself from one established by Jesuits, Marists or Dominicans. Over time, lay partners, along with the members of the founding congregation, become a living endowment for the institutions in which they minister, ensuring that the institutional identity is clear and the founding values respected.

How can the members of a congregation judge that they have turned a corner in the process of renewal? When a significant portion of them admit that their present life and the group's structures are neither personally satisfying nor appropriately responsive to the major needs of today's church and world.

At the same time, there must also be willingness on the part of those involved to change their current ways of living and acting and to develop new and renewed means of service. The individualism that plagues a number of groups at the moment must be confronted. Members must also grow in interdependence and show willingness to alter personal plans for the sake of the common good.

Groups will also know that they have turned a corner when they are able to assess the congregation's works hon-

estly. Many of the ministries for which men and women religious continue to take responsibility no longer need their presence. They must be willing to put aside their concern with these institutions and ask themselves: To what absolute human needs would our founder respond were he or she to arrive in this country today? Where would we find him or her, what groups would he or she choose to serve, what means would he or she use to evangelize? Men and women religious were meant to be on the margins, in those places where the church is not.

Today congregations must take steps to ground themselves again in the biblical roots of religious life and to use this foundation to rebuild community life. This will require new models suitable for adults who have come together to share life around the Gospel. For genuine renewal to take place, transformation also must move beyond the personal. The networking of like-minded members is essential for any process of renewal to take root and flourish.

As they address these tasks, individual men and women religious and their congregations will develop a new sense of personal and corporate identity and purpose. For personal identity to be clear, a sister, brother or religious priest must be in love with Jesus Christ and have grown over time to resemble a living portrait of his or her founder.

Organizational identity, though similar to personal identity, has some distinct characteristics of its own. Groups

with a strong organizational identity stand for something; they have a backbone. They claim a mission that is unique or, if similar to the mission of other groups, different from them in some unique way. Finally, these groups have a set of values that have stood the test of time.

Examples of congregations that are moving into a new phase of renewal are not easily labeled. Included among their number are groups that have developed a more profound understanding about their foundational spirituality and have spent time addressing important issues of community life. No longer defining the latter as a family, they have reaffirmed that life together is for the purpose of mission, centered around faith and spirituality and marked by the members' genuine interest in one another, as well as a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Reclaiming Charisms

Our world and church today are facing challenges far more profound than the superficial problems often reported by the media. The church, in particular, needs to remain aware of them as it helps religious congregations re-evaluate their mission and chart their future.

For example, the Catholic Church has during the last century witnessed the single greatest demographic shift in its 2,000-year history. At the outset of the 20th century, almost 70 percent of its members were found in Europe

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and North America; today more than two thirds of Roman Catholics live in the Southern Hemisphere. That number is projected to continue to grow during the years just ahead. The church in the Northern Hemisphere also once focused its attention on the young; today it is dealing with the fastest growing aging population in human history.

The growing influence of Islam worldwide, the rise of Pentecostalism, our failure as a church to effectively evangelize emerging generations of young Catholics, a set of social teachings that were formed for a world dominated by the Industrial Revolution and the transforming influence of information technology are other important developments that need to be considered as well.

There are groups working to respond to the human and spiritual needs of today's world. My own Marist institute, for example, in response to Pope John Paul II's call for a greater Christian presence on the continent of Asia, decided to mission an additional 150 brothers to that region. Our initial appeal for volunteers brought numbers far in excess of what we had hoped for.

John C. Haughey, S.J., once remarked that attempting to define charism is a bit like trying to capture the wind in a bottle. For charism is a free gift of the Spirit given for the good of the church and the use of all.

Pope Paul VI, who defined the charism of religious life as the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who is always at work within the church, identified these signs of its presence: bold initiatives, constancy in the giving of oneself, humility in bearing with adversities, fidelity to the Lord, a courageous response to the pressing needs of the day and willingness to be part of the church.

What, then, does reclaiming charism mean for the members of religious congregations and their lay partners today? Something quite simple: believing that the Spirit of God who was so active and alive in their founder longs to live and breathe in each of them today. Reclaiming charism means letting the Spirit lead, taking a chance that God's ideas might, on occasion, be better than our own and asking those questions that are on everyone's mind and in everyone's heart, but on the lips of only a few. This approach translates into daring, even unexpected action, ministries that respond to today's absolute human needs, centeredness in Jesus Christ and his Gospel.

We are falling short in the work of renewal because our designs for the future

are not daring enough; fear and routine cause us to bicker over accidentals rather than embrace what is essential to this way of life; our resistance to change makes us reluctant to become involved with the Holy Spirit.

Consequently, those of us in our church with an interest in renewing religious congregations for today's world must develop a disposition of will by which we separate ourselves from everything and everyone that might hinder our ability to hear the Word of God. As a result of grace and through ascetical practice, what God wants for us will become eventually what we want; God's will becomes our will.

Such a spirituality does not come cheaply. It demands a habit of prayer that helps us come to know who Jesus is and how he acts and decides. So, too, contemplation of Jesus in the Gospels is the essential discipline that makes this type of decision-making possible. For contemplation of this nature schools our hearts and guides us to decisions that bring us closer to God.

Making a spirituality of decision-making our own will allow us to rise above the culture wars that have plagued our church for too many years now. It will allow us to work together to envision a religious life, in all its different forms, that is suitable for the 21st century and worth the price asked of those called to consecrated life: the gift of their life, a religious life that will, once again, truly "wake up our world." ▲

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DAILY PRAYER FOR TODAY'S CATHOLIC

A Grace-Filled Light

The transformational world of John Hassler

BY ED BLOCK

Nearly 40 years after Jon Hassler's first novel, *Staggerford*, was published, rereading his work today can still provide a deeply absorbing experience. The novelist was not just a Catholic version of Garrison Keillor, chronicling small-town Minnesota. Jon Hassler and his comic Catholic vision exposed the crassness and brutality of postmodern superficiality and post-postmodern cynicism. His sacramental imagination brightens a world grown gray with the banality of reality television and teenage paranormal romances. Praised by the novelist Richard Russo for a "brilliance...that appears effortless," Hassler's novels and short stories deserve renewed attention.

A festival in Hassler's honor took place in June, spearheaded by a close friend of the author in Brainerd, Minn., where both taught for over a decade. The 2013 reissue of *Simon's Night*, Hassler's second novel, brought a fresh perspective for a brand new audience. And over the last decade Loyola Press has published a memoir, *Good People*, and Nodin Press of Minneapolis has released *Conversations With Jon Hassler*.

Born in Minneapolis in 1933, Hassler grew up in various small Minnesota towns. He attended Catholic grade school for a few years, attended high school in Plainview and graduated from St. John's University in Collegeville. He earned a B.A. in English and taught high school for 10 years. After earning a master's degree from the University of North Dakota—he wrote his master's thesis on moral decision making in Ernest Hemingway's novels—Hassler taught at Bemidji State University and Brainerd (now Central Lakes) Community College. In 1980 he accepted a Regent's profes-

sorship at St. John's, where he remained until his retirement in 2001. Diagnosed with progressive supranuclear palsy (a disease similar to Parkinson's) in the early '90s, he continued writing and publishing until his death in March 2008.

Hassler looked into the hearts of Catholics and non-Catholics alike in the years following the Second Vatican Council. Hassler began writing short stories in 1970, imitating the style of the New England author John Cheever. A New York agent read one of those stories, and this led to the publication of his first novel. Over the next decade, *Staggerford* was followed by *Simon's Night*, *The Love Hunter*, *A Green Journey*, and *Grand Opening*, as well as two young adult novels.

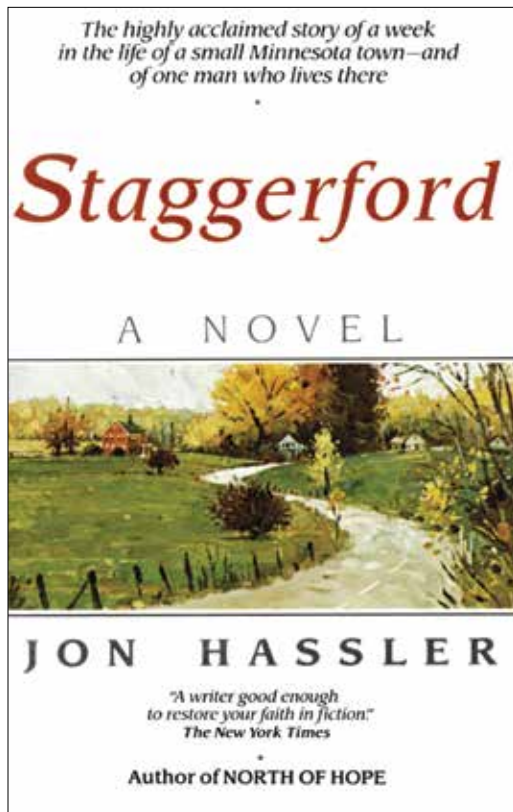
Like Alice McDermott, Hassler's Catholicism has a distinctly regional dimension. He therefore belongs in the tradition of Hamlin Garland, Willa Cather, Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson. His portrayal of small-town Midwestern life is more modern than Garland's, less acerbic than Lewis's, and less macabre than some of Anderson's stories

in *Winesburg, Ohio*. Cather's reputation now rests primarily on three or four unquestionable classics. Hassler's will ultimately rest on a similar handful of unforgettable works.

A More Inclusive Scope

As a Catholic writer, Hassler fits chronologically between Katherine Anne Porter, Flannery O'Connor, J. F. Powers and Walker Percy, on the one hand, and writers like Tobias Wolff, Andre Dubus and Ron Hansen on the other. Though likened to O'Connor because of some grotesque characters and situations, Powers is a more apt comparison. But whereas Powers, author of the acclaimed *Morte d'Urban*, specialized in stories about priests, Hassler's scope of characters and situations is broader and more inclusive.

Hassler completed *Staggerford* during a year-long sabbat-



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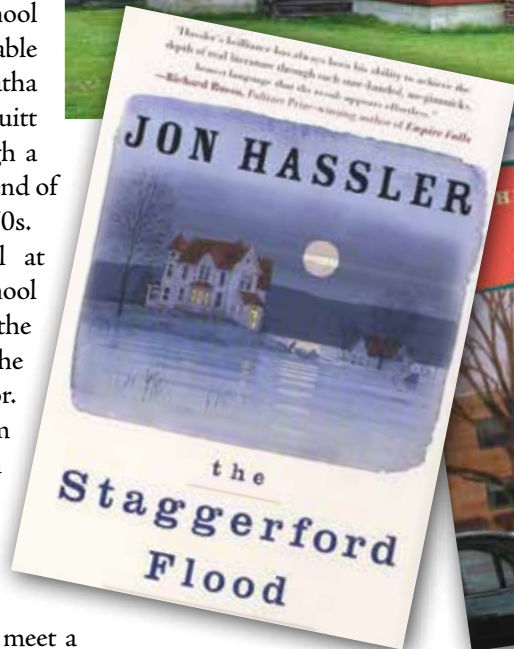
ical from teaching. He tells of that experience in *My Staggerford Journal*, a book that combines journal and memoir. *Staggerford* is on the way to becoming a classic. On the surface it is the story of a burnt-out high school teacher in the small, fictional northern Minnesota town of Staggerford. A lapsed Catholic who rooms with his former grade school teacher—the formidable old-style Catholic, Agatha McGee—Miles Pruitt seems to stagger through a week of teaching at the end of October in the early 1970s.

Readers will marvel at the picture of a high-school teacher's drudgery and the sheer exuberance of the satire and the humor. Characters pour from Hassler's imagination like the images painted by Fra Lippo Lippi in Robert Browning's famous dramatic monologue. Readers will also meet a comic principal and a lascivious dentist and his assistant, as well as a variety of students and a state patrolman who towers over everyone he meets. But woven into the humdrum life of Miles Pruitt is a tale of almost archetypal forces, including a figure of evil ominously called "the bonewoman." In trying to help a female student, Beverly Bingham, Miles becomes the subject of scandal, an object of derision and finally an innocent victim. Yet at the novel's end, the reader is left with a sense of grace and mystery despite the tragedy.

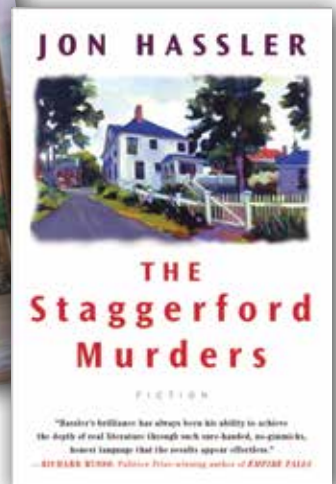
Hassler's second novel, *Simon's Night*, displays Hassler's understanding and sympathy as he takes a slyly satiric look at the elderly. After exhibiting what to him seem signs of dementia, the retired college professor Simon Shea has checked into the Norman Home, a residential retirement facility. A Catholic still faithful to a wife who had left him three decades earlier, Simon struggles through a dark night of doubt and fear before he finds his way out of the Norman Home and back to his beloved lake cabin—but not before he helps give a Catholic burial to the amputated leg of a former Norman Home resident. Besides a cast of memorable characters, *Simon's Night* also features a satiric, almost Dantean journey



PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/ JONATHAN THORPSON



Jon Hassler's boyhood home in Plainview, Minn.



through the hell that is the Mall of America.

The Love Hunter chronicles a last duck-hunting trip shared by two friends and fellow teachers, Chris Mackensie and Larry Quinn. Larry is in the late stages of multiple sclerosis, and Chris intends to drown his friend in a Canadian marsh, ending his friend's misery and leaving Larry's young widow for himself. Yet the three-day trip—a veritable hell for Chris—is filled with surprises and renewed vitality for Larry.

A Green Journey reintroduces Agatha McGee and sends her to Ireland to meet a pen pal who turns out to be a priest. Hassler said on a number of occasions that Agatha's conservative, pre-Vatican-II Catholicism expressed a part of himself, observing that when Agatha complained about the church's excesses, it relieved him from having to do so.

After the gentle satiric humor of *A Green Journey*, *Grand Opening* returns to address some of the issues that animate *The Love Hunter*: alcoholism, parental neglect and mental instability, as well as willful malice. His most autobiographical novel, *Grand Opening* remains one of Hassler's best-known

and most popular works.

The novel's densely plotted chapters introduce a host of fascinating citizens through their interactions with the Foster family, who had moved from Minneapolis to Plum, Minn., to realize the father's dream of owning a grocery store. While loneliness and the need for love and friendship drive the plot, small town gossip and religious divisiveness provide spice and fascination.

Each of these early novels received positive reviews in the local and national press. Focusing on *The Love Hunter* in August 1981, the reviewer for The New York Times Book Review called Hassler "a writer good enough to restore your faith in fiction." With these successes, Hassler gained a wider audience and, with *North of Hope*, perhaps his best novel, he confirmed his reputation as a Catholic author.

North of Hope introduces a priest, Frank Healy, whose midlife crisis does not prevent him from helping a childhood sweetheart and her drug-addicted daughter find hope on the edge of a northern Minnesota community of Native Americans. A sprawling chronicle that begins in Healy's adolescence and stretches into his middle age, *North of Hope* confronts contemporary evil and dysfunction in an almost post-modern way. The Rev. Andrew M. Greeley, of the University of Chicago, praised Hassler in a review for his "Catholic imagination."

Hassler's Gift

Despite the limited mobility due to his illness, Hassler continued to write, adapting two of his works for the stage and writing an original play, *The Staggerford Murders*. That play he turned into a novella, publishing it with "The Life and Death of Nancy Clancy's Nephew" in a volume titled *The Staggerford Murders*.

"The Life and Death of Nancy Clancy's Nephew" is a stunning novella of old age, depression and a search for friendship—and meaning in life. The protagonist, W. D. Nestor, is one of Hassler's most moving though also disturbing creations. A sympathetic narrator watches as the crotchety Nestor struggles through his early 80s, stoically mourning the disappearance of his son and the death of his wife and depending more and more on a young man whom he had befriended as a latchkey child in the town library. Years later, when the now grown young man drives Nestor to visit his Aunt Nancy Clancy, the old man experiences a mysterious moment of transcendence before his death. A testament to the author's dedication to his vision and his vocation as writer, "Nancy Clancy" should rank with *North of Hope* as one of Hassler's most insightful and moving works.

The epigraph to *A Green Journey* consists in two lines from the end of Theodore Roethke's poem "The Small," which celebrates the numinousness of nature on an early autumn evening. The last stanza reads:


*The small shapes drowse: I live
To woo the fearful small;
What moves in grass I love—
The dead will not lie still,
And things throw light on things,
And all the stones have wings.*

The last two lines are a distillation of Hassler's gift and a clue to his integrative incarnational vision. The final line, which might remind some of 1 Pt 2:5, suggests an almost mystical transformation of the material world.

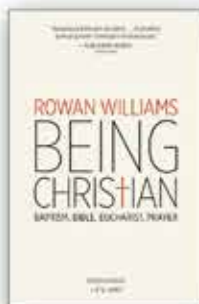
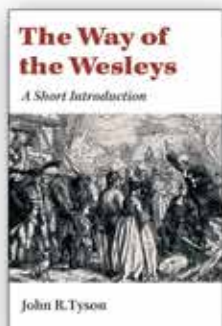
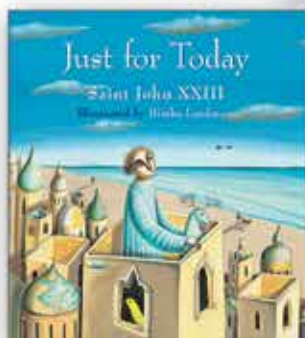
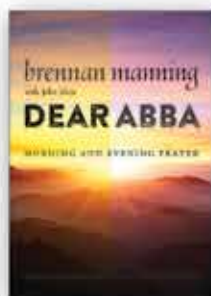
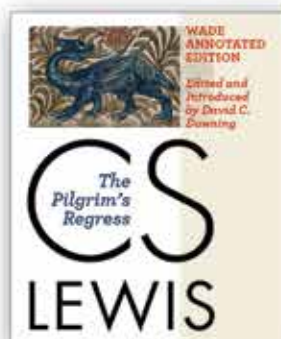
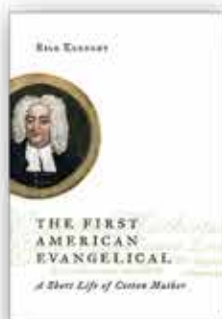
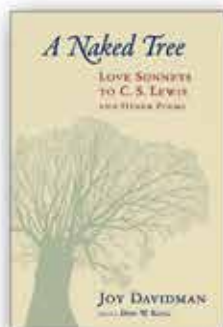
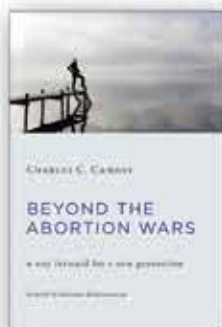
"Things throw light on things" is a more elegant but enigmatic way of saying that context makes things special. For Hassler, it is the context of the infinite that makes everyday existence special. Apt details, lovingly described or sometimes merely named, give value to characters, events or objects they surround, creating an aura of the infinite.

Near the end of *A Green Journey*, Hassler gives the lines literal form. Agatha McGee is about to leave Ireland with her friend, Janet Meers. While staying overnight in a fictionalized seaside town, Janet goes walking along the stony breakwater as Agatha watches from a distance. Agatha sees Janet along the shore where "there were dazzling white stones among the gray." After a few moments, "She watched in amazement as Janet, with a shout and a flap of her arms, turned all the white stones into gulls and sent them flying out over the water." Janet has transformed what Agatha *thought* she saw into a kind of apparition. Through Janet's agency, "all the stones have wings."

In an interview for *Image* magazine in 1997, I asked Hassler about the origin of his Catholic worldview. He responded, "I'm indebted to those first few grades in parochial school for teaching me that everything in life is connected." A bit later he added, "I guess maybe I see life as a whole." It is part of Hassler's gift, throughout his career, to see life as a whole, juxtaposing events and characters, thus yielding new meanings and interrelationships, making the entire work appear to fly. In a word, Hassler's style is not "magic realism" but realism magically transformed.

Again and again Hassler transforms the banality of evil into Flannery O'Connor-type characters and events. A crazed woman kills a burnt-out teacher; a brilliant teacher stricken by multiple sclerosis turns psychotic in his despondency; an unloved juvenile delinquent is crushed beneath a walk-in cooler like the Wicked Witch beneath Dorothy's Kansas cottage. But like St. Augustine, who speaks of God's love treating "each of us as an only child," Hassler (who includes many only children in his fiction) treats every character in that way. Jon Hassler discovers God's presence in everyday life, as his novels throw a grace-filled light upon caring teachers, open-hearted wives and lovers, priests and spinsters—and a latchkey child who responds to an old man's need for friendship and for love. 

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Not a Maverick Pope

Pope Francis will stand on American soil for the first time at 4 p.m. local time on Sept. 22, when he steps off an Alitalia plane at Andrews Air Force Base near Washington, D.C. Sources close to him say he has been looking forward to this moment, when at last he can make direct contact with the American people and open his heart to them.

His visit is arousing phenomenal interest and has given rise to attempts by commentators to reduce the man and his message to the political, ideological and cultural categories that characterize public discourse among Americans in general and among Catholics as well: Is he a liberal or a conservative? Do his social teachings validate more the Republican or the Democratic political agenda? Is he more aligned with the thinking of John XXIII and Paul VI or that of John Paul II and Benedict XVI? Does he embrace or reject American culture, society and economic life and, for that matter, the American people themselves?

I believe that those who seek validation from the pope's visit of any particular viewpoint framed by such categories will be deeply disappointed. Hence, I think it's important to understand that the centerpieces of Francis' message and witness, like those of the Gospel itself, escape all such classifications in essential ways.

To begin with, Pope Francis embraces wholeheartedly the clear doctrinal tradition of the church, while emphasizing that at the heart of that

doctrine is the affirmation of the God of mercy, whose first act toward each of us is a loving embrace precisely in the face of our own failings. While such emphasis has been warmly welcomed by believers worldwide, it has caused self-declared custodians of orthodoxy to subtly query his commitment to church doctrine, while overlooking the fundamental fact that it is he—as successor of Peter—not they, who is the guarantor of faith and unity in the church.

Like his Polish and German predecessors, Francis proclaims a social doctrine that bisects the current political divide in American society and affirms respect for the life and dignity of the human person at every stage of existence, an affirmation that is neither liberal nor conservative in the contemporary political lexicon and is not a selective morality.

This first Jesuit pope is a man of extraordinary inner peace but also a shaker and mover in the church and the world. He is a truly free man, not bound to any particular interests except those of Jesus. He continues to remind the whole church that “the poor” are at the heart of the Gospel and underscores the preferential option for the poor, solidarity and inclusion. He calls for an economy that puts the human person, not profit, at the center and highlights the urgent need to care for “our common home.”

Francis is a man of dialogue, committed to the culture of encounter, who looks for the best in people and is not judgmental. He is a peacemaker

and strategist who contributed significantly to the rapprochement between the United States and Cuba, tried to break the Israeli-Palestinian impasse and pushes hard for peace in Syria, Iraq, Ukraine and other lands.

Some portray him as a maverick, but this misleading depiction fails to understand that Francis is a pope who is ever listening to what the Spirit is saying to the church, and this re-

sults in an element of what some call unpredictability or surprise. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, grasped this well during their first meeting and afterwards described Francis as “a man of extraordinary humanity, on fire with the Spirit of Jesus.”

This is the pope who is about to visit the

United States. He comes as a pastor, a humble pastor, who never puts himself above anybody. He comes to reach out and embrace not just Catholics but all Americans, whatever the color of their skin, ethnic origin, religious creed, political allegiance or economic condition. He sees each one as first and foremost a child of God, loved by Jesus, a brother or sister whom he loves too. That is his starting point.

His personal decisions to speak to Congress and at Ground Zero are the clearest testimony to the fact that Francis wants to encounter and embrace all the people of the United States in their pain and their ideals, their aspirations and their failures, their greatness and their love.

GERARD O'CONNELL

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

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OUR MOMENT OF ZEN

Saying goodbye to Jon Stewart

Few things can humble me more quickly than a brief trip to the Home Depot. I recently found myself lost among the store's countless plumbing supplies, and when I sought the help of an employee, he looked at me with what appeared to be the disgust of an English professor being asked to spell cat. He grunted toward a shelf before shuffling off in the oppo-

site direction.

A few moments later a younger employee approached me and asked how he could help. He immediately showed me the appropriate items and applications. It dawned on me that I'd just witnessed a small act of translation. By listening to my questions there in the plumbing aisle, he'd helped me understand—despite my ignorance

and the overwhelming options on the shelves—what I actually needed to complete the job.

My small moment of relief and gratitude was lost on the employee but not on me. In many ways my humbling foray into home improvement mirrors the innumerable acts of translation we try to make daily in the digital age. We are constantly overloaded with endless oceans of information and complexity but we lack the ability to stay afloat, much less fundamentally make sense of much of it. Richard Saul Wurman referred to it as “information anxiety,” which he described as “the black hole between data and knowledge” and “the



LAST CALL. Castmembers salute Jon Stewart on “The Daily Show” on August 6.

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widening gap between what we understand and what we think we should understand.”

For millions of viewers over the past 16 years, Jon Stewart has been a bridge over that black hole in coping with the American political landscape. His departure from “The Daily Show” on Aug. 6 left many of us with a dif-

ferent type of anxiety: Whom can we trust to give us the daily dose of sanity we require in our polarized nation?

Stewart’s debut on “The Daily Show” in 1999 was well timed. Our body politic’s polarization was growing in the wake of the impeachment of Bill Clinton and the disputed presidential election of 2000. At the same time an explosion in electronic media occurred. Along with it came a bottomless need for content that was being filled by an ever-growing punditocracy, which helped turn the news media into the three-ring blood sport it is today.

Stewart stepped into that mix as a comedian who was not particularly known for political satire, much less topical humor. Prior to arriving at “The Daily Show,” he had spent most of the ‘90s hosting a few short-lived talk shows and playing supporting roles in films like Adam Sandler’s “Big Daddy” and guest spots on HBO’s “The Larry Sanders Show.” It’s not as if Stewart came out of nowhere, but certainly no one could have predicted that he would develop into what he has become.

And what he has become is one of the most incisive and intelligent commentators on politics and media in the United States. Those who try to dismiss Stewart as a liberal apologist would do well to read Jacob Gershman’s article “Why Neoconservative Pundits Love Jon Stewart” in New York magazine, in which conservatives confess that “The Daily Show” is one of the few places where the host is “fair” and “fundamentally wants to talk about the issues.”

“Fake news” is not a new phenomenon by any means.

The Onion has been around since 1988, and “Saturday Night Live” has had its Weekend Update segment in one form or another for 40 years, to name just two examples. But what Stewart has accomplished is different. Viewers look to “The Daily Show” not simply to laugh but to understand and gain some insight into the endless sound bites and spin that now constitute the highly mediated world of American politics.

Under Stewart’s leadership, the show has been as era-defining as “All in the Family” was in the early 1970s. Where Archie, Edith, Meathead et al. dealt with hot button issues of race, religion, gender and sexuality in a sitcom, “The Daily Show” has used its basic cable pulpit to puncture the ridiculous—and sometimes dangerous—nonsense that characterizes so much of our political and media discourse. His aggressive advocacy for a bill in 2010 that pledged federal funds for the health care of 9/11 workers was instrumental in rescuing it from a filibuster and having it become law. In 2009, he skewered CNBC and its host Jim Cramer for being disingenuous about the extent of banking troubles leading up to the collapse of 2008.

Perhaps his most famous moment didn’t come on his show at all but when he confronted Tucker Carlson and Paul Begala on their CNN show “Crossfire,” telling them that their program’s polarizing political theater was actually “hurting the country.” His appearance led to the show’s cancellation soon after.

The truth is that it wasn’t simply Stewart who created this phenomenon; his audience was a willing collaborator as well. The sort of media satire “The Daily Show” has produced over 16 years could not have had the impact it has had without an audience that has been steeped in media/marketing/spin since birth and has become sophisticated enough to see the substance and critique behind the humor. This younger audience gets its information in count-

A Rose

I bring you a rose
which you yourself created!

Did you create the rose
so that I could bring it,
or me, so that I
would find a rose
and bring it to you?

So, I give myself and a rose.
Thank you for the gift
of roses which I give back,
with my hands opening.

I love your roses and you.
Can you smell what you’ve made?
I can! They are exquisite
as you must be
to have thought of all this!
How I wish you had hands
so you could take the roses!
I hope only that you can smell them!
They are like incense!

JOE RICCIARDI

JOE RICCIARDI, a retired typesetter and newsman, volunteers as a poetry teacher at Newton Street School in Newark, N.J.

less ways—the web, television, social media, etc.; it is Stewart and his team at “The Daily Show” who offer context and candor.

And over those 16 years there has been abundant need not only for context and candor but also for outrage, sadness and every emotion in between. Hanging chads, the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the war in Iraq, Hurricane Katrina, Osama Bin Laden, the economic collapse, the election of our first African-American president and the debate over health care—just a small sampling of the issues “The Daily Show” has taken on. In the process of entertaining and informing it has also helped viewers feel less alienated and alone in our complex world.

“It can be said of three men that, in their time as communicators, this nation hung on their words, waited in eager anticipation of what they were going to observe and report and treat in their special way—Mark Twain, Will Rogers and Walter Cronkite.” When a UPI senior editor wrote this hyperbolic assessment of Cronkite’s retirement in 1981, television news consisted of three major broadcast networks. Cable television was in its infancy, CNN was less than a year old and Rupert Murdoch’s major U.S. media outlet was The New York Post.

To say that we live in a different media age would be an epic understatement. In evolutionary terms, news media over the past 35 years have evolved from harnessing fire to nuclear proliferation. The simpler world in which Cronkite plied his trade has fragmented beyond recognition. In the information age, Jon Stewart’s great contribution has been to hold up a fun house mirror to our shattered body politic and show us how those fragments might still fit together.

BILL MCGARVEY, a musician and writer, is the author of *The Freshman Survival Guide*, owner of *CathNewsUSA.com* and was the long-time editor in chief of *BustedHalo.com*. Twitter: @billmgarvey.

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WHO IS A SAINT?

Sainthood is a complicated and sometimes controversial subject. The significance of formally enrolling someone in the canon of saints is disputed, and the role of finances and ecclesiastical politics has over the centuries cast a shadow of incredulity over the proceedings.

Coinciding with Pope Francis' first visit to the United States, questions surrounding the meaning and purpose of this sort of official recognition have surfaced in at least two instances. Both cases center on North American Franciscans; and though they were centuries and a continent apart, both have attracted considerable interest and controversy.

On the west coast there is Father Junípero Serra, the 18-century missionary sometimes called the "Apostle to California." As a recent article in this magazine ("Serra's Sainthood," 8/31) explained, in the wake of Pope Francis' surprise announcement that he would canonize Serra during his visit in September, some Native American groups have protested, accusing Serra of maltreating the native peoples he encountered in the 1700s.

On the east coast there is Father Mychal Judge, the New York City Fire Department chaplain (and a friar of my Franciscan province) who died on Sept. 11, 2001, as he served first responders in a ministry of presence. Although personal support and veneration for Judge have continued to grow during the 14 years since his death, some people remain uncomfortable with reports that Judge was a recovering alcoholic and may have been gay (though committed to his religious vows).

Were these friars saints? Should

they be canonized?

Certainly, the two situations are very different. In Serra's case the concern is about alleged wrongdoing committed against the native peoples of California. Judge's case centers on the discomfort some people have with the complex humanity his story reveals.

In truth, neither friar was perfect.

But then again, that is not what it means to be a saint. Every saint was also a sinner, an imperfect and finite creature brought into existence by a loving God. Whether we are talking about Elizabeth Ann Seton and Francis of Assisi, or Serra and Judge, we are talking about people who responded—the best way they knew how—to God's call to live the Gospel and fulfill their baptismal vocation.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

explains: "By canonizing some of the faithful, i.e., by solemnly proclaiming that they practiced heroic virtue and lived in fidelity to God's grace, the Church recognizes the power of the Spirit of holiness within her and sustains the hope of believers by proposing the saints to them as models and intercessors" (No. 828). This summary makes no mention of preclusive past mistakes or lives of absolute perfection. Nor does the declaration that they practiced "heroic virtue" guarantee that each would-be saint never indulged in any vice in a moment of human weakness. To claim such a state would necessarily exclude everybody from the canon (maybe exempting

Mary, the Mother of God).

Rather than resort to black-and-white thinking that paints Serra and Judge as either saints or sinners, perfect or imperfect, we need to readjust our perspective. Saints are held up as models of Christian living, as spiritual mentors and intercessors reminding us of our baptismal call. The catalog of official saints provides a rich diversity of Christian guides, and different saints appeal to different people.

Serra will soon be added to that

roll, but what about Judge? Should he also be added? I don't know. But I do think that Judge provides a genuinely inspiring model of selfless Christian service. By all accounts he was a friar who tirelessly served the people of God, including many of those few others would serve: the homeless, people with H.I.V./AIDS, the imprisoned, the addicted, the disabled. And he served those who risked their lives

daily to help others, including firefighters, ultimately giving his own life in similar service.

It is the fact that both Serra and Judge were complex individuals that makes them so appealing. We should not whitewash Serra's relationship with native peoples but acknowledge the truth that saints can also be deeply flawed persons. We should hold up Judge's heroic ministry, as well as call to mind his own struggle for sobriety. We should look to these deeply relatable Christians as models of God's grace working where we at times least expect it, rather than in the false perfection we desire in the saints of our imagination.

Junípero Serra and Mychal Judge, pray for us!

The catalog of official saints provides a rich diversity of Christian guides.



DANIEL P. HORAN, O.F.M., is the author of several books, including *The Franciscan Heart of Thomas Merton*.

TODAY'S MORAL ISSUES

CHANGING THE QUESTIONS Explorations in Christian Ethics

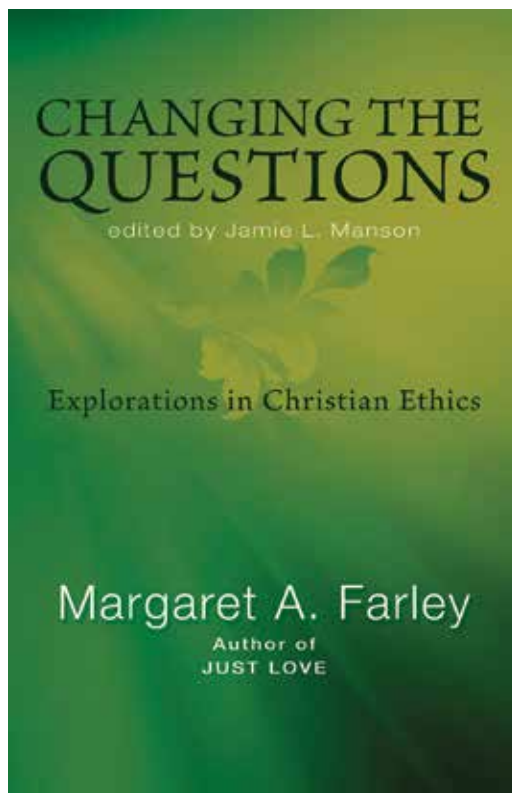
By Margaret A. Farley, edited and with an introduction by Jamie L. Manson
Orbis. 352p \$30

Although Margaret A. Farley's work is widely taught in colleges, many readers first heard of her when the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a notification about her book *Just Love* in 2012. Lucky readers were thus tipped off to one of the most influential theological ethicists of our age, who takes on tough topics—gender, sex, relationships and power—with clear-eyed compassion, in lucid prose. Longtime and new fans of Farley's alike should hail *Changing the Questions*, a new collection of Farley's scholarly essays, sermons and lectures for a broad audience.

The editor of this collection, Jamie L. Manson, Farley's student at Yale and a religion writer, has shaped a volume that demonstrates both the range of Farley's theological expertise and the persistence of certain themes throughout her long career. Two essays from the mid-1970s show her staking an early claim on the topics of romantic love and commitment, even while, as she notes in a footnote, we can see how far conversations around gender issues have evolved since then.

Just Love won both fans and detractors for the author's insistence on honoring individual experience as one source of moral insight. In an essay entitled "The Role of Experience in Moral Discernment," she demonstrates the legitimacy—indeed, the necessity—of this approach. The tradition of feminist theology, in which Farley locates herself, honors women's diverse experiences as sources of theological insight.

She reflects on that tradition in an essay arguing for a feminist universal morality, one that honors the tensions between autonomy and relationality and between the values of care and justice. Other essays include feminist reflections on hope and on respect for persons. In the latter, Farley upholds both autonomy and relationality as aspects of human persons that deserve



respectful treatment from others. The next essay, entitled "How Shall We Love in a Postmodern World?" returns to questions of love, commitment and personhood, urging attention to the concrete reality of others.

One essay finds Farley reflecting on the wisdom and just practice of "Moral Discourse in the Public Arena." Others show her engaged in discourse or urging others to it, like an essay calling Christians to prophetic speech in response to H.I.V./AIDS and one, first

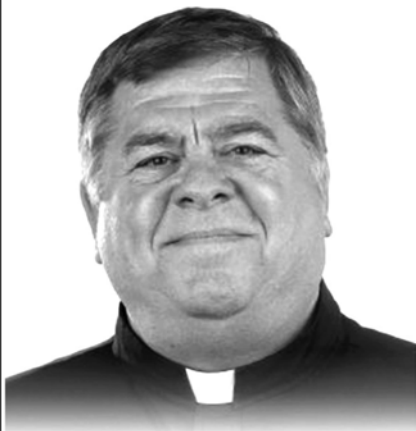
published in a secular biology textbook, reflecting on stem cell research in the light of religious ethics. Another, written for an interdisciplinary audience, reflects on Christian understanding of the natural world and humanity's responsibility for it.

Reflecting Farley's commitment to "changing the questions" asked by ethicists and by Christians, many essays insist that two apparently competing goods really exist in a fruitfully creative tension. Autonomy and relationality is one creative tension. Another is what Farley calls "anticipatory forgiveness," a stance that pursues the freedom that comes with forgiving an injuring party who has expressed no remorse. "Anticipatory forgiveness" maintains the humanity of the injuring person even as it insists on the wrongness of the injury and pursues healing for the injured one. Farley explores this concept at length in an essay published here for the first time, "Forgiveness in the Service of Justice and Love."

Manson suggests that this essay draws on Farley's experience with the C.D.F.; another almost seems to prefigure it. Farley addressed broken trust in the church hierarchy in an essay published in 2002 entitled "Ethics, Ecclesiology, and the Grace of Self-Doubt." She writes, "It is not possible for persons...to experience moral obligation simply because they are told that they ought to," and points to "a graced self-doubt, needed perhaps especially by those who are in positions of power."

Two essays reflecting on death draw on yet another fruitful tension, that between human transcendence and finitude. For Farley, the problem of death originates in the human desire for limitlessness: "We are the ones who love one another in such a way that we cannot believe that such loves will end." From reflection about our conceptions of death, Farley moves fluidly to a more technical bioethical reflection about

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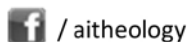
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end-of-life practice, guiding readers through changing medical, legal and social understandings of death and life.

In Farley's essay "No One Goes Away Hungry From the Table of the Lord," she shares some personal reflection on the concrete situation of Yale students planning communal prayer and argues for ecumenical eucharistic practice under certain conditions.

The sermons in the volume were preached at student services. It is good to see Farley in a more pastoral mode, yet never far from her key themes of justice, concrete reality, mercy and fruitful tension. In one sermon, Farley evokes "the discipline of nonfulfillment," like that experienced by Mary Magdalene when Jesus told her, "Do not hold on to me" (Jn 20:16-17). A discipline of nonfulfillment keeps believers in a fruitful tension in which they can rejoice in God's love yet continue to strive for greater union with God and God's purpose.

THOMAS V. McGOVERN

A PRIESTLY VOCATION

THIRTY-THREE GOOD MEN Celibacy, Obedience, and Identity

By John A. Weafer
The Columba Press. 282p. \$28

John Weafer, first lay director of the Irish bishops' Council for Research and Development, weaves narrative threads of three generations of diocesan priests, ordained in the 1950s and 60's, the 70s and 80s, and the 90s and 2000s. Through "conversations with a purpose," they reflect on their lives from seminary days to the present as curates, parish priests or retirees. Three qualitative questions shaped the study: How do Irish diocesan priests 1) understand and experience celibacy in their daily lives, 2) negotiate their priesthood within a complex organiza-

The fruitful dialectic between fulfillment and nonfulfillment resurfaces in Farley's essay on celibacy. While every Christian life exists in this creative tension, she shows how celibacy is a particular evocation of this "already but not yet" mystery.

Readers will appreciate Farley's lucid, lovely writing and her deep commitment to the concrete reality of complex ethical issues. Her authorial voice works through problems together with the audience, without preachiness—even when she is literally preaching—or talking down to readers. Scholars will welcome this classroom-ready collection of influential works. With it, many more readers will follow Manson to become Farley's with students.

KATE WARD, a doctoral candidate and Flatley Fellow in Theological Ethics at Boston College, coedited with Lacey Louwagie *Hungering and Thirsting for Justice: Real Life Stories from Young Adult Catholics*.

tion (the Irish Catholic Church) and 3) understand their priesthood and how this understanding has changed over time?

The author's Irish syntheses compare closely with 40 years of American research results, reported in *Same Call, Different Men: The Evolution of the Priesthood Since Vatican II*, by Mary L. Gautier, Paul M. Perl and Stephen J. Fichter. The texts deserve side-by-side reading. Readers may predict but will be unsettled by the intimacy of individuals' responses—priests being "bullied" by pastors and bishops or remaining in the priesthood as a long-term, loving, "sexually active celibate."

Weafer "created a space in the interview process, which invited the participants to discuss their experience of celibacy (and obedience and identity)

at whatever level of intimacy they felt comfortable.” His book is a bricolage of heartfelt, insightful disclosures about the priestly vocation. The comparisons across generations illuminate the conflicts generated by changing political and economic values in Irish society as it clashes with an insistence on continuity and certainty by people still in the pews, some priests and recent popes.

My empathy has never been higher for priests’ life stories—as a person with a 50-year vocation to the academic life as an interdisciplinary psychologist and as a lifetime marital partner. They bear witness to a resilient courage and a nuanced faith. Weafer’s deft use of their own words will enable readers to say: “I know someone like that, respect so deeply what he does, although I don’t know how or why,” or, “I wish I might have encountered someone that authentic in his own skin when I needed it most.”

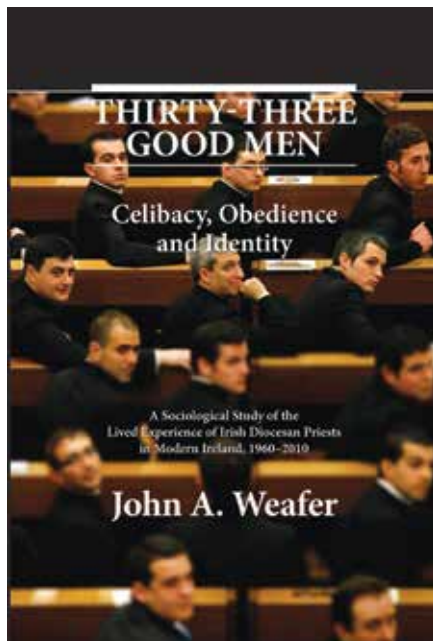
Melchizedek and St. Patrick

I imagined Weafer’s findings to mirror the iconic figures of Melchizedek and Saint Patrick. Their kingly righteousness and rugged pastoral ideals, respectively, suggest the competing rubrics for a priestly vocational identity narrated by these 33 good men.

The article on holy orders in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that the priesthood of the Old Covenant, prefigured in Melchizedek (Gn 14:18-20 and Ps 110:4), finds its fulfillment in Christ Jesus, as the mediator between God and men.

In contrast to folklore accounts, in the fifth century St. Patrick composed his “Confession” reflecting his evangelistic work, a pastor-bishop’s life-narrative.

I was like a stone that lies in deep mud, and he who is mighty came and in his compassion raised me up and exalted me very high and placed me on top of the wall... serving faithfully with fear and



reverence and without complaint that nation to which the love of Christ carried me, and he granted that, if I were to be worthy, I should at last do them good service during my lifetime with humility and sincerity...so as to leave after my death a legacy to my brothers and my children whom I have baptized in the Lord. This is my Confession before I die .

Weafer’s pre-Vatican II cohort

could identify with Melchizedek’s “cultic priesthood”: set apart, focusing on sacramental obligations, teaching the faith and accepting church hierarchy just as their filled congregations publicly obeyed the certainties of rules and rubrics. Orthodox theology, learned during monastic-like seminary training, went well with the legalistic Irish culture. Now older in mind and body, they felt celibacy ought to be optional, were unsure about women as priests, but thought that both topics deserved open discussion. After listening to so many troubles for so many years, they espoused a pragmatic pastoral approach.

The Second Vatican Council stimulated a shift toward St. Patrick’s “servant-leader priesthood.” The sacraments became teaching moments for pastoral service, inspiring creative liturgical practices. It was a time to challenge long-held assumptions about hierarchy and certainty. “Men of the cloth” transitioned to being “company men, with attitude.” Making moral choices took into account individual consciences. These priests felt celibacy ought to be optional and favored the possibility of ordaining women.

St. John Paul II inspired the revival


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of a “neo-orthodox priesthood.” The model fostered men again set apart, valuing church authority, cherishing formal liturgical rituals and embracing a sense of duty as defenders and restorers of traditional theological and moral positions. Celibacy is a defining, countercultural feature of their priesthood. They do not favor the ordination of women. Although identification with orthodoxy may be paramount, like both older colleague generations, they confessed a pragmatic and pastoral approach to priestly service.

Weaver concludes: “The Catholic Church has, for the moment at least, lost its absolute symbolic power, whereby it was able to construct a reality that was readily acceptable by the laity.” All three generations of the priests live with profound sorrow for the many children abused by other priests and are often conflicted about how best to express outrage toward the co-conspirators of silence who failed them.

Seminary did not teach the emotional complexities of human development, but rather to be “rugged men for a rugged life,” “lone rangers,” chosen as a “call by God,” then awaiting the effects of “the gift of celibacy.” How does someone live a “king of righteousness” Melchizedek vocation and be true to

Patrick’s “good service...with humility and sincerity”? Intergenerational priorities make daily life difficult: priesthood is “not the call of a social worker” (curate, 2000s) versus “my own curate has more vestments than God” (parish priest, 1970s). “The sense of church that was promoted over the years, to pay up, pray up and shut up, is still a good description of how the church operates. I am really disappointed with the failure of Vatican II, it just hasn’t happened” (parish priest, 1980s). Some felt support by their “band of brothers,” especially those who self-reported as being gay. In the 2012 American study, loneliness was the primary source of unhappiness and a felt lack of accomplishment from using one’s strengths was a close second.

Weaver finishes with: “I was left with the impression that their deep, personal commitment to priesthood has energized and sustained most of them in times of personal difficulties and societal challenges.... They believe they have been called by God to be priests, and for most of them, it is probably the best job in the world.”

THOMAS V. MCGOVERN is a professor emeritus of psychology and integrative studies at Arizona State University.

rosary, but they never quite get the meaning of their Roman Catholicism. They view their beliefs through a kind of superstitious irony. A Philippine politician, for example, believes he owes Jesus for helping him to pass a rural re-districting bill. So when Jesus “visits his dreams and scolds him for running too hard after power and away from faith,” he (in a Flannery O’Connor-like twist) decides to run in the Boston marathon.

The stories are set roughly during the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. There’s conflict—lots of it. One does not have to know Philippine history to savor the ironies in Alvar’s work, but two of the stories, “Old Girl” and the title novella, “In the Country,” depend on some knowledge of the political climate during the Ferdinand Marcos era.

“Old Girl” alludes to the perspective of Benigno and Cory Aquino during their three-year exile in the United States. A professor and his wife live in Massachusetts, where he teaches in Cambridge. Having escaped from Manila, he wants to go home now that martial law has ended, even if there is a good chance that he will be assassinated as he gets off the plane—which, as many readers will remember, is what happened to Benigno Aquino.

“In the Country” focuses on a journalist who secretly works for the political opposition and is imprisoned. As he waits out the eight or so years of martial law, he develops a code that he shares with his wife, who types her husband’s stories and sends them out to various overseas newspapers. Later, when he is freed, his 13-year-old son mysteriously disappears. (Events like these were common during the Marcos dictatorship.)

Alvar sprinkles red herrings through a story until, at the end, she reveals a truth that has been present but not apparent. A pharmacist, for example, lives in the United States and returns home (“The Kontrabida”). His father is dying in a poor Philippine neighborhood. His mother—sales clerk, cook, cleaner and

DIANE SCHARPER

MANILA TO NEW YORK

IN THE COUNTRY

By Mia Alvar
Knopf. 368p \$25.95

Mia Alvar was born in the Philippines, spent her early childhood in Bahrain and grew up in New York where she lives now. Yet after reading *In the Country*, her evocative debut story collection, one could argue she has never actually left the Philippines or, put another way, that the country has never left her.

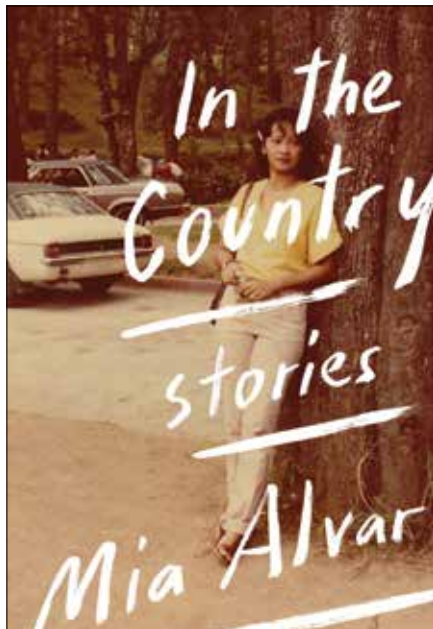
Details from Philippine life infuse these nine stories, adding authenticity and a memoir-like quality, as does Alvar’s frequent use of the first person point of view. There’s the “sari-sari” or variety store, “which smells like a heady mix of bubble gum and vinegar.” Sodas are sold from plastic sleeves. Statues are taken from the churches, and the girls “dolled up in their little white dresses to watch” festivals of the Virgin Mary.

Alvar’s characters walk in religious processions, go to Mass and say the

nurse—has run out of pain medicine. So the dutiful son steals pain pills and brings them home only to learn that his mother isn't the suffering servant woman he thought she was.

A cleaning lady from the Philippines lives in New York City during the time of the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers on Sept. 11, 2001 ("Esmeralda"). Her job is to clean one of the towers; and she'll get there, even if she has to pose as a hospital worker and hitch a ride in an ambulance. She does not give up, even as she sees black smoke billowing from one of the towers. She isn't sure which one but knows she has to get there. Only she's not planning to clean.

Danny ("The Virgin of Monte Ramon") is the least realized character in the collection. His story is not quite about a boy born with nubs where his legs and feet should be. Neither is it about the lies his mother told him. Nor is it about the evils of drug companies who dump bad drugs on third world countries. The story is about all of those



and none of them exactly.

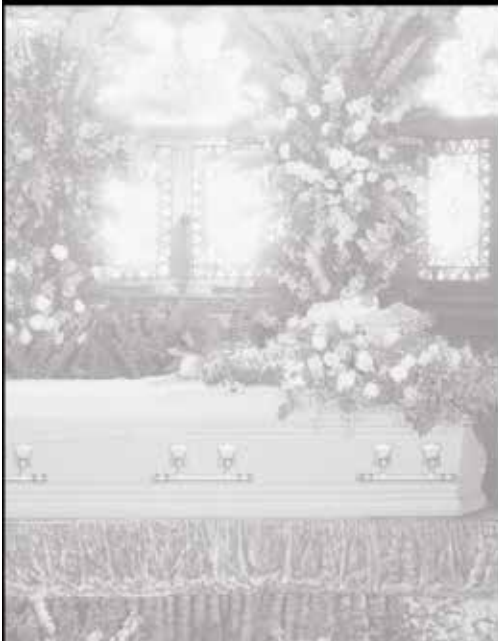
Alvar's families usually have a son or daughter who has to work abroad and send money home. An older brother, for example, in "A Contract Abroad," chauffeurs for rich Arabs in order to provide for his mother, sister and girlfriend. He

sends his sister to college where she takes up writing and creates stories about her brother's life abroad. She spends so much time writing "inside a story," as she says, that it "felt real."

Like most of the families here, hers lives in a slum where the houses are made of cardboard and tin. But when the First Lady (Isabella Marcos or a variation) initiated beautification efforts, the houses were rebuilt from cinder blocks with one room on top of another. A creek with a "fish-bone smell" flows down the middle of the development. After heavy rain, tainted syringes, beer-can tabs, bottle shards and eggshells cling to the banks. The sight and stench seem to stay with Alvar and her characters no matter whether they're at home in Manila or in New York, Boston or Bahrain—places where these stories are set and from which the best ones resonate.

DIANE SCHARPER, the author of several books, including *Radiant*, *Prayer Poems*, teaches English at Towson University.

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Solidarity Bridge is a lay Catholic medical mission organization in Evanston, IL. With our roots deep in Catholic social justice teachings, we channel the self-giving of diverse people of goodwill to bear the fruits of solidarity and mutuality, and to effect sustainable healing and empowerment in Bolivia.

The ADMI is charged with ensuring that every program is rooted in the transformative power of true solidarity, and that the whole organization remains faithful to its roots.

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The Greatest

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), SEPT. 20, 2015

Readings: Wis 2:12–20; Ps 54:3–8; Jas 3:16–4:3; Mk 9:30–37

“But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest” (Mk 9:34)

It feels good to belong—to one’s family, to a group of friends, to a team—to be part of something bigger than oneself. Belonging creates feelings of comfort, joy, peace and purpose. How good must it have felt to be chosen as one of the Twelve Apostles? And to have an inkling, then the growing certainty that the one who chose you is not just a man but the Son of Man, the Messiah. The one who called you to be among the inner circle, to be at the heart of the kingdom-building project, was the one prophesied throughout the ages.

Whatever the ancient Jewish equivalent was of the fist-bump or the “Yes!” while you high-five someone, it’s hard not to imagine the apostles getting a little pumped up about being the chosen Twelve.

This is the general context for understanding their behavior on the way through Galilee, when Jesus was telling them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” The Gospel of Mark tells us that they did not understand what Jesus was saying and that they “were afraid to ask him.”

Was this fear simply a desire not to hear Jesus, not to distract from their own scenarios of the future? It turns out that they had been arguing among themselves about “who was the greatest.” But this is normal, isn’t it? “I don’t want to be a football player, I want to

be the greatest football player!” “I don’t want to be an ordinary baker, I want to bake the greatest loaf of bread this city has seen.” And it does not seem inherently problematic to want to fulfill one’s human abilities and gifts to the best of one’s ability.

So what is the problem with arguing, “I am not just one of the twelve, I am the greatest apostle?” Jesus presents to his apostles a spiritual world in which true greatness is measured not by human striving or boundless ambition but by servanthood. This is a gift and an ability that does not rely on pre-eminence or superiority but on presence for those in need.

It is in caring for the little ones, Jesus says, that his apostles live up to the call of the Gospel. Jesus offers as an example a “little child” (*paidion*) and says, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.” The treatment of the child becomes the measure of greatness because it demands true humility and service. Loving a child does not offer prestige, honor or wealth, especially when a *paidion* in antiquity was generally in the care of mothers, nurses or slaves. This was not the work of a man, certainly not the hand-picked viceroys of the Messiah.

Yet the deep wisdom of God is at work here, for we are all children of God, dependent at all points in our lives on the service of others, in varying and different ways. Spiritual humility is not the manifestation of a lack of self-es-

teem or a sense that we are unloved and unlovable but the acknowledgment that we are dependent upon God and others, even for the genuine gifts and vocations we are to express for others. Our boast must be that we are children of the Lord and that God is our father.

To recognize that we are called as disciples of Jesus is to be at the service of others, especially children and all others who are vulnerable, marginalized and otherwise forgotten. Servanthood orients our relationships with others, for



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

We all yearn to belong, to be known and loved, but sometimes this can devolve into unbridled ambition, desire for human greatness and even fear that we are unlovable. How can we understand greatness in the context of the kingdom of God and God’s love for us?

when our desires are out of order, as James writes, our relationships become disordered: “Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you?”

We fulfill these cravings when we belong, when we are loved, and when we are part of something. Jesus calls us to the church for this purpose, to care for those whose own hopes for belonging have been dashed. When we bring our manifold human gifts to the service of others, true greatness emerges with every act of love and every word of compassion.

JOHN W. MARTENS

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LOYOLA

The word "LOYOLA" is written in a large, black, serif font. The letter "O" is replaced by a detailed image of the dome of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception at Loyola University Chicago, showing its ornate architecture and the cross on top.

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