

America

SEPTEMBER 2020

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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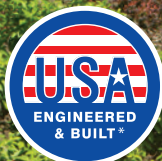
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Loss and Light in El Salvador

The Rev. Ricardo Antonio Cortez, rector of the Saint Óscar Romero seminary in El Salvador, was assassinated on Aug. 7. He was intercepted and shot by unknown attackers while traveling in eastern El Salvador. “Once again, our diocese is stained with the innocent blood of a good pastor,” said Bishop Elías Samuel Bolaños Avelar, S.D.B., bishop of Zacatecoluca.

Bishop Avelar was referring to the fact that this latest killing occurred during a year-long commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Óscar Romero, who was killed while serving as archbishop of San Salvador.

Again, the bullet. Again, the agony. Again, the senselessness. A friend in El Salvador wrote to tell me that the assassination of Father Cortez “was inexplicable, like so many other deaths here.” Bishop Avelar has asked the attorney general to investigate, but it is hard to imagine a successful investigation in the absence of an obvious motive and any eyewitnesses.

The priests and religious who have died are, of course, but one chapter in El Salvador’s sad story. While it is the smallest country in Latin America, its murder rate is three times that of Mexico. Crime rates have improved since a 2012 high, when El Salvador was rated the most violent country on earth, but crime is still endemic and the country is controlled as much by gangs as it is by the government.

In light of all of that, you might conclude that the situation is hopeless. Not so, say many of the people I met there during a recent visit. “I know the plans I have for you,” they might have said, quoting the prophet

Jeremiah, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Even God’s plan, however, requires human cooperation to be fully implemented. That’s where the Gloria Kriete Foundation comes in. Established in 2014 by the seven surviving children of the late Mrs. Kriete, the foundation is bringing material aid and hope to thousands (full disclosure: The foundation is supported by friends and benefactors of America Media).

In its first 15 years, the Gloria Kriete Foundation has assisted more than 2.4 million people through programs in health, education, community development, entrepreneurship and youth violence prevention, often helping people who are beyond the reach of the government.

One of the reasons for the government’s inability to provide essential services is the flight of capital in the face of the country’s instability. But the family of Gloria Kriete made a decision to invest the foundation’s resources in El Salvador, seeing the country’s people as its greatest natural resource.

During my visit, I spent a morning at one of the works supported by the foundation. The idea behind the Kodigo Programming Academy is simple enough: There is a shortage of trained personnel for programming and software development in Western Europe and the United States. The academy takes talented at-risk Salvadoran youths, trains them in English and computer programming skills and connects them to companies in the West. But Kodigo is not just a job training program. It also focuses on developing the character of its students by teaching values-based deci-

sion-making.

The program is also ambitious. It seeks to be an engine for building a middle class for El Salvador. Students are asked to make a commitment to remain in the country and work for its betterment. Since programming work can be done remotely, this commitment is possible and, in many ways more desirable. The cost of living is considerably lower in El Salvador than, say, Brooklyn or Silicon Valley. The disposable income that remains after graduates have paid their living expenses is then spent in other sectors in El Salvador and helps boost the economy.

When you consider that only 3 percent of those targeted by the program have previously received any employment training, Kodigo has great potential. In fact, it is already having a positive impact. Several of the students I met told me that without this program, they would be out on the streets seeking employment with gangs in the illegal economy.

Kodigo and the work of the Kriete Foundation are no substitute for a functioning government, one capable of bringing down the crime rate and providing a basic social safety net, but such a government is no substitute for a vital third sector either. And neither is possible without faith and devotion, the kind of devotion that Father Cortez reportedly displayed during his life.

Here’s praying that all that together will give El Salvador the opportunity and the means to be the place of lasting peace and prosperity the country’s name signifies.

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



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Brother Ronald Marin accompanies the relatives of 87-year-old Juan Tito Ramos, who died due to Covid-19, at the Martires 19 de Julio cemetery on the outskirts of Lima, Peru, on July 6. Peru has the highest Covid-19 death rate in the Americas.

Cover: The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem before the start of the Easter Sunday service, April 12. Ilya Yefimovich/AP Images

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HELEN PREJEAN
Stop the federal executions

Re: “Discerning Out” (July 2020):

I have been doing vocation work almost my entire religious life, so I read with great interest about what happens when a seminarian or young woman leaves during formation (either by choice or when it’s discerned by/with superiors that they should not continue).

The author told important stories that deserve to be heard. However, it was almost exclusively negative stories of discerning out—in fact, some of the worst-case scenarios.

My congregation (Daughters of St. Paul) used to do some of these not-very-respectful-of-human-dignity “dismissals” (e.g., in the middle of the night), but thank God we stopped decades ago. I’m sorry that other congregations continue these rather unhealthy traditions. There are many seminaries/convents that have a long process of discernment before and during formation that includes the candidate’s full participation every step of the way: seeking the will of God together, what is the person’s true vocation, what’s the best fit for the candidate and congregation both, etc.; and if the journey ends in discerning out, end in very amicable partings.

It’s also important to remember that those responsible for vocation work and formation in seminaries and religious congregations are bound by confidentiality with regard to a person’s vocational journey. The candidate is not, and therefore only one side of the story will ever be told.

Helena Raphael Burns, F.S.P.

Boston, Mass.

Re: “All will be well” (August 2020):

Mahri Leonard-Fleckman’s reflection on Julian of Norwich: There was no need to “translate” the dear nun’s words, which she was quoting of Christ, into contemporary English. In fact this is a disservice to the text. In contemporary English “will” and “shall” are considered equivalent. But in the time of Julian of Norwich they were not. “Will” in the first person added a notion of willingness and determination: “I will!” But “shall” in the second and third person added a note of obligation and debt: “You shall not steal.” Even today, this usage remains in legal documents with its “shall”s. So the correct text is: “All shall be well and all shall be well and every manner of things shall be well.”

This is not simply a statement of what is going to happen, but a statement of what must happen because God is the creator and sustainer of all things and ultimately God’s will must be accomplished regardless of human “freedom.”

Aquinas points out that people are only free when they willingly embrace God’s will. So much contemporary talk about liberty is basically illusion.

Paul A. Hottinger

Naperville, Ill.

Re: The future of Catholic schools around the country is in doubt (Aug. 10, 2020):

The future has been in doubt since the 1960s, and Covid-19 is being used as an excuse as to why schools continue to close. Unfortunately, it’s the schools in neighborhoods most in need of an alternative to public school that continue to close, and it’s heartbreaking.

David Lorden

Catholic schools are seeing a bit of a resurgence. Their lower enrollments and larger facilities mean they can socially/physically distance, allowing for classes to meet five days a week, unlike most public schools here. Several Catholic schools in my area now have waiting lists, for the first time in many years.

Laura Kuhn

Re: Want a Good Job? Major in Philosophy (Aug. 6, 2020):

I graduated from St. Louis University 68 years ago. I graduated in the old honors curriculum, as they called it back then [which involved a substantial amount of philosophy]. I also accumulated a B.S. in electronic engineering and an M.B.A. degree over the years, while raising a large family (my wife is a saint). The dividing line between a liberal education for its own sake and for utility is not nearly as sharp in real life as it seems in theory. I needed all of the education that I got to do the things that I had to do at the time. I feel fortunate that philosophy was a part of that.

Charles Erlinger

Some of the reader contributions above were drawn from the comments on our website. Letters to the editor can be emailed to letters@americamagazine.org, where they are always gratefully received.

Correction: A caption on page 21 of the July issue was incorrect. It should have read: “Auxiliary Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville of Washington, right, takes part in a prayerful protest outside the White House in Washington on June 8, following the death of George Floyd.”



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America Must Not Forsake the Common Good

The Statue of Freedom has stood atop the U.S. Capitol dome since 1863, the middle of the Civil War. The nation's motto, "E Pluribus Unum" ("Out of Many, One"), is emblazoned on the base of the statue, which depicts liberty as a woman. The hope of a united nation amid America's bloodiest war may have seemed naïve at the time.

"Our efforts must aim at restoring hope, righting wrongs, maintaining commitments and thus promoting the well-being of individuals and of peoples," Pope Francis said in his address to Congress in 2015, standing beneath the Capitol dome. "We must move forward together, as one, in a renewed spirit of fraternity and solidarity, cooperating generously for the common good."

Such hopes for unity may still seem naïve today. The world is coping with a global pandemic, and the United States is confronting its legacy of racial injustice. Under normal circumstances, facing foes like these could bring a nation together. But bitter partisanship has led us into a cold war within our borders, where candidates abandon civil discourse in pursuit of Election Day victories. In the heat of the campaign, the nation is in danger of forsaking its identity.

The United States was founded on the aspirational belief that all human beings are created equal and have a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The founders believed that a government, empowered by the consent of the people, exists to protect and preserve the natural rights of its citizens. They envisioned those rights being defended by the equal enforcement of law, not privileging people in power but promoting the common good.

The framers also recognized sin

and humanity's fallen nature, realizing that government leaders would be tempted by the power entrusted to them. Their blueprint for stability and national unity amid political divisions separated the powers of the executive, legislative and judicial branches so they could each check each other. Yet for decades, partly because of impasses in Congress, power has been consolidated in the executive branch. This partisanship and inaction by the legislative branch, which the framers may have only dimly foreseen, has also led to greater reliance on the judiciary to resolve national disputes. Furthermore, the executive branch has weakened the judiciary by politicizing appointments.

Meanwhile, society's trust in the media—the fourth estate—continues to erode. This lack of trust makes demagoguery possible. Citizens who fail to engage the "other side" are susceptible to deception. Influenced by technologies few of us fully understand, we can nestle into our curated feeds, brimming with opinions that affirm our own convictions, rather than engaging in meaningful discourse.

Society can progress together, but it will not happen without effort. Government leaders have set aside progress and compromise while continuously failing to ensure individual rights. The setting aside of the rule of law, which is meant to ensure equal rights, is but one example of this failure. Ongoing inequality among citizens represents another. The killing of George Floyd has awakened the national consciousness to systemic racism. Since the last presidential election, the #MeToo movement alerted Americans to widespread sexual harassment and sexual abuse. Furthermore, voter disenfranchisement and

the unequal enforcement of the law, including among the political elite, reveal how far this nation is from equality. A representative democracy works only when all its citizens are treated equally before the law, regardless of race or gender or class.

This summer, members of both parties celebrated the legacy of the civil rights leader John Lewis, who had also served in Congress since 1987. "When historians pick up their pens to write the story of the 21st century, let them say that it was your generation who laid down the heavy burdens of hate at last and that peace finally triumphed over violence, aggression and war," wrote Mr. Lewis in a *New York Times* column published after his death.

Some churches and pastors were at the heart of the civil rights movement, but too many others did not do enough. The Catholic Church must reckon with its historical failures with respect to race. Yet today's discord beckons the church to play a larger part in the process of national reconciliation. The church can be an instrument of reunion, bringing together the voices of individual citizens and ushering a Christian sense of unity into the public square.

That Christian unity reflects Jesus' prayer to the Father in St. John's Gospel: "that they may be one as we are one." Such unity comes not by denying persistent injustices but by engaging others as fellow human beings. Each person is an individual created in the image and likeness of God. But like the community of the Blessed Trinity, individuals are born into communities. Self-righteousness and performative acts of censure, including attempts to destroy reputations over an ill-chosen remark or tweet, make

civil discourse impossible.

This nation has never been uniform in culture, race or ideology. But it progressed, oftentimes slowly, to address injustice, defend individual rights and promote the common good. Citizens cannot let what they are fighting against prevent them from seeing their shared goal. Our political way of life cannot be simply about persuading enough people to vote for a certain party; rather, citizens must be willing to engage in discourse so that the right idea—the one that best serves the people—wins out. This requires honest, civil dialogue, compromise, conviction and openness to being wrong. The common good of the nation must be placed above ideological priorities.

Ultimately, in a representative democracy such as ours, citizens are the last defense against government corruption. Self-governance requires citizens to be engaged and to set aside partisan allegiances for the good of the nation. The Christian faithful can serve as models, as this form of government requires its citizens to have courage, to be vigilant against oppression and to be prudent.

“We are not enemies, but friends,” Abraham Lincoln, the first president to win on an anti-slavery platform, said in his first inaugural address. “Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory will swell when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

Being united amid disagreements is essential to being Americans. May the United States set aside cynicism and strive toward this ideal. As the nation enters the final weeks leading to Election Day, may citizens not only choose the best leader in political races but also unify to address prevailing wrongs through civil discourse. We are certainly many. May we also be one.

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The Electoral College is not what our founders imagined. It is time to rethink it.

In the presidential election of 2000, George W. Bush won a majority of the Electoral College while Al Gore won the popular vote by a margin of more than 500,000. In 2016, the Electoral College winner, Donald J. Trump, polled almost three million fewer votes than his opponent, Hillary Clinton. Some political scientists predict more split results like these if current projections hold true and the population becomes more concentrated in fewer states. One reason is that small states each get at least three electoral votes regardless of population size—a form of disproportionate representation that raises profound issues for our democracy.

Even before these elections, there had been serious efforts to reform or abolish the Electoral College. In 1969 the U.S. House of Representatives approved, by a substantial majority, a constitutional amendment, which I assisted in formulating, to implement a national popular vote system for electing the president and vice president; but the amendment later died in the Senate without a vote on its merits.

Previous attempts to end the Electoral College have failed because reformers have differed on how to change the system and because opponents have argued that the Electoral College has both provided stability and ensured representation for all states. But does fundamental fairness require that every vote be equal in a presidential election because the president is elected to represent all of the United States? This one-person, one-vote principle prevails in all other U.S. elections and was at the core of the amendment that passed the House in 1969. It is also embraced by the Na-

tional Popular Vote Plan, which I will discuss later in this essay.

The framers of the Constitution rejected a national popular vote for president, believing the people were not ready for such a system. George Mason, a delegate from Virginia, said, “It would be unnatural to refer the choice of a proper character for chief magistrate to the people, as it would to refer a trial of colors to a blind man.”

Some of the framers expressed concerns that the people would not be sufficiently informed of candidates beyond their own states and would vote for those they knew from their own states, leading to domination by large states, such as New York and Massachusetts. At least one framer worried about the people being misled by “designing” men. Others suggested that a popular election would not lead to a consensus on a single, national candidate after Washington left office. James Madison argued that the Electoral College would express the will of the people if the people chose the electors.

Hamilton’s Folly?

The framers ultimately chose a process of selection by presidential electors—who, in turn, would be chosen in each state by a method decided by the state legislature. As Alexander Hamilton envisioned, the choice of president “should be made by men most capable of analyzing the qualities adapted to the station.” He added that a “small number of persons, selected by their fellow citizens from the general mass, will be most likely to possess the information and discernment requisite to such complicated investigations.”

So why was there a serious effort to abolish the Electoral College in 1969? The previous year, a third-party candi-

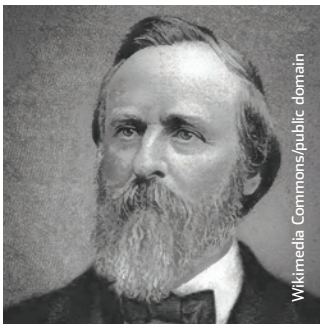
date, Gov. George Wallace of Alabama, had almost received enough electoral votes to deny either major-party candidate a majority. He wanted to prevent anyone from winning a majority so he could use his electoral votes as leverage; his plan was to ask his electors to vote for the major-party candidate who voiced stronger support for his segregationist policies. The incident raised concerns in both parties that the electoral process could be hijacked.

What the framers envisioned in their design—a kind of blue-ribbon commission with members from every state to select the most suitable person to be president—never really materialized. When George Washington, twice a unanimous choice for president, retired, the inherent defects of the Electoral College became obvious. In the election of 1796, one presidential elector cast his vote for president contrary to his instruction as a chosen elector of the Federalist Party, leading one citizen to say: “Do I choose Samuel Miles [the elector] to determine for me whether John Adams or Thomas Jefferson is the fittest man for president?... No, I choose him to act, not to think.”

By 1826, a Senate select committee concluded that electors had “degenerated into mere agents, in a case which requires no agency, and where the agent must be useless, if he is faithful, and dangerous, if he is not.”

From the beginning, states experimented with different methods of selecting presidential electors, mostly by state legislatures, by the winners of congressional districts (as Maine and Nebraska elect delegates today) or by giving all of a state’s delegates to the winner of the statewide popular vote.

By the middle of the 19th cen-



Presidents chosen by the Electoral College: Rutherford B. Hayes, Benjamin Harrison, George W. Bush and Donald J. Trump

tury, the statewide popular vote had become the dominant method of selecting electors. James Madison had remarked in 1823 that, although he preferred voting by district, winner-take-all voting was “the only expedient for baffling the policy of the particular states which had set the example” by adopting that system. In other words, states could maintain their political clout only by going along with the winner-take-all method.

How to Win With Fewer Votes

If the idea of an independent Electoral College did not survive the first few presidential elections, another principle has persevered: that each candidate’s breadth of geographic support is more important than raw vote totals.

Under the Constitution, each state has Electoral College votes equal to its representation in Congress, including the two U.S. senators given to each state regardless of population. (Under the 23rd Amendment, ratified in 1961, the District of Columbia has three electoral votes as if it were a state.) The apportionment of electoral votes results in citizens in different states having different voting power: Wyoming currently has one electoral vote for every 140,000 or so adults, while California has one electoral vote for every 510,000 adults.

Following the establishment of the current two-party system just before the Civil War, popular vote winners lost the Electoral College by small margins in 1876 and 1888. This

split did not occur again until 2000 and then 2016, when Democrats won several large states by wide margins, adding to their national vote total without helping them in the Electoral College. But small shifts in votes would have given the election to the popular vote loser in a number of other elections (1844, 1884, 1888, 1916, 1928, 1948, 1960, 1976 and 2004).

Not surprisingly, there have been many proposals for constitutional amendments to change the system. In addition to choosing the president by national popular vote, these have included: awarding electoral votes according to the winner of each congressional district (again, James Madison’s preference); proportional representation by state (so that a candidate who wins 40 percent of the vote gets roughly 40 percent of the state’s electors); and codifying what most states do now (giving all electoral votes to the popular vote winner in each state).

A more inventive solution is the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact, which was developed after the 2000 election. As of now, 15 states and the District of Columbia have entered into an agreement to award their electoral votes to the national popular vote winner—provided that states with at least 270 electoral votes join the compact. Effectively, the plan is an end run around the need for a constitutional amendment providing for a popular election of the president. Students in Fordham Law’s Democracy and the Constitution Clinic have endorsed the plan


but added that it should be implemented with ranked-choice voting to ensure that the candidate who ultimately wins has received a majority of the national popular vote.

None of these proposals will be enacted before the election of 2020, when the major-party nominees will be cherry-picking the states in which to campaign and spend money in an effort to secure the necessary 270 electoral votes to win the election. But hasn’t the time arrived for the candidates to pursue votes wherever they exist in the country? True, the states with the largest populations might have more influence over election outcomes than they do now. But most elections would still be close, so candidates would need to appeal to voters across the country, which could encourage moderation in the country’s politics.

As Gouverneur Morris declared at the Constitutional Convention of 1787: “[If the president] is to be the Guardian of the people, let him be appointed by the people.”

In endorsing the National Popular Vote Plan in 2006, former U.S. Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana, who was the principal sponsor in the 1970s of an amendment to abolish the Electoral College, observed, “In the United States...one person, one vote is more than a clever phrase. It’s the cornerstone of justice and equality.”

John D. Feerick is a professor at the Fordham University School of Law in New York. He was dean of the school from 1982 to 2002.



Without quick action, Covid-19 will create global hunger crisis by year's end

By Kevin Clarke

As Covid-19 continues to stalk the globe, food insecurity in vulnerable societies has begun to rise. Guatemalans have been advised by the government to signal that they need food by walking to the nearest main road and waving a white flag. According to Bill O'Keefe, the executive vice president for mission and mobilization at Catholic Relief Services, C.R.S. teams frequently encountered those makeshift distress signals along Guatemala's roadways this summer.

A hunger crisis, predicted to get much worse by the fall, is already beginning in Guatemala because of the loss of income caused by pandemic lockdowns and the related disruption of food production and distribution systems. Even before Covid-19 struck, Somalia was contending with drought and a locust infestation that decimated crop yields. The pandemic has also disrupted global shipping, an acute threat to a nation that is largely dependent on food imports. Hunger in Somalia, Mr. O'Keefe fears, is likely to get much worse. "Covid comes on top of other things that are going on; and in the most fragile places, where this breakdown in food systems is happening, there are already serious problems," he said.

Food insecurity has been on the rise for years even

before the pandemic, according to researchers at the U.N. World Food Program, because of conflict, climate change and economic downturns. Now they report that at least 25 countries around the world face acute food insecurity because of Covid-19.

While the greatest concentration of need is in Africa, according to the Early Warning Analysis of Acute Food Security Hotspots, compiled by the W.F.P. and the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization, countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East and Asia also face dangerous levels of food insecurity.

"Three months ago at the U.N. Security Council, I told world leaders that we ran the risk of a famine of biblical proportions," said David Beasley, W.F.P.'s executive director, speaking to the press on July 17. "Our latest data tell us that since then, millions of the world's very poorest families have been forced even closer to the abyss. Livelihoods are being destroyed at an unprecedented rate, and now their lives are in imminent danger from starvation.

"Make no mistake," he warned. "If we do not act now to end this pandemic of human suffering, many people will die."

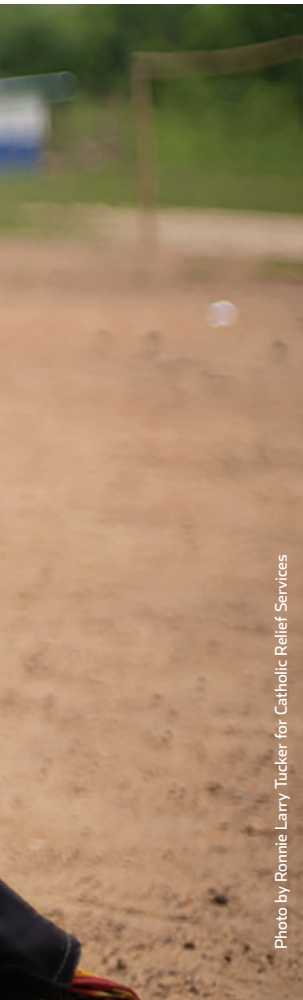


Photo by Ronnie Larry Tucker for Catholic Relief Services

Mariatu Sankoh joins a socially distanced Catholic Relief Services food distribution in Sierra Leone.

The number of acutely food-insecure people could increase from an estimated 149 million pre-Covid-19 to 270 million before the end of the year if life-saving assistance is not provided quickly, W.F.P. officials said. U.N. officials are seeking \$5 billion from donor states to reach up to 138 million people with food assistance, an effort that represents the biggest mobilization in the organization's history.

According to other U.N. estimates, up to 6,000 children could die every day from preventable causes before the end of the year as a result of pandemic-related disruptions to essential health and nutrition services.

Dr. Charles Owubah, the chief executive officer of Action Against Hunger, urged a dramatic response to the looming crisis. "The world must act now to help the most vulnerable both from Covid-19 itself but also from the secondary impacts of Covid-19," he said, commenting in an email. "Communities could be pushed beyond the

brink; we're concerned not only about Covid-19 itself, but the pandemic's secondary effects that could increase poverty and hunger to levels we have not seen for decades."

"Acutely food insecure" may sound like bloodless bureaucratic jargon, but behind the expression lurks profound human suffering. Mr. O'Keefe explained that W.F.P. officials are trying to sound an alarm as accurately and comprehensively as possible. The expression is meant to describe broad hunger conditions that could mean anything from outright starvation in some nations to chronic, gnawing hunger that can contribute to social and personal breakdowns.

In practical terms, he said, acute food insecurity means the inability to produce or purchase enough food to meet daily dietary needs. "That means having to skip meals. It means going to bed hungry; it means relying on a less diverse diet, on less expensive staples. It means having to sell your livestock and other productive assets; it means selling your future to survive now."

The world's hungry, he said, will be increasingly susceptible to a variety of short- and long-term health and developmental threats, including depressed immune sys-

tems (a special concern during the pandemic) and, among chronically undernourished children, stunted growth and thwarted brain development. The impact could be permanent on children and catastrophic on adults, he said.

The pandemic has already led to a spike in food prices in Guatemala and other states with high rates of food insecurity. Because of the coronavirus, "many people who rely on seasonal labor have been unable to get those jobs," Mr. O'Keefe said.

Almost two billion workers—two-thirds of the world's labor force—are employed in the informal economy, according to the U.N.'s International Labor Organization. Those workers typically fall outside national unemployment relief policies and now face an 82 percent decline in income because of lockdowns and other restrictions propelled by the pandemic.

Remittances from workers in the United States have traditionally been a lifeline to their relatives in Central America; but with many of those U.S.-based family members unable to work because of Covid-19 restrictions, that crucial income stream has dried up, he added. As a result, farmers in Guatemala, for example, have been selling cattle and productive assets that may put food on their table now but will mean greater impoverishment by the next growing season.

U.N. officials predict that women, children, elderly people, Indigenous populations and people on the move—refugees, displaced people and migrants—will be among those suffering the most by the end of the year. According to the W.F.P. report, "The urban poor living in densely populated areas, and households depending on the informal sector (both rural and urban), are expected to be among the hardest hit."

The report adds: "For children from already impoverished and food-insecure households, the negative effects of the crisis, including extended school closures and missing out on school meals, could have lifelong effects and further perpetuate the vicious cycle of poverty and inequality."

As the pandemic continues, at times locking out millions around the world from work, donor funding for humanitarian and development needs has fallen across the board, according to Mr. O'Keefe. Americans may be too distracted by their own crises related to the pandemic to worry about its impact overseas.

"Many donors have told us they have been moved to help vulnerable communities outside the United States, since we are all in this pandemic together," said Dr. Owubah. "But we don't know what the fundraising landscape

will look like later this year or next year. Given the continuing economic crisis in the United States, many individual donors are already stretched thin or are focused on their own families and communities. At the same time, given projections for rising poverty and hunger, we know that the world's poorest communities will need even more support in the months to come."

At the level of government response, Mr. O'Keefe has been gratified to see that international humanitarian aid has been part of the emergency response packages negotiated in the U.S. Congress as the impact of the pandemic on the global economy became clear. In addition, the European Union has mobilized nearly 16 billion euros in a comprehensive overseas response to the pandemic, and more aid is expected.

Since the beginning of the crisis in March, the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development have committed more than \$1.5 billion in emergency health, humanitarian, economic and development assistance; but much more money has to be raised quickly

to match the need, according to humanitarian groups. The U.N. has been seeking \$10 billion in emergency funding to confront Covid-19; by the end of July just \$2.5 billion had been pledged or received.

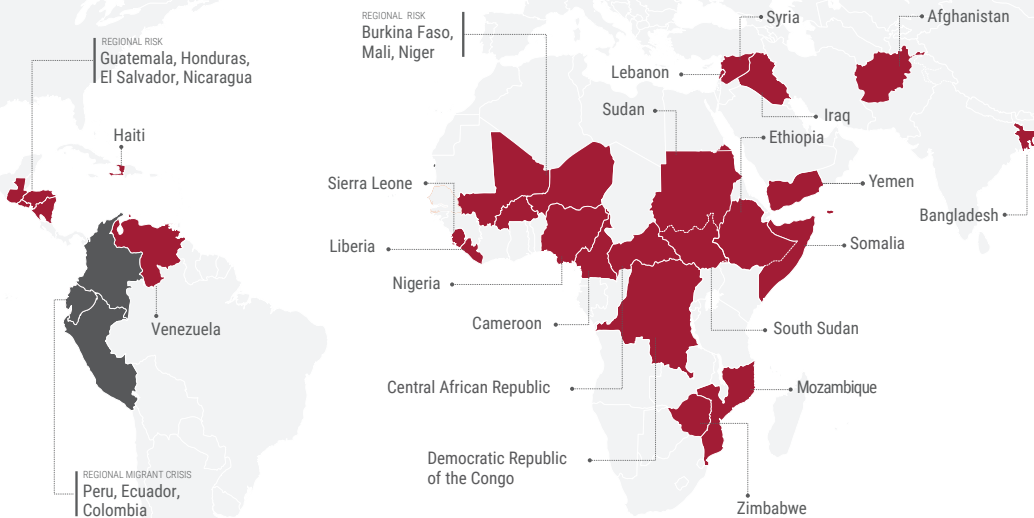
Mr. O'Keefe and other development and relief advocates are pressing for an additional \$20 billion in overseas aid in the latest coronavirus relief package under discussion in Washington to assist the more than 70 percent of countries the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention describes as ill-equipped to handle the coronavirus. "I think most members of Congress understand that if we don't deal with the pandemic outside our borders, we are never going to be able to deal with it inside our borders," Mr. O'Keefe said. "That's just the nature of a pandemic; this is going to cross borders.

"We're not going to succeed here if we don't succeed everywhere."

Kevin Clarke, *chief correspondent.*
Twitter: @ClarkeAtAmerica.

ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY HOTSPOTS

Sources: U.N. World Food Program; U.N. International Labor Organization; Unicef.



The "acutely food insecure" in the world could reach **270 million people by the end of 2020**—121 million more than initial estimates—because of Covid-19.

Covid-19 has meant the loss of **400 million** full-time jobs worldwide and a 14 percent reduction in global working hours.

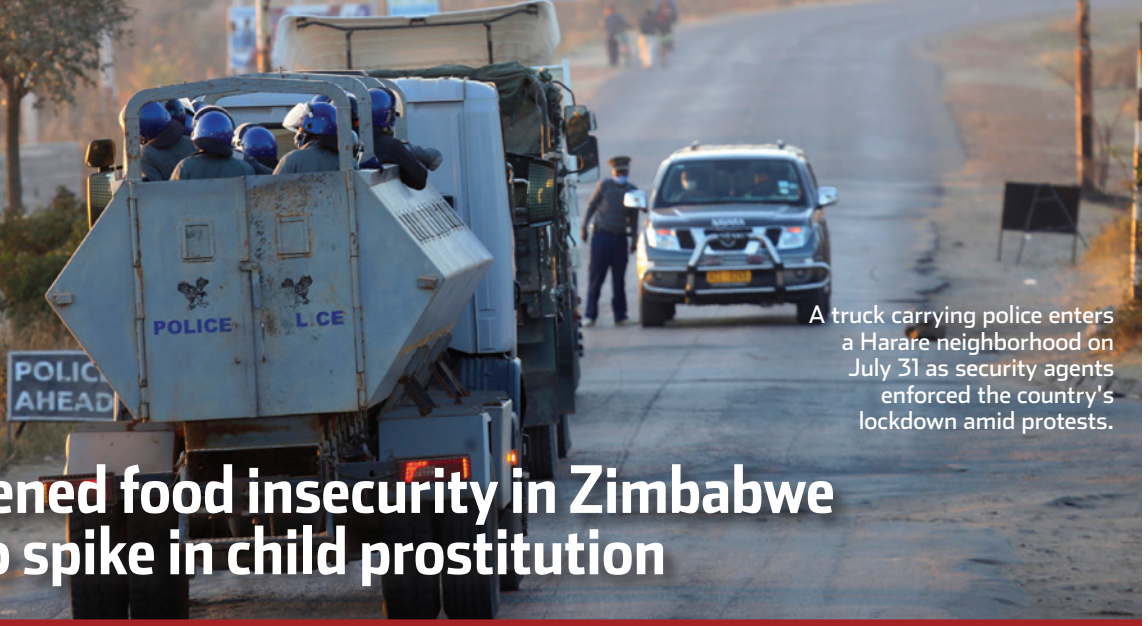
Earnings for informal workers have declined by **82 percent** because of the pandemic. **2 billion workers worldwide** are employed in the informal economy and now face hunger because of Covid-19-related restrictions.

Up to **6,000 children** could die every day from preventable causes before the end of the year as a result of disruptions to health and nutrition services related to the pandemic.



In a suburb of Dakar, Senegal, people stand in line during the distribution of hygiene kits by Catholic Relief Services.

Photo by Maya Hautefeuille for Catholic Relief Services



A truck carrying police enters a Harare neighborhood on July 31 as security agents enforced the country's lockdown amid protests.

Heightened food insecurity in Zimbabwe leads to spike in child prostitution

The young girls, many barely teenagers, line up along a short street that passes through a popular bar strip about 500 feet from St. Peter's parish church in Mbare, one of the oldest and most impoverished suburbs of Harare, Zimbabwe's capital city.

It is just after 8 p.m. on July 22, the day after President Emmerson Mnangagwa introduced a dawn-to-dusk curfew. That was one among several strict coronavirus lockdown measures that included a limit on religious gatherings to no more than 50 people.

Now the girls play hide-and-seek with roving police attempting to enforce the new measures. They disappear into narrow passageways between Mbare's bars and stores or hide at the back of the buildings as a ramshackle police van rumbles past. They re-emerge after a few minutes to take up their posts again along the street, beckoning again to potential clients who pass by.

Martin Nyadewo, S.J., of St. Peter's parish, explains that there are more young girls selling their bodies as Zimbabwe's economic difficulties continue, in a broad collapse now exacerbated by the pandemic.

"We have got a serious problem of child prostitution. And I don't mean organized prostitution, but among the young girls themselves, who are increasingly taking to the streets and corners hoping to sell their bodies to be able to feed themselves and their families," Father Nyadewo said.

Many of the girls are the heads of households that are bereft of parents, who are either dead or have abandoned their children; the households often include elderly grandparents "who can't fend for themselves."

The parish hopes to combat this phenomenon by offering economic alternatives for these young girls and other young people who are struggling to support their families. It is offering loans to begin backyard poultry production or to open mini-kitchens that sell food to traders in Mbare's

informal markets. The parish also provides food assistance to vulnerable families.

According to the World Food Program, Zimbabwe has the world's second-highest inflation rate after Venezuela—overall prices have surged by more than 122 percent since the start of the year and by more than 800 percent since March 2019. By the end of the year, the number of food-insecure people living in urban areas in Zimbabwe alone is expected to increase to 3.3 million from 2.2 million—45 percent of the country's total urban population.

But even Zimbabweans in rural areas, typically more food self-reliant, face shortages this year because of drought, the coronavirus and economic dislocation. According to W.F.P. forecasts, 5.3 million rural Zimbabweans will be food-insecure by the end of 2020, and between 3 million and 3.3 million will face a "crisis" situation.

Use of the Zimbabwean dollar is increasingly being abandoned for transactions from the commonplace to the official in favor of the use of U.S. currency. John Robertson, a Zimbabwean economist, described this unofficial dollarization of Zimbabwe's economy as a vast no-confidence vote for Mr. Mnangagwa's economic policies.

"A lot of people are unable to earn U.S. dollars, and that presents a lot of difficulties," said Mr. Robertson. Workers who are paid only in local currency are forced to adapt quickly to its galloping inflation rate. "It gets worse when every business or supplier asks to be paid in nothing else but the U.S. dollar," he said.

"Millions of Zimbabweans can't get U.S. dollars, and a lot of people in this country don't have steady work," Mr. Robertson said.

*Tawanda Karombo contributes from Harare, Zimbabwe.
Twitter: @tawakarombo.*



Latin American church finances devastated by Covid-19

Four months after the Covid-19 crisis began in Latin America, with most churches closed and a fierce recession accelerating across this already impoverished region, churches in some countries are on the verge of financial collapse.

According to the Rev. Francisco Hernández Rojas, the regional coordinator for Caritas Latin America, as donations dried up most dioceses had enough financial reserves on hand to continue operations for no more than three months. “Those resources were used up between April and June. After that, financial liquidity is over, but the expenses are the same or even greater than before,” he told **America**.

Churches that face the most difficulties are in those countries that already had serious economic problems before the pandemic started. “Central American countries like Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, and Caribbean nations like Haiti and the Dominican Republic are now very vulnerable,” Father Hernández said.

But no country in the region is having an easy time. Social and economic inequality is a profound problem in Latin America, and even big economies like Brazil and Argentina include vast territories with high poverty.

With the financial disruption caused by the pandemic, large segments of Latin American populations are more vulnerable than ever. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean forecasts a contraction of

more than 9 percent in the region’s gross domestic product in 2020.

“In most countries there are dioceses and parishes that are more well-structured that had already developed platforms to receive online donations. But there are many parishes that are not getting enough donations now,” Father Hernández said.

At the end of June, the Most Rev. Luis José Rueda, archbishop of Bogotá, Colombia, told *La Republica* that the Colombian church’s “total bankruptcy” could occur. Closures among the 80,000 social assistance efforts sponsored by parishes and dioceses—including orphanages, nursing homes, shelters for immigrants, food programs and education enrichment programs—could follow.

In Mexico, a donation drought is severely affecting at least half of the country’s dioceses and parishes, according to the Rev. Rogelio Narváez, the executive secretary of Caritas Mexico. “The crisis impacts especially the parishes located in rural regions, such as a great part of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Veracruz and Guerrero. The coastal regions, which depend on tourism, are also facing a critical situation,” he said.

In Guatemala and Honduras, a broad economic emergency has affected both the church’s humanitarian aid and its internal capacity. Both countries have been included in a list of 25 nations that will reach devastating levels of famine



Photo courtesy of Caritas Mexico

Food assistance in San Andrés Tuxtla in the state of Veracruz, Mexico

within the next few months, according to a survey jointly conducted by the World Food Program and by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

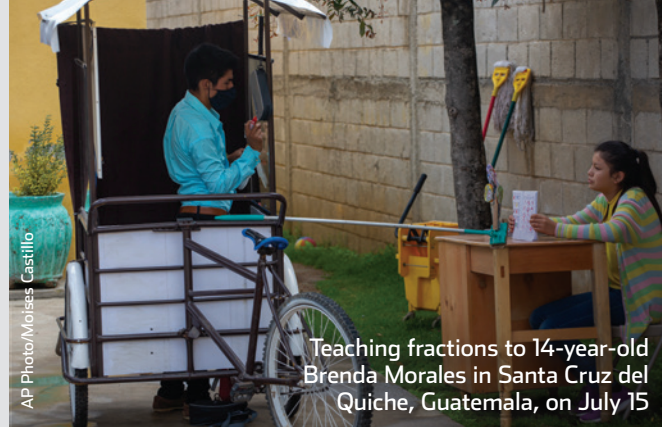
“The pandemic intensified a social crisis that has affected the most vulnerable populations, particularly rural workers. The church has been trying to respond to the situation, but there’s not enough money to deal with so many needs,” Caritas Guatemala’s executive secretary, Mario Arévalo, said.

With an expected reduction of 10.5 percent in the gross domestic product in 2020, Argentina has experienced a dramatic rise in the demand for food and social assistance.

“There has been a sharp increase in poverty in Argentina, so Caritas had to locate new sources of income,” said Luciano Ojea Quintana, the national director of Caritas Argentina. The organization’s annual fundraiser generated less than half the amount it produced last year.

That will mean Caritas Argentina’s childhood, education, nutrition and drug addiction programs will not be fully funded this year. “We’re very worried about it,” he said. “Many of our social programs are on the verge of being shut.”

Eduardo Campos Lima contributes from São Paulo, Brazil.



AP Photo/Moises Castillo

Teaching fractions to 14-year-old Brenda Morales in Santa Cruz del Quiché, Guatemala, on July 15

GOODNEWS: Guatemalan teacher hits the road on a tricycle built for school

When the coronavirus pandemic closed Guatemala’s schools in mid-March, the teacher Gerardo Ixcoy invested his savings in a secondhand adult tricycle.

But this is not just transportation. It is also a mobile classroom, with plastic sheets to protect against virus transmission, a whiteboard, and a small solar panel that powers an audio player.

Each day, he pedals among the cornfields of Santa Cruz del Quiché to offer individual instruction to his sixth-grade students. Mr. Ixcoy is known as “Lalito 10,” a childhood nickname that stuck. He tries to visit each of his students twice a week.

The classroom-on-a-trike was born of necessity.

“I tried to get the kids their worksheets, sending instructions via WhatsApp, but they didn’t respond,” Mr. Ixcoy said. “The parents told me that they didn’t have money to buy data packages [for their phones] and others couldn’t help their children understand the instructions.” In the entire province, only about 13 percent of homes have an internet connection.

For the kids, the classes break up the monotony of quarantine. Eleven-year-old Oscar Rojas waited eagerly in the doorway of his home. He lined up his notebooks and pencils and slipped on a face mask. “Teacher Lalito only comes for a little while to teach me,” he said, “but I learn a lot.”

The families he serves often struggle to stave off hunger.

“One day the mother of a student told me they didn’t have food,” Mr. Ixcoy said. “When class ended and I began to ride away on my tricycle she calls me and with a look of gratefulness says, ‘Teacher, they gave me some food, I want to share half with you.’”

“I arrived home crying,” he recalled.

Moises Castillo, *The Associated Press*



BEYOND THE MELTING POT

By Cecilia González-Andrieu

iStock



Is it time for a new American metaphor?

As a society and as individuals, we do not yet have sufficient distance to understand the lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic. Discerning them may take a lifetime, but we should at least begin.

How will future generations judge our response to the pandemic? The virus has exposed many truths about humanity and the ways we organize ourselves as societies. While we are adaptable, we are also vulnerable. One painful reality is overwhelmingly evident: The privileged are less at risk than the poor. We are a nation that has exalted individualism but in the end relies on the strength of community. Did the image of the American melting pot help us become the people we needed to be or did it ultimately harm us?

I imagine students researching periodicals (maybe even this article) decades or centuries from now, looking for what this moment felt like to the people facing this pandemic. Let me address them—well, actually, let me address you.

Dear future reader: As I write, most of us are subsisting on confusing theories, indeterminate fears, tenuous hopes and, in the best of cases, bits of science and some awareness of the lessons of history. Some of us are looking back, just as you are. There is continuity and discontinuity between us and the past, and we are trying to learn from both. In this quest, a few of us are asking questions to connect our past, the disconcerting present and the hoped-for future. I am sure we agree that generalizations are risky, but there seems to be an almost universal reaction to this moment: incredulity. Much of what we thought we knew, valued and could not live without is vanishing, and many of us just do not know how to feel.

I am a theologian who is part of the Catholic tradition, and engaging with this moment at its depth is most assuredly the work theologians are called to right now. I pray Christianity is flourishing and thriving in the future as you read this. If it is, it means we did something right.



For humanity the coronavirus pandemic is a raging storm. What kind of people will we be throughout the journey?

A Complicated Tradition

One of the advantages of belonging to a religious tradition spanning two millennia ought to be a heightened awareness of the precariousness of history, the unsettling quality of life as it unfolds and the constant need to adapt. Christians should be the kind of people who understand that faith as lived in the world provides the gift of reflecting on the fragility and temporality of everything, and most importantly of our own lives.

This is a complicated thing. We know ourselves heirs of a promise that transcends the brief span of our individual lives; the promise of the resurrection. At the same time, we know that we will get there not by avoiding our fragile materiality but by living fully into it. The one we follow, Jesus of Nazareth, began his ministry at a wedding party, abundantly filling the cups of his fellow guests. The party was fleeting, just an instant in history, but for that one moment a group of people rejoiced and delighted as they toasted the bride and groom with the finest wine.

The Christian tradition expresses this apparent duality humans inhabit with the symbol of the reign of God. Christ tells us the kingdom of God is not a place but an event that discloses God's purpose and vision for all reality. It broke in at the wedding in the small village of Cana. It discloses itself at food banks, hospitals, liturgies and family tables. It is promised as the eschatological banquet, where the last shall be first as we share a common table. The reign of God is both here and not yet, evanescent and eternal, earthly and heavenly, embodied and transcendent. What we do every moment matters precisely because it can help build the reign bit by bit until the day when all creation returns to God in fullness.

Just as our religious beliefs help us wrestle with the challenge of being made of finite matter and transcending spirit, the way we humans create is a persistent reminder of our spirit-filled temporality. Loving music, we might ruminate and grieve because Mozart died so unexpectedly young. If we love classical paintings, we might contemplate a scene of great bounty, all the while knowing it did not last. If we love architecture, we might be moved to tears by sun-bleached ruins, thinking back to the people who built and gave life to these spaces. To live in the world means to know its awe-inspiring fragility and to realize that through its loveliness everything also communicates its impermanence.

Making Difficult Choices

At this moment, when human vulnerability has been so thoroughly unmasked that it hurts, my contemporaries and I must choose how to live this truth. There are those who choose denial, hanging on to an illusion of invulnerability and refusing the possibility that our lives are not our private property but are meant to be shared in community. Some people disdain wearing masks or keeping distant or acknowledging that we cannot buy our way out of a global pandemic. Regrettably, many of us simply act out of self-serving egoism. As we see the daunting scarcity of jobs, loss of economic mobility and diminishment of privilege, we lash out against the weak and decide we are somehow more deserving than anyone else, without regard for anyone left behind.

There are also those who face the uncertainty with trepidation; so much of who we thought we were was enmeshed inside our well-laid plans. We feel lost, but in the midst of this disorientation we can be patient, knowing that there is something new being born. And there are many spirit-filled people finding purpose in sharing vulnerability and discovering a side of themselves they had not known before. These days, I hear from young (and not so young) people how they are experiencing a time of awakening, asking difficult and unavoidable questions, getting to know themselves and others more fully, discovering strengths and weaknesses and taking stock.

We might say that for humanity the coronavirus pandemic is a raging storm. What kind of people will we be, not only at the end of the storm but throughout the journey?

Looking Inside

Who are we? Although the question is global, it must be answered locally. Who are we as family, neighborhood, state, nation, human race? In the United States, this question is not new. We have been asking it for over two centuries, but it came to the fore powerfully during the last presidential election and its aftermath. Many of us, especially people of color and immigrants, witnessed



"The Storm," 2020, by John August Swanson, based on a reflection in "Urbi et Orbi," by Pope Francis, on the Gospel of Mark.

the powerful among us setting those they decide worthy against the excluded and making evident the chasm between privilege and expendability. We cringed as white nationalism took the microphone and wielded power. In uncovering what had been latent, we have watched in horror as black and brown persons become targets of bullets, beatings and incarceration wrought by racism and xenophobia, and we ask ourselves, "Who are we?" This question was there before the pandemic, but many of us are now paying attention to it for the first time.

The Fever

On a recent evening, I recoiled while listening to the news as an irate man wanting to dismantle all public health mandates during the pandemic declared imperiously, "If we don't have individualism, we don't have America!" It dawned on me that he is a thermometer, flashing the warning light of a high fever that has been raging for a long time. "American" individualism, containing the other "isms" that allow us to feel superior, promotes the fantasy that it can assert itself against a pandemic ravaging bodies and economies. "If I can just have everything for my own comfort and put my interests first, all will be fine," we tell ourselves as the sickness spreads. Egoism at full throttle is far from the reign of God. Perhaps it is what most clearly defines its opposite.

We need a treatment for this sickness tearing into us. On the streets of my neighborhood and stretching throughout the country, there are two strains contaminating us that are working simultaneously on the "American" psyche. The first, individualism, appeals to absolutist ideals of freedom that place individual benefit always ahead of the communal. As J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur wrote in his paean to budding Americanism in 1782, "the rewards of [the new American's] industry follow with equal steps the progress of his labour; his labour is founded on the basis of nature, *self-interest*; can it want a stronger allurements?" Crèvecoeur was a Frenchman who married an American woman and became a celebrated writer on both continents after publishing *Letters From an American Farmer*, which included his reflections on life in the United States.

Crèvecoeur left evidence for posterity of a seemingly total disregard for the original peoples inhabiting the land, as well as their destruction, and his is perhaps the first mention of new arrivals from Europe "melting into a new race of men." He delineates the requirements for being an "American" with precision: Be European, care single-mindedly about your self-interest and your "fat horses," and privatize your religious beliefs because these have no application to the "welfare of the country."

This early treatise argues that the question of who the people of the United States are, despite the language of "we

the people” used in the founding document signed only six years earlier, is one of economically motivated self-interest. Today, we witness this in an individualism that fetishizes liberty as one person’s private property and getting ahead of others as a primordial value that bears no responsibility for the common good. Indeed, in Crèvecoeur’s telling, there is no sense of community or joint purpose. The only requirements for being a “good neighbor” are to be prosperous so the neighborhood looks good and to stay out of each other’s way. In a telling sentence, Crèvecoeur identifies “religious indifference” as a much-desired outcome of being transplanted to the North American continent, adding that “persecution, religious pride, [and] the love of contradiction are the food of what the world commonly calls religion.”

If we look for a response to the question “Who are we?” from the time of the imperfect founding of this nation, the answer should make people of faith supremely uncomfortable. The requirements of caring for the widow, the orphan and the stranger, of sharing with the hungry, the prisoner and the sick, are all silenced in accounts like Crèvecoeur’s. According to him, “[w]e are all animated with the spirit of an industry which is unfettered and unrestrained, because each person works for himself.”

As self-interested individualism cleaved from communal concerns is set up at the center of early Americanism, a second identity marker develops during the wave of European migration that opens the 20th century: the melting pot. Although it seems to promote the opposite of individualism and was thus envisioned by its author, it was swiftly detached from its original meaning and put at the service of “Americanism” narrowly defined. To answer the question of who we are requires a deeper interrogation of the idea of the melting pot.

The Melting Pot

In the middle of the pandemic, I convened an online conversation about the idea of the melting pot. The thoughtful responses disclosed understandings forged in diverse contexts. Older folks thought it an outdated idea that had lost its usefulness, yet I was surprised that young people revealed its centrality in their elementary school classrooms. One millennial political scientist, Alejandra Alarcón, recounted that even though it was a relic by her elementary school days, a segment on the melting pot recipe in the “Schoolhouse Rock” television series was formative for her generation. While some who grew into adulthood abroad understood the “melting pot” positively

as “merging, not losing,” those from communities of color in the United States reacted with an opposite view.

Using images of “assimilation,” “erasure,” “disappearance” and “lie,” they related painful memories pointing to how the melting pot was weaponized as a way to destroy particularity at the service of a homogenized national identity. What the conversation revealed is that a construction of “Americanism” defined as a melting pot became synonymous with the Euro-American prosperous whiteness defined earlier by Crèvecoeur. The requirement of blending in and disappearing into an undifferentiated mass resulted in the loss of languages, customs and religions, and became an aspirational goal.

As the theologian Allan Figueroa Deck, S.J., pointed out in his lecture “Toward a New Narrative for the Latino Presence in U.S. Society and the Church” in 2012, Catholic thinkers in the United States embraced the Americanist principle and “supported the concept of Americanization which they identified with modernity as something positive that would allow the Catholic immigrants to be accepted by and eventually exercise influence over the dominant WASP culture of the United States.” What assimilation based on whiteness makes impossible is any inclusion of people of color. It also strips human dignity away from anyone refusing to submit.

The Crucible

In 1908, the play “The Melting-Pot” opened in New York City, premiering the metaphor that eventually became synonymous with assimilation. Yet, this was far from the intent of the play’s author, the acclaimed Jewish writer Israel Zangwill.

The drama presents a cast of immigrants asking the question “Who shall we be?” as life explodes around them through the aspirations of the young and the suffering of their elders. David, the young Jewish protagonist and sole survivor of a pogrom in Russia on Easter, takes refuge with relatives in the teeming tenements of New York City. He wrestles with ways to make sense of his faith, his language and his ancestors, conscious of the extraordinary suffering of the new immigrants arriving every day. Zangwill uses the phrase “melting-pot” only once in the play: A more prominent metaphor is “God’s Crucible,” a key religious term whose meaning has been subsequently lost.

The “Crucible of God” refers to the ways David makes sense of the searing experience of desolation and poverty, the self-destruction caused by despair, and the hope of forging bonds in shared vulnerability that will melt away



Election 2020: “There is no Catholic Vote—and, it’s Important”

Featuring EJ Dionne, Emma
Green, and Steven Millies
with Michael Bayer

Catholics comprise roughly 23% of the US population and the “Catholic vote” has picked the winner of nine in the last ten presidential elections. Still, since Catholic choices mirror the national results, many question whether there is such a thing as a distinctive Catholic voting bloc. Join us for a rousing conversation via a Zoom forum that will draw more deeply on distinctions among the many subgroups of Catholic voters, the issues that concern them, and the regions in which they vote.

September 17, 2020 from 4-5:30 p.m.
Event is free & open to the public
Registration at www.luc.edu/ccih



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E.J. Dionne Jr. is a syndicated columnist for *The Washington Post*, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, university professor in the Foundations of Democracy and Culture at Georgetown University, and visiting professor at Harvard University. Dionne provides regular political analysis for MSNBC and NPR’s “All Things Considered.”



Emma Green is a staff writer at *The Atlantic*, where she covers politics, policy, and religion. In 2019, she won three first-place awards from the Religion News Association, and she was recently named the laureate of the 2020 George W. Hunt, S.J., Prize for Excellence in Journalism, Arts, & Letters.



Steven P. Millies, the 2020 Hank Center Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, Fellow in Catholic Studies, is associate professor of public theology and director of The Bernardin Center at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. His most recent book is *Good Intentions: A History of Catholic Voters' Road from Roe to Trump Trump* (Liturgical Press, 2018)



Michael Bayer writes on faith, culture, and politics and is a national leader in evangelization and adult formation. He is graduate of Georgetown University and the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley.



Photo by Joshua Roberts, Reuters

A group of children at a Black Lives Matter protest near the White House in Washington on June 7.

“the feuds and vendettas” of old lives. Exploring bitterly the anti-Semitism that cost him his family, David imagines a new human family, where Christians recognize “that this Christ, whom holy chants proclaimed re-risen, was born in the form of a brother Jew.”

The heartbreaking retelling of the murder of his family as they celebrate Passover and his father clasps “to his breast the Holy Scroll” had a particularly powerful purpose. President Theodore Roosevelt was in the opening night audience, and through the play Zangwill pleads the case for 10,000 Jews fleeing Europe to be allowed into the United States. As David exclaims for the president’s ears, I am “holding out my hands with prayer and music toward the Republic of Man and the Kingdom of God! The Past I cannot mend—its evil outlines are stamped in immortal rigidity, take away the hope that I can mend the Future, and you make me mad.”

By 1914, the play’s meaning had been so distorted that Zangwill penned a response. “The process of American amalgamation is not assimilation,” he wrote, “or simple surrender to the dominant type...but an all-round-give-and-take by which the final type may be enriched.” He points out that his characters learn not to erase but embrace uniqueness and value each other. The anti-Semitic Irish maid learns some Yiddish, and the observant Jewish grandmother accepts that her grandson must play the violin on the Sabbath to feed his family.

Far from the “self-interest” espoused by Crèvecoeur, Zangwill argues his belief that ethically “in the crucible of love, or even co-citizenship, the most violent antitheses of the past may be fused into a higher unity.” Although his

focus is the desperate fate of Jews, which as an activist he wants to change, he understands the crucible to hold within it all of the world’s poor and desperate: “Celt and Latin, Slav and Teuton, Greek and Syrian—black and yellow—Jew and Gentile.” The play mounts a robust critique of wealth, of turning a blind eye to suffering and of seeking personal gain at the expense of others.

Who Are We?

We are called anew to this question of who we are. Individualism will be our end, and the melting pot betrayed us. We need our metaphors for who we are to be both global and intimate. Perhaps the Holy Spirit breathed some of it into being in Pope Francis’ “Urbi et Orbi” meditation on the Gospel of Mark. “We have realized,” the pope tells us, “that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other. On this boat...are all of us...we cannot go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we do this.”

It is time for a new human to emerge, ready to row for the sake of all. We are sharing the boat full of faith in each other, surprised by the gift and vulnerability of our fellow rowers, and as we row forward together, we face down the storm in kinship. Future reader, I hope we found dry land and built something new. Only you will know.

*Cecilia González-Andrieu is a professor of theological studies at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, Calif., and a contributing writer for **America**.*



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AND
THE WORD
BECAME STEEL
AND STONE

By Jim McDermott



At the Joyce Center, a new retreat house for the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass., full-length windows offer views of the reservoir below, over which the sun rises each morning.

The design of modern retreat centers is helping people grow closer to God

The term *retreat* implies an action that is also a location; we withdraw to some place away from our normal lives.

And yet the physical structure of the place where we go on retreat, things like its layout and interior design, are key elements for our experience as well. “Our bodies are our primary way of knowing the world,” the architect Terrence Curry, S.J., says. The way that world is structured informs everything from how we feel and think about ourselves to our experience of God.

Some architectural features of religious structures seem to work for everybody. Father Curry notes the way “immensity and infinity induce a quality of

awe” as well as the satisfaction we all take from a composition that is coherent and engaging. “Our brains are constantly trying to make sense of things; every time we look at a space we try to make sense of it.”

Other design choices are not so universally accepted. Consider the 1950s-style retreat centers, massive old novitiate buildings and convents out in the woods somewhere repurposed into hardy meat-and-potatoes places. For some their concrete monumentalism offers a comforting sense of permanence, a God who is strong and unflappable. Others find that such structures make us feel small and inconsequential. They seem to require submission instead of inviting a relationship with God.

Photo by Tom Rettig



Retreat centers around the country are thinking intentionally about the relationship between physical environment and spiritual experience.

Today a number of designers of retreat centers around the country are thinking intentionally about this relationship between physical environment and spiritual experience. Their work suggests key ways that design can help people grow in their relationship with God.


Spiritual Exercises in Glass and Stone

For decades the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass., offered the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius four times a year at a diocesan retreat center on the Atlantic Ocean in Narragansett, R.I., about two hours from the college campus. The experience was very popular. “You hear stories of married couples taking their children to show them the spot where they made their retreat,” says Paul Harman, S.J., the university’s former vice president of mission.

When the retreat center closed, Holy Cross began considering the possibility of creating a place of their own. Years of exploration finally led them to 50 acres of woodlands overlooking the Wachusett Reservoir near Worcester.

The site checked a number of boxes. Its location just 15 minutes from campus would allow the college chaplains to offer not just weekends or weeks away but programs on weekdays or evenings. And the spectacular views would give them the best of what they had known previously. “Narragansett was a clue for us,” says Marybeth Kearns-Barrett, director of the Office of the College Chaplains. “We knew we wanted something that had some sense of the natural world and God’s presence in that, a place that would leave you sort of in awe.”

Michael Pagano, the project’s lead architect from Lamoureux Pagano Associates, spent months learning from the university’s planning committee not only about the kinds of programs the chaplains planned to conduct at the center, but also about the spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola that informed them. In the end, the group decided that every element of the building should be inspired in some way by the Spiritual Exercises.



Simplicity became a key element in fulfilling that desire. The design would rely on just a few main materials—glass, stone, wood. The layout would likewise be easy to understand, with the public spaces of the dining room, meeting room and chapel all on one side of the building and the residential wing on the other. The simpler the building’s structure, the designers believed, the fewer potential distractions it would pose, and the easier it would be for people to feel at home. “We wanted students to feel they can breathe here,” explained Megan Fox-Kelly, associate chaplain and director of retreats. The hoped-for result, Mr. Pagano says, “is a sense of comfort and of being welcomed. A quiet mind.”

The idea of creating a space with minimal distractions led to other choices as well. The parking lot was placed down the hill and behind the center, where it was not likely to be seen. The center is also located at the end of a winding, four-block long uphill driveway through a wooded area, which gives retreatants a physical experience of leaving behind the ordinary world. The three-story building was also built into the hill rather than on top of it. “We wanted the natural landscape to dominate the experience,” Mr. Pagano explains.

Ms. Kearns-Barrett had visited Frank Lloyd Wright’s Taliesin West in Scottsdale, Ariz., and was struck by the way Wright tried to make the outdoors blend seamlessly with the indoors. “This idea of bringing the outdoors in is so Ignatian,” she says. “We’re always trying to say, ‘Look at the world; there you will find God, in all of its beauty and all of its roughness and all of its overwhelming awesomeness.’”

Everywhere you go on the public side of the Joyce Center you find full-length windows that offer views of the reservoir below, over which the sun rises each morning. It creates “a wonderful way to center prayer,” says Philip Burroughs, S.J., the president of Holy Cross. Ms. Kearns-Barrett agrees, noting the view also has a way of drawing students out of themselves: “Sometimes a retreat can become so self-focused. To see what’s outside, it’s like something bigger than yourself always calling back to you.”

Meanwhile the 48 bedrooms on the western side each have large windows looking out on nearby woods through which the sun sets. The rooms off the chapel for spiritual direction and confession were also given substantial windows with woody views. “In some [retreat centers] the direction rooms can feel so dark and cold,” Ms. Fox-Kelly explains. “We wanted ours to be a space where students could feel comfortable and invited.”





Photo by Tom Rettig



Photo by John Cannon

Years of exploration led Holy Cross to 50 acres of woodlands overlooking the Wachusett Reservoir near Worcester, Mass. Its location just 15 minutes from campus allows chaplains to offer not just weekends away but programs on weekdays or evenings.



The physical structure of the place where we go on retreat, things like its layout and interior design, are key elements for our experience.

In reading about St. Ignatius, Mr. Pagano was touched by the story of how he used to love to look up at the stars. To provide some sense of that experience, Mr. Pagano gave the chapel 52 small ball-shaped light fixtures at different heights and in a pattern that subtly mirrors a spiral galaxy. Students “will sit or lie on the ground and look up at them,” says Ms. Fox-Kelly. “It’s pretty amazing.”

In considering artwork for the building, chaplains chose pieces that reflect the main scriptural images they tend to use in retreats. “If retreatants want to pray with this passage from Scripture, we can invite people to go and sit in front of it,” says Ms. Fox-Kelly.

Meanwhile Father Burroughs had the idea to include photographs of religious iconography from campus, like details of statues; and Ms. Kearns-Barrett invited the artists who had designed the altar, lectern and crucifix in the college chapel to design the pieces for the Joyce chapel as well. The hope is that these kinds of details might allow the experience people have at the center to continue back at home. “I go back to campus and I’m reminded of my retreat again,” explains Ms. Fox-Kelly.

The center also offers a great variety of spaces in which to pray. In addition to the chapel and dining room, alcoves throughout the building offer quiet spaces in which people can sit and look out on the reservoir, the forest, an interior courtyard or some of the building’s artwork. The entrance room to the building is also designed like the living room of a home, with a fireplace, couches and a long shelf abutting the window, where students like to set up pillows and blankets.

The center seems to inspire such personal adaptations naturally. Discovering the long windows looking into the forest in the largely quiet stairwells, students moved chairs there. A chaplain had the idea to turn some chairs near the dining room toward the side courtyard. “It was like a whole other new experience,” Ms. Kearns-Barrett says. “So many

kids started eating their meals facing out in those chairs, or just sitting there during the day.” The design of the building thus has become a means of living out the invitation of an Ignatian retreat, empowering people to trust in their own instincts and relationship with God.

Christ in the Desert: Refuge and Wonder


Nestled between mesas 13 miles down a treacherous, winding, red dirt road in north central New Mexico, the Benedictine Monastery of Christ in the Desert has surprisingly few buildings. The abbey proper and a small church sit at the top of a rise. The church is built from the same stone as the mesas that rise behind it, as though it had been carved out from them.

A simple adobe guesthouse and a small free-standing ranch house lie a five-minute walk down the hill. In terms of architecture, that’s it. If the Joyce Center’s aim is to blur the separation between indoors and out, Christ in the Desert instead offers the canyon setting itself as the “structure” to inspire people’s spiritual experience.

There is wisdom in that decision. The silence and stillness of the mesas have a powerful effect on the place; they function as a high pressure front, forcing you to slow down and step gently. Over the course of days the space seems to naturally draw away any busyness within, leaving you room to simply be still and meet God in the silence and subtle beauties of this place.

The abbey church, designed in the 1960s by George Nakashima, takes its cue from the land around it, not only in its stone construction but also in the massive panes of glass that circle the upper walls. Much as at the Joyce Center, the world is offered as material for contemplation—the skies and cliffs that rise around the church, their colors constantly changing with the light; the moon and stars at night.


Here the invitation of the architecture calls forth a



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Photo by Tom Rettig

physical response. One's eyes are constantly drawn upward to those windows; the body naturally takes on a posture of seeking, of looking beyond oneself. It is a pose well-suited to a structure built for the Liturgy of the Hours, sung here by the monks throughout the day. Worshipers looking upward mirror the monks' voices raised in hope to the Lord.

The Benedictines have come to use the setting in meaningful ways. Incense at Sunday Mass creates material with which the sunlight pouring in forms beams, until the entire church is filled with them, transforming the small, simple prayer space into something otherworldly. Likewise, the large, freestanding tabernacle, which when open displays icons of saints from nine countries (representing some of the different nationalities of the monks), glows golden in the afternoon sun. When praying in this church, the notion of the Mass as an inbreaking of eternity becomes a lived experience.

The guesthouse down the road has an unexpectedly fortress-like quality; there are no windows or reception area, just a set of wooden beam doors that take a bit of puzzling out to unlatch. From outside you have no sense of what lies within: 13 rooms nestled around a courtyard and looking out on the gorgeous mesas and river of the Chama Valley.

But as disconcerting as that entrance seems—so different from the typical retreat house—with it comes an immediate sense of privacy and ownership. For the days you are here it is clear: This is your space. The guidebook placed in each room goes further: “This orientation will surely not answer every question that you will have during your stay,” the guestmaster writes. “We have found that searching for God is always a bit mysterious and requires the need to wonder, to puzzle, to reflect and to pray for a deeper understanding of what lies right before us.”

In his book *The Poetics of Space*, the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard talks about the human need for

The Joyce Center offers a great variety of spaces in which to pray. Planners decided that every element of the building should be inspired in some way by the Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola.

cave-like spaces. “It gives [one] a physical pleasure,” he writes, to dwell within “the primitiveness of the refuge.”

In a place where brutal heat, cold or precipitation can descend and the darkness of night is sometimes frighteningly absolute, the guest rooms at Christ in the Desert very much function like Bachelard's cave. Many are little more than cells in size, yet the craftsmanship of the furniture somehow provides an immediate feeling of comfort and home.

The most significant item in each room is a large reproduction of a religious painting, like Bartolomé Esteban Murillo's poignant image of St. Francis embracing the crucified Christ. Placed in such small, simple quarters, the art offers its own powerful invitation into prayer.

Christian Leisy, O.S.B., the abbot of the monastery, notes that the retreat center's location in a canyon is a somewhat unusual place for a Benedictine community. “Benedictine abbeys are traditionally located on mountains,” he explains. “That's the tradition of Monte Cassino or Subiaco.” But he believes their physical location creates a unique spiritual experience: “I think of God cradling us in this space in so many ways.”

The Spiritual Ministry Center: No Place Like Home

From the outside, the Spiritual Ministry Center in the Ocean Beach community of San Diego looks like a set of two-story townhouses in the middle of a suburban block. Farther down the street children run around playing with their dog, while guys sit in lawn chairs listening to the Padres on the radio. This is a community of yard sales and American flags, bird feeders and the kind of gently swaying palm trees one sees in the movies. A 10-minute walk away,



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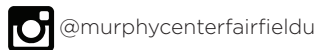
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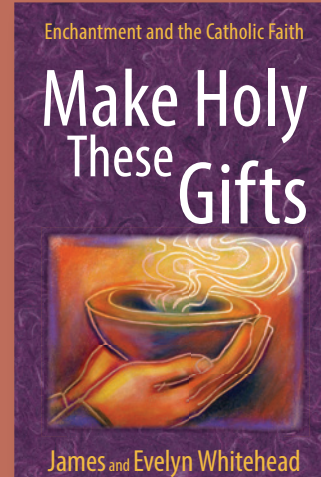
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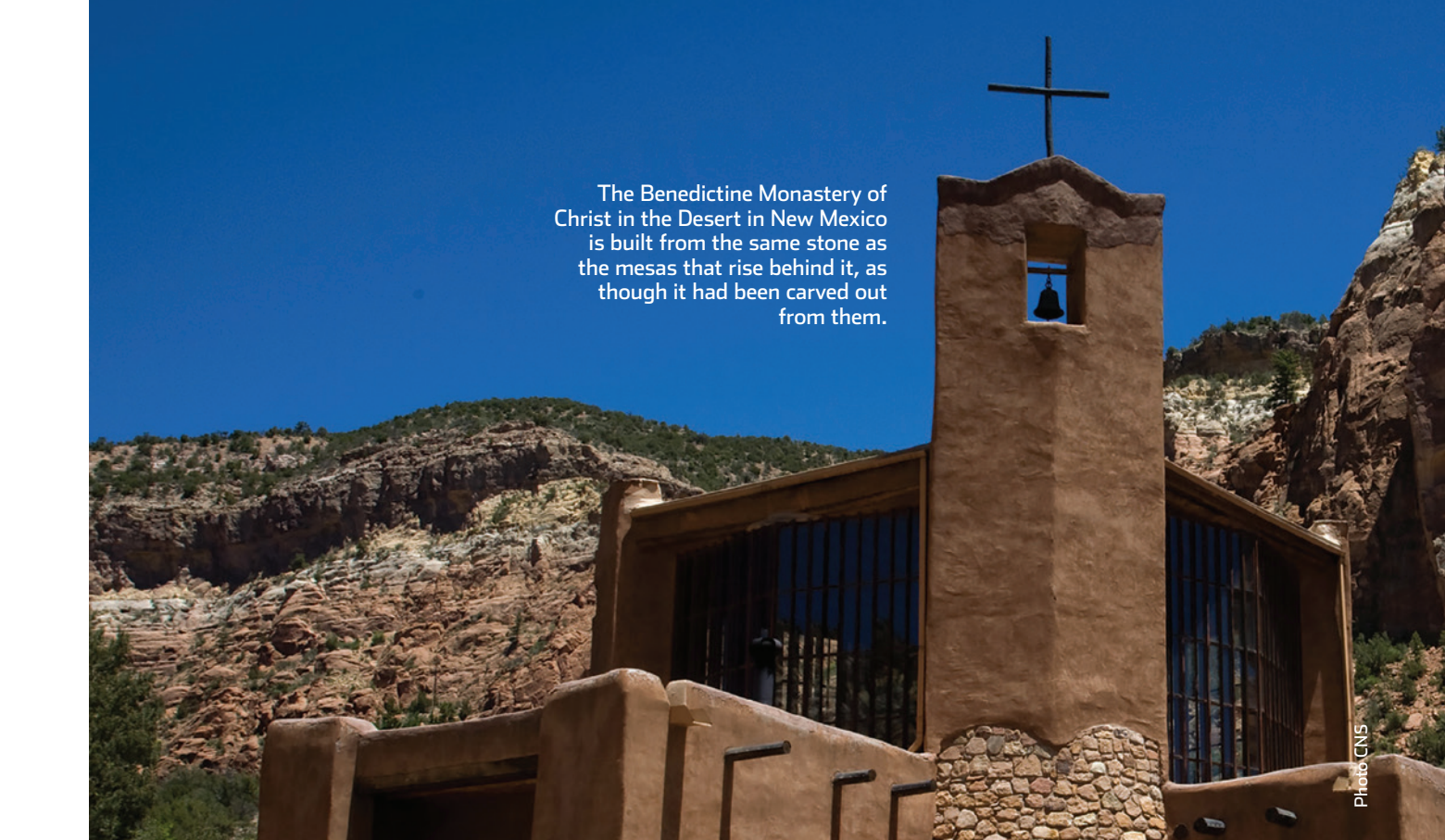
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The Benedictine Monastery of Christ in the Desert in New Mexico is built from the same stone as the mesas that rise behind it, as though it had been carved out from them.

in the center of town, tourists wander past souvenir shops while homeless children sell paintings and beg for change along the beach.

It is an unexpected location, in other words, for a retreat house. And intentionally so; when the Society of the Sacred Heart decided to start a retreat center in 1987, they did so inspired by the idea of bringing together contemplation and normal life. “The thought was to leave these isolated, protected big houses where everyone is holed up and be immersed in the regular, ordinary life,” says Marie-Louise Flick, R.S.C.J., the director of the center.

The front two townhouses of the center serve as a community for the nuns who work there and a gathering place for workshops on prayer, psychology, spirituality and art. Meanwhile, the back half offers rooms for up to four retreatants, who may come for anything from a weekend or evening to 40 days.

Every detail of the space has been considered with an eye toward giving retreatants an experience of home. The beds are much bigger than one would normally find in a retreat center, with comfortable mattresses and bed linens. The rooms also have a pleasant sitting area, large walk-in closets and an en suite bathroom. “We believe comfort is important,” explains Sister Flick.

At the same time there is simplicity to the space. “We don’t have a lot of fluff around,” says Sister Flick. The artwork on the walls is understated, and while the furniture is

comfortable, it doesn’t all match. Nor do the sheets. For the sisters, that, too, is about creating a feeling of home. “Our model is that we are not institutional,” says Jane O’Shaughnessy, R.S.C.J., a staff member. “People can come, and the retreat is arranged the way they’d like.”

The idea of going on retreat to a place that looks quite like the one you left at home may seem odd. And yet the sisters have witnessed how being in a space that looks and feels like a home without all the responsibilities of one creates a sense of freedom and rest. “People really do like the ease of it,” says Sister O’Shaughnessy. “They find their comfort zone.”

Cooking for oneself—part of the setup of the center—has turned out to be a powerful part of that experience for some, as well. “People really like the freedom to eat what they want when they want,” explains Sister Flick. “It creates a kind of hermitage for people; it actually kind of amplifies their silence and their routines.”

And on a pleasant San Diego evening, having a simple meal by yourself on a patio as the stars slowly come out is itself a kind of spiritual experience. The light changes so gradually, you find yourself naturally starting to slow down, savoring the world around you.

The other thing that has made the Spiritual Ministry Center uniquely attractive for retreatants is its proximity to the commercial district of Ocean Beach. For visitors, the neighborhood streets become a part of the experience, a



Photos courtesy of Spiritual Ministry Center



At the Spiritual Ministry Center in the Ocean Beach community of San Diego, every detail of the space has been considered with an eye toward giving retreatants an experience of home.

kind of actual labyrinth space in which their physical wandering can mirror what they are going through spiritually. And oftentimes in that activity retreatants have powerful experiences of discovering or being discovered by God. Sister O’Shaughnessy recalled a woman from the East Coast: “She came with her surfboard, rented a bicycle and she was all over the place. When I met with her and asked where was Jesus, [she said] Jesus was on the rock, he was out there surfing, ‘He was there with me.’”

In Margaret Visser’s *The Geometry of Love*, a best-selling book on the architecture and spirituality of St. Agnes Church in Rome, the author writes, “A church is deliberately ordered toward consequences, toward the future.” It is laid out “with a certain trajectory of the soul in mind.” It has a “plot,” a story being told.

For as different as they are in setting and design, the Joyce Contemplative Center, the Monastery of Christ

in the Desert and the Spiritual Ministry Center share an interest in simplicity and in the world as a fundamental source of grace. These features give them a slightly different orientation from Visser’s image of church. Rather than being pointed toward a future, the modern retreat house intends a deepened appreciation of the multitudinous present, an opportunity to discover, as Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J., wrote, that “Christ plays in ten thousand places,/ Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his.”

Like all Catholic institutions, these centers have as both their foundation and purpose our shared story, the story of salvation. And yet rather than directing people where to go, they seem built to enable all who visit to meet the God who loves them as they are, in their own way.

Jim McDermott, S.J., is a contributing writer for America.



A Black Lives Matter organizer, Teal Lindseth, 21, leads protesters in Portland, Ore., on July 23.

THE TRUTH IN BLACK LIVES MATTER

By William E. Lori

What do these three words mean to Catholics?

Three of the most prominent words in today's world are: Black Lives Matter. These words are emblazoned on streets, on public buildings and storefronts, on social media, in the windows of homes and indeed, at houses of worship. For some, these words are simply a call for racial justice long denied. For others, they are a call for fundamental changes in society. Many regard the words "Black Lives Matter" as self-evident. Others see them as divisive and partisan.

At the outset, it is important to clarify that my efforts here are not intended to address, and certainly not to endorse, the specific political organization legally known as the Black Lives Matter Global Network. Many ideological platforms and tactical strategies promoted under the umbrella of the phrase "Black Lives Matter" are in direct contradiction to church teaching and should rightfully be rejected by faithful Catholics. Rather, the question before us as Catholics is this: Is there a truth reflected in these words that transcends partisan platforms and ideological constructs, a truth that indeed resonates with the Gospel values that flow from our faith?

Catholic Social Teaching

In other words, what should these three words mean for us as Catholics? Within the church's membership, we find

the same range of opinions as in the larger society. Even so, the church's social teaching offers important insights into the meaning of the phrase "Black Lives Matter." What are those insights, and why are they important? Without intending to be comprehensive, I would like to attempt an answer to that question and offer a modest contribution to an important discussion that is going on within the church and beyond. In doing so, I also hope to help the Catholic community I serve to find common ground on which to seek racial justice.

Let me begin with this: Catholic social teaching is not an addendum to the Gospel but a living part of the church's proclamation of our salvation in Christ Jesus. It is because of God's love for each person and for the entire human family that the church speaks about matters such as economic and racial justice; the evil of abortion, capital punishment and euthanasia; the economy and the environment; religious liberty; the plight of immigrants and refugees; and a host of other social issues. What light, then, does the church's social teaching shed on the words "Black Lives Matter"?

The Dignity of the Human Person

The cornerstone of the church's social teaching is the truth concerning the dignity of the human person. Every person

Continued on Page 40

The Way We Live Now in the Time of the Pandemic.



SOMOS

By Mario J. Paredes

WALKING THE STREETS of New York City, an observer is struck by the many people who are not wearing masks. There are gatherings outside of bars and restaurants that obviously fail to observe the six-foot social distancing requirement. A cavalier attitude toward the danger of the COVID-19 pandemic is evident across town.

That lack of discipline can be explained, in part, by the fact that, for the past few months, New York State and New York City have done very well in terms of the number of new infections. It would appear that the worst is over, and for all its drama and impact, the coronavirus has come down a few pegs in the headlines. People are tired of being locked down and kept from their social pleasures. Their behavior can be understood—though it is very unwise.

The nonchalance of New Yorkers can also be attributed to the attitude of our national leadership. This Administration, putting a premium on jump-starting the economy, has a mixed record at best when it comes to confronting the pandemic. News just broke about its efforts to strike billions of dollars earmarked for testing and contact tracing from a Republican-drafted relief bill. It is absolutely baffling that the President has sidelined Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's foremost expert on infectious diseases, along with his prudent warnings. President Trump labeled him an "alarmist."

In parts of the country, there has also been a rush about reopening the economy; in some cases, like Alabama,

state authorities have downplayed the importance of wearing masks. A look at the sharp rise in the number of infections and deaths in Texas, Florida, California, and several other states, makes it clear that the pandemic is far from contained. It is, therefore, foolhardy to go about one's business as if New York City were in the clear. Eventually, spillover from other states may hit New York with a new wave of infections, and it is conceivable that the entire nation may relive the horrors of March and April this upcoming flu season. We know that wearing masks works. Europe, China, and some Southeast Asian countries were able to contain and dramatically decrease COVID-19 infection rates when national mask-wearing policies were in place.

It is impossible to tell, of course, but as long as there is no vaccine for COVID-19, there remain major risks, including continued damage done to the economy. The United States already counts a huge number of unemployed, up 12 million compared to February of this year, with the unemployment rate up by 7.6 percent. Today, close to 18 million Americans are out of work, and the unemployment benefits they receive are not sufficient.

It is imperative that we consider the severe impact of the pandemic on nations like India, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic, where governments are confronting the virus with far fewer resources than Western countries. And, clearly, at home in the United States and around the world, the poor suffer the brunt of the hardship.



The pandemic has put the spotlight on the growing gap between rich and poor—and between whites and people of color—with the latter at a far greater risk of falling ill or dying from the virus. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that the world has reached “a breaking point” when it comes to inequality. He proclaimed that “COVID-19 has been likened to an X-ray, revealing fractures in the fragile skeleton of the societies we have built;” “it is exposing fallacies and falsehoods everywhere: The lie that free markets can deliver health care for all, the fiction that unpaid care work is not work, the delusion that we live in a post-racist world, the myth that we are all in the same boat.”

Delivering the Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture in Johannesburg, the U.N. chief charged that the developed world is too concerned with its interests and has fallen short of its responsibility to come to the aid of poorer nations, failing “to deliver the support needed to help the developing world through these dangerous times.” May this call to action reverberate throughout the West and prompt genuine change on the international level.

For the good of all, managing the coronavirus depends on three pillars: a change in behavior, testing and contact tracing—otherwise, new lockdowns will have to be imposed, Americans everywhere should pay heed! The nation will need to depend on trusted leaders at the local and national levels for guidance, with Gov. Andrew Cuomo

of New York one shining example —leaders who do not put economic growth before the well-being of people, particularly the poor.

Meanwhile, SOMOS staff and doctors are doing what they can. SOMOS has deployed teams to Georgia, Arizona, Florida, and Texas to train and assist local doctors and their staff in the area of testing, contact tracing, and telemedicine. Another SOMOS team will offer hands-on support to doctors and health-care personnel in 15 municipalities in the Miami area.

In New York City, SOMOS is overseeing operations at testing sites at 24 churches in the Archdiocese of New York and 14 Protestant churches. These testing sites serve especially poor communities of color. SOMOS is also gearing up its preparations for this upcoming fall and winter when cold & flu season will be upon us once again.

The deadly virus has changed our world. COVID-19 is likely to stay with us for at least a good while longer. In the face of fear and uncertainty it behooves us to turn to an indispensable tool in these dark times: prayer—asking God, the giver of life, to protect us from the ravages of the disease, and to grant us well-being and peace of mind as we put our trust in his care.

Mario Paredes is C.E.O. of SOMOS Community Care, Inc. SOMOS is one of 25 Performing Provider Systems operating under the mandate of New York State’s Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) program.

The words ‘Black Lives Matter’ should prompt us to examine our own consciences with regard to racism.

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is created in God’s image and likeness and is endowed with inviolable dignity from the moment of conception until natural death. Each person is God’s handiwork and is made for God’s friendship. We further believe that the true dignity of the human person is most fully revealed in Christ our Redeemer, the Son of God who assumed our humanity. Becoming one of us, God’s Son united himself to each person and called us to conversion and eternal life. Indeed, our defense of human life and dignity must always be “clear, firm, and compassionate” and extend to every person at every stage of development. (See Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation “*Gaudete et Exsultate*,” No. 101.)

Thus, the words “Black Lives Matter” ought to remind us that every Black person is made in God’s image and is endowed with inviolable dignity, from the moment of conception until natural death. But why single out Black people? Why not be content just to say that everyone is God’s handiwork? First, in saying “Black Lives Matter,” let us remember that we are part of a church whose past is stained by its participation in slavery and other forms of racism. Let us also remember that we live in a country where slavery was once the law of the land in both local statutes and the Constitution.

Slavery has long since been outlawed in the United States, and that constitutional provision has long since been repealed. But changing laws and even the Constitution itself is one thing, whereas changing human hearts is quite another. No one can justly deny that racism against people of color—which is a denial of their God-given dignity—persists in our society. From the recent killings of unarmed Black men and women by law enforcement to the subtle and pernicious suspicion endlessly endured by even the most highly accomplished Black men and women today, racism remains manifest in our society, and in our

church. The words “Black Lives Matter” should prompt us to examine our own consciences with regard to racism and spur us on to advocate and work for racial justice.

As Catholics, we rightfully believe that the unborn and frail elderly are endowed with inviolable human dignity. The words “Black Lives Matter” should turn our attention not only to the grave injustices and indignities suffered throughout the Black community but especially to the smallest and most fragile Black lives whose situations are often made more perilous by poverty, unemployment, sub-standard schools, inadequate housing and poor health care. We cannot say we are fully “pro-life” if we routinely overlook the conditions in which far too many people of color live. To reiterate, the church’s teaching on human dignity extends through the entire continuum of human life. Being true to that teaching requires us to act on our beliefs, not just talk about them. If something “matters” to us, we act on it. Because Black Lives Matter, then each of us must do our part to create conditions in which every Black person has the opportunity to be born, to grow to maturity, to live in community and to flourish.

The Common Good

A second building block of Catholic social teaching is its focus on the common good. The words “common good” mean “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1906). Two observations follow: First, built into the church’s mission of bringing salvation to every person and all peoples is the obligation to help create a society that is just and equitable, where everyone can flourish. Second, the notion of the common good does not mean that individual human dignity takes a back seat to the overall good of society. Rather, by promoting the dignity of each person at every stage of life we are helping to promote the common good of all. Similarly, when any group of people in society is hindered by bigotry and racial prejudice from attaining a healthy measure of fulfillment, the common good of the whole society is undermined.

It is for this reason also that Black Lives Matter. Some object that in affirming the importance of Black lives, we are implying that other lives do not matter. Quite the contrary. By at long last rejecting a persistent and sinful attitude that places less value on Black lives than on other lives, we are in fact serving the common good. Affirming the dignity of Black lives diminishes no one else’s dignity. The common good and dignity of all is fostered, however, when

we work collaboratively across partisan and ideological lines, to create conditions in society wherein Black people and all people of color can equally flourish. By flourish, I mean: attain equity, live in peaceful neighborhoods, attend good schools, have access to job training, find full and satisfying employment, have access to good health care, and rise to positions of leadership in every field of endeavor and institution. The ascendancy of Black lives is not a zero-sum gain for everyone else. Rather, it is a source of strength.

Subsidiarity

A third building block of Catholic social teaching is subsidiarity. This means that insofar as it is possible and appropriate, problems are to be addressed and initiatives for the good are to be undertaken at the most local level. In other words, while the government and other large institutions, including churches, must consistently and continually provide help and care for those who are struggling, it is also important that local groups and communities be empowered to create conditions of human flourishing. Governments and big corporations and institutions do not have all the answers nor even all the resources needed to address chronic problems or lost opportunities. Rather, families and community-based groups must work together at the local level to create the conditions for human betterment.

This means that the homes and neighborhoods where Black people live matter. The de facto housing segregation that still exists in many places remains an indictment of society. All the more reason why it should matter to us that far too many of these predominantly Black neighborhoods are deteriorating and ridden with violence and drug use. It should matter to all of us that in many such neighborhoods, there are no stores or banks, no grocery stores or other essential services. To reiterate, government at all levels has a critical role to play in addressing these and other chronic problems.

Yet the residents of these neighborhoods are the most important agents of all. Participation and decision-making are ways in which people affirm that their own lives matter. This is all the more true for the Black community, whose autonomy was for far too long legally denied.

The foundation for building genuine autonomy all begins with our homes and families, regardless of our racial identity. It is in the home where a young person discovers his or her dignity. It is in the home where virtue is learned. It is in the home where the stage is set for success in school. It is in the home where young people first learn that their lives matter. It is in the home where our children—all of

our children—must learn too that Black Lives Matter. Our churches, schools, community groups and other institutions and initiatives should be extensions of our homes and should invite and encourage the participation of neighbors.

Solidarity

A fourth pillar of Catholic social teaching is solidarity. This is the recognition that those who differ from us—by race, language or culture—are in fact our brothers and sisters. We are bound together by a common humanity and by equal dignity. We are bound together by a common call to friendship with God. God is the one who calls us to care for one another along life's journey. The principle of solidarity calls us also to have a special love for those who are poor, vulnerable or oppressed.

When those who are not Black affirm that “Black Lives Matter,” they stand in solidarity with those who have been the victims of prejudice, brutality and deprivation. Authentic solidarity, however, is not *noblesse oblige*—the responsibility of “privileged” people to act with noble generosity toward the less privileged. Solidarity, in fact, means asking God's help in purifying our hearts of any and every notion of privilege, whether explicit or implied. The words “Black Lives Matter” may rub some the wrong way because the plain meaning of the words undermines notions of privilege that are deeply engrained in our culture and in many minds and hearts.

To be sure, the words “Black Lives Matter” mean different things to different people. Nonetheless, those same words should resonate with us as Catholics and indeed with all those who embrace the principles of Catholic social teaching. More than that, they should spur us on to action. By its nature, the church's social teaching is not a mere statement of principle or policy but more a summons to heal the wounds of sin and division and to take up anew the task of building a society that is a civilization of truth and love. This we must do as a church community in partnership with others. Catholic schools and Catholic social services play a critical role, as do our parishes, in the cities and beyond. With the church's social teaching as our guide, let us, as a Catholic community, build bridges of understanding so that we can say in wisdom, truth and love, that “Black Lives Matter.”

The Most Reverend William E. Lori is
the archbishop of Baltimore.

CNS photo/Jonathan Ernst, Reuters



The Supreme Court building in Washington, May 8.

WHEN RIGHTS AND LIBERTY CLASH

By Nathaniel V. Romano

How should Catholic institutions solve employment disputes?

The recent term of the U.S. Supreme Court ended with a flurry of decisions involving the relationships among religious institutions, civil government and the individuals who interact with both. People affiliated with Catholic schools—teachers and administrators, pastors and bishops, parents and students—were particularly affected by the court’s decision in the combined cases of *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru* and *St. James School v. Biel*.

Both cases concern what is known as the ministerial exception, and both have been a cause for celebration and consternation. Simultaneously, these cases present a real opportunity for the Catholic Church to model to the broader world how to “be church,” an opportunity to build up a community dedicated to doing substantial justice for its members and affiliates without recourse to civil courts and secular adjudication.

Carving Out the Ministerial Exception

The ministerial exception is a judge-made rule derived from the First Amendment’s protection of religious exercise and its limits on state involvement with religious institutions. It holds that courts cannot adjudicate disputes between religious employers and their employees when those employees are doing the core religious work of the institution.

This rule is marked by tensions, however. State and federal governments should not dictate who is best fitted to lead a religious institution or approve or license preaching and prayers. But the state has a legitimate concern that mischievous employers could “find religion,” declare their employees to be ministers and simply do what they will without recourse.

The Supreme Court tries to navigate these tensions, rejecting the broadest claims of immunity while preserving a core institutional autonomy for religious institutions. Writing for the majority, Justice Samuel Alito emphasized that the First Amendment “does not mean that religious in-

stitutions enjoy a general immunity from secular laws, but it does protect their autonomy with respect to internal management decisions that are essential to the institution’s central mission.” This includes the ability to choose the individuals who exercise fundamental or essential “key roles.”

Understood thus, the ministerial exception is not about ministers at all. It is rooted not in a desire to eliminate the rights of teachers and other church employees but in a genuine concern for protecting the integrity of the decision-making processes of religious institutions. Moreover, the exception did not emerge arbitrarily but was part of a broader line of cases dealing with the autonomy of religious bodies in a free and pluralist society.

Questions about resolving intra-ecclesial disputes arose with regularity in the middle of the 19th century. Numerous religious congregations fractured over disputes about slavery and the place of Black Americans. These disputes lead regularly to court cases as divided congregations dueled over the property and other assets of their communities.

The issue reached the Supreme Court in the 1871 decision in the case *Watson v. Jones*. Applying the First Amendment, the court concluded that secular courts must generally defer to decisions arrived at through internal church processes. If courts were to inquire into the reasons a church made its internal decisions, they would be forced to take sides in religious disputes. This would mean settling, as a matter of civil law, what a religious institution’s doctrines actually are or how they are to be applied. This was anathema in a constitutional system that prohibited state establishment of religion and ensured its free exercise.

Over the next century, a general consensus emerged concluding that courts could not intervene in any internal disputes of religious institutions if such intervention would require evaluating religious doctrine. Judicial intervention could occur only when based on neutral legal principles without resort to religious doctrine, practice or belief.

This consensus was challenged when disputes ap-

peared in which employees claimed unlawful discrimination. Employment laws generally protected employees from discrimination on a wide assortment of classifications—race, sex, ethnicity, pregnancy, marital status, illness, age, religion and disability, among others. In the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Congress provided some protection for religious employers. A statutory exception allowed discrimination on the basis of religion for jobs where religion is a legitimate qualification. Catholic churches can thus refuse to hire Lutherans as parish priests, and mosques are not required to hire Unitarian Universalists as their imams.

Still, religious institutions often make employment decisions based on religious motivations or doctrine that do not map neatly onto nondiscrimination law. For example, a religious institution that limits ordination to men is not discriminating against women on the basis of religion, for it would refuse ordination both to its own co-religionists as well as women of a different religion. It remains, however, a potential form of sex discrimination and thus subject to liability without the benefit of the statutory exemption. Indeed, shortly after passage of the Civil Rights Act, courts encountered nonreligious claims brought by employees against religious institutions. (The earliest case involving the ministerial exception, for example, was *McClure v. Salvation Army*, decided by the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in 1972, in which a female minister brought a sex discrimination claim against the Salvation Army.)

Judges questioned their competency to intervene in these kinds of disputes. If courts could not adjudicate property disputes when questions about religious doctrine were involved, it made little sense to do so when employment matters were involved, at least as regards to key employees. Courts concluded that members of the clergy and similar persons had to be exempt from nondiscrimination laws (hence the term “ministerial”).

Recognizing that different religions have different answers to what roles count as “ministerial,” the exception was expanded to cover numerous positions understood as fundamental for religious missions: church teachers and principals, music or choir directors, hospital chaplains, kosher preparation supervisors and even public relations staff.

The Supreme Court ratified these decisions in the case of *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission* in 2012. There the court concluded that a ministerial exception did apply as a means of ensuring that religious institutions can govern themselves, worship as they see fit and teach or proclaim their doctrines. These same rationales

underlie the recent decision in *Morrissey-Berru and Biel*.

For the court, the exception is not about who an employee is but what job the employee does. Religious institutions need the freedom to set their own leadership and to determine their own doctrines and practices. This includes the need to choose for themselves who will teach and transmit those doctrines and practices. Teachers are key employees, and judicial intervention into their employment would undermine the core ability of religious institutions to govern themselves.

Defining Discrimination

We can see this play out in the questions raised by *Morrissey-Berru and Biel*. In both cases, the teachers claimed they were fired for unlawful reasons; age discrimination in the case of Agnes *Morrissey-Berru* and disability or illness discrimination for Kristen *Biel*. If true, such discrimination would be not only unlawful but highly immoral. It would be a gross violation of Catholic teaching and contrary to the dignity of Ms. *Morrissey-Berru* and Ms. *Biel* as humans and as co-laborers with God and God’s people.

Thus, it should come as no surprise that the schools and the archdiocese deny that such discrimination occurred. Rather, they argued that both teachers were let go because of performance-related issues. They claimed that Ms. *Morrissey-Berru* had difficulty administering a new curriculum and that Ms. *Biel* failed both to follow the curriculum and to keep order in her classroom.

Such disputes are normal in the course of employment litigation. Employers routinely offer as justifications for their adverse decisions reasons that are nondiscriminatory. Courts evaluate these justifications to determine if they are legitimate or if they merely mask unlawful discrimination. Determining whether a religious qualification is really part of the job or is merely being used as a pretext in these and other teacher-employment cases, however, would require courts to evaluate doctrinal issues, which is exactly what courts are not competent to do.

Resolving these cases in favor of the teachers would require a court to investigate and determine that Catholic administrators—and ultimately the archbishop—at a Catholic school misunderstood or misapplied Catholic doctrine and practice in the field of education.

Catholic schools hire for mission. Mission is not limited to a set class period on religion or an occasional liturgical service but spreads across the school experience. This approach is not limited to Catholic schools. It is the experience, if not the entire justification, of religious schools gen-

erally in the United States. And when an employment dispute arises, it will be almost always the case that resolution of that dispute will involve religious doctrine and practice, because it will require courts to review a religious official's judgment about the ability of someone to practice, model, teach and proclaim a religious mission. Courts simply are not equipped to judge or resolve such disputes.

The robust application of the exception makes sense but is perhaps also unsatisfactory. This exemption, while bringing the civil judicial process to a conclusion, is not intended to be the end of the road. Yet too often it is. Recall that the whole point of the exception is religious autonomy. Autonomy is served best when religious bodies actually exercise it to govern themselves responsibly. If bishops and religious superiors simply rest in the blessed assurances of the Supreme Court that their teachers and other key employees cannot sue them, they are missing a key opportunity.

Autonomy and Accountability

The ministerial exception presents an opportunity for Catholic leaders to demonstrate how religious communities can effectively govern themselves with integrity and justice. Distrust and fear emerge in the public conversation about this issue because of the concern that "religious liberty" is code language for "religious impunity." Bishops, superiors and administrators of Catholic institutions know that discrimination is wrong; the fact that civil courts cannot remedy such discrimination does not mean no one can do it.

Instead, imagine a world where bishops and superiors institute formal dispute resolution processes to protect employees of Catholic schools and other institutions. Well-regarded arbitrators can manage such tribunals, assisted by appropriate professionals knowledgeable about the institution where a dispute arises—teachers, for example, in a dispute brought at a school. They can be empowered to compel Catholic institutions to provide documents and testimony. Similarly, they can be empowered to offer real remedies when unjust discrimination is found to have occurred—back pay, reinstatement, lost insurance costs, etc. Even if bishops or other superiors reserve to themselves the final decision, a neutral person hearing both sides, receiving relevant evidence and offering an independent conclusion is a crucial element of true justice.

This type of process is not something new for the church, nor one alien to its sensibilities. Historically, the church has long operated courts and tribunals to resolve disputes among its members. Today, church courts continue to adjudicate a number of disputes, the most prominent

being annulments. Catholic leaders also have direct experience with the use of lay experts to make, ratify or advise on their decisions. Every parish and diocese has a finance council; most also have parish pastoral councils. Bishops are advised by presbyteral councils and religious superiors by consultants.

Moreover, bishops can even go a step further and concede some level of civil oversight by committing themselves to radical transparency. As much as the Supreme Court has protected church autonomy, it has also recognized that if a dispute emerges under "neutral principles of law" that do not involve religious doctrines, courts can hear those cases. Here, bishops can designate these tribunals by contract as arbitration bodies subject to the Federal Arbitration Act.

That act broadly defers to arbitration awards but allows them to be set aside when there is fraud, collusion or duress. Thus, bishops would not have to worry about their religious determinations being reviewed or overruled by a secular judge, but at the same time they would be ensuring the broader church and secular society that the systems they set up are being held accountable for integrity and honesty in their proceedings.

This is an opportunity but not a panacea. If our objection to the bishops' use of the ministerial exception stems from a disagreement with them over who actually should be a minister or the extent to which church leadership should recognize or accommodate L.G.B.T. rights, for example, this is not a solution. Those debates will require long and difficult conversations, spiritual dialogue, mutual charity and church-wide discernment. If, however, our concerns also include the transparency of church decisions and how we model authentic Gospel values in our institutions, then this can be a first step in that process.

Resort to civil courts is problematic. This does not mean, though, that Catholics should resign themselves to subpar outcomes or the lack of recourse for apparently unjust decisions. Rather, bishops can use this opportunity for self-government in the ways the First Amendment imagines. Religious liberty exists so that the church can be a responsible member of civil society. So let us be a responsible member of a pluralist and diverse society, demonstrating with integrity and authenticity what it means to be the people of God.

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Our Emmaus

*Under quarantine, my family saw
with new eyes the land where Jesus walked*

By Stephanie Saldaña

Old City, Jerusalem

A flash of wings. That's what I remember.

We had already been quarantined for weeks. My son, Sebastian, appeared stunned, a little boy unaccustomed to being secluded from the world for so long. A month had passed since Jerusalem was locked down; and we were waiting in our apartment, set on a campus among olive groves on the edge of the city, on a hill just before the checkpoint into Bethlehem. For days we had inexplicably stopped stepping outside, as though even the trees, even the earth could harm us.

"Let's go for a walk," I whispered.

He nodded, bending down to tie his shoes. He took my hand. He is 9 years old, and I wondered for how long he would agree to hold my hand. We made our way outside, moving together into the olive groves, his fingers pressing into mine. A flash of blue and white struck into our path.

"Look, a kingfisher!" Sebastian shouted.

We stopped and looked. Just a streak of color but enough to recognize that something from the outside had broken in.

"Never forget this," I said.

The virus had arrived in Jerusalem six weeks before that flash of wings, at the onset of a spring unlike any other I can recall. The almond trees exploded into pink and white blossoms, and the fields were blanket-ed yellow with mustard flowers and spotted red with anemones. At the end of February, I left our home to pick my children up from school and crossed paths with soaring cattle egrets, their wings fanning white as they lifted in sight of the traffic of the adjoining street.

I sent a message to my husband: "What are these birds?"

A few days before Ash Wednesday, we learned about the first cases of Covid-19. Our community priest, Father Russ, deciding that it might be too dangerous to press ashes to our foreheads, sprinkled them over our heads instead.

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The first week of March, I received a call: The virus had arrived in Bethlehem, and the students at the university where I was heading for a meeting were rushing home. The checkpoint between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, which we regularly crossed, was closing. I looked from our vantage of the hilltop, over the separation wall to Bethlehem on the other side, to houses lit up: friends,

colleagues, the hospital where my children were born. That afternoon, the Church of the Nativity, where I had prayed during the pregnancy of each of my children over the place where Mary had given birth to Jesus, closed its doors. A week later, my children's school in Jerusalem closed. The borders into the country shut soon after.

A world was growing slowly more restricted. My three children, Joseph, 12, Sebastian, 9, and Carmel, 4, unpacked their backpacks onto our dining room table and, like millions of children around the world, began their school days at home.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built on the site where Jesus was crucified, died and was raised from the dead, closed to pilgrims for the first extended period in nearly 700 years.


Even as I write this, I am still shaken. Our world is one of gathering, of touch itself. I have taught my children to kiss the icons of the saints as we enter churches. Our Jewish friends touch the mezuzah as they pass through doors. Our Muslim friends prostrate side by side at Al Aqsa Mosque for their Friday prayers, the word "Friday" in Arabic coming from the word for "gathering." When the virus hit, we were heading into our most sacred seasons: Easter, Passover and Ramadan.

Had I understood, I might have slipped into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to light one last candle while I could. For years, I had lived within walking distance of the church, which stands in the heart of the markets of the Old City. Today, Christians are only an estimated 1 percent of the population of the Holy Land. Like others who live in Jerusalem, I did not simply pray at the Holy Sepulchre. The church anchored me. I stopped to light candles on the way to buy carrots or to bring home a chicken, the empty tomb beneath elevating the mundane chores of my days, binding them up with eternity.

Now no longer. The government announced that we could venture no farther than 100 meters from our front doors, save for emergencies.

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"Love calls us to the things of this world," the poet Richard Wilbur wrote, to the here-ness and the now-ness of God. The hilltop where we lived had become our entire world. I knew that we were lucky to have



The world narrowed, and every fruit we touched tethered us in a suddenly frightening reality. This would be our cathedral.

trees. We were even luckier to have one another. But I was accustomed to basing my life in urban centers, and I had never really embraced our current home, to which we had moved four years ago for my husband's work. This Lent, I would have to rediscover what it means to be a pilgrim in a land in front of our door.

I took my children's hands, and we ventured to discover the immediate world. Cars disappeared from roads. Carpets of cyclamen called out. The first tender shoots began sprouting on fig trees, and green furry almonds appeared. My boys climbed into lemon trees, scraping their hands on the thorns, to throw down yellow bulbs for us to carry home.

The world narrowed, and every fruit we touched tethered us in a suddenly frightening reality. This would be our cathedral. My daughter led us each afternoon to a trail of ants, and we carefully climbed over them, anxious not to do them harm. The world now seemed to be asking only one thing of us, that we hurt one another as little as possible.

"Consider the lilies of the field.... Look at the birds of the air." For the first time in my life, I took these words not as suggestion but directive.

As for "Do not worry about your life," this seemed impossible. I had no idea how to navigate a world in which danger might come to my family from a doorknob, an embrace, a song sung too close by. We were cut off from our loved ones in the United States and France—the borders between us closed. News arrived: two friends, worried about chest pains; my brother, an essential worker, manning long shifts; my husband's cousin testing positive; a friend on a ventilator; another recovering after catching the virus on a plane; the fragility of a world upended. It had come to France first, my husband's family watching in dread as it headed to us. It came to us, and I watched in dread as it headed to the United States.

I walked with my children among trees. Jesus, too, had taken solace in nature. After the execution of John the Baptist, he left on a boat in search of solitude. On the night before his death, he prayed among trees. He was a man who climbed mountains and hills. Now I felt him walking with us in our loneliness.

Look at the birds of the air. We learned their names: the brown chukar, sprinting across the path, green parakeets, the black and white hoopoe fanning its crown.

I woke up one morning and discovered, in the middle of Lent, that it was the feast of the Annunciation.

We moved and held and loved and waited. We drew one another near. When you are only allowed to embrace a few people in the world, you recognize the gift of it.

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The government announced the strongest restrictions yet as we entered into Holy Week. On any other Palm Sunday, we would have climbed the Mount of Olives to join the procession from Bethphage into Jerusalem, waving our palms alongside thousands of pilgrims, the parade a beautiful mess of competing choirs and languages walking in the footsteps of Jesus. This year, I awakened early, walked to the garden and sliced a few palm fronds from a lonely tree.

As I carried them, a memory flashed back to me: of folding the fronds into green crosses we would hold in the pews of Our Lady of Lourdes Church when I was a little girl. I picked up a frond, folded, turned, hesitantly, to fashion it. I had not forgotten.

My husband, a deacon in the Syriac Catholic Church, draped a pale sash over his shoulder, and we gathered the children. Each held a palm. We set out onto the path cir-

cling the property, waving our branches in the air, parading by ourselves. My daughter brought a plastic drum she wouldn't stop beating.

"Hosannah in the highest!" she cried.

We lasted a few turns before we collapsed in the backyard. My 12-year-old, normally cynical, remarked: "I think that God is proud of us."

And I smiled. Smiled at my son, seeing God seeing us.

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That week, I watched live videos on Facebook of the photographer and conservationist Amir Balaban at the Jerusalem Bird Observatory, ringing birds before releasing them: a white-breasted kingfisher, a lesser white throat, a reed warbler. Something about those birds, still crossing borders while the rest of us remained home, helped me breathe.

Then I turned to videos posted by Adeb Jawad Joudeh Al Hussein, the custodian of the keys to the Holy Sepulchre, who was unlocking the door to the church for the few members of the clergy still allowed inside. He provided proof: brown-robed Franciscans processing through with their masks, and Greek Orthodox priests. If we could no longer light our candles, at least someone could.

Holy Thursday arrived. We ate a solemn meal as a family. When we finished, my husband left the room and returned with a basin of warm water. We knelt and washed one another's feet—shy and unfamiliar and quiet, and I found myself saddened and moved by us in our human bodies, trying and failing and still trying to love one another.

We lit a lantern and set out into the olive trees.

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On Good Friday, I cut the branches of the hawthorn tree with a knife, for tradition held that the thorns for Christ's crown had been made from that tree or perhaps the jujube, also growing nearby. I had never noticed them before.

I was learning about so much I had never noticed. Since we were unable to walk the Stations of the Cross on the Via Dolorosa this year, we

Heaven Help

By Peter Kozik


Boom! The thunder rattles every pane in the house
as our Gracie, four,
leaps to our bed! Boom!
It bellows! Each uncertain pause
in clap after clap shivers spine after wobbly spine!

Whatever prayerfulness she knows
plays hide and seek in the blackness behind
her eyelids clenched like fists on nickels,
where wolves and witches
still roam tough and unredeemed.

Her mother strokes her hair and whispers:
Farmers need the rain. Does she care or listen?
Or is the harvest of whatever is coming
sown beneath each claw of lightning
thistle weed and hog wort?

The bully on the bus will punch her stomach.
The teacher will upend her desk,
her lunch and books and papers and pencils strewn at her
classmates' feet;
hypocrisies will grind like spurs on bone.
It rains and rains and rains and rains and the children
cannot sleep.

*Peter Kozik teaches educational studies at Keuka College. He has previously had poetry published in **America** as well as in the anthology **A Tumult** for John Berryman.*



We moved and held
and loved and waited.
We drew one another
near. When you
are only allowed to
embrace a few people
in the world, you
recognize the gift
of it. 🔥



decided to draw them. As I sat down in front of pen and paper, I struggled to remember them. I passed those stations so often on the streets that I no longer gave them thought. The idea that I had grown accustomed to the Passion made me uncomfortable. Now Carmel, 4 years old, drew Jesus falling down. She took another sheet of paper and drew the scene again. She hates to fall. By the third sheet, she asked if she might take a Band-Aid from the medicine cabinet, and she pressed it reverently on the paper in place of a drawing: *Jesus Falls the Third Time*.

Then she turned to sketching Jesus on the cross, the two lines, the simple body. When she finished, she announced: “Now I will draw his friend standing beside him.”

It took a 4-year-old to teach me what it means to really walk beside Jesus, to long to heal his wounds, to provide friendship in the darkest hour.

The world was bound up in sadness. Thousands were dying alone of the virus each day. We took in the shock of health care workers and bus drivers and the elderly, of mothers and fathers and their children, of priests and religious, of workers and teachers. The cross had never been so apparent—nor had love. We kissed Christ’s body on the cross, took it down and placed it away.

•••

Holy Saturday, called the Saturday of Light in Arabic, passed. Easter arrived. We feasted. We sang Alleluia from

our front porch in sight of two neighboring families, who sang from theirs. We lifted Jesus from his resting place and kissed him and draped him in white to welcome him back to us.

Yet we did not walk to the Holy Sepulchre, as we normally would, to light a candle beside the empty tomb. In fact, I cannot remember such a lonely Easter as this one.

We knew that Christ was risen. But I did not really *know* it.

Days passed. We stopped going outside—until that morning when my son Sebastian came to me. He appeared stunned, like a boy taken from the world for too long.

“Let’s go for a walk,” I whispered.

He nodded, kneeling down to tie his shoes. We made our way into the trees.

A flash of blue and white wings.

“Look! A kingfisher!”

We stopped. Something had broken in. The beginnings of Easter.

We continued walking. After a while, I said: “You know they say that the kingfisher is the symbol of Christ, don’t you?”

“But why?”

“I’m not sure. Maybe because Christ is King? And the fisher of men?”

“That makes sense,” he answered, and squeezed my hand.



Inside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher

•••

My daughter's school reopened. I filled her pink backpack, her water bottle. I took her temperature, fastened her mask and my own, and we headed into a city I had barely seen in months. At the school parents paced, summoning the courage to let their children go. The world revealed itself to be frightening and beautiful; and once again we were in it—walking on tip-toe, trying not to touch too much, to break or get broken in the process.

Carmel pointed skyward. "Look mom, swallows!" A flock was circling overhead.

I let go of her hand.

I descended the hill until I arrived in front of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The door remained closed. But the faithful were kneeling on the pavement, praying in front of the closed door. A young man from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in white robes knelt in a corner, reading from a prayer book. Two Russian Orthodox Christians laid prostrate. Pedestrians approached the door and kissed the ground before continuing on their way.

I watched, overcome by their fidelity.

A few days later, Sebastian summoned me for another walk. I could tell that something had been on his mind.

We were almost home before he spoke up, hesitantly. "Mom, can I ask you a question?"

"What's that, Sebastian?"

"It's about the kingfisher."

I had sometimes wondered if it had even been a kingfisher that we had seen that day—perhaps it was a jay striking into our path. But my son had held onto the flash, like a promise.

"Mom, do you think that kingfishers fish for people?"

I asked him what he meant.

"I mean, I know that they fish for fish, but do you think that they also go fishing for people? I mean, do they go looking for us, so that they can show us a sign from God?"

I stopped on the path, startled.

"Yes, Sebastian. I think that they must."

This is what I will remember, about this season of heartbreak and hope, of terror and waiting, when we could not be there at the empty tomb. It would take time to recognize the world given back again, the bread vendors still standing outside Damascus Gate. The holiness in a bus ride shared. The father, pushing his little girl on a bicycle. Apricots coming into season. These ordinary miracles, revealing themselves for the first time. The boy who took me walking, to show me that God makes a pilgrimage to us.

Stephanie Saldaña is the author, most recently, of *A Country Between*. She lives in Jerusalem.



An illustration of the death of Uncle Tom from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe



Harriet Beecher Stowe and 'Feeling Right' on Race

By Elizabeth Grace Matthew

Almost 170 years ago, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* helped to propel many progressive, elite white women toward abolitionist sympathies.

When President Abraham Lincoln, as is alleged, greeted the novel's author, Harriet Beecher Stowe, as "the little lady that started this big war," the description was mostly hyperbole. Nevertheless, it would be no exaggeration to say that Stowe's novel, published in 1852, both epitomized and codified the 19th-century sentimentalist idea that progressive white women's feelings should be the ultimate compass for American morality—on race and more generally.

In the "Concluding Remarks" of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe urges her readers—mostly Northern white women whose ostensibly


delicate sensibilities had been shielded by their men from real knowledge about the brutality of slavery—to "feel right" about abolition, and all would be well. Leave the politics—the thinking and the doing—to others. Just *feel right*.

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe paints an enslaved woman, Eliza, as a Black Madonna figure trying desperately to save her innocent baby. She paints an enslaved man, Tom, as a Black Christ figure who is willing if not happy to be slaughtered for love of those who enslaved him. And, of course, it should go without saying that Northern white women "feeling right" by Stowe's injunction—crying indignant tears at her portrayal of Tom's death, for example—was indeed preferable to the grotesque

alternative (cheering, say, at his demise).

Yet it is essential to recognize that for Stowe's readers, this low bar of "feeling right" still obscured and excused more than it revealed or demanded. After all, it was relatively easy for many Northern white women, even in 1852, to feel shock, sympathy and righteous anger about the fact that through the brutality of race-based slavery, those bad people down there in the American South could crucify a Black Christ figure.

But it would have been much harder for progressive white women in 1852 to acknowledge some far more complex and self-incriminating realities. For one, through the very existence of race-based slavery, the United States as a



For Harriet Beecher Stowe's readers, the low bar of 'feeling right' obscured and excused more than it revealed or demanded.

whole dehumanized all Black people in ways that flatly contradicted the nation's stated ideals. Two, white Northern women's own prosperity, like the prosperity of the country in which their husbands and fathers had done so well, was built on the backs and the blood of the enslaved. And three, there are individual Black people, just as there are individual white people, who are good, bad and indifferent; and this fact is entirely immaterial to the unequivocal evil of enslaving any human being.

By failing to acknowledge these crucial realities, Stowe made feeling right easy, righteous and comfortable, all at once. If she had made it harder—hard enough to struggle with rather than obfuscate the facts stated above—she probably would not have written the best-selling novel of the 19th century. And she probably would not have compelled as many white women to embrace the abolitionist cause.

In the mid-19th century, white American women were at the height of their seclusion in the domestic sphere. They did not typically hold jobs outside the home. They could not vote, and they did not run political in-

stitutions. In the rapidly industrializing North, women were newly seen as uniquely virtuous because the homes where women labored were increasingly seen as sacred havens apart from the sordid realities of business and production (rather than as the centers of agricultural production, as they had been in the 18th century).

Thus, Stowe's insistence that a reader's most effective contribution to abolition would be to feel right—notwithstanding the factual and moral oversimplifications that she created in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to induce that feeling—was probably more helpful than harmful on the whole. In 1852, white women's self-exculpatory, oversimplified progressivism on race was better than no progressivism on race at all.

But in 2020, the oversimplified social narratives around race that make it easy for many progressive white women to feel right (not to mention the apparent continued consensus that progressive white women's feelings are the point) are a real problem.

They are a problem because progressive white women are much more powerful than we were 170 years ago. We hold leadership positions in many

sectors; moreover, unlike women of color, unlike self-professed conservative women and unlike men of any race or creed, we are uniquely privileged in that, in most spaces, we tend to be perceived as nonthreatening. Thus, our white privilege works in tandem with a perverse form of reverse gender privilege to affect our being engaged, more often than not, as racially innocent (as well as innocent more generally). This allows us to be heard through fewer ideological filters than is possible for individuals of any other group.

What do we do with our unique cultural power as it pertains to race and racism? Too often, many of us do exactly what Stowe asked her readers to do: emote in a well-meant attempt to show that we feel right, without thinking about whether we are entirely right.

It is both easy and right, for example, to read Robin DiAngelo's 2018 best seller *White Fragility* and feel shock, sympathy and discomfiting recognition of the casual exclusion and routine belittlement with which Black people are too often treated in predominantly white spaces. It is both easy and right to feel duty-bound to

reflect on whether we, as individuals, treat Black people with the same presumptive decency and respect with which we treat fellow white people. And it is both easy and right to feel ashamed of any defensiveness or oversensitivity that we have evinced around discussing race with people of color because white people who are incapable of honest dialogue about race and racism are correctly perceived by people of color as impossible to trust.

It may be harder to recognize that DiAngelo's portrayal of Black people is just as reductive and dehumanizing as Stowe's was 170 years ago and that her conclusions are solely about white people's feelings, just as Stowe's were. For starters, there is astonishing anti-Black racism at work in DiAngelo's lack of any remedy for the fact that white people tend to be seen as individuals, while Black people are too often viewed as a monolith, incapable of individual thought. DiAngelo does not encourage us to extend to individual Black people the same presumptive respect that we are afforded as white people. She encourages us instead to view white people as a monolith as well, incapable of (and, therefore, not responsible for) individual thought.

For DiAngelo, a white person who feels right is one who knows she feels wrong and can never feel right and then does exactly nothing, materially or otherwise, to improve the conditions of any Black person or community, while ceding the interpretation of her own feelings to DiAngelo. Thus, DiAngelo remains eternally relevant because nothing ever has improved (so, the civil rights work of many Black leaders and others over the past 170 years has been for naught) or ever will

improve (so, white progressives feeling right is not a means to an end for people of color but an end in itself for white progressives).

It is both easy and right, for another example, to feel right—that is, to feel utter horror—about the ghastly murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis and about the deaths of other Black Americans killed by police officers. It is both easy and right to feel enraged that the murder of an unarmed Black citizen happened in America in 2020, as three other police officers looked on. It is both easy and right to feel outraged that police brutality still—for a variety of reasons, all of which have their roots in past or present racism—falls disproportionately on Black people.

It may be harder to recognize that the few young people (many of them white) who disrupted peaceful protests with violence and destruction wound up harming the same economically fragile Black communities that are most affected by police brutality. It may be harder still to receive the complicated perspectives of people with real understanding of and stakes in those economically fragile Black communities in which many progressive white women do not intimately know anyone. Perspectives from those communities may be harder to receive because they draw on more than one idea (and more than one feeling) at the same time.


There is pride in the protesters of all races peacefully exercising their constitutional rights to draw attention to the evil of racist injustice. There is also heartbrokenness at the looting and burning of their communities. And there is outrage at criminals of all races capitalizing on an opportu-

nity for a prosperous evening on the job, at the expense of people in neighborhoods that were already suffering from high levels of property crime and violence. Indeed, they were suffering long before a lot of progressive white women were shown one oversimplified strand of a complex and harrowing reality, and accepted the idea that feeling right about that one oversimplified strand somehow constitutes broad solidarity.

Now, I am by most measures a progressive white woman myself—demographically (I am white), ideologically (I am a registered Democrat with Jesuit-inspired political ideals) and culturally (I like fair trade coffee and know all the words to “Hamilton”). So I understand how tempting it is to focus on feeling right with respect to matters of race and racism. After all, that is what we have been told to do for the past 170 years by the supposedly progressive white women who addressed us as contemporaries from positions of alleged moral authority.

It is just that, through nothing intrinsic to me as a person and purely because of the demographic cards I have been dealt, it is probably easier for me than it is for many women who are otherwise like me to see that feeling right is not an accurate barometer for either thinking right or doing right.

I grew up in a white, interfaith household (my dad grew up Catholic and working class, and my mom grew up Jewish and middle class) in one of the most socioeconomically and racially diverse zip codes in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. I am married to a Black first-generation Liberian-American man, who grew up in the poorest municipality in the State of



Robin DiAngelo's portrayal of Black people is just as reductive and dehumanizing as Stowe's was 170 years ago.

Ohio, where the residents are almost all Black. Today he and I are raising Black, Catholic, Jewish sons in another one of the most socioeconomically and racially diverse zip codes in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. Our neighborhood has many synagogues; our sons attend day care at one of them.

My husband and I tend to avoid the kinds of isolated, white working-class spaces where we might run into the wrong MAGA-hat-wearing white man. But we are just as deliberate about avoiding the kinds of self-consciously leftist spaces where we will surely encounter many Robin DiAngelo knock-offs. These self-righteously radical white women often betray a pride so brittle it borders on discomfort when they share spaces with working-class Black people; and welcome interracial families like ours with a voyeuristic enthusiasm that might seem flattering if it were not so insidious. They also use other progressive white women's well-meant desire to feel right in their attempt to co-opt us into helping them create a fraudulent moral high ground on race.

This supposed high ground entails treating Black people with the soft-pedaled racism of sugar-coated condescension.

We chose the mixed-race spaces where our family lives, worships and learns quite intentionally because we want our sons to experience as little as possible in early childhood the twin racisms of second-class citizenship (sadly, still the rule in many less-than-progressive spaces) and explicit

tokenization (equally sadly, now the rule in many ostensibly progressive ones). We chose our family's Catholic parish specifically because the mostly white parishioners welcomed us with no trace of the hesitance we had experienced in some other majority white parishes; nor did they patronize us.

We chose our sons' diverse Catholic school specifically because it was the only school we visited that we believed could give our Black boys both a solid education and a fighting chance to be children rather than objects of either regressive white fear or faux-progressive white patronization. My husband and I feel extremely grateful for this parish and school because we know how dishearteningly rare such spaces are, both within the church and outside of it.

Hence, the many human experiences shaping my own only-in-America story have given me a rare vantage point from which to notice what happens when white progressives' conversations about race and racism are not anchored in the complicated facts of others' historical or present

realities, the rigors of theology or the imperatives of civic service. Without embedded challenges like these to the primacy of white progressives' feelings, such conversations can become profoundly counterproductive.

They can become so counterproductive because by replacing the subconsciously racist bias of white fragility with the emotional masochism of feeling right about white fragility, we are doing nothing to mitigate the blatant racism embodied in brutal policemen, wanton racial profilers, under-resourced schools or inadequate housing. Moreover, we are codifying and expanding upon the devious racism of sycophantic patronization perpetrated by Robin DiAngelo, making it even less likely that Black people in mixed-race spaces will be treated with the same respect given to white people—that is, with full acknowledgment of their complex humanity, moral agency and intrinsic equality.

This is why, 170 years after *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, it is long past time for progressive white women (and men) to stop worrying about feeling right and start worrying about thinking right and doing right instead.

Elizabeth Grace Matthew works in online education at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

AMERICA'S GUIDE TO RETREATS

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

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Bellarmino Jesuit Retreat Center

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Website: www.jesuitretreat.org

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Ph: (781) 419-1337; Website: www.campioncenter.org/programs

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Ph: (404) 255-0503; Email: registrar@ignatiushouse.org
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P.O. Box 223, 501 N. Church Road, Wernersville, PA 19565
Ph: (610) 670-3642; Email: mleonowitz@jesuitcenter.org
Website: www.jesuitcenter.org

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



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4800 Fahrwald Road Oshkosh, WI 54902
Ph: (920) 231-9060; Website: www.jesuitretreathouse.org

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Visit www.jesuitspiritualcenter.com for our complete retreat listing.



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9601 Union Rd, Plymouth, IN 46563
Ph: (574) 935-1780; Email: lindenwood@poorhandmaids.org
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 Website: www.desertrenewal.org

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

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5637 Erie Street, Racine, WI 53402
 Ph: (262) 898-2590; Website: www.SienaRetreatCenter.org

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Spiritual Ministry Center

4822 Del Mar Avenue, San Diego, CA 92107
 Ph: (619) 224-9444; Fax: (619) 224-1082
 Email: spiritmin@rscj.org; website: www.spiritmin.org

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Luke

By Cristina Legarda

Some physicians taste the patient's urine
to diagnose the sweet-water disease.

I like to pour it on the ground
and await the telltale trail

of tiny experts, ants and other creeping things
attracted to sweetness, as most of us are.

I've been to Alexandria and Rome,
Jerusalem, Byzantium, and nowhere

are the sick in any way distinct.
Same rashes, fevers, weeping sores;

the same taut faces parents have
when their babies are ill or dying;

the same terror and despair in sufferers' eyes
when they realize relief will never be theirs.

We were taught in school that this pain was
earned,
that they brought it upon themselves somehow

yet also that we are prey to nature's whims,
effects following causes in a game of chance.

Be sober, be grave, be quiet, we heard
as apprentices following our teachers around

but never be merciful, compassionate, and kind.
These sinners deserved, after all, to be sick.

But now comes this radical idea
that sufferings are not the wages of sin,

that abscesses are not stigmata of guilt,
that towers that fall are not meant for the fallen.

If that is true, then when we look into their eyes
we must admit we see ourselves looking back;

we can no longer throw victims of plague by the
road,
abandoning them while they still live and
breathe;

we can no longer shut the door
to women in labor with no place to turn;

we must set aside the pleasure of blame,
and see more closely instead, understand.

This is total upheaval, the world upside-down.
How sweet and free to be told love is ours.

*Cristina Legarda is a physician
practicing in Boston.*

Coming to America

By Jenny Shank

Two Vietnamese refugees in a tent city at the Camp Pendleton Marine Corps base in Southern California, May 7, 1975.

In June, a math professor at Laney College in Oakland, Calif., was put on leave after he asked a student named Phuc Bui Diem Nguyen to “anglicize” her name because, he said, it sounded “like an insult” in English. Phuc Tran, the author of the hilarious and heart-breaking new memoir *Sigh, Gone*, similarly grappled with American mispronunciations and jokes about his name ever since his family came to the United States from Vietnam as refugees in 1975, when he was a toddler.

In Tran’s earliest memory, when he was 4, he asks his dad what his name is “in English.” In Vietnamese, he writes, “my name is phonetically pronounced *fuhp*. It sounds like a baseball clapping into the lithe, oiled leather of a catcher’s glove.” His father tells him his name is “Fook” in English. During the “Star Wars”-besotted years in which Tran grows up, he tells people his name “rhymes with Luke.” He briefly substitutes the name Peter for his own before middle school. His

devout Catholic parents agree because of the biblical resonance of the name, but the decision to switch leads to more teasing than before, so he quickly reverts to his given name.

When the Tran family immigrates to the United States, they are assigned to Carlisle, Pa., where local Lutheran families sponsor them, providing “an array of household items, scattershot all over Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.” The town, Tran writes, epitomizes “small-town PA. Poorly read. Very white. Collar blue.” The Trans are “the token refugee family,” who “blended right into the mix like proverbial flies in the ointment. That is to say: we didn’t.”

In Vietnam, Tran’s father had been a lawyer, but in Carlisle, he takes a job at a tire factory, where his fellow workers make fun of his pronunciation of the word “teeth.” The family of four lives in a 660-square-foot apartment for a decade, while Tran’s parents struggle to learn the English language and American customs, like writing

one’s given name first instead of one’s surname, as is done in Vietnam. “Do things backward to fit in,” Tran writes, “a fitting metaphor.” When Tran is in elementary school, seeing his parents struggle makes him doubt their infallibility, doubts that usually don’t surface in children until much later. “If I couldn’t believe in my parents, in whom (or what) could I believe?”

Tran’s parents immerse him in Catholic rituals and demonstrate their profound faith when in 1979 Tran’s mother is diagnosed with Hodgkin’s lymphoma. They travel to Philadelphia to visit the shrine of St. John Neumann, where they pray and purchase a relic, a bone fragment of the saint, and Tran is given a prayer card, “the trading cards of Catholicism.” When his mother undergoes surgery a few days later, the doctors find no cancer. His father calls it a miracle. “He believed it,” Tran writes. “I didn’t know what to believe. I didn’t know what a miracle was. I only knew what

Sigh, Gone
A Misfit's Memoir of Great Books, Punk Rock, and the Fight to Fit In
By Phuc Tran
Flatiron Books
320p \$27.99

I could see: that my mother was alive.”

As Tran navigates a rocky childhood, marred by racism and physical abuse, he yearns for spiritual and intellectual sustenance beyond the “muscular, if simple, Catholicism” of his parents. He finds salvation in two sources that might seem contradictory: punk music and the classics of literature. Tran shows how the two disparate art forms are related, both created by people who wanted to transmit an artifact of their inner lives to others.

Tran constructs *Sigh, Gone* as a series of meditations on the lessons from great books that moved and instructed him. “As an immigrant, as a Vietnamese kid, as a poor kid, I had collected so many scarlet letters of alienation that I connected profoundly to the great works,” he writes. “As I read, I began to understand that all the great works wrangled with big questions, *important* questions: our place in the world, the value of our experience, the fairness and meaning of our suffering, our quest for love and belonging.” In a town where Tran’s co-worker at the gas station glances at his copy of the *Iliad* and thinks it’s called “I Laid,” classics are a life raft for Tran.

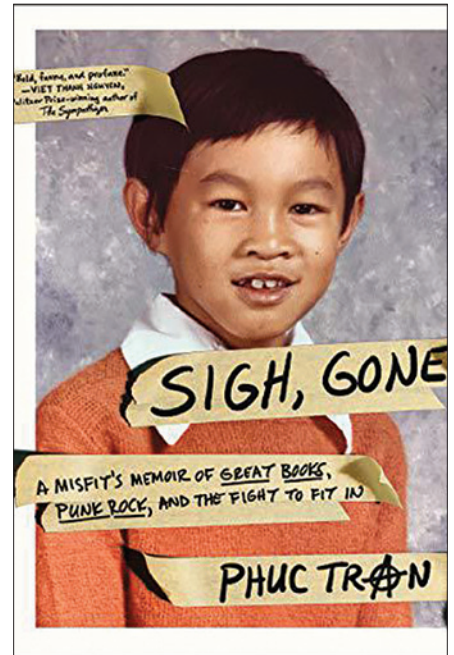
Tran learns from his parents a knack for survival. The Bee Gees’ “Stayin’ Alive” is the “accidental theme song for the Tran family.” His survival instincts induce him to abandon his “Star Wars”-and-comic-book sci-fi nerdery, and instead throw in with a group of skateboarding punk rockers, who accept him for who he is, a transformation he likens to that of Eliza Doolittle in “Pygmalion.” As he learns tricks on his skateboard, he ex-

plores punk music, beginning by photocopying the pages on punk from *The Rolling Stone History of Rock and Roll* at the library. He bleaches his hair and sources his wardrobe from second-hand stores—a gesture that his thrifty parents grudgingly approve of. “You know one way to show that you fit in?” Tran writes, “By *not* fitting in.”

While some people receive their identity as a sort of hand-me-down from their family’s resources, religion and culture, for a refugee who begins life in the wake of the obliteration of his family’s native country, this is not an option. Because nearly everyone considers him an outsider, Tran recognizes with rare acuity how he is viewed, and sets about deliberately choosing what influences he will cultivate and project. The names of the bands he loved, the movies he watched and the literature he devoured will conjure many memories for Gen-X readers.

While Tran’s pop cultural enthusiasms leaven the story, the most searing parts of the book address Tran’s relationship with his father. When Tran’s father beats him so badly he cannot sit in class, his second-grade teacher visits and instructs Tran’s father that “in America, parents can’t hit their kids *as much* as they do in Vietnam.” Tran writes, “As an adult, I can explain and even understand where his anger came from (PTSD as a refugee, his own abuse as a child, the cycle of abuse that can perpetuate itself in a culture that equated obedient children with great parenting). As a second grader, I knew this violence as my only reality.”

Tran’s father’s anger flares periodically throughout his childhood, and



combusts so spectacularly when Tran is in high school that he leaves home and couch-surfs for several months. There are beautiful moments of near-connection between Tran and his father—such as their mutual respect for books, and one holiday’s perfect gift of a stereo system. Their moments of frightening disconnection shadow his childhood, but he writes about his father with sensitivity and forgiveness.

Sigh, Gone, like Tran himself, contains multitudes. It might seem like a jumble of contradictory themes and ideas, but as the book reveals its design, one can see Tran has selected what to include as carefully as he assembled his thrift-store punk wardrobe. This is a winning, funny, big-hearted book about what it means to choose an American identity despite this country’s flaws.

Jenny Shank’s first novel, *The Ringer*, won the *High Plains Book Award*. She is on the faculty of the *Mile High M.F.A. in creative writing* at *Regis University* in Denver.



AP Photo/Elaine Thompson

An unending argument

By Michael A. Vaccari

In November 2019, voters in Washington State defeated Referendum 88, which would have reinstated affirmative action policies in the state.

At the start of *The Affirmative Action Puzzle*, Melvin Urofsky makes it clear that his goal is not to “make a case for or against affirmative action” but to provide context for “how affirmative action affected politics, the economy, higher education, the law, and the groups involved.” He achieves this aim, and readers of this book who are engaged with these issues will be rewarded and will find their views challenged.

To appreciate this goal, we must first understand what affirmative action is. In this book, Melvin Urofsky, an emeritus professor of history at Virginia Commonwealth University and the author of numerous books, including *Louis D. Brandeis: A Life* (2009) and *Dissent and the Supreme Court: Its Role in the Court's History and the Nation's Constitutional Dialogue* (2015), details the critical issues.

What is affirmative action? Urofsky defines two types of affirmative action: “soft” and “hard.” Soft is open-

ing doors to groups (for example, the Civil Rights Act of 1964), while hard involves preferential treatment and quotas or timetables. According to Professor Urofsky, the subject of affirmative action is still “a great puzzle.”

The author begins with the Supreme Court’s infamous decision in the case *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which upheld segregated schools so long as the facilities for separate races were of “equal merit.” In one of the most important dissents in Supreme Court history, Justice John Marshall Harlan looked for a “color-blind” Constitution: “the Constitution is color-blind and neither knows nor tolerates classes among its citizens.” At the time, Justice Harlan’s decision in 1896 was seen as an ideal to dream for. Today, the color-blind approach does not provide justice to minorities.

Various factors involved in affirmative action are further analyzed in a famous opinion for the case *Regents of the University of California v.*

Bakke (1978). This decision involved a white applicant to a state medical school who was denied admission because the school’s plan set aside a quota of 16 seats for minorities. In a 5-to-4 opinion, the Supreme Court found that the school’s absolute quota approach was unconstitutional and that it denied Allan Bakke’s right not to be discriminated against based on race. The opinions in the case broke out into two groups of four justices on each side, with Justice Lewis Powell Jr. issuing the decisive opinion.

Four justices argued that the Constitution was indeed color-blind, that Justice Harlan’s dissent in 1896 was correct and that the heart of the civil rights movement and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 sought race-neutral treatment. Four other justices believed that the Constitution has never been color-blind and the 14th Amendment’s equal protection clause was an affirmative plan to help former slaves to overcome 250 years of slavery.

The Affirmative Action Puzzle
A Living History From Reconstruction to Today
By Melvin Urofsky
Pantheon Books
572p \$35

Justice Powell's decision, described by a reporter as "a Solomonic decision," concluded two things. On the one hand, he agreed with four justices that race could be a factor in admissions as a remedy for centuries of racial discrimination and was a legitimate step to advance diversity. On the other hand, he concluded with the other four justices that absolute quotas could not be tolerated under the Constitution.

The critical points of affirmative action programs continue to present themselves to the court today. Urofsky's book provides abundant analysis of the numerous cases brought to the Supreme Court throughout the last few decades. In substance, the court holds that while diversity is a compelling governmental interest, the response to injustice must be narrowly tailored under strict scrutiny (using applicable legal terms) and prove that the discrimination involved occurred to the party in the case.

How did we get here? Urofsky divides the history of affirmative action into two parts. Part I covers the administrations from Kennedy to Reagan; Part II considers the period from Reagan to President Trump. In each of these parts, crucial critical subjects appear frequently—politics, law, education, jobs, Blacks and other minorities, women and affirmative action, reverse discrimination (where white male workers saw themselves "as the primary victims of affirmative action") and seniority systems that give minority workers preferences.

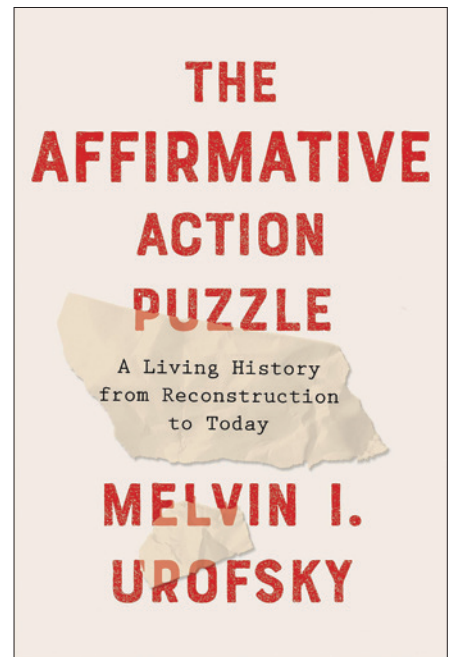
Both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, for example, supported soft affirmative action through congressional legislation, believing

that they could not get Congress to approve broader plans. Johnson also advocated for the hard version in his famous Executive Order 11246 in 1965. We learn, however, that the Nixon administration did more for affirmative action than both Kennedy and Johnson together: "The great push for a hard affirmative action began not in the liberal administrations of John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson but under the unlikely leadership of Richard Milhous Nixon."

The Carter administration backed plans that used goals rather than quotas and required that minority business enterprises would get 10 percent of appropriations for governmental works. At the time, this M.B.E. requirement was attacked as a violation of the equal protection clause. In 1980, the Supreme Court, in a 6-to-3 decision, upheld the M.B.E. mandate as a legitimate public policy.

The debate continued during the presidencies from Reagan to Trump, and the book details the issues from 1981 to today. Urofsky concludes in his last chapter: "If current trends continue, it will take 228 years for the average middle-class black family to reach the same level of wealth that white families have today."

Does justice require that a *particular* person show that he or she has suffered discrimination, or can the person demonstrate that he or she is a member of a *group* (e.g., Black people) that have experienced discrimination for centuries? Critics of affirmative action plans argue that they are public policies that are neither fair nor logical when they compensate minority groups for ills suffered by ancestors at



the expense of innocent, non-minority groups today. This argument may seem reasonable to many. But this book makes clear that results of centuries of racial discrimination against Black individuals because they are members of a group still amounts to injustice to this *individual* today in his or her job, education or housing.

Professor Urofsky focuses on affirmative action in education and jobs and touches only briefly on its role in housing. In addition, this reviewer would have found a bibliography a useful tool.

This book challenges the reader to think about decisive social justice issues and clearly lays out the arguments that we continue to struggle with today. Regardless of where one comes out on topics such as "soft" versus "hard" affirmative action, discrimination is pervasive today, and it will take many years to address the injustice that affirmative action seeks to resolve.

Michael A. Vaccari is an attorney and an adjunct associate professor of law at the Fordham University School of Law.



Un-American
A Soldier's Reckoning
of Our Longest War
By Erik Edstrom
Bloomsbury
304p \$28

Reconsidering war

At the heart of this jeremiad against the wars the United States has waged in Afghanistan and Iraq is a memoir of harrowing loss. What unites the anger and the grief is the belief that the people of the United States ought to understand what war has meant to the people of those countries. Erik Edstrom—West Point graduate, Army Ranger, platoon leader for one annus horribilis in Afghanistan—asks us to imagine trading places with ordinary Afghans, who see our troops as invaders.

Un-American is “dedicated to the more than 312,000 civilians killed in America’s War on Terror—more than one hundred 9/11’s worth of civilian death.” It will not be welcomed by those who think criticism of military policy is unpatriotic.

Before Edstrom accepted the offer to attend West Point, he had misgivings about the invasion of Iraq:

My stepmom, a Catholic school teacher, responded: “Even if we don’t find nukes, we’re going to free those poor Iraqi people...” “Yes, but what about the pope?” “Yes, Erik—what about the pope?”... “The pope doesn’t support invading Iraq.”... “I certainly can’t argue with

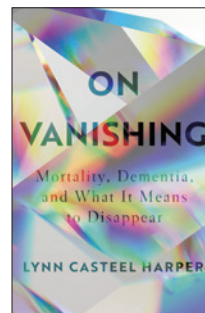
the pope, but he doesn’t have a background in military strategy, does he?” “And President Bush does?” “Shut up, Erik! America wouldn’t be doing this unless it was a good idea.”

Empathizing with Afghans hardly means Edstrom is inattentive to his brothers and sisters in arms. He reports that “[t]he wars caused mental and emotional health problems in 31 percent of the vets.” He also points out that “an estimated 29 percent of Afghans [civilians] meet the definition” for post-traumatic stress disorder. This gives new meaning to the concept of asymmetrical warfare.

Has Edstrom turned pacifist? He explains to his commander when requesting reassignment, “Sir, if this was about defense—if Boston was bomb-ravaged and I was hiding in rubble—I’d happily shoot invaders in the face all day. But that’s not this war. We are the invaders. If I were them, I’d shoot me, too.”

However, “There are more Un-Americans than you think,” people who recognize that our nation is broken and want to fix it, Edstrom writes. “And once enough get into office, we can reshape what America stands for... Then I will once again be able to proudly and uncomplicatedly refer to myself as ‘American.’ But this time with eyes wide open.”

Roger Bergman is the author of the forthcoming book *Preventing Unjust War: A Catholic Argument for Selective Conscientious Objection*. He is emeritus professor of justice and peace studies at Creighton University, Omaha, Neb.



On Vanishing
Mortality, Dementia,
and What It Means to
Disappear
By Lynn Casteel Harper
Catapult
240p \$26

Hello, darkness

About 10 years ago, when my mother was five years into her diagnosis of early-onset dementia, I attempted to channel my frustrations as her caregiver through song. I titled my composition after a phrase I had heard toddler-age children use: “I Can’t Know.” I couldn’t understand what or how my mother was thinking, and I was only making it harder on myself by trying to. Lynn Casteel Harper’s contemplative new work of nonfiction, *On Vanishing*, would have been a welcome friend.

Drawing on her years as a Baptist minister and nursing home chaplain, Harper asks the reader to reconsider much of the stigma—and terminology—that we place on people diagnosed with dementia. As the book title suggests, she begins with the notion that people with dementia are disappearing, “already gone” or simply not there. It is much easier to move people into the margins, to consider them “the other,” or, to quote the bioethicist Stephen Post, “exclude human beings from moral concern while they are still living.”

“The vanishing at the vanishing point, however, is an illusion,” Harper reminds us. “The person with dementia exists beyond my capacity to keep her in my line of sight; she remains a person despite my (or any-

one else's) limited powers of vision."

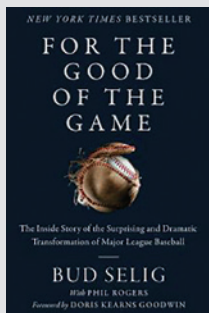
In the chapter titled "The Golden Hour," Harper takes a philosophical turn, seeking to understand our culture's relationship to dementia by exploring how we see darkness. There is a rhythm to aging, she writes, and when we try to lose darkness "or any earthbound equilibrium," we succumb to what the author Wendell Berry calls the myth of human limitlessness.

Berry is one of many great minds Harper calls upon in the book. Among Catholics, there is Dorothy Day, who cared for her Catholic Worker co-founder Peter Maurin and recalls how honored the community was to care for him in his last years. But Harper spends the most time ruminating on the final years of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Emerson died in 1882 of what were likely complications from Alzheimer's disease. Those who visited or were with him during that time, including Walt Whitman, all recall his happy and serene demeanor. They did not see him as a burden or ruminate on what might today be considered a tragic end.

If only Emerson and his friends and family knew what we know now—that he had a terrible disease—they might not have so easily accepted his condition. "I wonder how," Harper asks, "this is progress."

Joe Pagetta is a museum professional, essayist and arts writer in Nashville, Tenn.



For the Good of the Game
The Inside Story of the Surprising and Dramatic Transformation of Major League Baseball
By Bud Selig (with Phil Rogers)
William Morrow/
HarperCollins
318p \$28.99

Collegiality in baseball leadership

Allen Huber "Bud" Selig, the retired commissioner of Major League Baseball, governed the majors for 23 years through its most turbulent but ultimately most financially successful era. A large part of his success, as described in his autobiography, *For the Good of the Game*, lay in his leadership style. While the book offers compelling backstories, insights and anecdotes about Selig's lifelong love affair with the national pastime, it also testifies to ways he embraced transparency, honesty and decency as a businessman, club owner and commissioner.

Whether selling cars in Milwaukee, seeking (and failing) to keep his beloved Braves from moving to Atlanta, acquiring (almost by accident) the bankrupt Seattle Pilots and turning them into the Milwaukee Brewers or becoming (almost by default) baseball's ninth commissioner, Selig emphasized open-minded communication and respectful dialogue. "Part of being a good politician, a good leader, is the ability to listen to people," Selig writes. "One thing I tried to teach the owners [as commissioner] was to learn to disagree without becoming mortal enemies."

Such collegiality-based leadership was encapsulated in a lesson Selig learned at one of his first owners

meetings, soon after acquiring the Brewers in 1970. When John Fetzer, owner of the Detroit Tigers, cast a vote that seemingly contradicted the Tigers' interests, Selig asked him why. "This is good for baseball," Fetzer replied. "If I always do what's in the best interest of baseball, it will be in the best interest of the Detroit baseball club."

While *For the Good of the Game* is an easy, enjoyable and highly educational read for fans and non-fans of baseball alike, it is not always a comfortable one. Selig does not hesitate to criticize (usually in polite terms) anyone or any faction—fellow owners, players, union officials, politicians, even himself—for selfishness, short-sightedness or blind allegiance to their own point of view.

Yet while often frustrated at others' intransigence, Selig always sought to act with fairness and without malice to move baseball forward, he says, "with clear eyes, an open mind and a willingness to make personal sacrifices for the good of the game." That's a style worth emulating by any leader of any enterprise.

Mike Nelson contributes "Faith Alive" columns for Catholic News Service. He served as editor of *The Tidings*, the newspaper of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, from 2001 to 2014.

Reciprocity and Complicity

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), SEPTEMBER 6, 2020

READINGS: EZ 33:7-9; PS 145; ROM 13:8-10; MT 18:15-20

If you typically focus on your own behavior and happiness, without regard for the actions of others, today's readings are especially for you. The second reading is a reminder to love others, and the first reading and the Gospel are calls to reject complicity with corruption. These principles are important ideals that are timely given our current political leaders and the nearness of the election season.

In the Letter to the Romans, Paul quotes portions of the Ten Commandments that call for ethical behavior (Ex 20:13-17, Dt 5:17-21). He says that the laws can be fulfilled when you "love your neighbor as yourself," a command from the book of Leviticus that Jesus also quotes in the Gospels. Often, the word used here for love (Gk. *agape*) is emphasized as a selfless action that is modeled on God's love for creation. The call to love "as yourself" is also important. This adds reciprocity to the equation, requiring us to condition our treatment of others on how we want to be treated. This reminds us to give thought to how our actions affect others. As the events of the last months reveal, many people have been treated with contempt and disregard rather than love. If we would not want such treatment, we should not treat people in that manner; moreover, we should not elect people who openly

promote hate over love.

In the first reading from Ezekiel, the prophet is told to warn people about living in the midst of corruption. God instructs Ezekiel to tell wicked people to correct their behavior. If he does this, and the wicked refuse to change, the wicked are solely guilty for their actions. But if Ezekiel refuses to speak out against the wicked, God casts blame on both Ezekiel and the wicked people.

This reading holds an important gem: Failure to act against corruption makes you a passive participant in corruption. If you find political leaders to be morally corrupt and you still vote for them because of your own selfish interests, shortsightedness or intentional naïveté, you contribute to corruption in society. Jesus affirms a similar message in the Gospel.

Jesus speaks to his followers about how they should react to the sinful behavior of people in their community. Rather than ignore it, they must address corruption and attempt to correct it. If they encounter a person who sins against them, Jesus' followers are to confront the offender. If the person refuses to change, Jesus advises a group of two or three people to confront the person, a legal maneuver that calls for witnesses to participate and help apply pressure for moral behavior. If the person is still not motivated to change,

'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'
(Rom 13:9)

Praying With Scripture

What can you do to condemn corruption in society?

What actions can you take to be more selfless?

How can you exercise your right to vote to help create a just society?

then the larger community is instructed to call out corruption. Jesus then empowers the community, saying, "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

In the Gospel reading for the Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time, this power was given to Peter when he received the keys to the kingdom, and it is interpreted as giving Peter authority to lead. In today's reading, the entire community is given authority to hold its members to account and rectify wrongful acts. The Gospel tells us that we have a duty with respect to the moral failings of others: to call them to conversion and avoid complicity in their sin. It should inspire us to speak out to promote love and justice in society and to require the same of our leaders.

Read Carefully

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), SEPTEMBER 13, 2020

READINGS: SIR 27:30-28:7; PS 103; ROM 14:7-9; MT 18:21-35

Today's Gospel is about mercy and forgiveness. Using the parable of the unforgiving slave, Matthew teaches some principles that are relevant today. The parable itself, however, is

problematic, even if insights can be gleaned from it.

The Gospel begins with Peter asking Jesus how often he should forgive people in his community, as if there

could be a numerical answer. Peter suggests seven times, but Jesus insists on 77 times, suggesting there is no limit on forgiveness. Jesus' response shows the importance of continuous mercy, and

he tells a parable to illustrate this point.

The parable, however, begins with a problematic image. The kingdom of heaven is likened to a king's relationships with his slaves who owe him money. God is imagined as a royal overlord, and humans are indebted servants. The parable reflects social reality of Matthew's time, in which slavery and debt bondage were accepted practices. Modern readers can find such parallels offensive and frustrating as a way to reflect on humanity's relationship to God, especially since the parable is grounded on dehumanization.

When the king (God) is informed of the slave's outstanding debts, he initially orders the man, his wife, children and possessions to be sold as slaves to obtain payment. Imagine reading this in a context in which slavery is legal. Today's Gospel takes for granted the practice of keeping and acquiring new slaves to increase one's wealth. Unfortunately, such biblical texts influenced European slave owners, who justified their actions based on beliefs in white supremacy and divine right.

Despite the inclination to enslave the family, the king (God) releases the slave and forgives his debt because he is moved with pity when the slave begs for

leniency and patience. But when that same slave encounters another slave in a similar situation, he fails to imitate the king and has his debtor imprisoned.

Distressed, the community of slaves reports his lack of compassion to the king, who reprimands the slave, saying: "You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?" The king then has the slave tortured until he can pay his debt. Jesus concludes by proclaiming that God will torture humans if they do not offer forgiveness to one another.

The image of God as eternal torturer is difficult to reckon with, although it fits Matthew's eschatological vision, which we have seen in the parables of the past few Sundays. Another difficulty is the demand that the first slave behave in exactly the same manner as the king (God). While that would be an example of selfless love (Gk. *agape*), under the economic conditions presupposed in the parable, it is problematic. The assumption is that the person living in debt slavery could or should behave as the wealthy king did, failing to recognize the clear asymmetries in their economic

'How often must I forgive?' (Mt 18:21).

Praying With Scripture

Do you ask for forgiveness from others?

Do you forgive people who have wronged you?

What helps you to understand and interpret Scripture?

and social statuses. While the first slave was harsh, his demand for debt repayment would surely be more pressing than the demand of the wealthy king.

Nonetheless, a careful reading of this parable yields some good insights. It teaches the importance of mercy, asking for help and granting relief to those in need. It also suggests that those with means, like the king, should be fair, just and generous because of their abundance; and it challenges those with lesser means to show kindness to those in even worse circumstances. These concepts are valuable especially when creating policies, laws and programs to help people living in poverty, particularly in economic systems that benefit from disparities and inequalities.

Just Wage

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), SEPTEMBER 20, 2020

READINGS: IS 55:6-9; PS 145; PHIL 1:20-27; MT 20:1-16

In today's Gospel, we read the parable of the generous landowner, which builds on themes of mercy using images of economic and social disparities. This parable has several interpretive possibilities.

Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a landowner who pays all his workers the same daily wage, even

though the employees did not work the same amount of time. Some worked all day, while others worked a partial day. Still others worked only one hour. Yet the landowner pays them all for a full day. One of the full-day workers criticizes the landowner, noting the perceived unfairness of this practice. But the landowner rebuffs the criti-

cism, instead condemning envy and affirming generosity and equality.

Since several of Matthew's parables are focused on final judgment, this parable could be interpreted eschatologically. The landowner would symbolize God's generosity in judging. The people who worked all day could be those who have been faithful

throughout their lives, and the people who worked the least might be the most sinful people, who eventually came to live righteously. In this interpretation, the parable would show God's openness to all, even rewarding the last before the first. This idea finds support in the first reading from Isaiah, which highlights God's mercy in forgiveness. Matthew's parable also has echoes of Luke's parable of the prodigal son.

Yet this parable can also be interpreted as a statement about the dignity of work and the importance of a just wage. Such a reading might be more compelling today, especially in light of Catholic social teaching and current economic hardships.

Often the equal pay at the end of the parable is highlighted, but the landowner is generous before then. After hiring the first round of employees, he encounters more unemployed people and hires them. He continues the practice multiple times until the evening, when presumably there were no remaining people in the marketplace. This shows the employer's will-

ingness to hire as many workers as are in need of employment.

Many people are unemployed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which only exacerbated the precarious economic circumstances many faced beforehand. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of June 2020, 17.8 million people were unemployed, up from 12 million in February. Many others are underemployed, working reduced hours or temporarily furloughed. Today's Gospel should inspire people with hiring power to be creative and innovative in creating space for people in need of work.

Likewise, this parable affirms that minimum wages must be living wages. When the landowner pays the same wage to everyone, he does not cheat those who worked the longest. Instead, he compensates everyone for working that day so that those who worked the least are still able to live on what they earned. As of July 2020, the federal minimum wage is \$7.25/hour, which is not a living wage. Movements like the Fight for \$15 are necessary so that people can live, supporting them-

'You too go into my vineyard, and I will give you what is just.'
(Mt 20:4)

Praying With Scripture

How can you promote a fair, living wage for all people?

What actions can you take to be more generous?

What can you do to promote life?

selves and their families.

In today's Gospel, the landowner could have given alms, but instead he is generous by making just work and wages available to all, enabling people to live with dignity through their own labor. This reminds us that just labor practices are a pro-life issue that should be considered as we discern our election choices. Wages allow people to eat, clothe themselves, have shelter and health care—all essential resources for life.

Action

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), SEPTEMBER 27, 2020

READINGS: EZ 18:25-28; PS 25; PHIL 2:1-11; MT 21:28-32

In today's Gospel, we read the parable of the two sons. Jesus uses this short story to compare Jewish leaders, tax collectors and prostitutes in hopes of changing people's views and inspiring them to live righteously.

In the parable, there is a father and two sons. The father instructs the first son to work in the vineyard, but the son refuses. Then he changes his mind and works. Given the same in-

struction, the second son says he will work but does not follow through. Jesus affirms that although the first son initially refused, he ultimately did the will of his father.

Jesus emphasizes the importance of transformation. The first son is likened to tax collectors and prostitutes, who represent sinful behaviors. During Jesus' ministry, these groups received Jesus' message and were

transformed, changing their minds and lives. Jesus confirms that their conversion has led them to the kingdom of God. The chief priests and elders, on the other hand, are compared to the second son, who appears to live righteously but does not. These groups have refused guidance from the prophet John the Baptist and have failed to change their way of thinking and living.

This parable demonstrates that actions reveal character and intention more than words do, a fitting reflection for the recent feast of St. Vincent de Paul. St. Vincent de Paul dedicated his life to the service of others, especially the poor and disenfranchised. His ministry was founded on the Gospel message of honoring human dignity and caring for those most in need. St. Vincent founded the Congregation of the Mission and co-founded the Daughters of Charity with St. Louise de Marillac so that more people could act on the Gospel's call to service. St. Vincent's legacy continues today in global Vincentian parishes, schools and organizations, such as the Society

of Saint Vincent de Paul founded by Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, a lay Vincentian. These communities continue to respond to the Vincentian question: What must be done?

Today's Gospel is a reminder of the importance of actions. It reveals that transformation and conversion are possible when people openly receive the Gospel and act on its message. St. Vincent de Paul is an excellent example of the Gospel message in action.

Jaime L. Waters teaches Scripture at DePaul University in Chicago. She is an associate professor of Catholic studies.

Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves (Phil 2:3).

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Stop the Federal Killings

We are awakening to the injustice of the death penalty

By Helen Prejean



In the spirit of Elijah, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jesus and my own Catholic faith, I am compelled to speak out about the rush by the U.S. Department of Justice to resume federal executions, a process that before this summer had lain dormant for 17 years.

In Terre Haute, Ind., on July 14 at 8 a.m., Daniel Lee died by lethal injection after lying strapped to the death gurney for four hours. He lay there awaiting death as Attorney General William Barr, in the wee hours of the morning, vigorously negotiated with the Supreme Court to override lower courts' stays of execution. Following Daniel Lee's death, Wesley Purkey was executed early the morning of July 16, then Dustin Honken on July 17. That made three killings in four days, with four more scheduled before the end of September, including Lezmond Mitchell, the only Native American on federal death row. (The Navajo Nation strongly opposes the death penalty.)

"Let federal killings resume," orders the current occupant of the White House. Why the rush, I can't help but wonder. What is the moral imperative behind the government's urgency to hasten the death of its citizens?

We are witnessing a dramatic decline in executions across the United States and a palpable loss of desire for government killing. Most citizens now recognize that the government's "machinery of death" (to use former

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Harry A. Blackmun's phrase) has a staggering number of mistakes, flaws and unconscious biases, which have resulted in at least 168 wrongful death sentences thus far—and counting.

Is anyone with even the slightest leaning of support for the death penalty not shocked that since the resumption of executions in 1977, for every 10 executions carried out in this country, one wrongfully sentenced person on death row has had to be freed? Would anyone be inclined to book a flight on an airline with that kind of track record?

Denny LeBoeuf, an astute criminal defense lawyer, pointed out to me that in order to make the rushed resumption of federal executions more acceptable to the public, the first three scheduled for execution were all white males whose crime was the murder of children, the most egregious of crimes, which causes any decent person to gag with disgust. She adds that the government's rationale seems to be that following the executions of these most despicable killers, it can move on to execute inmates whose racially driven sentences are apt to raise morally troublesome questions.

Grease the tracks with the supposed "worst of the worst" (the Supreme Court's criterion for deciding who should die, ill-conceived from the start and impossible to apply in a way that respects constitutional protec-

tions), and the rest will be more palatable to the public.

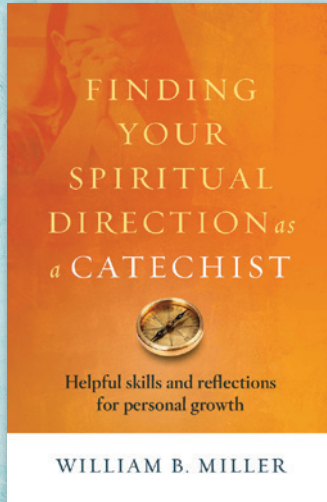
After hearing of her client's death, Daniel Lee's devastated defense attorney, Ruth Friedman, said: "It is shameful that the government saw fit to carry out this execution when counsel for Danny Lee could not be with him, and when the judges in his case and even the family of his victims urged against it. And it is beyond shameful that the government in the end carried out this execution in haste, in the middle of the night, while the country was sleeping. We hope that upon awakening, the country will be as outraged as we are."

That phrase, "upon awakening," is worth noting, as our nation is now freshly awakening to the systemic racism by local law enforcement in the unlawful killings of people of color across the nation. (No surprise: Of the 61 condemned persons on federal death row, almost 60 percent are people of color.)

I am especially alert to "awakening," having recently published *River of Fire*, my spiritual account of gradually awakening to Jesus' radical call to justice, which led me to death row—and which set my soul on fire with the ministry to abolish the death penalty.

Helen Prejean, C.S.J., is the author of *Dead Man Walking*, *The Death of Innocents* and *River of Fire*.

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