

America



2019 CPA MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

OF FAITH AND CULTURE

AUGUST 5, 2019

The Charismatic Pope

By Austen Ivereigh
p18

Existentialism for Millennials

p32

**Can you be Catholic and
Communist?**

p24

Monk for a Month

p30

Jesus loves me,
this I know.



568
 1 Timoteo 1, 2
 gaan kólóku ku en bunuhati. Biga a mbei mi ko ta biibi neen liba, noó hén a toona da mi di lobi di dee sémbe dee nama ku en ta feni. Aai womi, di soni de noó a

15 Wé Timoteo, mi o taki wan soni da i akl gbelin seei, kijoo. Noó a de wan gaan bambuu taki di hii sémbe musu piki waiwai. Hén da disi: Jesosi Keesitu ko a goonliba u heepi takulibima puu de a hogi basu. Nöö mi wé bi da di móon gaan takulibima a hii dee otowan dendu.

16 Wé noó feén hedi tu Jesosi Keesitu ko abi tjallhati da mi e. Aai. A hoi pasensi da mi seei, fu mi sa de wan maaka da hiniwan u libima kuma mi di ké ko biibi neen, taa a sa feni di libi u teego tu.

17 Wé fa i si Masa Gadu sai de, hén wé da di kaba Tiima u mundu fu noómó e. Fa a de feén de, an o dedé móonsó. Libisémbe an tjika u si en ku wai...

19 Nöö mi taki e, ta hoi di biibi di i si i ta biibi a Masa Jesosi naandé gingin e. Nöö i musu ta piki di hati fii noómó te a ta manda i a wan bambuu soni. Biga wanó sémbe an bi du só, noó hén wé di biibi u de kaba a soso gbegeede, leti kuma te i singi a dan tuwe lai fii go fiaa. 20 Wan u dee sémbe dee mi taki de, da Himéneusi, wan da Alekesani. Ma noó mi buta de tu sémbe de a di didibi maun kaa, be de lei taa de an musu ta waka ta mindi soni da Gadu ta poi en né móon. Nöö da só.

Aki Paulosu ta lei fa dee biibima u Masa Jesosi musu ta tja deseel.

21 Wé womi Timoteo, awa mi o taki da i fa fii lei dee biibima u Masa Jesosi a i ala fa u de musu libi.

Só. A di fosu kamian, noó un musu ta begi Masa Gaangadu da hii sémbe. Un musu ta tja dee...

Are You Now, or Have You Ever Been...?

One of the finest hours in the history of the Catholic press occurred in the late spring of 1954, when this magazine, along with several others, published an editorial denouncing Senator Joseph R. McCarthy's witch hunt against communists, which was then reaching its ugly zenith in the infamous Army-McCarthy hearings. "Catholic Weekly Assails McCarthy," read The New York Times headline—just one among several national stories about the editorial.

America's comments about Senator McCarthy generated a great deal of interest for a couple of reasons. First, Senator McCarthy was a prominent Irish Catholic, and he had powerful friends in the Catholic community, including several bishops. Second, **America** had spent much of the previous 50 years loudly denouncing communism in its pages. As early as 1934, my predecessor John LaFarge, S.J., who later served as the sixth editor in chief, had even introduced a detailed plan for how American Jesuits should attack the growing threat of communism in the United States. So the fact that the anti-communist **America** magazine was now critical of Mr. McCarthy created an "only Nixon could go to China" moment, lending great credibility to the anti-McCarthy forces.

So, you might ask, after 110 years of opposition to communism, why are we publishing an article in this issue that is sympathetic to it? Well, for one thing, you should not assume that **America's** editorial position on communism has changed very much. It has not. What has also not changed is our willingness to hear views with which we may disagree but that we nonetheless think are worth hearing. And we could not have picked a bet-

ter author for such an article. Dean Dettloff has made many fine contributions to these pages as our Toronto correspondent.

This sort of thing is also not a first for **America**. One year before Father LaFarge declared his red alert, the saintly Dorothy Day appeared in these pages, defending the values of the communists she knew, if not their political program. "The trouble with many Catholics," Ms. Day wrote, "is that they think of Communists as characters from E. Phillips Oppenheim's international mystery novels." In other words, she thought Catholics were missing something of value amid all the legitimate criticism.

Could the same be happening today? It is possible. Socialism is much in the news. One presidential candidate says he is a socialist, and several others don't mind sounding like one.

My reading of Catholic social teaching, especially the commentary of recent popes, is that it has many good things to say about capitalism while always reminding us about the bad that comes with it. At the same time, it has many bad things to say about socialism while always reminding us of the good that comes with it. For my part, I don't like ideological "-isms" of any kind, except for Catholicism, which is nothing like an "-ism" in the sense I mean here.

For what it's worth, my general view of economics begins with the fact that markets, for all their downsides, are the greatest force for economic empowerment that the world has ever seen. But that is just my opinion and, therefore, not the point. Mr. Dettloff's piece is in this issue not because I agree with it but because I think it

is worth reading, just as I did with Arthur Brooks's article in defense of free markets that we published in February 2017 and just as we did when we published Dorothy Day in 1934.

America, in other words, is not a journal of Father Matt's opinions. Not even I would want to read such a magazine. This is a journal of Catholic opinion, and Catholics have differing opinions about many things. Our job is to host a conversation among Catholics and our friends in which people can respectfully and intelligently disagree. Accordingly, we publish something in almost every issue with which I personally disagree. I hope we publish something you disagree with, too. If not, we are not doing our job.

It will be interesting to monitor reactions to Mr. Dettloff's article on social media. I have followed folks on Twitter long enough to recognize certain patterns. While you who are reading this will know what we are up to, many among the Twitterati can be counted on to be uninformed, unreasonable and uncharitable. I can see the tweets now: "This Dettloff piece! So typical of that left-wing **America** magazine!" "**America** shows its radical tendencies again!"

Well, that's just claptrap. I once said that being an **America** reader requires you to engage with opinions that are different from your own. It occasionally requires something else, especially when browsing social media: the ability to spot what this family-friendly magazine will call male bovine fecal matter.

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



THE ISSUE

GIVE AND TAKE

6
YOUR TAKE
What do you suggest for summer reading?

8
OUR TAKE
President Trump's racist tweets; caring for baby boomers

10
SHORT TAKE
Latin is the right language for a global church
Grace Spiewak

DISPATCHES

12
CAN THE CHURCH DO MORE TO DEFEND UNDOCUMENTED PEOPLE?

Infographic: Border crisis or a spike?

A fight erupts over Brazil's patron of education

Catholic health care network seized in Eritrea

GoodNews: Wiping out medical debt, 'loaves and fishes' style

FEATURES

18
THE SPIRIT OF PETER
Could Francis be our first charismatic pope?
Austen Ivereigh

24
NOT SO MENACING
What Catholics (still) don't understand about communists
Dean Dettloff



Demonstrators chant in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on July 17, the fifth day of protests calling for the resignation of the island's governor, Ricardo Rossello.

Cover: Pope Francis at Mass on Pentecost, June 9, in St. Peter's Square
CNS photo/Yara Nardi, Reuters

FAITH IN FOCUS

30
NEW HABITS
 Why a happily married father became a monk—for a month
 Stephen B. Grant

POEM

36
HERE IS THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD!
 Pádraig Ó Tuama

IDEAS IN REVIEW

32
EXISTENTIALISM FOR MILLENNIALS
 “Hadestown,” “The Good Place” and “Fleabag” tackle life’s big questions
 Tara Isabella Burton

BOOKS
Amen; Can I Get a Witness?; The Moment of Lift; An Orchestra of Minorities

CULTURE
 “Good Omens”; “American Heretics: The Politics of the Gospel”

THE WORD

44
Christ’s return is still a reality, and it will transform everything

The peace that Christ offers does not affirm the status quo
 Michael Simone

LAST TAKE

46
NYASHA JUNIOR
 Fix the system that failed
 Cyntoia Brown

In June, **America** published online summer reading recommendations from members of our editorial staff. Given that we have the smartest readers in publishing, it felt fitting that we ask for their recommendations, too. Below you will find a sample of suggestions from our staff, newsletter readers and members of our Catholic Book Club and Jesuitical Facebook groups.

What book are you reading this summer, and why would you recommend it?

The Shattering of Loneliness: On Christian Remembrance, by Erik Varden. For older seekers, this unique exploration of several fundamental biblical themes through the lens of remembrance is a wonderful guide to reviewing your life's path.

David Schwinghamer
Kitgum, Uganda

The Line Becomes a River, by Francisco Cantú. This book, written by a former border agent in Texas, is relevant, truthful and revealing. It's well written by a Fulbright scholar and shows us some personal examples of people trying to make a safe life for themselves and their families. It follows one man through his deportation and legal journey, too. I think it's a must-read. It's also highly engaging and readable. I loved it.

Kathleen Nilles
Wellesley, Mass.

Charming Billy, by Alice McDermott. How could a book that starts with a crowd of people drinking after a funeral not be a good summer read?

Kerry Weber, executive editor

The Life of Jesus Christ, by Ludolf of Saxony. What an unexpected treasure. If you want to know Jesus and his church, read this book! This book, written by a 14th century monk and extremely popular for centuries, has only recently been translated into English. St. Ignatius Loyola was among the many who were greatly influenced by this work. Why did it take so long to get the entirety of this fascinating compilation of meditations on events in Jesus' life translated into English? It provides a wealth of information and inspiration. I never expected a 14th-century monk's writings to teach me so much and touch me so deeply. One caveat: This is no beach read. A couple of pages a day is all I can absorb.

Laura Harrison
Okemos, Mich.

Book I of Alan Moore's *Jerusalem*, which jumps through time to tell a massive story set in Moore's hometown of Northampton, England. It's huge, full of astounding prose and ambitious writing experiments, and can be deeply weird. But it's also a beautiful and heartfelt story about connection, gentrification, art, God and family, rooted always in the daily struggles of ordinary people. It's definitely a time investment (I'm barely a third of the way through it) but so far extremely worth it.


John Dougherty
Union, N.J.

Handling Sin, by Michael Malone. Despite the grave-sounding title, this book is hilarious. Raleigh Hayes, an upstanding citizen, faithful husband and responsible life insurance salesman, has been able to keep the chaos of the world and his large, loud, reckless family at bay for 45 years. But his well-ordered life begins to unravel when his father, a thrice-married, defrocked Episcopal priest, escapes from the hospital and refuses to come home until Raleigh has completed an absurd scavenger hunt across the South. Raleigh rages against the father who loves him and the God that refuses to follow the rules. "Hayes was a Christian," Malone writes, "but if the truth be known, Christ irritated him to death.... In his personal opinion, Christ's advice sounded like civic sabotage, moral lunacy, social anarchy, and business disaster." As Raleigh confronts one disaster after another on the road, he turns into a person he can hardly recognize, which, we suspect, is exactly what his dad wants.

Ashley McKinless, associate editor

Life of the Beloved, by Henri Nouwen. This book has changed my relationship with God in a way no other book except the Bible has.

Nolan McBride
Elkhart, Ind.

 For more information about our Catholic Book Club Facebook group, visit [americanmag.org/catholic-book-club](https://www.facebook.com/americanmag.org/catholic-book-club).

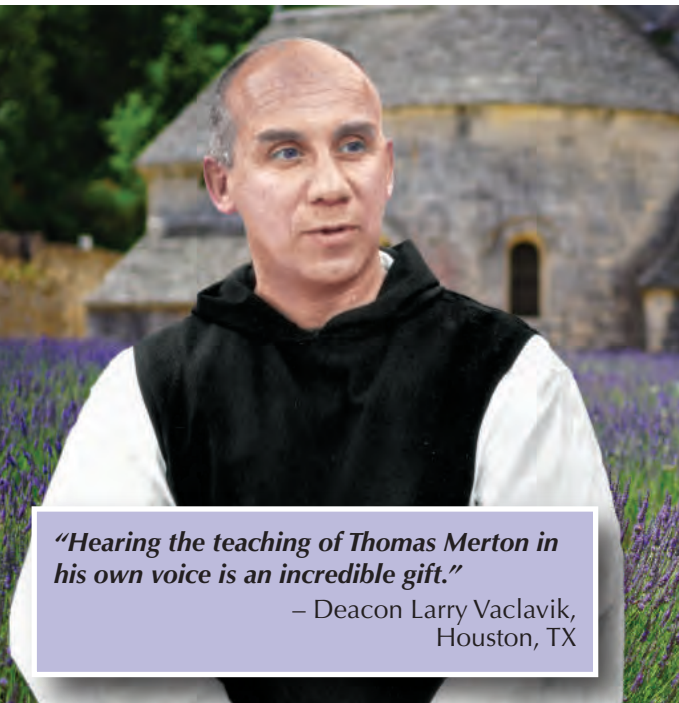
Thomas Merton on Prayer

Presented by Thomas Merton
with an afterword by Father Anthony Ciorra, Ph.D.

Renew **your prayer life** with Thomas Merton
in this **life-changing series**.



LEARN25



“Hearing the teaching of Thomas Merton in his own voice is an incredible gift.”

– Deacon Larry Vaclavik,
Houston, TX

Thomas Merton on Prayer invites you to take one of the great modern spiritual masters as your personal guide. Near the end of his life, Thomas Merton gave a powerful set of lectures on prayer to the Sisters of Loretto. He channeled a lifetime full of wisdom, piety, and prayerfulness into these erudite yet down-to-earth talks. Now, you have the rare opportunity to hear Merton’s moving lectures.

This series of heartfelt talks has been remastered and made available for you to enjoy. Merton reaches out across the decades to inspire your spirit. You will explore such topics as religious poverty, philosophy, and monasticism. As you do so, you will discover what it means to truly live as a Christian today.

Photograph of Thomas Merton by Sybille Akers. Used with Permission of the Merton Legacy Trust and the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University.



Thomas Merton on Prayer

remastered
archival recording
of Thomas Merton

14 Talks (including afterword) on 6 Discs

SAVE 80%

Audio CD Set ~~\$149.95~~ **SALE \$28.95**

Coupon Code: **A2217** +\$7.95 Shipping & Handling

Order within 30 days of issue date.

14 Talks

1. Balance and Grace (7/28/1967)
2. Religious Virginity and Communal Love (7/28/1967)
3. The Institutionalized Church (7/28/1967)
4. Our Dedication to God (7/29/1967)
5. Escaping Entrapment (7/29/1967)
6. Ecstatic Life in the Spirit (7/29/1967)
7. Education, Learning, and Success (7/30/1967)
8. Christian Nonviolence (7/30/1967)
9. The Privilege and Obligation of Religious (7/31/1967)
10. Camus: The Status Quo (7/31/1967)
11. Religious Freedom (8/1967)
12. Monasticism and Contemplation (9/25/1967)
13. The Contemplative Life So-Called (9/26/1967)
14. Afterword by Fr. Anthony Ciorra, Ph.D.

Order online or by phone | Learn25.com/MertonPrayer | 1-800-955-3904

Learn25 / Now You Know Media, Inc.

12115 Parklawn Dr., Unit B | Rockville, MD 20852

Congress Has a Duty to Condemn the President's Racist Attacks

The president of the United States issued a series of racist tweets on July 14 telling some members of Congress to “go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came.” Though he did not name them at first, his tweets appear to have been directed at four Democratic members of the U.S. House of Representatives: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota and Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts.

No one seems to be surprised by yet another diatribe from Mr. Trump. The nation has, tragically, grown accustomed to such language from its commander in chief, from claiming he could shoot someone on Fifth Avenue in New York and not lose political support to calling Kim Jong-un “Little Rocket Man” and deploring refugees from “shithole countries.”

Mr. Trump's tweets have been, unquestionably, a distraction from the critical business of the country: Congress must soon raise the debt ceiling again to prevent the government from running out of cash; the Trump administration has once again taken steps to make it more

difficult for asylum seekers to find safety in the United States; there are children still being detained at the border after being separated from their parents.

Behind Mr. Trump's tweets is an attempt not only to delegitimize his political opponents but to appeal to nativist tendencies, suggesting that citizens born in other countries or born to immigrant parents are somehow less American than others. That is antithetical to the values of this country, for which generations of immigrant Americans have sacrificed to the point of shedding their blood on foreign shores.

Some have pointed out that, true to form, Mr. Trump has his facts wrong. Three of the four congresswomen were born in the United States. But Mr. Trump's remarks would have been reprehensible even if they all had been born in Canada or Haiti, Somalia or China. To echo what Ms. Ocasio-Cortez said at a press conference on the day after the president's tweets, “No matter what the president says, this country belongs to you, and it belongs to everyone.”

These comments need to be

called out as racist, xenophobic and sexist. They are wrong, full stop. The president's lack of restraint has perhaps briefly unified Democrats in outrage, but they seem to have had little impact on Republicans. Only a small number of G.O.P. members of Congress have criticized the president's tweets or even indicated that they were disturbed by them.

While we may have come to expect this sort of behavior from the president, it should not be treated as normal. Especially if they ally themselves with Mr. Trump's public policy goals, members of Congress have a moral obligation and constitutional duty to denounce such remarks and to defend their colleagues against such attacks. Public debate and public decency require minimum standards. The U.S. Constitution and its separation of powers presumes those standards.

Our national leaders should not stand by in silence while the voices of the elected representatives of the people are delegitimized by the head of the executive branch. What is left of the parameters of civil discourse in the United States must be defended.

Uphold the Dignity of Elders and Their Caregivers

Most crises do not give responders the benefit of being completely predictable. But the so-called silver tsunami—the demographic shift toward an older U.S. population as baby boomers enter retirement age—has been on the horizon for years, and its effects are now beginning to be felt. Each day 10,000 people turn 65, and half of Americans age 65 and up will require long-term assistance

at some point for an average length of two years. The health care system is not equipped to meet the needs of an aging population, especially the roughly 14 million middle-income seniors who do not qualify for Medicaid and cannot afford private long-term care insurance.

Long-term care has not been a priority for the Trump administration, and while promises for new social pro-

grams—from Medicare for All to free public college—have been touted by Democratic presidential hopefuls, so far only three of the two dozen candidates have put forward policy proposals to address the long-term care of older Americans.

States are beginning to realize that they cannot wait for Congress to act. In May, Washington became the first state in the country to adopt a publicly

funded long-term care benefit. Under the Long-Term Care Trust Act, workers will pay a 0.58 percent payroll tax into a state fund. After 10 years, enrollees will be eligible for a \$100 daily allowance to pay for a wide range of services, including stays in an assisted living facility and help with daily activities like dressing and bathing, as well as home modifications and reimbursements for family caregivers. The benefit has a lifetime cap of \$36,500, indexed for inflation.

That might not sound like much, given that the average cost of assisted living in Washington State is over \$4,000 per month. But the vast majority of seniors (76 percent, according to a survey by the AARP) say they would prefer to stay in their homes for as long as possible, and many would be able to do so with modest or short-term assistance.

Providing for long-term care helps not only older Americans but also the millions of family members who today act as unpaid caregivers, often at a high emotional and financial cost, as well as professional in-home aides. While Washington State already ensures a \$15 minimum wage for professional caregivers, care aides nationwide earn an average wage of \$12, which leads to high turnover in the industry and a shortage of workers. Sterling Harders, the leader of the union that represents caregivers in Washington State, said the new trust will “help ensure that the caregivers who are providing this care are skilled, that they are trained, that they are certified, that they are paid fairly for the work that they’re doing.”

States confronting the coming demographic wave can look to Washington as a model for upholding the dignity of not only our elders but also the spouses, children, grandchildren and professionals who care for them.

President and Editor in Chief	Matt Malone, S.J.
Deputy Editor in Chief	Maurice Timothy Reidy
Executive Editors	Sam Sawyer, S.J. Kerry Weber
Editor at Large	James Martin, S.J.
Production Editor	Robert C. Collins, S.J.
Senior Editors	Kevin Clarke James T. Keane J.D. Long-García Robert David Sullivan
Creative Director	Shawn Tripoli
Graphic Designer	Alison Hamilton
Poetry Editor	Joe Hoover, S.J.
Vatican Correspondent	Gerard O’Connell
National Correspondent	Michael J. O’Loughlin
Associate Editors	Zachary Davis Ashley McKinless Olga Segura
Producer	Eloise Blondiau
Assistant Producers	Colleen Dulle, Tucker Redding, S.J.
Assistant Editors	Vivian Cabrera Joseph McAuley
Contributing Writers	Nichole M. Flores Cecilia González-Andrieu Rachel Lu Eileen Markey Jim McDermott, S.J. Kaya Oakes Nathan Schneider Eve Tushnet
Contributing Editors	Ellen Boegel Patrick Gilger, S.J. Adam Hincks, S.J. Maryann Cusimano Love Paul McNelis, S.J.
Regional Correspondents	Dean Dettloff (Toronto) Anthony Egan, S.J. (Johannesburg) Jan-Albert Hootsen (Mexico City) Jim McDermott, S.J. (Los Angeles) David Stewart, S.J. (London) Melissa Vida (Brussels)
Special Contributors	Jake Martin, S.J., Sean Salai, S.J.
Editor, The Jesuit Post	Daniel N. Gustafson, S.J.
Moderator, Catholic Book Club	Kevin Spinale, S.J.
Summer Interns	William Critchley-Menor, S.J. Kevin Christopher Robles Mike Seay
V.P. for Finance and Operations	Rosa M. Del Saz
Director of Advertising Services	Kenneth Arko
Director of Advancement	James Cappabianca
Advancement Strategist	Heather Trotta
Special Assistant to the President and Editor in Chief	Nicholas D. Sawicki
Studio and Production Manager	J. R. Cronheim
Business Operations Staff	Glenda Castro, Karina Clark, Geena Dicamillo, Ana Nuñez, Junior Peña, Jonathan Tavarez, Elena Te Raymond A. Schroth, S.J. Francis W. Turnbull, S.J.
Editors Emeriti	
Chair, Board of Directors	Susan S. Braddock

americamagazine.org
facebook.com/americamag
twitter.com/americamag

1212 Avenue of the Americas, 11th Fl.
New York, NY 10036
America Press Inc. d/b/a America Media ©2019

Latin is not just for encyclicals. For Catholics, it is our history.

The Catholic Church often faces the perception that it cannot adequately respond to the social issues of our modern age. For example, the Congregation for Catholic Education's recent document "Male and Female He Created Them," with its aversion toward the field of gender studies, perpetuates the idea that the church has outdated views on L.G.B.T. issues. Some also call the church misogynistic for its exclusion of women from the priesthood. Many of these critics say the church's use of Latin is another outdated tradition, a symbol of resistance to modernity.

On the contrary. Severing our Latin roots may only further confuse and divide us. To demonstrate the relevance of Catholicism today, the church should celebrate the Latin language and its significance in our history.

The decline of the Latin Mass, as well as the disappearance of Latin and ancient Greek in education, seems to reflect the belief that classical languages no longer have a purpose for us. We forget the influence of Latin and Greek on leaders across the centuries, from St. Ignatius Loyola to Jane Addams. The discipline of studying ancient languages translates to a zeal for learning overall, as well as a dedication to the improvement of the self and the world. These are among the reasons the church adopted Latin as an official language, and the work of scholars in the church over many centuries proves its effectiveness.

Even as Latin Masses become less common, there is an enduring appreciation for the ancient language. In his apostolic letter "Latina Lingua," published in 2012, Pope Benedict XVI notes that liturgical books and Vatican communications are written in

the Latin of early Christian communities "precisely in order to highlight the church's universal character." Pointing to a renewed interest in the language because of its value in science and technology, Benedict established the Pontifical Academy for Latin to promote the study of the language.

In June, Vatican Radio began broadcasting a weekly bulletin in Latin titled "Hebdomada Papae" ("The Pope's Week in Review"). Vatican Radio's editorial director, Andrea Tornielli, described it as a way to bring new life to the language. "We did not conceive it with a nostalgic look to the past but as a challenge for the future," he said. Meanwhile, Pope Francis' popular Twitter account has a Latin version with 914,000 followers, a notable increase from its 100,000 followers in 2013.

We may still be few in number, but some of us see Latin as a way to grow within our faith. Latin's absence from everyday speech gives a sense of specialness when it is read, heard or spoken. It offers relief from the superficial talk that swarms our daily lives.

When using a foreign language, one must be more intentional since the words do not come naturally. But this is fitting for a global religion: Latin is not the native language of any one people and thus offers an equal opportunity for all to share in its learning.

Even as a long-term student of Latin, I cannot use it colloquially. Reading a Latin prayer challenges me to examine every word and elevate my comprehension of the phrases I have heard since childhood. I usually make the sign of the cross with a mechanical muscle memory akin to scribbling my signature. But when I recite in Latin—*In nomine Patris, et Filii et Spiritus Sancti*—I slow my gestures and con-

sider the brief phrase that envelops the greatest mystery of my Catholic faith. Latin does not create the miracle of the Trinity, but it reminds me of it in a way that English cannot.

Does using a language unfamiliar to most of the Catholic community discriminate against certain populations? Remember that women, slaves and prostitutes in the ancient city of Rome spoke at least simple Latin, using the same language that Cicero and Caesar did. Promoting the use of Latin—in Masses, publications and prayers—can foster pride in the church, reminding us of our unique and complicated history. It allows people of all cultures and classes to connect not only with the roots of the church but with the vast population who have spoken the language throughout time.

Offering only Latin Masses would not serve the needs of Catholics today. But incorporating Latin prayers and phrases into everyday spirituality and catechesis can revitalize the striving for holiness and for service to others. It presents an opportunity to interlace our prayer lives with the scores of people who have come before us.

Horace writes in his Satire 1, "sed quod eram narro," or "rather, I said who I was." Similarly, the Catholic Church can say what it is without fear of being seen as antiquated. Latin prayers, songs and writing can refresh a wilting pride for Catholicism's past and present. Latin can help the church declare in honesty what it was, what it is and what it wants to be.

Grace Spiewak is studying library and information science at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. She has a bachelor of arts in classical languages from Creighton University in Omaha.

JOIN US

as we award the 2019 George W. Hunt, S.J., Prize for Excellence in Journalism, Arts & Letters to Mary Szybist, Author of *Incarnadine*.

WHEN: **Saturday, September 21, 2019, 7 p.m.**

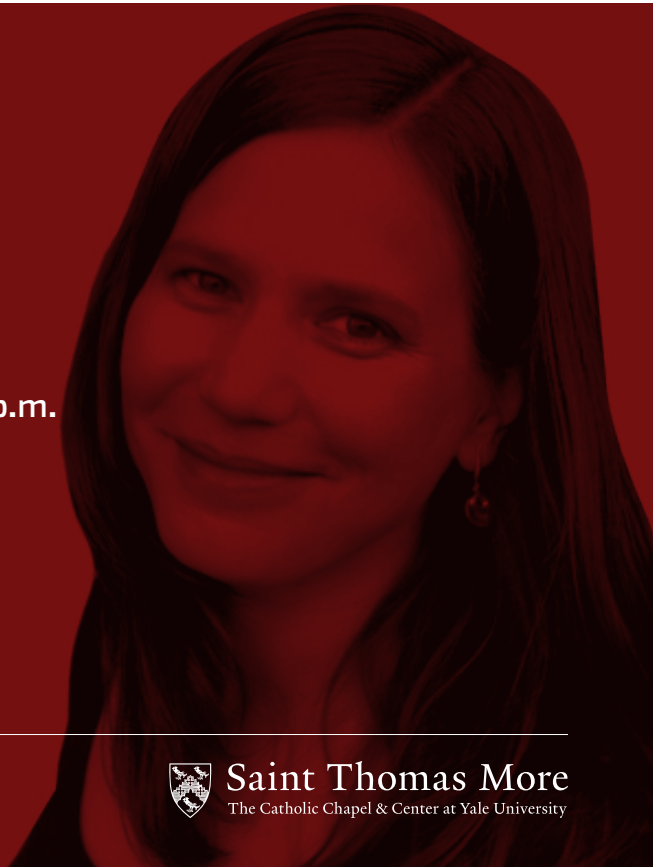
WHERE: **Loyola University Chicago**
1032 W Sheridan Rd, Chicago, IL 60660

ATTIRE: **Business (jackets required)**

RSVP: **events@americamedia.org**

America | MEDIA
A JESUIT MINISTRY

 **Saint Thomas More**
The Catholic Chapel & Center at Yale University



YOU ARE A CHURCH LEADER

Enhance your ministerial skills in one of our advanced programs for pastoral leadership and theology.

- Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies
- Doctor of Ministry
- Post-Master's Certificate in Pastoral Theology

Learn more about these and other programs:
USML.EDU/AMERICA



INSTITUTE
FOR
PASTORAL
LEADERSHIP

Can the church do more to defend undocumented people?

By Jim McDermott

As the Trump administration threatened to round up undocumented immigrants around the country in mid-July, Guadalupe Pacheco (not her real name) of Los Angeles tried to keep focused on anything else. “Of course it was in the back of my mind because I am an undocumented woman,” she said. “But it was a moment of feeling that I have to choose. I could choose to stay home and watch the news or just enjoy my life, go to Mass.”

But what she found at church disappointed her. “I was hopeful they would include people seeking asylum in the intercessions. And it was not there.”

Across the nation, bishops and other church leaders have spoken out against the Trump administration’s policies on asylum, detention and immigration. Many dioceses have mobilized to provide services for those under threat, but some Catholics worry that the overall church response has been too muted.

Bryan Pham, S.J., a professor of law and canon law at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Wash., previously worked as an immigration attorney at the Loyola Immigrant Justice Clinic in Los Angeles. “Parishes and institutions that are directly working with immigrants [speak out]; this affects them. But in other parishes, you don’t hear anything.”

Isaac Cuevas, the director of the office of Immigration Affairs for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, has certainly heard these complaints. “We’re a very diverse city. What a priest in Redondo Beach is going to say is very different than a priest in East L.A. or Huntington Beach,” he said. “I would hope that every priest understands how important an issue this is, the impact of this for people’s sense of well-being and how frightened people were” about possible



deportation actions.

“It’s hard for people to understand the amount of work we have going on behind the scenes,” Mr. Cuevas countered. “As a church we don’t do a great job of promoting it. I know the archbishop uses his platform in strategic ways that maybe aren’t so overt.”

In his work as a U.S. historian, Sean Dempsey, S.J., focuses on the ways religious organizations serve as societal brokers of human rights. The situation Americans find themselves in today, he said, bears strong similarities to the United States in the recent past.

Southeast Asian immigrants of the period were often met with openness. “Because many of those refugees had supported the United States’ cause” in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, he said.

But Central American refugees, fleeing nations whose governments were supported by the Reagan administration, faced obstacles to acceptance similar to those experienced by contemporary migrants, many of whom are migrating from the same countries.

In the 1980s, religious organizations in Los Angeles responded forcefully to the refugee crisis as Central Amer-



CNS photo/Tyler Orsburn

A Catholic Day of Action for Immigrant Children on July 18 led to the arrest of 70 religious women, clergy and lay advocates during an act of civil disobedience in the rotunda of the Russell Senate Office Building.

icans fled death squads, poverty and civil war. Grass-roots action was accompanied by a concerted effort to make a moral argument on the national front for the acceptance of Central Americans as refugees, he said. “At an intellectual level, the church was arguing that it doesn’t matter if certain people didn’t qualify as asylum seekers, that they were human beings fleeing war and [therefore] we were morally obligated to help them.”

What may be lacking today, according to Father Dempsey, is the kind of persistent, forthright moral voice that typified the response in the 1980s. “Change only happens when there’s both grass-roots activism and pressure put on elites until they side with you,” Father Dempsey said. “We have to keep articulating loudly and strongly that what’s happening right now is immoral. All of our social teaching backs that up, and most of [the migrant and undocumented people] are also Catholic. It should be a no-brainer for us.

“If you’re only whispering that it might be immoral, how can you go to outright action?”

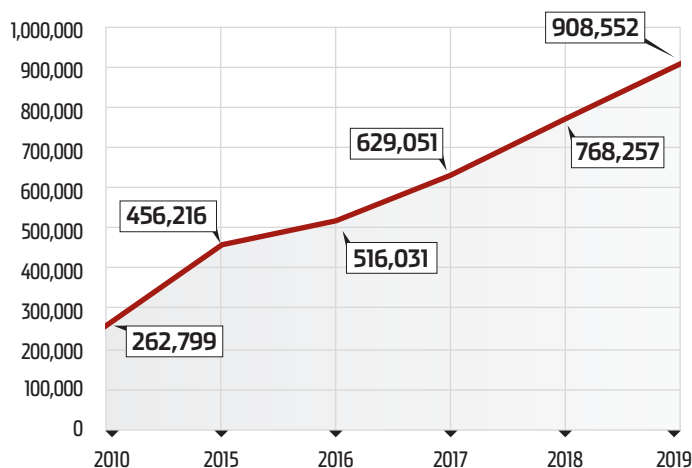
Melissa Cedillo is a fellow at Faith in Public Life, a national network of members of the clergy and faith leaders

who advocate for social justice and the common good. She believes Catholic bishops could have a significant impact on the current dialogue around immigration if they wedded their words to more strategic action. “It’s helpful when the bishops issue statements, like welcoming immigrants,” she acknowledged. “But when you’re thinking about media and what gets attention, when the bishops do something—walking a family across the border, giving communion through the wall—that gets attention.”

Gail Gresser is the director of campus ministry at Mount St. Mary’s University in Los Angeles. She, too, praises the bishops for the formal statements they have made on immigration. “But I wish the bishops as a whole would do something more dramatic, more visible,” she said. “All the bishops at one of the detention centers... That would convey a message.”

Dylan Corbett, the director of the Hope Border Institute in El Paso, Tex., believes the church is “doing a lot” on immigration. “It’s advocating on Capitol Hill. It’s supporting development in regions like Central America,” he said. “But this historical moment we’re living in calls for a more visible, public, dramatic enactment of what our faith is. Our

Backlog of pending cases in immigration courts as of May 2019



Apprehensions at the southwest border spiked between January and May, but declined dramatically in June



Sources: TRAC Immigration; "Southwest Border Migration Fiscal Year 2019," U.S. Customs and Border Protection

faith is essentially performative. It's meant to be put into action. It's something to be incarnated."

"I think that's what's missing: that visible demonstration of solidarity," Mr. Corbett said. "I think people are looking for that."

"You look at Pope Francis offering these visceral images," Ms. Cedillo said. "He does not say, 'Visit the imprisoned.' He goes there himself and washes their feet. He goes to where the refugee crisis is and tells them, 'God loves you.' He doesn't get lost in complex theologies of what do we do, what is the answer. He says, 'I'll just show you.'"

Catholics working with undocumented people suggest there are many ways to marry words and deeds in this moment. Louise Martínez (not her real name) runs one of the few Catholic institutions in Los Angeles that offer sanctuary to undocumented people.

Her shelter has chosen to keep its status quiet; because it is one of the few places the undocumented can go, the fear of government action against the shelter or people staying there is high. But "if the archdiocese were to declare itself a sanctuary, [including] all its churches," she suggested, things could be different for her program. "Nobody would be able to target a specific location."

But the idea of sanctuary presents practical challenges. "Sanctuary is not a one-time thing," said Ms. Cedillo. "Look at the Mennonites hosting Edith Espinal in Ohio—she's been there for over a year. She doesn't need just a bed but food and help for her children."

For her part, Ms. Pacheco questions the whole idea of

making sanctuary just about churches. "If we think of sanctuary as just one place, we're missing a great opportunity to become living Christians who are temples of sanctuary for others. My home is a sanctuary. So is your home, your business, your car. We are each called to be a place where the refuge of God is vivid and experienced.

"We shouldn't be asking which place should be a sanctuary," she said. "Don't make me, as an undocumented immigrant, run to a church. Please, neighbor, open your door and let me be there."

Mr. Cuevas agreed. "The church isn't an entity upon the hill or in a white castle that can issue a statement and things will automatically happen. Anyone that feels like the church should be doing something, they are the church. Rather than demand something from their pastor, I wish they would get more involved."

He also noted that alongside action, immigration reform is essential. "Immigration has been this can we've been kicking down the road for years and years. The last time we had some form of law put in place was under Reagan. We came very close again under President Bush just before 9/11 hit."

It is still possible to pass a comprehensive immigration reform package, a goal long supported by U.S. bishops, he said. "This isn't a Democratic or Republican issue. Both sides have to meet in the middle."

Jim McDermott, S.J., *Los Angeles correspondent.*
Twitter: @PopCulturPriest.

Paulo Freire or a Jesuit saint?

A fight erupts over Brazil's patron of education

President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil attends a ceremony on May 30 at the Planalto Presidential Palace, in Brasilia, Brazil.

The author and theorist Paulo Freire was honored in 2012 as the patron of education in Brazil. Now an ally of far-right President Jair Bolsonaro wants to strip Freire—who died in 1997—of that title. He has proposed that it be given instead to St. Joseph of Anchieta, a Spanish-born missionary of the 16th century. But he did not count on one thing: opposition from the rectors of the Sanctuary of Anchieta.

Carlos Jordy, a member of Brazil's Congress from Mr. Bolsonaro's Partido Social Liberal, introduced a bill in May that proposes to transfer the title from Mr. Freire—famous for, among other works, his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—to St. Joseph of Anchieta. Mr. Jordy says that the move is justified by the “calamity of the national education.”

In response, Nilson Marostica, S.J., and Bruno Franguelli, S.J., rector and vice rector respectively of the National Sanctuary of Saint Joseph of Anchieta in Brazil's southeastern state of Espírito Santo, released a statement recognizing the “great importance of Paulo Freire's legacy” and noting that both he and St. Joseph chose the side of marginalized people.

“Anchieta, using the language and the methods of his time, also was a ‘pedagogue of the oppressed’ when he made the option of being with the indigenous peoples, educating them, defending them and protecting them from the ambition of the powerful ones,” the statement says. St. Joseph, a Jesuit missionary, denounced the violence of the Portuguese colonizers against the indigenous peoples in Brazil and opposed their enslavement.

Ricardo da Costa is a medieval scholar at the Federal University of Espírito Santo in Vitória, Brazil, and an advisor to the Ministry of Education. He described the letter issued by the Sanctuary of Anchieta as “stupefying, but not surprising.”

“Internationally, the Catholic Church has been much

influenced by the left. In Brazil it was the basis of Liberation Theology and welcomed former President Lula da Silva's political movement when the Workers' Party was created.”

Mr. da Costa posted an article on Facebook in June criticizing Freire's educational theories. “In my humble opinion, he was the basis of the educational decadency in Brazil,” he said.

Paulo Roberto Padilha, director of the Instituto Paulo Freire, a nongovernmental organization that promotes Freire's legacy and advocates for the “emancipated” education system he proposed, said the bill “is one of the tools the government is using to distract the people from what really matters: the dismantling of public services, including the public school [system], in Brazil.”

According to Mr. Padilha, attacks on Paulo Freire's ideas have been frequent since the military coup of 1964, when Freire had to flee the country for 16 years. “When they attack him, they are really attacking education and democracy, the two things that he always stood for,” said Mr. Padilha.

“He stood for the critical consciousness of students and was never for indoctrination. Someone who accuses Freire of being a communist not only doesn't know anything of his works, but also doesn't know anything about communism,” said Mr. Padilha.

Father Marostica thinks the same is true regarding St. Joseph of Anchieta. “These people don't know anything about him, about his greatness, about his virtues and about the fact that he stood for the indigenous peoples in Brazil,” he said.

“All they want to do is to attack the Workers' Party—and for that end they are using even religion.”

Eduardo Campos Lima contributes from São Paulo, Brazil.

Catholic health care network seized in Eritrea



In June, Eritrean authorities closed all 22 of the nation's church-run health care facilities, days after government officials ordered the administrators of these facilities to transfer their ownership to the government. The health care administrators declined and asked authorities to speak to church leaders.

Soldiers, police and health ministry officials later carried out the government's seizure order, expelling staff and in some cases patients from church institutions and shutting down facilities, most of which are located inside monasteries. Angered by this action and by the presence of Eritrean security officers now standing guard at monasteries, the bishops of the Council of Catholic Hierarchs in Eritrea raised their voices in protest.

"How is it possible for such things to happen in a state where the rule of law should be abided by?" the bishops asked in a letter addressed to the health ministry. The bishops condemned the decision as "unfair and unlawful" and said it was synonymous with "persecution."

"Is this the manner in which the government wishes to break, without the slightest sign of recognition, a cooperation that the church has been offering in a variety of public sectors for decades, for the good of the people and of the nation?"

"These actions show that, despite the improved re-

gional climate for peace and security, the human rights situation in Eritrea remains unchanged," Daniela Kravetz, the U.N. special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, said in a statement. "The seizure of these health facilities will negatively impact the right to health of the affected populations, in particular those in remote rural areas."

Government officials argued that the East African country is a secular state where no approved religion enjoys preferential status. It defends the directive of the health ministry, which, it says, was in line with a regulation enacted in 1995 requesting religious institutions to transfer authority of clinics under their control to the respective regional branches of the Ministry of Health.

Some here believe, however, that the government closed the church's health centers in retaliation for a critical pastoral letter issued by the Eritrean Catholic bishops. In a letter published in April the bishops said the need for a "change of direction and renewal" in the country was "undisputed, urgent and unavoidable" and urged a national reconciliation process accompanied by respect for human rights and religious freedom.

"This is the message we would like to send with great conviction: if we do not want to perish as a nation and as a people, let us build this peace and reconciliation among



CNS photo/Thomas Mukoya, Reuters

Women walk along a street in Asmara, Eritrea, in February 2016.

us,” they wrote.

Eritrea officially gained independence from Ethiopia in 1993 and since that time has been ruled by Isaias Afwerki. Mr. Afwerki’s authoritarian grip over the one-party country has created an atmosphere marked by fear and repression.

A 2016 report by a U.N. human rights commission of inquiry found widespread crimes of “enslavement, imprisonment, enforced disappearances, torture, persecution, rape, murder and other inhumane acts” in the country’s detention facilities, military training camps and other places.

Catholics make up about 5 percent—some 163,000—of Eritrea’s population of almost six million people. The church in Eritrea runs a network of schools, health centers and children’s homes that assist people throughout the country regardless of their faith. Most of the church’s health centers provide free services and operate in remote areas where people have few health care options.

Linus Unah contributes from Nigeria.
Twitter: @linusunah.

 For more international reporting, visit americamagazine.org/dispatches.



iStock

GOODNEWS: Wiping out medical debt, ‘loaves and fishes’ style

The leaders of Pathway Church on the outskirts of Wichita, Kan., set out only to help people nearby pay off some medical debt, recalled Larry Wren, Pathway’s executive pastor. But then they learned that, like a modern-day loaves-and-fishes story, their \$22,000 collective donation could wipe out \$2.2 million in debt not only for neighbors in the Wichita area but for every Kansan facing imminent insolvency because of medical expenses they could not afford to pay—1,600 people in all.

As Mr. Wren thought about the Easter message of redemption, things clicked. “Being able to do this provides an opportunity to illustrate what it means to have a debt paid that they could never pay themselves,” he said. “It just was a great fit.”

Churches in Maryland, Illinois, Virginia, Texas and elsewhere have been reaching the same conclusion. RIP Medical Debt, a nonprofit organization based in Rye, N.Y., arranges the debt payoffs. It reports a surge in participation, primarily from Christian places of worship.

The mountain of bills they are trying to clear is high. Medical debt contributes to two-thirds of U.S. bankruptcies. When a person cannot pay a bill, that debt is often packaged with other people’s debt and sold to bill collectors for some fraction of the total amount of the bill. RIP Medical Debt buys debt portfolios on this secondary market for pennies on the dollar with money from its donors. But instead of collecting the debt, RIP forgives it. RIP reports that since 2018, 18 churches have been able to abolish \$34.4 million in medical debt that had been hanging over their neighbors.


Rosie Hammill, *Kaiser Health News*.



THE SPIRIT OF PETER

By Austen Ivereigh

Could Francis be our first charismatic pope?



Pope Francis celebrates Mass marking the feast of Pentecost in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican on June 4, 2017. In attendance were thousands of people celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Catholic charismatic renewal.

CNS photo/Paul Haring

When Pope Francis joined 6,000 people in Rome on June 8 for the launch on Pentecost eve of a new Vatican body to serve the 115 million charismatic Catholics around the world, they made sure to perform his favorite Latin-American “praise” song, “Vive Jesús el Señor” (“The Lord Jesus lives”).

It is always a sign that Francis is relaxing among friends when he feels able to josh them. During his 10-minute address, he referred to them laughingly as “spiritists” (as charismatic Catholics are often disparagingly known in Latin America); and, after asking for a minute’s silence to pray for peace, he said it was “heroic” for them to keep a minute’s silence for anything.

Francis may not pray in tongues, but no pope has ever identified as closely with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, nor been so keen to move it to front and center in the church. The relationship was born in his early years as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, when Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio realized the movement was not a “samba school,” as he had disparagingly referred to it in his early Jesuit days, but rather, as he called it in his eve-of-Pentecost address, “a current of the grace of the Holy Spirit” being poured out for the renewal of the church in our time.

The link with the Charismatic Renewal grew stronger especially between 2006 and 2012, when Cardinal Bergoglio attended yearly gatherings of around 7,000 Catholics and evangelicals in Luna Park stadium in Buenos Aires, among the biggest such ecumenical praise meetings at that time anywhere. Hesitant at first, the cardinal came up to be prayed over by the church’s leading charismatic preacher, the Capuchin friar and preacher to the papal household, Father Raniero Cantalamessa, together with a handful of pentecostal pastors. He was said to have received a “baptism in the Spirit,” an experience of the pneumatic power mentioned often in the New Testament.

In Cardinal Bergoglio’s case it led to a new boldness, especially in ecumenism. He began to meet regularly to pray with evangelicals, convinced that the Spirit was at work in bringing them together. Since his election in 2013, he has continued that openness, reaching out through the renewal to evangelicals and Pentecostals, who are quick to recognize in him one of their own. Francis has invoked the Holy Spirit so often and so emphatically, constantly emphasizing the “new things” the Spirit is calling forth and the dangers of resisting it through rigidity and ideology, that he is arguably not just history’s first Jesuit pope but also the first charismatic pope.

‘Renew the Renewal’

But Francis is a reformer, and he has been keen to “renew the renewal” while at the same time encouraging it. The launch of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal International Service, or Charis, is the fruit of a three-year bid not just to integrate the renewal as a “current of grace” for the whole Catholic world, as Belgian Cardinal Leon-Joseph Suenens famously referred to it, but also to refresh it at its sources, above all by recalling it to the vision of the so-called “Malines documents” of the 1970s, to which Charis has acquired the publication rights. “Make those documents known!” Francis urged Charis leaders at Pentecost, describing them as “the compass of the current of grace.”



The Malines documents are named after the city where, in Cardinal Suenens’s residence, theologians, bishops and renewal leaders gathered to explore the charismatic phenomenon then breaking out in the church, and to bridge the gap with the institutional church. In its statutes, Charis specifically locates the mission of the renewal in these foundational documents, stressing in particular evangelization, the call to Christian unity and service of the poor (the topic of the third paper, the fruit of a dialogue with Bishop Helder Câmara of Brazil).

Francis’ “renewal of the renewal” is also reflected in the new body itself, Charis. Back in 2015 Francis asked the two existing charismatic liaison organizations recognized by Rome, International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services and the more recently established Catholic Fraternity, to work with the new Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life to create a new, single “service of communion” to the renewal worldwide. In his address on June 8, Francis said Charis serves all the charismatic groups that the Spirit “has raised up in the world,” not “one office to serve some and another office to serve others” but “one office for all.”

Charis’s role will be to help forge communion among the world’s hugely disparate charismatic groups, some of which have fallen prey to the evangelical vice of authoritarian, self-enriching leaders. In his address Francis told charismatic leaders to guard against “the ambition to stand out, to lead, to make money,” warning that “corruption enters that way.” The purpose of the renewal was “service, always



CNS photo/Vatican Media handout via Reuters

Pope Francis arrives for an audience with members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal International Service in Paul VI hall at the Vatican on June 8, 2019. Francis strongly identifies with the charismatic movement.

service”: serving the Spirit, each other and the poor. “Service is not about filling our pockets—the devil enters through the pockets,” he said, but “about giving, giving, giving of oneself.”

Service and accountability are built into the design of Charis itself, which for now has just a handful of personnel and a small budget but, unlike its two predecessors, enjoys what canon law calls “public juridical personality.” It was erected by the Holy See and has the right, therefore, to represent the church. It also has tighter Vatican oversight: the Dicastery for Laity, for example, appoints the moderator, for now the Belgian layman Jean-Luc Moens.

When I asked the dicastery’s number two, Alexandre de Awi Mello, I.Sch., of Brazil, which other church bodies have a similar canonical status—that is, erected by the Holy See but independent of it—he pointed to Caritas Internationalis, the Rome-based office that coordinates the various national Caritas organizations around the world (in the United States, known as Catholic Relief Services). Giving Charis a similar place in the church, says Father Awi, “is a strong gesture by the pope that he wants to integrate the renewal, to say the renewal is church and that baptism of the Spirit belongs to the church in the way that charity belongs to the church.” In his address to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal at the gathering in Rome, Charis’s ecclesiastical assistant, Father Cantalamessa, said “charismatic” should always be an adjective rather than a noun: One can no more speak of “charismatics” as a specific group than one can speak of “charitables,” for it is in the nature of the whole

church to be charismatic, as it is to be charitable.

Because there is no membership structure, Charis excludes none of the expressions of the renewal: national or international, diocesan or parish-level, stable community or start-up prayer group. There will be no attempt to classify or define these charismatic “realities,” says Father Awi, but Charis will focus instead on assisting them with formation and guidance. Simply acknowledging them is no small feat. In Brazil alone, he says, there are around 700 “new communities” of charismatic inspiration, together with an estimated 20,000-odd charismatic prayer groups, involving at least two million people.

This is, in many ways, the paradox of the renewal: More than 120 million charismatic Catholics in 235 countries belong to a vast tapestry of “expressions and ministries,” as the Charis statutes describe it, which have little in common beyond an experience of baptism in the Spirit and an openness to the charismata pneumatika listed in 1 Cor 12:8-10, such as prophecy, healing and tongues. Although it is this emphasis and openness that sets the renewal off from “traditional” Catholicism, it is not one of the “new movements” within the church. It has no founder—C.C.R. leaders tend to point to the sky when you ask where it all began—nor governing structure as such. Cardinal Suenens used to liken it to the Gulf Stream that warms the coasts of northern Europe; after joining the Atlantic, it becomes indistinguishable from it. You only have to go to an ordinary parish Mass in Brazil to see that this has already happened.

Francis may not pray in tongues, but no pope has ever identified as closely with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

People pray as Pope Francis attends a meeting in 2015 with Catholic charismatics in St. Peter's Square. Pope Francis sees the charismatic movement as playing a vital role in the missionary and pastoral conversion of the church.

But Francis wants that integration to deepen, for mainstream Catholicism to become more open to what he sees as a fresh outpouring of the Spirit in our time. At World Youth Day in Panama in January, Francis spoke of an urgent need for “a new Pentecost for the church and for the world,” as he put it. “The Joy of the Gospel” in 2013 spelled out that vision of an outgoing, Spirit-filled church in which “missionary disciples” can speak of a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and share joyful stories of the Spirit at work in their lives. “Evangelii Gaudium” dreams of an evangelizing church, open to the spontaneous, gratuitous infusion of the *charismata pneumatika* that in the Acts of the Apostles turned fearful fishermen into bold proclaimers of the Gospel, able to speak of the love of Christ in ways that transcended boundaries of culture and language.

What the Spirit Is Asking

The vital role Francis sees being played by the charismatic renewal in the missionary and pastoral conversion of the church is clear from the Latin-American bishops' gathering at Aparecida in May 2007. Aparecida's concluding document, which Cardinal Bergoglio was in charge of drafting, spoke in classically charismatic terms of the need for a personal encounter with Christ and the role played by the Holy Spirit (mentioned 44 times) in opening minds and hearts to God's law. This emphasis reflected not just the pope's discernment that this was what the Spirit was asking of the church, but also his diagnosis of modernity.

Secularization and technology were dissolving the traditional transmission belts of faith; the ethical and doctrinal edifice of Christianity would in the future be ever less sustained by the weight of law and culture. What was needed was a return to what Aparecida called the “primary encounter” (*encuentro fundante*) of Christianity: bold and kerygmatic, strong on grace and mercy, not dependent on law, culture or powerful institutions but on the testimony of love and the power of the Spirit. It was this discernment that Pope Francis sought to bottle in “The Joy of the Gospel,” where the Holy Spirit (men-

tioned 49 times) is the chief protagonist.

All of which explains why Francis is so keen on this family of Catholics, who are quicker than most to grasp the renewal of the church's culture that “*Evangelii Gaudium*” calls for. In many meetings with the C.C.R. in Buenos Aires as cardinal and since his 2013 election as pope, he has urged them not to keep for themselves the baptism of the Spirit, for “we are all servants of this flood of grace,” as he put it at the C.C.R.'s 50th anniversary celebrations two years ago.

Those celebrations in 2017 showed the need for a new leadership structures. Francis had given clear instructions a year earlier that he wanted the anniversary not to be self-congratulatory and inwardly focused but ecumenical and missionary, as at Luna Park. But he had faced push-back from C.C.R. leaders wanting to affirm the renewal's identity as a movement, and in the end the vigil was divided awkwardly into two halves. In the first, the only people on stage were the C.C.R. leaders, who led the worship and gave testimonies against a backdrop of the jubilee logo and the words “*Veni, Creator Spiritus*” (the Latin was itself a kind of identity affirmation); while the second part, hosted by Pope Francis, included the evangelicals and Pentecostals under the banner “Jesus is Lord.” The first felt tired and self-referential, while the second was joyful and energetic.

The Charis launch at Pentecost this year marked the triumph of the second over the first. The Rev. Wilfred Brieven, who was Cardinal Suenens's secretary for 12 years and was involved in the renewal from 1973, told me outside the Paul VI Audience Hall in Rome that “the cardinal is in joy in heaven that this is happening,” that Francis' “bold step in establishing Charis” was “a new direction bringing unity where it was badly needed” and “a moment of *kairós* not just for the renewal but for the church.”

Charis's statutes ensure that the renewal faces firmly outward by making clear the three Malines priorities of evangelization, Christian unity and service of the poor. The last is especially important in Latin America, where the renewal has often been set against so-called social justice Catholics, producing a tragic cleavage. “The Spirit takes us to the poor,” says Father Awi. “That is an essential part of the renewal, which perhaps many lost along the way.”

Francis has often referred to the third Malines document, in which Archbishop Helder Câmara of Brazil sees the renewal as a service to the dispossessed of society. “We will be judged, not on our praise but on what we have done for Jesus,” Francis told the C.C.R. in 2017, quoting Matthew 25, in which Jesus appears in the guise of the hungry



CNS photo/Paul Haring

and the imprisoned who are asking to be fed and set free. “We are in a new season now,” Mr. Moens, the director of Charis, told me last weekend. There could no longer be a separation between prayer and service of the poor. “You will have people praying and serving the poor together, like Mother Teresa: adoring the Lord in prayer and sacraments, and then adoring the Lord in his wounded people,” he said.

The second mission, Christian unity, is also key: Francis sees the charismatic renewal as the church’s bridge to the fast-growing Pentecostal world, the place where the Spirit is forging a “reconciled diversity” out of churches separated by history. As the late Rev. Peter Hocken—one of the best theologians of the renewal—described him, Francis is a committed “charismatic ecumenist,” meaning that he sees unity as firstly the work of the Spirit rather than an achievement of theological or institutional dialogue.

In Chapters 10 and 11 of the Acts of the Apostles, Christ’s Jewish disciples are astonished to see the Spirit bestow the same charismatic gifts on the gentiles. The disciples grasp that they are all one. In the same way, unity comes about when people gather in prayer and friendship and see how the Spirit is working in the other. The renewal was born in this way, outside the Catholic church, by way of Pentecostalism, when in January 1967 Catholics from Duquesne University attended an interdenominational charismatic prayer meeting and a few weeks later received a dramatic outpouring of charismatic gifts before the Blessed Sacrament during what

came to be known as the “Duquesne weekend.”

Francis’ example has inspired a U.S. Pentecostal pastor from Newark, Joseph Tosini, to create the John 17 movement bringing together Catholics and evangelicals in friendship, involving a number of U.S. Catholic bishops. Pastor Tosini regularly takes dozens of pastors to Rome to meet Francis and has collected their testimonies in a new book, *John 17: The Heart of God*. The pope has a letter in the front of the book praising their “ecumenism based on the unity of the Spirit.”

Over lunch on Pentecost Sunday, Pastor Tosini described to me the many fruits of this movement, the way Catholics and Evangelicals were being given a new insight into the Spirit’s work of unity in our time. That unity is happening, he says, “at the speed of relationship.” The Holy Spirit had shown Francis that in this era of mistrust of institutions, “if it’s not personal, it’s not real,” he said. And that was why the charismatic world—Catholic and evangelical—was looking to Francis as one anointed to channel this inspiration. “People know if you love them or not,” he added. “Pope Francis is genuine. He moves people by his presence and by his kindness.”

Austen Ivereigh’s *Wounded Shepherd: Pope Francis and His Struggle to Convert the Catholic Church* will be published by Henry Holt and launched at an America Media event on Nov. 5.



A mural of Dorothy Day, co-founder of The Catholic Worker, on a wall in a park near the Church of the Nativity in New York City. Day wrote on the tensions between Catholicism and communism for America in the 1930s.



NOT SO MENACING

What Catholics (still) don't understand about communists

By Dean Dettloff

“It is when the Communists are good that they are dangerous.”

That is how Dorothy Day begins an article in *America*, published just before the launch of the *Catholic Worker* on May Day in 1933. In contrast to the reactions of many Catholics of the time, Day painted a sympathetic, if critical, view of the communists she encountered in Depression-era New York City. Her deep personalism allowed her to see the human stories through the ideological struggle; and yet she concluded that Catholicism and communism were not only incompatible, but mutual threats. A whole Cold War has passed since her reflection, and a few clarifying notes are now worthwhile.

Communists are attracted to communism by their goodness, Day argued, that unerasable quality of the good that can be found within and outside the church alike, woven into our very nature. It might have been an easier thing to say back in 1933, when American communists were well known to the general public for putting their lives on the line to support striking workers, but it was also the kind of thing that could land you in a lot of trouble, not least in the Catholic Church.

By affirming the goodness that drives so many communists then and now, Day aimed to soften the perceptions of Catholics who were more comfortable with villainous caricatures of the communists of their era than with more challenging depictions of them as laborers for peace and economic justice. Most people who join communist parties and move-

ments, Day rightly noted, are motivated not by some deep hatred toward God or frothing anti-theism, but by an aspiration for a world liberated from a political economy that demands vast exploitation of the many for the comfort of a few.

But in her attempt to create sympathy for the people attracted to communism and to overcome a knee-jerk prejudice against them, Day needlessly perpetuated two other prejudices against communism. First, she said that under all the goodness that draws people to communism, the movement is, in the final analysis, a program “with the distinct view of tearing down the church.”

Then, talking about a young communist in her neighborhood who was killed after being struck by a brick thrown by a Trotskyite, she concluded that young people who follow the goodness in their hearts that may lead them to communism are not fully aware of what it is they are participating in—even at the risk of their lives. In other words, we should hate the communism but love the communist.

Though Day’s sympathetic criticism of communism is in many ways commendable, nearly a century of history shows there is much more to the story than these two judgments suggest. Communist political movements the world over have been full of unexpected characters, strange developments and more complicated motivations than a desire to undo the church; and even through the challenges of the 20th century, Catholics and communists have found natural reasons to offer one another a sign of peace.

A Complicated History

Christianity and communism have obviously had a complicated relationship. That adjective “complicated” will surely cause some readers to roll their eyes. Communist states and movements have indeed persecuted religious people at different moments in history. At the same time, Christians have been passionately represented in communist and socialist movements around the world. And these Christians, like their atheist comrades, are communists not because they misunderstand the final goals of communism but because they authentically understand the communist ambition of a classless society.

“From each according to ability, to each according to need,” Marx summarizes in “Critique of the Gotha Program,” a near echo of Luke’s description of the early church in Acts 4:35 and 11:29. Perhaps it was Day, not her young communist neighbor, who misunderstood communism.

It is true that Marx, Engels, Lenin and a number of other major communists were committed Enlightenment thinkers, atheists who sometimes assumed religion would fade away in the bright light of scientific reason, and at other times advocated propagandizing against it (though not,



as Lenin argued, in a way that would divide the movement against capitalism, the actual opponent). That should not be so scandalous in itself. They are hardly alone as modern atheists, and their atheism is understandable, when Christianity has so often been a force allied to the ruling powers that exploit the poor. Catholics have found plenty of philosophical resources in non-Christian sources in the past; why not moderns?

Despite and beyond theoretical differences, priests like Herbert McCabe, O.P., Ernesto and Fernando Cardenal, S.J., Frei Betto, O.P., Camilo Torres and many other Catholics—members of the clergy, religious and laypeople—have been inspired by communists and in many places contributed to communist and communist-influenced movements as members. Some still do—for example in the Philippines, where the “Christians for National Liberation,” an activist group first organized by nuns, priests and exploited Christians, are politically housed within the National Democratic Front, a coalition of movements that includes a strong communist thread currently fighting the far-right authoritarian leader Rodrigo Duterte.

Closer to home and outside of armed struggles, Christians are also present today in communist movements in the United States and Canada. Whatever hostilities may have existed in the past, some of these movements are quite open to Christian participation now. Many of my friends in the Party for Socialism and Liberation, for example, a Marxist-Leninist party, are churchgoing Christians or folks without a grudge against their Christian upbringing, as are lots of people in the radical wing of the Democratic Socialists of America.



© 2019 Estate of Fritz Eichenberg / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

“The Christ of the Breadlines,” by Fritz Eichenberg. Eichenberg contributed over 100 illustrations to *The Catholic Worker*.

public, like shared land, a process enforced first by physical violence and then continued by law. As time went on, human beings themselves would become the private property of other human beings.

Colonial capitalism, together with the assumptions of white supremacy, ushered in centuries of unbridled terrorism on populations around the world, creating a system in which people could be bought and sold as commodities. Even after the official abolition of slavery in the largest world economies—which required a costly civil war in the United States—the effects of that system live on, and capitalist nations and transnational companies continue to exploit poor and working people at home and abroad. For many people around the globe today, being on the wrong side of capitalism can still mean the difference between life and death.

What Motivates a Communist?

Communism has provided one of the few sustainable oppositions to capitalism, a global political order responsible for the ongoing suffering of millions. It is that suffering, reproduced by economic patterns that Marx and others tried to explain, and not the secret plot of atheism (as Day once argued), that motivates communists.

According to a report by Oxfam released in 2018, global inequality is staggering and still on the rise. Oxfam, which is not run by communists, observed that “82 percent of the wealth created [in 2017] went to the richest one percent of the global population, while the 3.7 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity got nothing.”

While entrepreneurs like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos are investing in space travel, their workers are grounded in daily economic struggle here on earth. In Mr. Musk’s Tesla factories, workers suffer serious injuries more than twice the industrial average, and they report being so exhausted that they collapse on the factory floor.

An undercover journalist reports workers urinate into bottles in a U.K. Amazon warehouse for fear of being disciplined for “idle time,” and the company has a long list of previous offenses. In Pennsylvania, Amazon workers needed medical attention both for exposure to the cold in the winter and for heat exhaustion in the summer. These hardly seem like prices worth paying so a few billionaires can vacation in the black expanse of space. As one Detroit Tesla worker put it: “Everything feels like the future but us.”

For communists, global inequality and the abuse of workers at highly profitable corporations are not the result only of unkind employers or unfair labor regulations. They are symptoms of a specific way of organizing wealth, one

The Communist Party USA has published essays affirming the connections between Christianity and communism and encouraging Marxists not to write off Christians as hopelessly lost to the right (the C.P.U.S.A. paper, *People’s World*, even reported on Sister Simone Campbell and Network’s Nuns on the Bus campaign to agitate for immigration reform). In Canada, Dave McKee, former leader of the Communist Party of Canada in Ontario, was once an Anglican theology student at a Catholic seminary, radicalized in part by his contact with base communities in Nicaragua. For my part, I have talked more about Karl Rahner, S.J., St. Óscar Romero and liberation theology at May Day celebrations and communist meetings than at my own Catholic parish.

In other words, though some communists would undoubtedly prefer a world without Christianity, communism is not simply a program for destroying the church. Many who committed their very lives to the church felt compelled to work alongside communists as part of their Christian calling. The history of communism, whatever else it might be, will always contain a history of Christianity, and vice versa, whether members of either faction like it or not.

Communism in its socio-political expression has at times caused great human and ecological suffering. Any good communist is quick to admit as much, not least because communism is an unfinished project that depends on the recognition of its real and tragic mistakes.

But communists are not the only ones who have to answer for creating human suffering. Far from being a friendly game of world competition, capitalism, Marx argued, emerged through the privatization of what was once

Communists are attracted to communism by their goodness, Day argued, that unerasable quality of the good that can be found within and outside the church alike, woven into our very nature.

that did not exist at the creation of the world and one that represents part of a “culture of death,” to borrow a familiar phrase. We already live in a world where wealth is redistributed, but it goes up, not down or across.

Though polls show U.S. citizens have become increasingly skeptical of capitalism—one Gallup survey even reports that Democrats currently view socialism more positively than capitalism—that attitude is not widely popular among electoral representatives. A revival of socialist hysteria typified the response to Bernie Sanders’s inspiring 2016 primary bid and the electoral success of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib, members of the Democratic Socialists of America, a party co-founded by a former Catholic Worker, Michael Harrington. Republican and Democratic politicians have made it abundantly clear that whatever their differences, they both agree that in U.S. political culture support for capitalism is non-negotiable, as Nancy Pelosi told a socialist questioner during a CNN town hall.

Communists are not content with the back-and-forth of capitalist parties, who point fingers at one another while maintaining, jointly, a system that exploits multitudes of people, including their own constituents. Communists think we can build better ways of being together in society.

Contrary to the fear that communists simply want everyone’s “stuff,” the abolition of private property, for which Marx and Engels called, means the abolition of privately owned ways of generating wealth, not taking the clothes off your back or your dad’s tie collection. As the popular saying in communist circles goes, communists do not want your toothbrush. Some of the standard proposals in the programs of communist parties include things like providing free health care, abolishing private profit from renting property and the creation of truly democratic institutions in which politicians are not millionaires and are subject to recall.

In fact, although the Catholic Church officially teaches that private property is a natural right, this teaching also comes with the proviso that private property is always sub-

ordinate to the common good. So subordinate, says Pope Francis in a truly radical moment in “Laudato Si’,” that “The Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute or inviolable, and has stressed the social purpose of all forms of private property.”

Something like this is paralleled in “The Communist Manifesto,” when Marx and Engels underscore that abolishing private property means abolishing not personal property, or the kinds of things an artisan or farmer might own, but the amassed property held by the rich, which divides human beings into antagonistic classes of people—in other words, the kind of private property that most of us do not have.

“You are horrified at our intending to do away with private property,” Marx and Engels say to their bourgeois detractors. “But in your existing society, private property is already done away with for nine-tenths of the population; its existence for the few is solely due to its non-existence in the hands of those nine-tenths.”

Instead, they write that property should be transformed. In a passage not too far from Pope Francis’ bold sentence above, Marx and Engels say: “When, therefore, capital is converted into common property, into the property of all members of society, personal property is not thereby transformed into social property. It is only the social character of the property that is changed. It loses its class character.”

What communists desire is an authentically common life together, and they think that can only happen by relativizing property in light of the good of everyone. Radical indeed, but certainly not all that shocking to people who remember when the Virgin Mary sang that God has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty (Lk 1:53).

Dorothy Day and Christian Communism

Dorothy Day seemed to recognize the deeper motivations for communism later on, changing her judgment of good communists to suggest perhaps there is also good communism. Her article in **America** was written at the beginning of the Great Depression. Twenty years later, Fidel Castro and comrades founded the 26th of July Movement. That effort in 1959 ousted Fulgencio Batista, whose regime was infamous for torturing or killing thousands of Cubans while enjoying support from the United States.

Reflecting on the Cuban revolution in *The Catholic Worker* in 1961, Day offered a complex perspective on the persecution of some Catholics following the revolution. Nevertheless, she wrote, “It is hard...to say that the place of *The Catholic Worker* is with the poor, and that being there, we are often finding ourselves on the side of the persecutors of the Church. This is a tragic fact.”



The funeral procession for Dorothy Day makes its way to the Church of the Nativity in New York on Dec. 2, 1980.

Day reminded her readers that Castro emphasized he was not against the church or Catholics as such (he knew Catholics in the revolution, after all) but against those factions within Cuba that would prefer to cling to the old regime, built on the oppression of Cuba's people. Castro had not only permitted priests and nuns to stay in Cuba, Day wrote, but affirmed that the church endured through monarchies, republics and in feudalist states. "Why cannot she exist under a socialist state?" she asked. She noted many Jesuits would stay in Cuba to work in parishes and added that the Jesuits already had experience living through periods of persecution and suppression.

But Dorothy Day was not open only to the begrudging possibility that the Cuban church might not be wiped out by socialism. She went further: "We are on the side of the revolution. We believe there must be new concepts of property, which is proper to [humanity], and that the new concept is not so new. There is a Christian communism and a Christian capitalism.

"God Bless the priests and people of Cuba. God bless Castro and all those who are seeing Christ in the poor," she said. A year later, Day visited Cuba to see the revolutionary society for herself. In a series of dispatches to *The Catholic Worker*, she reported glowingly, albeit not without noting the many problems the young society had to solve, problems she hoped could in fact be solved with a little communist ingenuity.

Spanning over a century now, communists—Christians and non-Christians—have fought against a violent capitalist economy, putting their lives and freedoms at risk, enduring character assassination, imprisonment and war.

Whether or not one is convinced by the communist hope of abolishing private property, it is undeniable that communists have provided a real, material challenge to a global system that the most powerful world governments have every intention of perpetuating. The loss of a mass communist movement, due in large part to an aggressive legal and political persecution by the United States and other governments, has made organizing opposition to capitalism itself a difficult task; but even in its absence, a majority of millennials reject capitalism.

As Marx and Engels put it in "The Communist Manifesto": "In place of the bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." It is with that hope for free development, beyond the competition of capitalists, that many Catholics, myself included, count themselves among the communists.

So Dorothy Day was right when she said it is when the communists are good that they are dangerous. Communists are pursuing the good when they are dangerous; they are opposing an economic system based on avarice, exploitation and human suffering, afflicting the comfortable and comforting the afflicted. And in a world beholden to an economy of death, one that is crippling our "common home," as Pope Francis tells us, and asserting itself as the end of history, we must also add: It is when the communists are dangerous that they are good.

Dean Dettloff is *America's* Toronto correspondent and a junior member of the Institute for Christian Studies.



New Habits

A happily married father of six becomes a monk for a month

By Stephen B. Grant

“Be a Monk. For a Month. For a Year.” So says the advertisement for Mepkin Abbey, a Trappist monastery in South Carolina.

It was a call for which I had been waiting, albeit not a call to vocation. I am middle-aged, happily married and the father of six children. Thankfully, the monastic guest program at Mepkin is open to all: those discerning a vocation or not, Catholic or not, men or not.

I have been making five-day retreats at Trappist and Benedictine monasteries for the past 20 years and have found the experience of living in silence and detaching from work and family life restorative and re-energizing. And yet, as the renowned contemplative Paul Hewson (a.k.a. Bono) would put it, I still hadn’t found what I was looking for.

The truth is, I was becoming restless during my monastic stints. I sensed that I was just scratching the surface of the monastic experience and that as a mere visitor to an abbey guest house, I was still on the outside looking in.

So I decided to be a monk for a month.

I arrived at Mepkin Abbey on a July afternoon during

a South Carolina monsoon. The monastery sits on a bluff above the Cooper River, its 3,200 acres a patchwork of pine forest and vast lawns punctuated by ancient oaks that drip with Spanish moss. The property was originally a colonial rice plantation, later acquired by Clare Boothe Luce, who in turn donated the grounds to the Trappists in the 1940s.

I reported to the retreat house, a gleaming glass and steel half-cloister that is the most recent addition to the abbey’s modern buildings. Gerard Jonas Palmares, O.C.S.O., the director of the monastic guest program, greeted me as though I were a long-lost relative.

During my month-long monastic immersion, I lived in a small, comfortable room in the monks’ dormitory. I wore an unflattering, hoodie-like habit. I ate my meals quickly and in silence. I joined the monks in chanting psalms during the seven offices of the Liturgy of the Hours, the first of which, Vigils, kicks off at 3:20 a.m. I worked for four or five hours a day in the abbey’s mushroom-growing operation. I spent each day in silence, speaking only when necessary and not at all during the Grand Silence from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. I loved it.

During my first couple of weeks at the monastery, I felt immense gratitude nearly every day and nearly every hour of every day. I felt privileged to reside in such a beautiful place, to live in silence and to brush against the gentle disposition, intelligence and wisdom of the monks. Every sunrise and sunset, a sign of God's presence. The horn of a freight train blaring from across the Cooper River, a temporary reminder of the noise and distractions of the outside world. Each passing nod by a fellow resident, a further embrace into the community. I wondered whether I had missed my calling.

But during my third week at Mepkin, I hit the monastic wall. I started counting the days until my departure. Father Gerard Jonas was unsurprised and confided that the monastic guest program lasts for one month for a good reason: A would-be monk should understand that the life can be monotonous. I was able to muddle through this dry spell, as I assume that all monks must do for various stretches of time, and the latter part of my stay at the monastery was replete with blessings.

Those blessings included daily Mass, which at Mepkin Abbey begins at 6:30 a.m. The liturgies at Mepkin are short and simple, the homilies concise and incisive. Nonetheless, Mass at the abbey packs an emotional wallop. I am not prone to strong sentiment, and yet I nearly broke into tears during several Masses during my month at Mepkin. I hoped that none of the monks noticed, but if they did, that's O.K., too. And while we're in the confessional, I should fess up, as I did to Father Gueric, that I had dozed off a couple of times during the centering prayer session that he hosts at 5 a.m. each day. I learned that this failing is pardonable because, as Father Gueric told me, I did not snore and "it happens."

Father Gueric granted that indulgence during one of our conferences, at which I was reminded that if you meet with a Mepkin monk to discuss what is going on in your life, spiritual or otherwise, you will leave the meeting with a book. After a few such conferences, the books started piling up on my desk. The problem was that I never had the time to read them. Throughout my tenure at the abbey, it always felt as though there was somewhere that I was supposed to be and

something that I should be doing there. So I made the rookie mistake of waving off further book recommendations. Eventually, I recognized my error and came to appreciate that a book recommendation from a Trappist monk is a precious gift, something that the monk believes or perhaps knows will help you on the journey. Now the books suggested by the monks are helping to change my life.

And, of course, things in my life need to change. For example, there is a person in my workplace who, a decade ago, saw to it that I suffered more than necessary from a Hobbesian Wall Street reorganization. I needed to find a way to forgive this person after all these years, and my month at Mepkin seemed like a good opportunity to cross this problem off my spiritual to-do list. So I asked Father Columba, formerly a parish priest in Dublin, whether I could discuss an unspecified "pastoral issue" with him. Father Columba readily agreed, but before we got together, he delivered an amazing homily on Mt 18:21-22, in which his theme was that "forgiveness is a miracle." Father Columba and I still had our talk, but forgiveness was not one of the topics that we discussed. I had already heard what I needed to hear.

The miracle of forgiveness also showed up unexpectedly at the monastery. During my month at Mepkin, there were two fractious incidents between monastic inhabitants. Naturally, I was involved in one of them. One of the monks had suggested that I was not cleaning the mushroom logs properly, and because I am perfect in every way—not to mention stubborn—I gave him the cold shoulder. I felt incredibly sheepish when the monk on the other side of this contretemps sought me out to apologize within a half-hour. If you want to know how the monks manage to live peaceably in community, day after day after day, there is your answer.

I went to Mepkin Abbey with three objectives: to improve my prayer practice; to experience a full immersion into the daily life of a monk; and to begin a discernment about the next phase of my life. I ended up making so much progress on those three goals during my month at Mepkin that I wonder whether I should have included another three—or 10. Fortunately, there will be time for that, as the monks invite anyone who has completed the month-long program to return to the abbey at any time for a shorter stay. Just what I wanted: more opportunities to be a monk.

Stephen B. Grant is a graduate of Gonzaga College High School and the University of Virginia and its law school. He works as a securities lawyer for a bank in New York City.

In the last few years, more and more media aimed at millennials is getting serious about life's Big Questions.



EXISTENTIALISM FOR MILLENNIALS

By Tara Isabella Burton



"The Good Place" Colleen Hayes/NBC/NBCU Photo Bank, "Fleabag" Hal Sjinnee Amazon Studios, "Hedestown" Matthew Murphy


A few years ago I interviewed the lyricist-composer Dave Malloy, who had adapted a section of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* into the Broadway electropop opera "Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812." In the opera, the emotional underpinning of the depressed aristocrat Pierre Bezukhov's life is not the relationship between him and H el ene, his estranged wife, or between Pierre and his unrequited crush, Natasha, but between him and God. "How did I live?" Pierre sings in

his defining solo. "Was I kind enough and good enough?"

Back in 2013, during the first Off Broadway run of "Comet," a character experiencing a religious crisis felt revolutionary, even transgressive. But in the six years since, more and more media aimed at millennials is getting serious about life's Big Questions. Characters are increasingly likely to worry not just about their romantic prospects, but about their spiritual ones. The most affecting of today's

dramas are about the relationship between human beings and the infinite: a conflict between ordinary mortals and a God more and more of us do not even know how to conceive of, let alone engage with. Think "Good Omens," "Santa Clarita Diet" or "Chilling Adventures of Sabrina."

While at least 40 percent of millennials claim no religion, 72 percent of America's religiously unaffiliated still believe in a Higher Power, a Great Something. The quintessential



While millennials have all too often been accused of solipsism and selfishness, these shows betray both moral seriousness and moral curiosity. ●●

millennial experience is not asking *whether* to believe in something; it is asking *what*, exactly, are we meant to believe in. While millennials have all too often been accused of solipsism and selfishness—we all come out from underneath Lena Dunham’s rompers—our latest crop of millennial-focused media betrays both moral seriousness and moral curiosity. More and more characters are wrestling with the same question that defined Pierre’s search: How can you be good enough when you’re not even sure what *good is*?

Among the most on-the-nose dramatizations of this quest is the NBC series “The Good Place,” which follows the postmortem adventures of an admitted dirtbag, Eleanor Shellstrop (Kristen Bell), as she navigates the titular Good Place: a heaven-like suburbia she believes she has been admitted to by mistake. By the close of the series’ first season, we learn that Eleanor isn’t in the Good Place at all, but rather—along with her newfound friend and love interest, the moral philosophy professor Chidi Anagonye (William Jackson Harper)—in a beta test of a new Bad Place that is designed to prove the Sartrean truism that hell is, indeed, other people. Over the course of

the subsequent two seasons (a fourth and final season is yet to air), Eleanor and Chidi not only try to escape to the real Good Place but also try to help others get into the Good Place. Disheartened by the realization that seemingly *nobody* gets into the Good Place (being a truly good person all of the time, it transpires, is all but impossible), they try to bargain with the powers that be. Maybe people can’t always be perfect, they say, but they can get better.

While Eleanor and Chidi’s budding romance makes up a part of the show, it consistently takes a back seat to their friendship—and, in particular, the way the two of them act as what Aristotle once called friends of virtue, encouraging one another to become better people. Eleanor becomes less selfish. Chidi stops spiraling into self-indulgent neurosis.

There isn’t much of a theology, as such, in “The Good Place.” The metaphysical architecture of the afterlife—hell, demons, torture, judges—is structured for comic effect, not spiritual seriousness. The viewing audience is implicitly expected to find the idea of an everlasting hell implausible, and therefore funny. But what “The Good Place” does have, in abundance, is a sense of moral seriousness that takes

place in a thematically, if not narratively, godless world. The real question “The Good Place” asks is not *what will the afterlife be like*, but *how do we live if there probably isn’t one?* Among the most affecting narrative arcs of the show takes place in its third season, when Chidi and Eleanor are given another chance at life on earth but (erroneously) think that they’re doomed to the Bad Place no matter what they do. Rather than indulge in hedonism (for Eleanor) and anxiety-spiraling (for Chidi), they decide to use their time on earth to save as many other people from the Bad Place as possible and make a Good Place here on earth.

That same combination of moral hunger and spiritual uncertainty defines the British television show “Fleabag.” The two-season story of the titular, chain-smoking, compulsively sexual millennial wreck (Phoebe Waller-Bridge, also the show’s writer and creator), “Fleabag” culminates in a wrenching affair between Fleabag and a young, attractive priest (Andrew Scott). What starts out as just another “Fleabag”-patented misadventure—of course the self-sabotaging Fleabag would fall for the most emotionally unavailable man of all—turns into a delicate meditation on what it means to love another person for the better and what it means to love at all.

Fleabag thinks she’s in love with the priest. But as the second season progresses, she comes to another epiphany. “I want someone to tell me what to wear every morning,” she admits to the priest, right there in the confessional. “I want someone to tell me what to eat. What to like, what to hate, what to rage about...what to not joke about. I want someone to tell me what to believe in.” The story of Fleabag is not the story of her relationship with

the priest. Nor is it, exactly, the story of her relationship with God. When we leave Fleabag, she is still wandering off the beaten track of faith. But like “The Good Place,” the series is fundamentally the story of a woman wrestling with the Big Questions in what seems to be a godless world. At their core, both “Fleabag” and “The Good Place” are stories about characters’ relationships not just with one another, but with their ideal selves: flawed people learning to be good people.

So too “Hadestown,” the Tony Award-winning Broadway musical by Anais Mitchell that has been hailed as a spiritual (and financial) successor to the smash hit “Hamilton.” A modern-day retelling of the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, set in a railroad town reminiscent of old-school New Orleans that sits alongside the track “to hell,” “Hadestown” focuses less on the relationship between its two (relatively thinly drawn) lovers than on what it means for Orpheus to see and enact goodness in the world.

In this version, the mythic bard is working on a song beautiful enough to bring back spring, long absent from the town. Orpheus’s pursuit of that one song—something beautiful enough not just to soften Hades’s heart to restore spring (and implicitly Eurydice, trapped in the underworld), but to make the world “as it should be”—grounds our emotional experience. Orpheus’s final, triumphant love song isn’t *to* anyone, but rather *for* everyone: a vision of how the world could be a better place, if only we made it so. Orpheus’s story is (spoiler alert) a tragic one: He turns back to make sure Eurydice is following him out of hell, breaking his agreement with Hades; his own lack of trust in Eurydice (and himself) means that

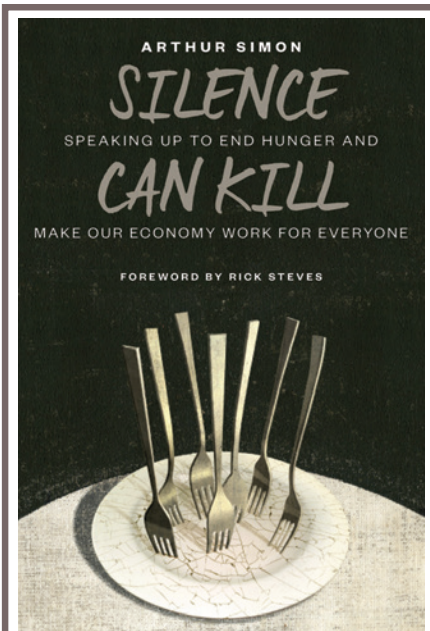
he cannot benefit from the vision of that future. Yet the musical closes with the cast committing to try, once more, next spring, to make the world not just a better place, but the place it morally, spiritually, ethically, should be.

Central to all three contemporary pieces is the implication of atheism, or at least a non-Christian metaphysics. The call to goodness is purely existential: *things are terrible, life is meaningless and chaotic, but try to be a good person anyway*. It is a tragic vision of the world, hopeful only in the call for human resistance against that meaninglessness.

In the absence of a Christian conception of divine grace, the most we can hope for is what happens at the end of the Greek myth in “Hadestown”: a failure of human will, a tragic recognition and a promise to try to do better next time—a promise we know will fail. (Of all the Greek myths, Orpheus and Eurydice is the one where we most long for a *deus ex machina*: a god who will not *let* Orpheus turn back). At their best, all three pieces explore that failure and that tragic hope. In so doing, they reflect a much greater cultural hunger for stories that deal authentically not with a purely “secular” world, but one in which Christian answers no longer commonly feed spiritual need.

They are stories about the perennial need for religion—and about the millennial uncertainty about what that religion will look like.

Tara Isabella Burton is the author of *Social Creature*. Her next book, *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless Age*, will explore the rites and practices of the religiously unaffiliated and will be published in 2020. She is also a columnist for *Religion News Service*.



Eerdmans Publishing, July 2019
Paperback, 300 pages

“An inspiration and a call to action, *Silence Can Kill* is a guidebook for changing the world and an urgent invitation to take on the task.”

— E. J. Dionne, Jr.,
Washington Post

SPECIAL OFFER:

You can order Art Simon’s newest book for only \$29 (includes shipping) and learn how an outpouring of citizens’ voices can help bring our nation together—and end hunger once and for all.

**Order at bread.org/book,
or call 800-822-7323.**



breadfortheworld

HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

425 3rd Street SW, Suite 1200
Washington, DC 20024
bread.org

XD19-AM2

Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

By Pádraig Ó Tuama

You weren't that perfect, weren't lamb-pure or cocksure with certainty. You weren't as innocent as you're made out to be. You knew people, you knew power games, knew that the main aim of ambition is ambition.

You knew the names of other people's fears because you had plenty of your own. You knew the touch of a friend was not dependent on their cleanliness, and you knew this because you knew need, knew the way that story bleeds

through actions of a day, and how shame makes us play parts that are beneath us. You are beneath us, and above us, in the song we sang as children. You are in the piss and blood;

you are spit mixed with mud, you are the rotting hand of god, waiting for a hand to hold. You're not gold, you're rock; cracked open.

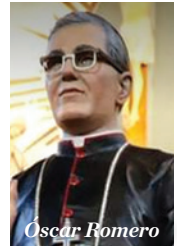
Pádraig Ó Tuama is a poet who lives and works in Ireland. His work has been published by Canterbury Press and Hodder & Stoughton.

Custom Lifesize Statues!

Bronze or marble, delivery in 120 days

Prices starting at \$7,500

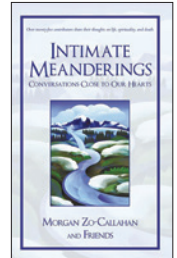
Website: www.caveco.us
Email: caveco33@aol.com
Ph: (800) 989-CAVE (2283)



Oscar Romero

"Intimate Meanderings"

... is an inspiring array of insight and bears witness to human life and our innate movement towards wholeness." -Roshi Wendy Egyoku Nakao, Abbot ZCLA, Buddha Essence Temple



Daniel Berrigan, S.J. (may he enjoy eternal peace), our great friend and contributor, says: "This book is an amazing potpourri of wisdom. I am so grateful to you, Morgan and the friends. *Intimate Meanderings: Conversations Close to Our Hearts* should be required reading in every Jesuit tent."

Twenty-six contributors offer interviews, reflections, stories and poetry on meditation, religion, community involvement, hospice, eulogies, human journeys, living and dying well...piquing spiritual and literary curiosity in interested readers.

Available: Barnes & Noble; Amazon; Kindle

The Next Chapter In A Multi-Million Dollar Publishing Business Needs To Be Written

See Customstudios.com/successor

Man seeking college-type Jesuit priest as occasional spiritual director (about one hour a month and as needed by email). Academic / chaplaincy experience a plus. Prefer Long Island / Nassau County
Respond to Peter at:
peter_15321@msn.com

Bring us your retreats, books, job postings and all missions!

Visit the America Classifieds Marketplace:

www.marketplace.americamagazine.org

Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus in the Holy Land

Under the leadership of Fr. James Martin, S.J.

11-Day Pilgrimage February 27 to March 8, 2020



We invite you to join

Fr. James Martin, S.J.
Editor at Large
America Media

Fr. Matt Malone, S.J.
President & Editor in Chief
America Media

on our annual (and once-in-a-lifetime!) pilgrimage through the Holy Land as we walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

Full Package

- Includes round-trip airfare from Newark to Tel Aviv
- \$6,750 discounted price (cash payment by check or money order) per person, based on double occupancy

Land-Only Package

- Travelers are responsible for their own travel arrangements
- \$5,550 discounted price (cash payment by check or money order) per person, based on double occupancy

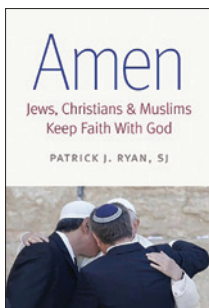
Space is extremely limited. For more information contact

James Cappabianca
Director of Advancement
(212) 515-0101
jcappabianca@americamedia.org

Three faiths, a lifetime of study

By Jack Miles

iStock



Amen
 Jews, Christians &
 Muslims Keep Faith
 With God
 By Patrick J. Ryan, S.J.
 Catholic University
 Press
 258p \$34.95

As a metaphysical poet, I am no John Donne, but Patrick Ryan's vital and wide-ranging new book did bring an unlikely metaphor to my mind: open-heart surgery, my own, in 1999. On that occasion, my two mammary arteries were diverted from my nonexistent mammary glands to points below the blockages in two of my three blocked coronary arteries. My life was saved and my strength restored as my heart received again the nourishing blood that it needed.

Amen reminded me of this surgery because he strengthens faith in each of the three faiths he discusses by diverting nourishment from the other two. An operation of such delicacy calls obviously for extensive train-

ing in the surgeon, but Ryan has it. His Christian formation came about through the full, classical Jesuit training in literature, rhetoric, philosophy and theology. Along the way, he completed a doctorate in Islam at Harvard University, studying under the late and legendary Annemarie Schimmel and Wilfred Cantwell Smith.

He complements deep intellectual formation in these two traditions with the extensive interpersonal experience that is his after 26 years teaching and otherwise working along the 10th parallel in West Africa, where Muslim Africa and Christian Africa meet and mingle, plus almost as many years as a priest and theologian at Fordham University. This book draws, in short, on far more than the author's reading alone. There are births in it and deaths; marriages and funerals; and, most notably, a framing, recurrently intruding open letter to an idealistic unbeliever.

Ryan is more nearly self-taught in Judaism than in Christianity or Islam, but he is self-taught as a "Nostra Aetate" Jesuit, which is to say a Jesuit

powerfully motivated, even obligated, to become a student of Jewish life and culture in the wake of the Shoah and the Second Vatican Council. Writing thoughtfully here about "A Common Word Between Us and You," an important 2009 interfaith overture by a group of Muslim scholars, Ryan writes that "both Christians and Muslims have to come to terms with the Jewish roots of their respective traditions before there can be any genuine mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims." Clearly, he has taken his own advice to heart.

As Fordham's McGinley Professor of Religion and Society, Ryan delivers a public "McGinley Lecture" every spring and fall, and he has selected topics for these over the years that, while traditional enough for a public lecture, are apt for the threefold perspective that has come to shape his own thought.

The late Huston Smith, late in his career, changed the title of his hugely popular *The Religions of Man* to *The World's Religions*. Male writers like him once wrote thinking, unre-

“Christians and Muslims have to come to terms with the Jewish roots of their respective traditions,” writes Patrick J. Ryan, S.J.

flectively, only of male readers, but no more. Similarly, Christian theologians and apologists have long written thinking, unreflectively, only of Christian (or post-Christian or anti-Christian) readers.

They still do so, on the whole, but when Ryan thinks of the classic subjects and key figures in Christian tradition, he makes a shift analogous to Smith’s and thinks also of Jews and Muslims, how they might react to what he writes and what they might think or write on the same subjects. In fact, each of his McGinley Lectures has had a Jewish and a Muslim respondent.

Ryan’s *Amen* is no simple collection of these past lectures, however. Rather, around faith as a unifying master *theologoumenon*, he has shaped a closely integrated book of seven main chapters, each of which explores the core topic in a new way. The seven exploratory vehicles are: 1) covenant, 2) Abraham (as an ancestor in faith), 3) culture, 4) prophecy, 5) death, 6) pilgrimage and 7) God—“the God with Whom We Keep Faith.” Ryan has an inner Jew and an inner Muslim who speak in his left and right ear about whichever of these classic theological topics he may have on his mind. Banish the thought, however, that he listens to them out of politeness or, God spare us, “niceness.”

Of the seven mentioned chapters, the most ambitious and accomplished are the third and the fourth. In the third, “Faith and Culture,” Ryan borrows a triple taxonomy—rejection, accommodation, integration—from H. Richard Niebuhr’s 1951 classic, *Christ and Culture*. The result, giv-

en the prior religious triplication, is three-times-three—thus, an impressive nine-part survey of the sharply varying paths taken by three great traditions in coping with the modern world. Here, Ryan combines the skills of a subtle scholar with the *au courant* savvy of a journalist who knows what’s what and who’s who.

He is theologically at his most adventurous, however, in the fourth chapter, “Prophetic Faith, Repentance, and the Development of Tradition.” It is not only Jesus who said, “You have heard...but I say unto you.” No, the same revisionist tones were heard earlier in Ezekiel and Jeremiah and later in the conscious prophetic daring of the 11th-century Jewish biblical exegete Rashi: exegesis as latter-day prophecy. As for repentance and revision in Islam, Ryan plunges into the “Satanic verses” episode, in which Allah clearly revoked his own most disturbing revelation to Muhammad. To Muhammad’s embarrassment? Not, Ryan says, if we can trust the first caliph, Abu Bakr, whose words on the day of Muhammad’s death he quotes.

The range here is stunning: Rashi and the continuation of prophecy through exegesis; Abu Bakr on Muhammad and the human fallibility of all prophecy—how many other Christian theologians can summon up such references in so apposite a way? (F. E. Peters comes to mind—an ex-Jesuit, as it happens, and a great scholar but not really a theologian—but otherwise the list is short.) Finally, for Christianity, Ryan summons John Henry Newman with the lapidary “to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.”

There are moments of comparable daring and delight elsewhere in the book. Chapter 5, on faith and death, is a discussion of the afterlife in the three monotheistic traditions, ending most touchingly and unexpectedly with a perfectly placed quote from John Updike’s short story “Pigeon Feathers.” Chapter 6, on pilgrimages, grapples with the holiness of holy lands and includes a fuller description of the Muslim *hajj* than I recall ever reading in a textbook.

Finally, however, *amen* is a word of culmination and ratification. Ryan’s book is a kind of extended *amen* at the end of a long life of scholarly faith and faithful scholarship. Among its dedicatees is an African man to whom Ryan once administered the last rites and who on that occasion could do no more than murmur “Amen” with his dying breath. Ryan ends his book: “I will never forget the name of the man who died that night, Edward Nutsugah. I pray he will be there in turn when I am dying and help me to nod the ‘Amen’ of my faith in God.”

Jack Miles, *emeritus professor of English and religious studies at the University of California, Irvine, is currently the Corcoran Visiting Chair of Christian-Jewish Relations at Boston College. His most recent book is God in the Qur’an (Alfred A. Knopf).*



Can I Get a Witness?

Thirteen
Peacemakers,
Community Builders,
and Agitators for Faith
and Justice
Edited by Charles Marsh,
Daniel P. Rhodes and
Shea Tuttle
Eerdmans
368p \$26.99

Great souls

The first chapter of *Can I Get a Witness?* is about Cesar Chavez. The first paragraph of that chapter paints a picture of Chavez—diminutive, chestnut-skinned, “handsome but forgettable.” Here is how that paragraph closes: “That he would organize the first farmworkers union in a struggle for justice that took on the industry of agribusiness scarcely seemed possible.”

I was crying by the time I finished reading those words. It was not the last time I would cry while reading the excellent, edifying essays that Charles Marsh, Shea Tuttle and Daniel P. Rhodes have collected for us in this volume.

What they have done is gather a set of 13 stories, each a mini-biography of one of those great souls whose faith in Jesus inspired and necessitated and sustained their work toward a more righteous world. Each of these 13 were, say the editors, “peculiar people, dissidents, misfits.” The kind of people “who sing strange and beautiful songs of God’s peaceable kingdom.”

It is the editors’ hope that today’s misfit-dissidents will learn something new, something applicable to today’s challenges, from the stories of Howard Thurman and Father John Ryan, of Mahalia Jackson

and Dorothy Day. And they will.

You will read about how Ella Baker’s grandfather, who was himself a slave, purchased a portion of the land on which he had been enslaved and planted a garden on it. And how watching her grandfather till that soil helped Baker believe that, in the words of the author Nichole M. Flores: “change doesn’t happen in an instant. Freedom is a habit, one requiring constant patience.”

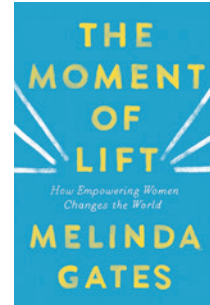
You will read about how William Stringfellow’s devotion to Scripture led him not to withdraw, but to “love the world more readily.” And you will read about how David Dark, who writes glowingly about Daniel Berrigan, S.J., wept in his car after seeing the movie “The Mission” because it showed Christianity for what it really is: “a centuries-old witness of long-suffering love.”

Or, if they are strange, then they are only strange to the extent that they show how much you still hope for a place in that number. And that you still need reminders to hope for such a place.

Patrick Gilger, S.J., is *America’s* contributing editor for culture.
Twitter: @Paddygilgersj.



Full book reviews at
americamagazine.org/books



The Moment of Lift

How Empowering
Women Changes
the World
Melinda Gates
Flatiron Books
288p \$26.99

Catholic with conflicts

In her new book, *The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World*, Melinda Gates shares her experiences building the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, especially the time she spent on the margins listening to people her foundation serves. She emphasizes how the things she saw and heard from women shaped her charitable work and pushed her to focus on gender equality.

Melinda Gates is Catholic, and the book raises a question many Catholics wrestle with: Can you take actions in conflict with a teaching of the church and still be part of the church?

In 2012, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation pledged \$560 million to increase access to contraceptives; Melinda Gates writes that making contraceptives available is about following her conscience, which has been formed by the teachings of the Catholic Church. Her decision to publicly support and fund birth control initiatives was the subject of a front-page story in the Vatican newspaper *L’Osservatore Romano*, in which Giulia Galeotti, a frequent contributor on abortion and other life issues, said that Gates was “off the mark” and the victim of “bad information and persistent stereotypes on this theme.”

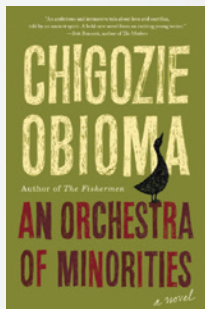
“I was putting my faith into

action when I went into the field and met the women who asked me about contraceptives,” Gates writes. To help women who want to space their pregnancies for their health and the health of their children “aligns with Christ’s teaching to love my neighbor,” she writes.

The book is not an attack on Catholicism but an honest accounting of how Melinda Gates came to be in conflict with the church while living her faith. She writes that an all-male hierarchy makes rules that hurt women but is grateful for the nuns at the high school she attended (Ursuline Academy in Dallas), who taught her the importance of hearing the cry of the poor. She also shares how a Marriage Encounter weekend affected her parents and the immense gratitude she feels toward women religious who dedicate their lives to serving the poor.

The Moment of Lift also weaves together stories of Melinda Gates’s family life and marriage. These anecdotes add vulnerability and personality to an account by a woman whose extreme wealth could otherwise make her seem unrelatable. (She is careful not to imply a false sense of equivalence between her life and those of the poor.) From asking Bill to leave her first public speech because she was nervous to her shock that her husband would offer to drive their daughter to school, she offers a candid account of striving for an equal partnership with Bill Gates.

Emma Winters, a recent Joseph A. O’Hare fellow at America.



An Orchestra of Minorities

By Chigozie Obioma
Little, Brown
464p \$28

Fusion and clash

A typical night portrayed in *An Orchestra of Minorities*, the second novel by Chigozie Obioma, is “filled with the din of spirits and the brass drum of the sublunary world, a multitude of voices emitting cries, shouts, voices, howls, noises.” The novel is narrated by a guardian spirit—a *chi*—imbuing the book with a grand voice and vision, consistent with the Igbo cosmology of a preordained world. Obioma’s novel captures the religious paradox of Nigeria, a paradox he has described as both the “fusion” and “clash” between Christian belief and Igbo cultural traditions.

Obioma’s central character is Chinonso, an Igbo poultry farmer who seems content with his life. Early in the novel, Chinonso notices a car parked on a bridge above the Amatu River, “one of its doors flung wide open.” He sees a woman, Ndali, about to jump into the river and yells for her to stop. Chinonso throws two chickens into the water to make a violent point: This is what will happen to you.

A few months later, Chinonso sees Ndali again at a fueling station, and they soon fall in love. Ndali is Catholic, and Chinonso’s *chi* speaks of the coexistence of Igbo and Catholic faiths: “In the doctrine of the new

religion the children of the fathers have embraced, it is said that the two become one flesh. What truth,” the *chi* proclaims. This religious interplay permeates their relationship. “You are a shepherd of birds, and you love your flock,” Ndali says to Chinonso. “You care for them the way Jesus cares for his sheep with so much love.”

Ndali is nervous about Chinonso meeting her family, but religious difference is not the main concern. Ndali’s family is wealthy; she warns Chinonso that her family may not accept him. They don’t. Humiliated, Chinonso decides that he must do something drastic to gain the respect of Ndali’s family. He sells his farm and, through an acquaintance, applies to study at Cyprus International University. Ndali realizes he has been defrauded by his acquaintance, and there is no acceptance or scholarship.

By narrating Chinonso’s struggles through his *chi*—a being with transcendent knowledge but one who must not interfere in the life of his host—Obioma creates dramatic tension. Distraught and alone in Cyprus, Chinonso desires revenge, a theme that powers the second half of the novel. *An Orchestra of Minorities* is a profoundly tragic story of ambition and despair and how both come from the struggle to love.

Nick Ripatrzone has written for *Rolling Stone*, *The Atlantic*, *The Paris Review* and *Esquire*.

Best friends forever, indeed

By Jim McDermott

In "Good Omens," Crowley (David Tennant), left, and Aziraphale (Michael Sheen) are the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of salvation history.

Near the middle of Amazon's new TV series "Good Omens," based on the much-beloved fantasy novel by Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett about an angel and a demon trying to stop the apocalypse, the series veers away from its witty, winding plot to walk us through the 6,000-year history of its main characters' friendship. So in ancient Mesopotamia the two stand in a crowd marveling at Noah's ark. Hearing what God has planned, the demon Crowley reacts with horror: "That's more the kind of thing you'd expect my lot to do."

Three thousand years later, as the two watch Jesus being crucified, Crowley wonders what he had said that got him into so much trouble. "Be kind to each other," his compadre Aziraphale explains. "Ah. That'll do it," Crowley deadpans.

On and on they wander through

the ages, forced by their superiors to get involved in various causes for good or ill but mostly just happy to be together amid the general madness of it all.

Part Monty Python, part fairy tale, "Good Omens" presents itself as theodicy. In its own wonderfully whimsical way, it wonders about evil, suffering and God's ineffable plans by way of the divine middle management who have watched it all happen. The plot involves an 11-year-old boy worried about the state of the world—who unbeknownst to himself is actually the Antichrist—his best friends and pet dog (a hound sent from hell to protect him), a witch, witchfinders, a fake psychic, a real psychic, the four horsemen of the apocalypse (two of whom are women), Jon Hamm as a condescending Angel Gabriel and a bunch of quite hostile demons.

Crowley and Aziraphale wander amid the action like the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of salvation history, silly bit players with no real understanding of the big picture. But their ignorance makes them wise. While their superiors, both demonic and angelic, push for the apocalypse so that they can defeat one another once and for all, Crowley and Aziraphale cannot take their eyes off humanity. They see our flaws and our absurdity, yet they look upon us with the gentle delight of a pair of loving uncles.

Yet far more meaningful than the series's theological ruminations is its exploration of friendship. It is not often today that you come across a series or a story where two people are just really good friends. Everything eventually seems to get turned into a "Will they?/Won't they?" situation.

And to be clear: As portrayed by

God and man in Oklahoma City

the brilliant actors David Tennant and Michael Sheen, the demon Crowley and angel Aziraphale, respectively, certainly do have sparks. But the depth of their relationship does not come from sex, fantasy or longing; it is not about chasing anything for oneself, but doing something nice for another.

You can understand why movies and TV shows rarely want to stop the relationship story there. Friendship generally isn't flashy; it is not about save-your-life kinds of deeds but about little gestures, like an unexpected chat or buying someone a book they had been talking about. Really, it's something that first happens to you, the unexpected discovery that someone else knows you and thinks about you even when you don't ask for it.

We see the true power of that realization play out on Aziraphale's face when he discovers Crowley has saved some of his books from destruction. After 6,000 years on the planet, this angel suddenly realizes that all this time he, too, has been seen and cared about. Not only is he not alone; he is important in someone else's life.

"Good Omens" is a story about heaven, hell, the potential end of everything and where to get a really fine crepe. Revelations, in other words. But amid it all, the friendship between Aziraphale and Crowley is like the tiny wildflowers that grow in the cracks of a sidewalk. It goes unseen a thousand times over. But once discovered, that relationship is a humbling, life-changing revelation of its own.

Jim McDermott, S.J., is a contributing writer for *America*.
Twitter: @PopCulturPriest.

The words *fundamentalist* and *racist* are never uttered during "American Heretics: The Politics of the Gospel," and yet in the film's efforts to define what is amiss at the intersection of religion and politics right now, those are precisely the words that might be used. As we are told, Southern Baptists are "Southern" because they needed to justify slavery. The South went Republican because a Democratic president signed the Civil Rights Act. And unblinking allegiance to the word and not the spirit of the Gospels—"Your belief is more important than what you actually do," as one interviewee puts it—is what for the most part characterizes American evangelical Christianity, at a time of detention camps for migrants and xenophobic public policy.

Directed by Jeanine and Catherine Butler, "American Heretics" has at its center the Mayflower Congregational Church in Oklahoma City, and its founding minister, the author and activist Robin Meyers. Other principal figures include Meyers's associate minister, Lori Walke, and her husband, state legislator Collin Walke. They are all champions of immigrants' rights, L.G.B.T.Q. rights and the rights of the poor in a state that seems determined to eradicate them all. An ally at Tulsa's All Souls Uni-

tarian Church is Carlton Pearson, a once-prominent media evangelist who had been mentored by Oral Roberts, developed a huge TV following and then was actually declared a heretic by the Joint College of African-American Pentecostal Bishops for his belief in universal reconciliation and his declaration that hell did not exist.

Pearson is a refreshingly frank observer of the conservative religious scene, as is Bernard Brandon Scott, whose contrarian views (for Oklahoma) belie his decades-long tenure at the University of Tulsa's Phillips Theological Seminary. His students come out of a culture, he says, that is "unthinking about its Christianity," and he no doubt gives them plenty to think about. So does the rest of "American Heretics." As a postscript tells us, no one in the Oklahoma evangelical community would talk to the filmmakers.

So the viewer will have to make due with the people of open-minded, tolerant and generous qualities who do appear in the film and inspire hope that in Oklahoma, at least, not every avowed Christian has either ignored their savior's teachings or made their religion conform to their biases.

John Anderson is a television critic for *The Wall Street Journal* and a contributor to *The New York Times*.



"American Heretics: The Politics of the Gospel" seeks to define what is amiss at the intersection of religion and politics right now.

Courtesy of Abramorama

Awaiting the Master's Return

Readings: Wis 18:6-9, Ps 33, Heb 11:1-19, Lk 12:32-48

Matthew and Luke faced a similar problem. Writing some 80 to 90 years after the birth of Christ, both needed to respond to the apparent delay of the Lord's return. To the disciples of Jewish background who made up much of the early church, the delay was especially perplexing. Gentile armies had raged against Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple in the year 70 C.E. A wave of persecution followed, in which many followers of Christ lost their lives. The survivors expected Jesus to come soon after these events, but as time passed, expectation turned into disappointment.

Matthew's Gospel traces the way these Jewish disciples adjusted their understanding and came to regard Jesus' teachings as a guideline for moral living rather than as preparation for the end times. Luke addressed the problem of Christ's delayed return in a different way. He found in end-times expectations a spiritual wisdom that inspired disciples to material detachment and humble service.

This spoke to many of the Christians who entered the church after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. These newer members came from gentile backgrounds and had little interest in ancient Israelite prophecies about God's coming kingdom. Gentile converts, coming from backgrounds influenced by Greek philosophy, wanted instruction in a lifestyle of material detachment and personal self-control. Such teachings were in fact an important part of the early Gospel message, which encouraged disciples to avoid attachments in order to be able to recognize the arrival of God's kingdom; signs of it were easy to miss amid the distractions of wealth, power or social status. Luke thus synthesizes Jewish expectations with gentile aspirations, encouraging his audience to use end-times prophecies to develop the kind of wise living that gentiles sought.

Essential to that synthesis is the realization that everything is temporary. Christ's return, however delayed, is still a reality, and it will transform everything. Material goods, social realities and even human relationships are thus entirely provisional. After Christ's return, prosperity will no

*'Where your treasure is,
there your heart will also be.'*
(Lk 12:34)



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

What is the treasure your heart seeks?

How will the coming of Christ transform what you desire?

How does your labor build up treasure in heaven?

longer consist in wealth, power and pleasure but rather in love, service and joy. Live now, Jesus commands, so as to be rich then.

Service to others is the labor that builds up this treasure, as the parables in this Sunday's reading illustrate. Vigilant attention to duty will result in a surprising reversal, in which the servants become the guests. With this insight, Luke makes Jesus' feeding of the multitude (9:12-17) a foreshadowing of the kingdom to come. By contrast, a disciple whose attention grows slack may lose everything at the arrival of Christ. Even worse is the highly placed disciple who loses faith. As a commitment to diligent service gives way to ego, gluttony and violence, the disciple earns only future condemnation. For this servant, the arrival of Christ will result not in a feast but in punishment.

Luke's synthesis reminds us that everything we have is temporary and that we will have to account for ourselves when we meet Christ. A disciple's path, then, is to take what God has given and use it for humble service. The servant who thus lives a life of material detachment and care for others will flourish at the Lord's return.

Send Down Your Fire

Readings: Jer 38:4-10, Ps 40, Heb 12:1-4, Lk 12:49-53

In the Hebrew Scriptures, divine fire represents the presence of God. Sometimes fire composed God's body, as in Ez 1:27 or 2 Sm 22:9. Sometimes, fire was all that appeared when God appeared, as in Ex 19:18 or Dt 4:11-12. Beings and objects of fire could visit the earth to accomplish the divine will, as in Ex 3:1-5 and 2 Kgs 2:11. Finally, fire was an essential component of worship, serving as a kind of gate that transmitted offerings from the earthly to the heavenly realm (Jgs 13:20; 2 Chr 7:1-3). In all these cases, fire represents divine presence and action.

Divine fire always demanded a transformation and response. In some cases, an encounter with divine fire inspired deeper faith. Moses became a divine messenger after his encounter with the burning bush, and Israel's encounter with divine fire at Carmel led them back to the faith of their ancestors. Divine fire protects Jerusalem in the prophecy of Zechariah (Zec 2:5), and fire purifies garments affected by leprosy (Lv 13:47-58). Those who approached God's fiery presence impiously, however, found the experience destructive. Divine fire took the lives of Aaron's sons (Lv 10:1-3) as

well as the arrogant officers sent to arrest Elijah (2 Kgs 1:9-15). In each case, fire represents divine presence and elicits an irrevocable response from those who encounter it.

On his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus takes stock of the transformation and disruption that his ministry has caused, and he recognizes in it the effects of divine fire. The disciples who continue to follow him have grown stronger in faith and understanding. People from the crowds who turn to him for healing have come away whole. But more and more people are finding him a disruptive presence and rejecting him and his message. Like the divine fire of the Hebrew Bible, Jesus' presence elicits a response from all who encounter him.

Christ continues to challenge, reaching out today through the sacraments, the Scriptures, the church and the poor. In each case, the call requires conversion of heart. Many will find the Gospel's affirmation that God is present and still at work to be deeply consoling. This consolation can free many from fear and transform them into servants of God's kingdom.

For others, however, such an encounter will be disruptive. The peace that Christ offers does not affirm or support the status quo. Those of us who benefit from the world as it is may come away from Christ's presence feeling scorched. If, through good discernment, we can recognize the divine presence even in those challenging encounters, we will find in it a divine fire that purifies and does not destroy.

Every heart turned to Christ brings a little more of the fiery divine presence into the world. In his own day, Jesus found that his words and actions burned some, but cleansed and inspired many others. Likewise, as we continue his mission today, we must remember the power of the message we bear. Bound up in every word is the divine presence that blazed on Sinai and transformed Israel. We are now God's fire, purifying, healing, protecting and opening a way between heaven and earth.

Michael Simone, S.J., teaches Scripture at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

'I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!'
(Lk 12:49)



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How has living the Gospel challenged and transformed you?

How can you challenge others with Christ's words and example?

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



CATHOLIC
INITIATIVES

Justice for Cyntoia Brown

Another reason to re-examine our criminal justice system

By Nyasha Junior



One of the things I love about being a professor is the chance to start over. Although I gripe about the end of summer, each new group of students offers fresh insights and challenges.

As I head back to campus this fall, I will be thinking of Cyntoia Brown.

Cyntoia Brown was 16 years old when she was charged as an adult and convicted of premeditated first-degree murder, felony murder and “especially aggravated robbery.” Johnny Allen, a 43-year-old man, had solicited Brown for sex and taken her to his home. Ms. Brown claimed that she had shot Mr. Allen in self-defense. In 2006, she was sentenced to concurrent life sentences without the possibility of parole until she had served a minimum of 51 years.

As with other abused girls, Ms. Brown’s efforts to survive her conditions brought her into the “abuse to prison” pipeline that disproportionately affects girls of color. The abuse suffered by these girls leads to encounters with the criminal justice system, and this system treats them as perpetrators rather than as victims and survivors of abuse. Thus, rather than being sheltered, protected and provided with resources, girls who have been sexually and physically abused are criminalized for surviving their abuse.

On Jan. 7, 2019, Bill Haslam, then governor of Tennessee, granted clemency to Cyntoia Brown. In a statement regarding his decision in Ms. Brown’s

case, Mr. Haslam argued, “Transformation should be accompanied by hope.”

In Ms. Brown’s statement, she thanked Mr. Haslam and others who have assisted her. She stated: “I will do everything I can to justify your faith in me. I want to thank those at the Tennessee Department of Corrections who saw something in me worth salvaging.”

“We truly serve a God of second chances and new beginnings,” Ms. Brown said.

When Ms. Brown is released in August, I anticipate lots of clickbait headlines on beating the odds, rising above one’s circumstances and overcoming obstacles. Yet treating her story as a redemption narrative positions her as a reformed criminal and the governor as her benevolent savior. It centers on Ms. Brown as an individual without acknowledging the many ways that our society and the State of Tennessee failed her prior to her arrest.

Mr. Haslam’s decision to commute Ms. Brown’s sentence is not evidence of his humanity or decency but rather further proof of the whims of the criminal justice system. Furthermore, focusing on the governor takes away from the numerous family, friends and advocates who have labored for years to secure Ms. Brown’s release. Her case has received attention through the tireless work of grassroots organizing campaigns, as well as the 2011 PBS documentary “Me Facing Life: Cyntoia’s Story.”

It was only after being confronted by Black Lives Matter Nashville that Mr. Haslam stated publicly that he was even considering her case.

To read Ms. Brown’s story as a triumph over adversity affirms U.S. optimism and our collective belief in a trite, predictable progression from negative to positive, from rags to riches or from sinner to saint. Yet, even with her clemency, Ms. Brown’s story does not offer a happy ending. Clemency does not nullify her conviction or provide restitution for the 15 years she has lost in the Tennessee Prison for Women. Clemency for her is not justice. Moving toward justice would mean not seeing her experience as an isolated case. It would involve working toward eliminating the systems that support and maintain oppression and violence. It would require constructing a vision for the future that values the wholeness of black girls and women.

I hope that Ms. Brown has a joyous reunion with her community upon her release. I hope that her story will lead to greater support and advocacy for survivors who remain incarcerated not because of their individual faults or failures but because of the same system that has failed Cyntoia Brown.

Nyasha Junior is an associate professor in the department of religion at Temple University in Philadelphia. She is the author of Reimagining Hagar: Blackness and Bible (Oxford University Press).



Sacred Journeys

**Host a Group
& Earn Your Travel**
Contact Ray for Details

- Inspire Faith & Change Lives

Spiritual & cultural experiences in Bible Lands around the Mediterranean Sea.

Sacred Journeys of Paul Cruise

June 4-14, 2020

Guest Speaker: Fr. Damian McElroy

*Rome, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Ephesus,
Corinth, Athens, and more!*



2nd & 3rd Journeys of Paul Cruise September 13-24, 2020

Guest Speaker: The Rev. Dr. Chuck Robertson

Venice, Ephesus, Athens, Corinth, and more!

Lands of the Bible Cruise

September 25 - October 8, 2020

Guest Speaker: Fr. Dwight Longenecker

*Rome, Ephesus, Jerusalem, Bethlehem,
Corinth, and more!*



2019 *Award-Winning* BOOKS FROM AVE MARIA PRESS

We are proud to announce that the Catholic Press Association (CPA) and the Association of Catholic Publishers (ACP) recently honored several Ave Maria Press books. Please join us as we celebrate these award winners.

FIRST-PLACE AWARDS

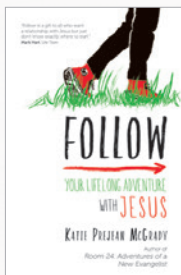


Boundless Compassion

JOYCE RUPP

CPA: First Place
(Spirituality/Soft Cover Books)

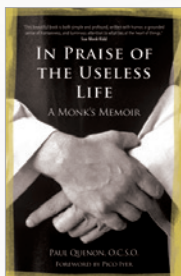
ACP: Second Place
(Spirituality Books)



Follow

KATIE PREJEAN MCGRADY

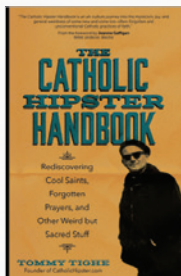
ACP: First Place (Teen Books)



In Praise of the Useless Life

PAUL QUENON, O.C.S.O.

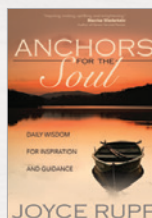
CPA: First Place (Memoir)
CPA: Second Place (Cover Design by Samantha Watson)



The Catholic Hipster Handbook

EDITED BY TOMMY TIGHE

CPA: First Place (Backlist Beauty)



Anchors for the Soul

JOYCE RUPP

CPA: Second Place
(Collections of Prayers)



Gratefulness

SUSAN MUTO

ACP: Second Place
(Inspirational)
CPA: Honorable Mention
(Cover Design by Brianna Dombo)



Off the Hook

TIMOTHY P. O'MALLEY

CPA: Second Place
(Family Life)



Go Bravely

EMILY WILSON HUSSEM

CPA: Honorable Mention
(Teens and Young Adults)



Called to Pray

JUSTIN MCCLAIN

CPA: Honorable Mention
(Collections of Prayers)



Side by Side

LORI AND AVA UBOWSKI

CPA: Honorable Mention
(Design and Production by Brianna Dombo)

Look for these titles wherever books and eBooks are sold.
For more information, visit avemariapress.com.



AVE MARIA PRESS
A Ministry of the United States
Province of Holy Cross