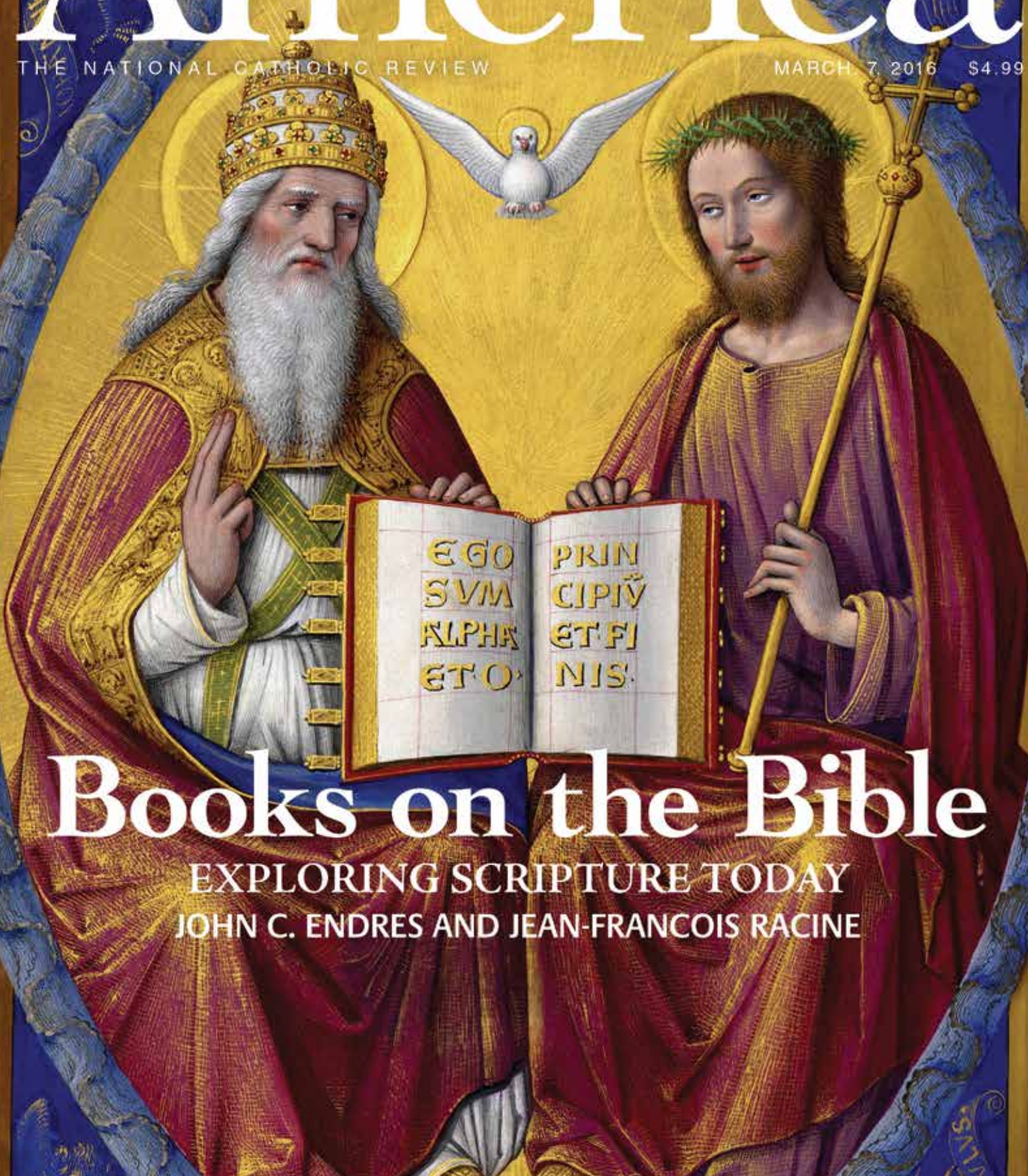


# America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC REVIEW

MARCH 7, 2016 \$4.99



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## Books on the Bible

EXPLORING SCRIPTURE TODAY  
JOHN C. ENDRES AND JEAN-FRANCOIS RACINE

# OF MANY THINGS

**O**n Sept. 18, 1965, Thurston N. Davis, S.J., editor in chief of **America**, announced in this space that the offices of **America** were relocating from the Upper West Side of Manhattan to our current Midtown location on 56th Street. This was the fourth time **America's** offices had moved since its founding in 1909. "For years," Father Davis explained to our readers, "we have worked out of an editorial and business office that were five miles apart. Now everything is under one roof."

It was no easy task to pick up and move: **America's** headquarters had been located at 329 West 108th Street for nearly 40 years. But Father Davis, rightly regarded as the second founder of **America**, saw that the world was changing. More and more Americans were getting their news from radio and television rather than from print, a change that was accelerated by the momentous events of that tragic November weekend two years before. Father Davis recognized that if **America** was to survive and prosper in this new world, then the editorial and business functions would need to be more closely integrated and, most of all, the organization would need a space that was better suited to a mid-20th century apostolate. As the N.H.L. great Wayne Gretzky once said, "a good hockey player plays where the puck is. A great hockey player plays where the puck is going to be." Father Davis, like his predecessors, was a great hockey player.

So it was with a prayer for the intercession of Father Davis that I recently announced the sale of our headquarters building in Midtown Manhattan. This was a long time in coming. The current nine-story building houses not just our offices and its 25 employees but a residence for approximately 20 Jesuits. Months of arduous negotiations, a few false starts and a lot of deal making, not to mention a lot of prayer, went into the process. It was apparent, however, that as much

as we cherish this house, we needed to skate to where the puck is headed.

The sale achieves three goals: First, in a rapidly changing publishing environment, the sale will provide baseline financial security for the future of **America Media**. Second, the transaction will give us the resources to continue our multiplatform expansion, including the redesign of existing platforms and the launch of new digital products and video. Lastly, the transaction will allow us to create a modern facility to house our operations, one more suited to 21st-century **America**.

**America Media** will remain in New York City. It is one of the most important social communications apostolates of the Society of Jesus and should be located in the capital of global communications. We have now begun an intensive search for commercial office space in Manhattan to house the headquarters of **America Media**. Just as Father Davis sought to ensure that the business and editorial departments would be housed under one roof, we are looking for a space where both departments can be housed on the same floor, for the integration of both functions that Father Davis so presciently foresaw continues apace in the digital age.

The Jesuit community will relocate to a renovated facility at 120 West 60th Street, just across the street from the entrance to Fordham University's Lincoln Center campus. **America Media** and the Jesuit community expect to complete their moves within the next 12 months.

With this move we renew our commitment to you to provide a smart, Catholic take on faith and culture, every week in print, every day online, every hour in social media. We earnestly pray that we will continue to be worthy for many years to come of both your trust and the noble legacy we have inherited.

**MATT MALONE, S.J.**

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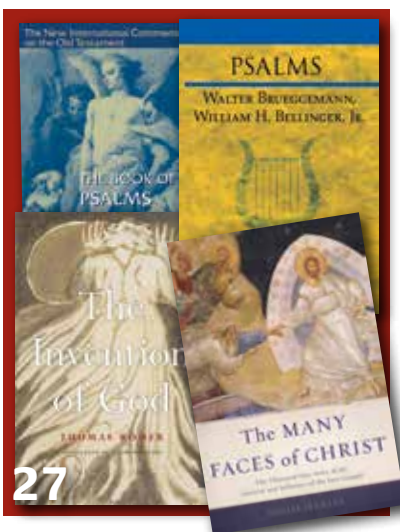
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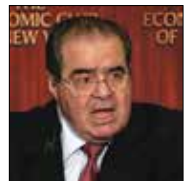
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## ON THE WEB

Video reports from **Pope Francis' visit to Mexico**, and from "America This Week," a discussion of the judicial legacy of **Antonin Scalia**, right. Full digital highlights on page 38 and at [americamagazine.org/webfeatures](http://americamagazine.org/webfeatures).



### Mind the Gap

To most, it comes as no surprise that for people in poverty life can be hard. But new research indicates it may also be short. A study from the Brookings Institution found that the gap between the life spans of those in the top 10 percent and the bottom 10 percent of earners has widened in the United States over the last several decades. This longevity gap has grown from a six-year difference, for men born in 1920, to 14 years, for men born in 1950. Among women, the gap increased from 4.7 to 13 years. Possible causes for this worrying trend include a significant decrease in smoking among the wealthier group and increased abuse of prescription drugs among the less wealthy demographic.

The longevity gap also can exacerbate inequalities already present in society. For example, those who live longer reap the greatest benefits from programs like Social Security and Medicare, as they receive these benefits for longer amounts of time. Greater funding for programs that can help alleviate stress and offer care for those facing addiction and increased education to discourage smoking could improve life expectancy in low-income communities. The implementation of the Affordable Care Act may help to lessen this gap, but it is too soon to tell. And experts argue that access to medical care is not at the root of this problem. There is no easy answer to this growing disparity. Closing the longevity gap requires that our society address the many systemic injustices and everyday challenges, in all their complexity, faced by those in need.

### Listening to the Universe

The discovery of gravitational waves by a pair of detection devices in the United States was major news in the field of astronomy. Originally proposed by Albert Einstein in his theory of relativity, the existence of gravitational waves was confirmed by the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory when it detected tremors caused by the collision of two black holes in a distant galaxy. LIGO is a major project of CalTech, M.I.T. and the National Science Foundation. Over \$1 billion has been spent on the search since it began decades ago. This fall LIGO unveiled more sophisticated detection technology that helped lead to this most recent discovery.

For astronomers, the detection of gravitational waves marks the official birth of a new field of study. “Gravitational waves provide a completely new way of looking at the universe,” said Stephen Hawking. One billion dollars may seem like a steep price to pay for what, at the moment, is mostly theoretical knowledge. Astronomers engaged in

this work are sometimes asked, “Wouldn’t this money be better spent elsewhere?” A helpful answer is provided by Guy Consolmagno, a Jesuit brother who is the director of the Vatican Observatory, where news of the detection of gravitational waves was greeted with great excitement. Astronomy, he explains, “is something every human being alive can take pride in.” Everyone can look up at the stars and marvel at the planets. Astronomy can bring people together and give scientists a better understanding of the working of the universe. “Science is where I get to spend time with the Creator,” Brother Consolmagno once said. Seen as a great human undertaking, one that can unite scientists around the world, believers or not, astronomy becomes a pursuit very much worth our time, our money and our imagination.

### Cable Competition

On Feb. 18, the Federal Communications Commission approved a measure opening a period of public comment on a proposal to require open standards in cable set-top boxes, thus setting the stage for a final vote later this year. If approved, the rule would require pay-TV providers to provide content and programming information to makers of third-party hardware and software, giving cable subscribers the option to stop renting their box from the cable provider.

One advantage of the change would be financial savings for consumers, who pay an average \$231 a year in rental fees for set-top boxes, totaling about \$20 billion in revenue for the cable companies, according to a study commissioned by Senators Edward J. Markey and Richard Blumenthal. It would also potentially drive more innovation by making the interface to their video content something consumers decide to buy rather than something cable providers dictate, both choosing the hardware and setting its price without any meaningful alternate options. Companies like Apple or Google, or other new entrants, could offer devices that would be able to integrate programming from a cable subscription a user already pays for.

The cable companies are predictably opposed to this move, but their objections—including that the regulation would somehow impose additional costs on consumers—do not hold water. In fact, the existing situation, in which 99 percent of subscribers rent an expensive set-top box, reflects not consumer choice, but rather the absence of effective competition in the cable TV market. Until these companies are exposed to meaningful competition, we should not trust them to have consumer interests at heart and should support regulations bringing other players into the market.

# College Free for All?

As the Democratic and Republican conventions loom on the horizon, higher education has not been a widely or deeply discussed issue. This is unfortunate. The economic security of the American people requires that each generation be educated to confront the social, environmental and technological challenges of our time and to appreciate the arts and literature, which nourish the personal and national soul.

This calls for greater access to a college or university education. U.S. leaders once hoped that by 2025, 60 percent of the population would be college-educated. So far it is closer to 30 percent. The curse of inequality continues to isolate the ruling elite from the common public. The average male high school dropout might earn \$24,000 a year. One with a four-year college degree might make \$52,000, while an advanced degree could merit \$67,000. On a salary of \$62,000 a family might enjoy a comfortable lifestyle; but the average college graduate moves into public life overburdened by college debts.

A college education today is not a luxury; for many careers it is a personal necessity as well as a social good. Senator Bernie Sanders has proposed that the government should guarantee tuition for every student in a public university, which is 75 percent of the student population. This would be paid for by a tax on Wall Street. Hillary Clinton's plan would spend \$350 million in states that increase their funding, tighten rules on for-profit colleges, have students work for 10 hours a week and allow families to pay according to their income. Her plan would also offer some help to private colleges with high numbers of needy students. Jeb Bush offered the student a \$50,000 line of credit to be repaid through federal income taxes over 25 years. Marco Rubio would "fundamentally overhaul higher ed" and supports night school and online degree programs.

A variety of theories explain the rising college costs at public institutions as a recent phenomenon. Critics blame luxurious dormitories and athletic centers and high-salaried administrators and professors. In many cases state legislators have lowered funding year by year, forcing public universities to raise tuition. High tuition can also be falsely perceived as a sign of quality, leading wealthier students to enroll and middle-class strivers to sacrifice and follow.

Proponents of free tuition, at least for the lower middle class, point to Germany, Finland, Norway and Sweden, all of which offer a free college education. It is "free" because fewer students attend college in these countries than in the United States and because citizens are willing to pay much

higher income taxes. In the United States, with 50 different state educational systems, California's public colleges were free until 50 years ago; and Tennessee, Oregon and the city of Chicago have recently provided or will soon provide free tuition for two-year colleges.

Whatever its limitations, the Sanders program has started an important conversation and inspired other government leaders to propose alternatives. Some critics argue that a larger role for Washington in public education would build bureaucracy and stifle entrepreneurship. Others praise President Obama's plan for the federal government to pay 75 percent of the tuition to public two-year colleges only if the states pick up the rest. This nudges the states to take up again their responsibility for public education.

Free education clearly has its advantages. Costs are spread across the population, and there are fewer financial risks for the individual. Meanwhile, shifting various current expenditures for higher education to direct student tuition support is more efficient; it becomes a collective investment rather than an individual one.

A million people signed a petition in support of the Student Loan Forgiveness Act in 2012. The hope is that this law would liberate the debtors to spend money, build the economy, get jobs and pay their taxes. An interesting proposal that goes beyond President Obama's initiative and is more focused than Senator Sanders's comes from the Campaign for Free College Tuition, which offers a full college scholarship at a public or private college to every academically qualified student whose family makes less than \$180,000 a year.

What would be the impact of these proposals on Catholic and other private institutions? If the federal government, in fairness, can support needy students who could otherwise not afford Catholic schools, so much the better. But we should recall that traditionally there are two rationales for Catholic education. Unburdened by state control, they strive to achieve academic excellence alongside their secular rivals, but they also teach theology and philosophy and urge love for one's neighbor and the importance of a more just society. Even in a competitive academic world where affordable education would be available to all, a Catholic education offers something unique. Catholic colleges have little to fear from a robust public education system and should see the overall benefits of an educated and engaged population.



## REPLY ALL

### Voter's Complex?

In "The Greatness of a Nation" (2/15), Bishop Robert McElroy writes, "Voting for candidates is a complex moral action in which the voter must confront an entire array of competing candidates' positions in a single act of voting." It is not as complex as Bishop McElroy suggests. As today's laws and institutions permit the killing of innocents, injustice grows. For nearly 40 years, the abortion mentality has poisoned our family life and our national debates, causing a deep divide in our political, religious and cultural institutions.

To sanction the legal killing of innocent persons has a price. This recurrent crime has hardened the collective heart of our nation, has created a social tolerance for other wrongs and crimes and has set us free from the safe harbor of truth and justice. All of the good sought through social justice work is for naught unless we first pursue the legal and actual protection of the most innocent persons among us. To change the cultural mindset about abortion is the first step in actually achieving true social justice.

And that is why voting for the right candidate is not so complex after all.

JOHN KEENAN  
*Online Comment*

### Mixed Message

The graphic layout of the neighboring articles "Create in Me a Just Heart," by Megan McCabe, and Gerald Schlabach's "The Glamour of Evil" (2/8) caught my attention. "The Glamour of Evil" is introduced by an image of a young woman in a glitzy low-cut dress, tanned skin, champagne glass in hand, in the middle of a flirtatious laugh. "Create in Me a Just Heart" leads with a gray computer keyboard, one key of which shouts a sordid "XXX."

The articles' critiques of cultural

values complement each other well: Ms. McCabe describes pornography as an imagined world teaching us that women do not (and should not) have choices and agency in the realm of sex and intimacy, and Mr. Schlabach describes evil as the void that results when we pursue happiness in appearances and objects rather than living relationships.

But with evil seemingly personified as a glamorous and sensuous young woman and the fantasy world of porn characterized as a computer keyboard rather than a worldview offered to men, we may unwittingly reinforce the long-held and limiting cultural belief that women's sexual agency is unnatural (or even evil) and fail to offer a vision of men's ability to be self-aware, engaged agents of intimate relationship.

MAGGIE WRIGHT  
*Denver, Colo.*

### Rehabilitating Pilate

Re "What Pilate Knew," by Steven P. Millies (2/8): We need to be very careful about looking at Pontius Pilate as a victim. There are accounts of him being ruthless during a Samaritan uprising and also taunting the Jewish people in the Temple when he first arrived in Jerusalem. Pilate had too much Jewish blood on his hands before and after the crucifixion of Jesus. The Jewish people are not to be blamed, and we should not let Pilate off the hook. Jesus was Jewish and suffered along with his Jewish brothers and sisters. We must not historically rehabilitate a man like Pilate, who caused so much pain and suffering.

THOMAS RUDA  
*Online Comment*

### No to 'Sinopolitik'

The title of Gerry O'Connell's column (2/8) asks, "Will the Church Lose China?" It depends what it means to "lose China." If it means accepting a puppet, patriotic church subservient to the regime in China—then yes, it is a real danger and it means the Holy

See learned nothing from its original Ostpolitik. During the Communist era in Eastern Europe, the Vatican betrayed many martyrs in the name of dialogue. Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun is a hero in the mold of Stefan Wyszyński, József Mindszenty and Aloysius Stepinac. He knows the Chinese regime's mentality; he knows the situation of Christians. He should be listened to. Realpolitik is understanding the situation as it is, not as one would like it to be. The Ostpolitik/Sinopolitik dream world would yield a document not worth the paper it is written on.

LEONARD VILLA  
*Online Comment*

### A Christ-Centered Mission

I greatly appreciated the article, "Our Reason for Being," by Don Briel, Kenneth E. Goodpaster and Michael Naughton (2/1), with its much-needed challenge regarding the identity and mission of Catholic colleges and universities. The authors rightly worry that 25 years after "Ex Corde Ecclesiae" (Saint John Paul II's apostolic constitution on Catholic universities), signs of "mission drift" persist.

The authors write: "A vital, articulate Catholic vision of the school's intellectual life is often missing from mission documents, convocation speeches, curriculum designs, research agendas and strategic plans." To this end they appositely cite the trenchant remarks of Michael J. Buckley, S.J., in an article in *America* in the aftermath of "Ex Corde," about the danger of reducing the "richness of the Creed" to "a morality or a general social ethic."

In the light of Father Buckley's remark, I only regret that the authors did not underline the distinctive Christology of the Creed and, hence, of the Catholic university's vision and mission. Perhaps they do so in the book from which their article was excerpted. But unless this rich Christ-centered vision and language is brought to the fore, the danger of an (at best) mor-

alistic deism will remain. To further this crucial conversation, I recommend another article from the **America** archive that forthrightly confronts the challenge: “Christ and the Catholic University,” by Brian Daley, S.J. (9/11/93).

(REV.) ROBERT P. IMBELLI  
Newton Centre, Mass.

## Education Examen

In my days as a Catholic high school teacher and administrator, I was constantly confronted by the amenities war, nowhere more evident than in athletics, as we all rushed to keep up with the Joneses with artificial turf fields, new gyms and the like. This is certainly evident at the college level as well. Where does it all fit in the context of Catholic education? What do we say to the student body when we alter admissions requirements, when we spend an inordinate amount of money to attract a coach, when we rely on athletic dollars to fund operations?

One question missing from the self-examination suggested by the authors is about whom exactly we are asking to be board members. How many board members would support the ultimate mission of the university when confronted with a conflict on the financial side between athletics and academics? How many board members embrace the social teaching of the Catholic Church? Finance committees tend to dominate boards and board meetings, and we have done little to alter that over the years. Of course, no Catholic college can function without financial stability at its core, but mission questions cannot always be answered or developed using the bottom line as the main guide.

BARRY FITZPATRICK  
Online Comment

## Adding Insult

Re Of Many Things, by Matt Malone, S.J. (2/1): One of the

many things I admire about **America** is the tone and content of the published letters to the magazine. When people are seriously disagreeing with one point or another, as happens in some of the letters in the Feb. 1 issue, the writers are polite, constructively critical and charitable. What happened to Father Malone’s column in that same issue?

His criticism of the Republican Party is what we usually read in **America** and is not unexpected or offensive—until he insults the voting public with, “The electorate is anxious and afraid; their thirst for some sense of control is so great that they’ll drink the sand just because some would-be Moses tells them it’s water.” Thank you for telling us that we are so lacking in comprehension that we cannot eventually identify someone who is selling us a bill of goods.

(DEACON) THOMAS E. BRANDLIN  
Los Angeles, Calif.

## Without Blinders

“A Rooted Vision,” by Rafael Luciani and Félix Palazzi (2/1), is an excellent article that makes its point without labeling the views of modern popes as conservative or liberal. Pope Francis has much in common with Benedict XVI. In fact, when it comes to their positions, I often think that where

one articulates, the other shows the action needed to put the belief into effect. We Americans get hung up on labels, which become blinders, and this makes it difficult to put the Gospel of life into action.

ANTOINETTE CARBONE  
Online Comment

## Modern Monastics

Re “Fugitives From Injustice,” by James T. Keane (2/1): Someone once said that the jail cell is the new monastery cell. There are still those who are willing to risk arrest and go to jail to confront an evil. Dorothy Day did it. Dan and Phil Berrigan, Kathy Kelly, Sr. Megan Rice and all those who have crossed the line at the School of the Americas did it. Or what about Alfred Delp, S.J., or Dietrich Bonhoeffer? The merry chase is only part of the story.

BETH CIOFFOLETTI  
Online Comment

## Victim-Shaming

In his letter “Shocking Study?” (Reply All, 1/18), James Booth objects to the use of the phrase “battered by life” to describe those left behind in today’s economy, saying it implies “victimhood rather than resilience.” I disagree.

Victimhood is neither voluntary nor shameful. It is the result of being victimized, and has nothing to do with how resilient a person is. To be made incapacitated, physically, emotionally, financially or psychologically as the result of someone else’s brutal victimization should not be trivialized by people who consider themselves merciful and compassionate. In my experience, the church and Christians are still walking past those who have been brutalized by others.

ROBERTA FITZPATRICK  
San Jose, Calif.



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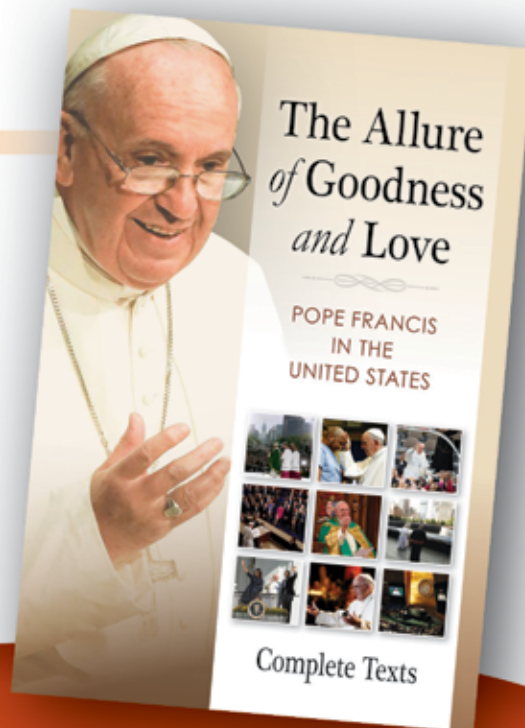


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# SIGNS OF THE TIMES

**A PROPHETIC MOMENT.** Pope Francis arrives in Ciudad Juárez on Feb. 17.



CNS PHOTO/PAUL HARING

## THE POPE IN MEXICO

### Francis Calls for Conversion Across Borders

**T**here is still time to change," Pope Francis told the people of Mexico, as he called for "conversion" six times during the homily at his final Mass in Ciudad Juárez, on the border with the United States. His insistence on the need for conversion and change has been the leitmotif of his speeches throughout the six-day visit to this country, but it was particularly striking how strongly it featured in the three main talks on his last day in Mexico, Feb. 17.

It was the common thread linking his talk to 3,000 prisoners at El Cereso prison, his address to more than 1,000 business and labor leaders at the Colegio de Bachilleres of the state of Chihuahua and his homily at a Mass attended by more than 200,000 people on the fairgrounds 90 yards from the border with the United States. The homily had a message for those on the other side, as well. One could describe these discourses as part of a triptych painted by Francis, as he sought to send a "wake-up call" to Mexico (and the wider world) to change course urgently and respect human dignity.

He compared the way people lived in the biblical city of Nineveh and way they live in Mexico today. Nineveh, he said, "was self-destructing as a result of oppression and dishonor, violence and injustice," and "its days were numbered because the violence within it could not continue."

But God did not wish to destroy the city and in his mercy sent the prophet Jonah "to help" its citizens "understand" that destruction would surely come if they continued with "the way they treat each other...only creating death and destruction,

suffering and oppression." Recalling how the king and people of Nineveh repented and wept for their wrongdoing, Francis told his Mexican audience that "to weep over injustice, to cry over corruption, to cry over oppression" is the path "to transformation."

During his visit to Mexico, and especially in his homily in Ciudad Juárez, Francis appeared to take on the mantle of Jonah as he set out "to help" the Mexican people—but also those north of the border—to understand the great suffering that comes with involuntary migration, describing it as a humanitarian crisis that is now "a global phenomenon."

Pope Francis asked people to pray to God for "the gift of conversion, the gift of tears" and "to hear his call in the suffering faces of countless men and

women.” He appealed for “No more death! No more exploitation!”

Going off script at the end of his homily, Pope Francis said, “I wish to use the opportunity of this moment to greet our brothers and sisters who are simultaneously accompanying us at the other side of the border.... Thanks to the help of technology, we can pray, sing and celebrate together the merciful love that the Lord gives us, and which no border can prevent us from sharing. Thank you, brothers and sisters of El Paso, for having made us feel one only family and one same Christian community.”

## A Prayer for Migrants

In a moment which will surely reverberate across the border, Pope Francis paused at the fence between Mexico and the United States on Feb. 17 to pray for migrants who have lost their lives making the perilous journey north. Silence fell over the nearby Ciudad Juárez fairgrounds as the pope walked up a ramp lined with yellow flowers to a specially built platform facing across the fence toward the United States to reach a large cross erected along the border.

During a homily delivered a short time later, Francis called for “open hearts” and recognition that the thousands fleeing their homelands are often victims of the worst forms of exploitation. “We cannot deny the humanitarian crisis which in recent years has meant the migration of thousands of people, whether by train or highway or on foot, crossing hundreds of kilometers through mountains, deserts and inhospitable zones,” he said. “They are our brothers and sisters, who are being expelled by poverty and violence, drug trafficking and organized crime.”

The pope has asked policymakers

north of the border to stop looking at people from Mexico, Central America and even farther south who are migrating north seeking a better life as a problem or as numbers, but to see them as individuals, each with a story to tell, each with a different drama propelling them into the North and its uncertain welcome and future.

## Listening To the Humble

They came down from the mountains surrounding the city; they came from faraway villages in other parts of Mexico and Guatemala. They came by bus, by car and taxi; they walked into town on their own two feet.

They came and waited overnight in

of the spectacle of Pope Francis visiting a community like San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas, Mexico. Just a few months after visiting with the most powerful people in the world, he has come to the ends of Mexico to meet with perhaps the most marginalized people in Mexican society. The indigenous communities here have been denied their land, denied their culture and denied their languages—often by the church itself. But Francis came here today as *hermano*, a brother, as pockets among the crowd chanted.

For one small family who managed their way through the crowd at the urging of others around them, desperate hopes were realized with great bounty. A small disabled girl, pushed to the front of the dense crowd first



**A HEALING EMBRACE.** Pope Francis stops to embrace a disabled girl brought to him outside the cathedral in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

PHOTO: KEVIN CLARKE

the cold and then in the morning under a punishing sun. Those thousands who were turned away from the Mass itself waited for hours alongside the roads; they waited pressing against metal barricades surrounding the Zócalo, crowding around the cathedral nearby for tiny precarious vantage points; they waited with ailing children for a hoped-for moment of Francis’ touch.

It is hard to overestimate the impact

by her mother and father and then by everyone around them who saw what they were trying to do, was finally lifted over the metal barricade and brought out into the square before the cathedral. As Pope Francis drew near, the people around the little girl called out to him and gestured to the girl. Their hopes were not disappointed as the popemobile slowed to a stop and the little girl in pink was lifted from

her wheelchair and brought to the pope. He embraced and blessed her as the crowd roared in approval.

Just a few hours earlier, the pope had told the indigenous people who had gathered to celebrate Mass with him in the city's stadium, "Some have considered your values, culture and traditions to be inferior. Others, intoxicated by power, money and market trends, have stolen your lands or contaminated them." "You have much to teach us," Pope Francis said. "Your peoples, as the bishops of Latin America have recognized, know how to interact harmoniously with nature, which they respect as a source of food, a common home and an altar of human sharing."

## Lecturing the Elite

Pope Francis sought to shake up Mexico's bishops on his first morning here on Feb. 13 with a powerful, challenging speech, in which he called on them to live as humble pastors, "not princes," to be close to the poor and oppressed, and to prophetically denounce the drug trade and other evils of society.

Francis is aware that not a few Mexican bishops are closer to the rich, powerful and influential sectors of society in this country where the economic and social inequalities are striking, than they are to the some 50 million people (among the many indigenous peoples) who are living in poverty or misery and to a large extent discarded by that other society.

He had just moments earlier issued a similar call to conversion to Mexico's civic and political leaders at the Palacio Nacional. He told these elite, "A hope-filled future is forged in a present made up of men and women who are upright, honest, and capable of working for the common good.

"Experience teaches us that each time we seek the path of privileges or

## Plane Talk on Bridge-Building

After making history with tough talk to bishops and politicians on the ground in Mexico, Pope Francis was not done in the skies above on the way home to Rome on Feb. 17. During one of his back-of-the-plane press conferences, the pope was drawn into the U.S. presidential race by a reporter's question about the Republican candidate Donald J. Trump. Trump has already announced that were he to become president, he would deport 11 million undocumented people from the United States and build a presumably impenetrable wall along the U.S. border with Mexico.

**Pope Francis gets drawn into the U.S. election during a Q&A with journalists on the way home to Rome on Feb. 17.**



"A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not Christian. This is not in the Gospel," Pope Francis said. Asked "if an American Catholic could vote for a person like this," Francis responded, "I am not going to get involved in that. I say only that this man is not Christian if he says things like that."

He added, "We must see if he said things in that way, and in this I give the benefit of the doubt."

Pope Francis also waded into the debate over the use of contraception in South American regions affected by the mosquito-borne Zika virus, which has been tentatively linked to the birth defect microcephaly. While the pope deplored abortion in response to the crisis as a "crime, an absolute evil," he left open the possibility of "avoiding pregnancy" until the crisis abates.

benefits for a few to the detriment of the good of all, sooner or later the life of society becomes a fertile soil for corruption, drug trade, exclusion of different cultures, violence...bringing suffering and slowing down development."

Before his arrival here, he revealed that his main reason for coming to Mexico City was to pray before the revered image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and he focused his talk to the bishops around the message of Guadalupe, which is at the heart of the spirituality of the people of this land. He reminded them that La Virgen Morenita "teaches us that the only power capable of conquering the hearts of men and women is the tenderness of God" and

urged them to live as pastors who incarnate that tenderness.

"It is necessary to have an outlook capable of reflecting the tenderness of God," he told them. In this context, he asked them "to be bishops who have a pure vision, a transparent soul and a joyful face." He urged them, "Do not fear transparency. The church does not need darkness to carry out her work."

The bishops applauded at the end, but in a rather muted way. It now remains to see what effect the visit of Pope Francis will have on how they conduct their ministry as pastors after he has left this land.

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## Death Penalty on Trial

Even death penalty supporters agree that Florida's attitude toward capital punishment is a little too cavalier for comfort. The chronic and gruesome malfunctions of its electric chair—including flames shooting from prisoners' heads—led Bob Butterworth, the attorney general in 1997, to quip that “Old Sparky's” problems were a splendid murder deterrent.

Three years later, amid national outrage, the U.S. Supreme Court pressured Florida into ditching the chair and adopting lethal injection.

But the Supremes have recently had to weigh in again on Florida's death-penalty doings. This time the issue is not how the state carries out executions but how it decides who faces them.

Few disagree that Florida has been operating unconstitutionally when it comes to imposing the death penalty. The Supreme Court justices themselves certainly do not. In a nearly unanimous 8-to-1 ruling in January, they struck down the state's capital sentencing system, calling it a violation of the Sixth Amendment—or at least a violation of how the court interpreted the Sixth Amendment 14 years ago.

Back in that 2002 case, *Ring v. Arizona*, the court said the Sixth Amendment requires that juries—not judges—apply the death penalty. But Florida disregarded the ruling.

It adhered instead to a practice in which juries recommend to judges whether there are “aggravating circum-

stances” in a murder case that warrant capital punishment. The judge then makes the final call.

This year, writing for the majority in *Hurst v. Florida*, Justice Sonia Sotomayor said a “jury's mere recommendation is not enough” to “impose a sentence of death.”

Florida's Catholic bishops welcomed the court intervention. A conference statement notes that while the bishops

Florida has been operating unconstitutionally when it comes to imposing the death penalty.

believe “that life imprisonment without parole...renders the death penalty unnecessary,” they have also long identified the need to address the state's “flawed death sentencing scheme.”

At first glance, it would seem that January's ruling would not be a huge legal disruption for Florida. The late Justice Antonin Scalia, the Supreme Court's sole dissenter, pointed out that if a jury recommends the death penalty, it follows that it would also impose that sentence if it had the final say. So all the state should need to do is adjust its law and give juries that power.

As if to make precisely that point, the Supreme Court issued its judgment in *Hurst v. Florida* on the same day the Florida state legislature started its 2016 session. But in Florida, this is turning out to be more complicated than simply tweaking flawed legislation.

First, there is the question of retroactivity. *Ring v. Arizona*, after all, has long been the law of the land, and many

of the 389 prisoners now on Florida's death row were sentenced when the state was essentially a constitutional scofflaw. Should their cases now be reviewed, if not thrown out altogether?

On Feb. 2, the Florida Supreme Court signaled it is wrestling with that quandary when it issued an indefinite stay of execution for Cary Michael Lambrix, a prisoner on death row. It is also hearing the cases of other death-row inmates who insist their sentences should be scuttled as a result of *Hurst*.

The Florida legislature also has to decide whether to mandate that jury members impose death sentences unanimously rather than by majority vote, as current state law allows. Should it stick with the majority procedure, it risks having the U.S. Supreme Court strike that down as a Sixth Amendment breach as well.

Whatever the legislature does, death-penalty sentencing has been all but suspended in Florida. And since Florida is among the states that employ capital punishment most—it has the fourth highest number of executions in the United State in the past 40 years—legal scholars believe that legal limbo could have the psychological effect of further dampening death-penalty enthusiasm nationally. Last year, the number of people condemned to death in the United States was the lowest in almost half a century.

“It clearly contributes to the sense that the death penalty is dying in this country,” says Stephen Harper, a law professor at Florida International University. “It will change the perspective.”

That perspective has changed even in Florida. A new F.I.U. law school survey finds only a third of Floridians now favor the death penalty over life imprisonment.

TIM PADGETT

TIM PADGETT, *Latin America editor for NPR affiliate WLRN*, is *America's Miami correspondent*.

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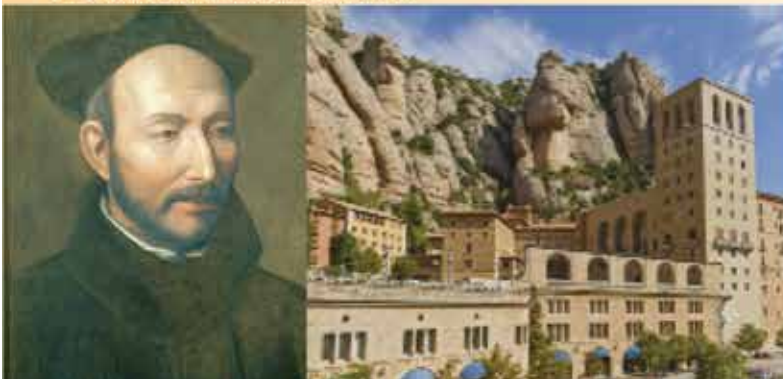


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# False Mercy

**T**he Zika virus is the latest predicate for the argument that we need to make abortion more available to poor women. It's just tragic all around. Abortion advocates trade on fears that poor women would give birth to children suffering microcephaly, though a review of Colombian and U.S. medical resources indicates that the link is quite uncertain.

Though Zika is new, the argument tying more legal abortion to the plight of poor women is old. And it always goes like this. Step 1: Find a health problem that poor women or their children suffer disproportionately more than other women. Step 2: Recommend abortion as the solution. Step 3: Include self-deprecating language about how the person making the argument is a woman of privilege who is not at risk of the aforementioned health problem and who is therefore promoting abortion strictly altruistically. Step 4: Round up the usual suspects. These inevitably include the Catholic Church, pro-life politicians and uncaring men. Special disdain is reserved for pro-lifers who cannot demonstrate that they recently tried to adopt a disabled child. Step 5: Recite a litany of the programs and opportunities that would allegedly preclude the "need" for abortion among the poor but that are expensive and unachievable over the short run—hence the continued resort to the cheaper and quicker abortion solution.

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Yet no matter how often it is repeated, the "merciful" case for abortion fails.

First, poor women have never wanted abortion as much as more privileged women have wanted to provide it for them. This finding has been constant for years, and the situation in Colombia is no exception. Poor women have fewer abortions per pregnancy than women of greater means. This is despite (and because of) the hundreds of millions of federal dollars (domestically and internationally) spent on contraception targeted to them.

Second, abortion really does cause women's suffering, even or perhaps especially on the grounds of the child's disability. This is not a debating or debatable point any longer. We are well past anecdote on this matter. And no one knows it better than the Catholic Church, with its Project Rachel ministry to thousands and thousands of women after abortion. A few weekends ago I spent time with several women who had experienced abortion following rape. Ten, 20, 40 years ago...it doesn't matter. They regret the loss of the child bitterly. They just do, and it makes all the sense in the world.

Third, one has to wonder at what point advocates of more legal abortion will acknowledge not only that opponents are taking care of women and children before and after birth in extraordinary numbers, but that "pro-choice" organizations are doing almost nothing. It is extraordinary, really, this false—and ironic—accusation. I call it the "lazy slander of the pro-life cause."

Fourth, a fair, empirical review of


the literature urges caution at the very least, before commencing a full-on contraception-will-fix-it campaign. No matter one's theological opinion about contraception, the net health effects of contraception are uncertain. There are the increased rates of nonmarital and unintended pregnancies among the poor who receive free contraception, as noted above. There is the Department of Health and Human Services' admission that the current

array of contraception (the same array the government would foist upon the Little Sisters of the Poor) is unpopular with women (40 percent annually leave their method), dangerous especially for obese women (36 percent of the population) and ineffective at surprising rates (failure rates of 9

percent to 30 percent). There is also the fact that nearly five years after the preventive services report that provoked the H.H.S. contraception mandate, the government's preventive services body has yet to adopt its recommendation to list contraception. Then there are the nearly annual settlements, amounting to billions of dollars, paid by pharmaceutical companies to women harmed by contraception or to their surviving families.

Finally, there is the poignant fact that one cannot recommend abortion on the grounds of the disability of the child involved without making an awful statement about the value of the lives of all disabled people. It cannot be helped and even by itself should shut down the "merciful" case for abortion.

The argument tying more legal abortion to the plight of poor women is old.



**HELPING HAND.** Denver Broncos defensive end Robert Ayers helps a boy at the Knights of Columbus Coats for Kids event in Jersey City, N.J., in 2014.

CNS PHOTO/EDUARDO MUNOZ, REUTERS

THE ONGOING RELEVANCE OF AN  
OFT-FORGOTTEN CHURCH TEACHING

# Property and People

BY ROBERT MALONEY

**W**e forget many things. Usually, they do not disappear completely from memory; they just lie buried under countless other things. From time to time they rise to the surface, but quickly fall back into oblivion. When reminded about forgotten things, we often say, “Oh yes, now I remember; but I haven’t thought about that in ages!”

One of these oft-forgotten truths, the universal destination of material goods, is extremely relevant today, especially in societies like the United States and Western Europe, where we defend the right to private property almost always without question.

Pope Francis is reminding us of it. In “Laudato Si” he cites St. John Paul II: “The principle of the subordination of private property to the universal destination of goods, and thus the

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right of everyone to their use, is a golden rule of social conduct and 'the first principle of the whole ethical and social order.'"

He returned to the theme in Bolivia in July 2015, a few months after the publication of "Laudato Si": "The universal destination of goods is not a figure of speech found in the church's social teaching. It is a reality prior to private property. Property, especially when it affects natural resources, must always serve the needs of peoples."

While welcomed by many, this assertion has also aroused strong negative reactions. Calmer voices have pointed out that the universal destination of material goods has been part of the church's teaching for centuries, though, in candor, one must admit that it has often been a "forgotten truth."

Actually, negative reactions to this teaching are not new. In early centuries, some bishops who preached on the theme met with exile and death. In modern times, sharp criticisms have frequently greeted encyclicals that touched on the matter.

On March 26, 1967, for example, "Populorum Progressio" called for "concrete action toward each person's complete development and the development of all humankind." In a quick, strong reaction, The Wall Street Journal labeled the encyclical "warmed-over Marxism," as if it were a radical departure from previous Catholic thinking. Paragraph 22 was the focal point of the criticism: "The recent Council reminded us of this: 'God intended the earth and all that it contains for the use of every human being and people...'. All other rights whatsoever, including those of property and of free commerce, are to be subordinated to this principle."

This is hardly a radical departure from prior Christian teaching, as critics have suggested; rather, the universal destination of material goods or the social function of property is a long-standing tenet in Christian thought.

### What Do the Scriptures Say?

It is clear from the Old Testament that God is the sole king of Israel and sole lord of the soil. God apportions land to God's people as its stewards. To use the more affective language favored by Pope Francis, Yahweh's people are to care for the land.

God protects the land and, through the Seventh and Tenth Commandments and other prescriptions, guarantees it as the private property of those to whom it has been given. But private property also has a religious and social thrust. One's property must be used for tithing, for offering sacrifice and for giving alms to the poor. Legislation on interest-taking, glean-

ing and the sabbatical year emphasizes the social responsibility of those holding private property.

In the New Testament, many sayings of Jesus address the use of property to aid one's brothers and sisters. St. Paul tells the Corinthians that since the form of this world is passing away, they should possess as if not possessing. The ideal picture of the primitive community in Acts shows Christians so bound together in selfless love that they voluntarily hold all things in common, so that those in need have their share. The motive behind the Christian attitude toward property is clear from Acts and Second Corinthians: the conviction that this community, founded on Jesus' love and his two-fold command, must be a fellowship of brothers and sisters.

These are merely indications, but clear ones, that if Christian love is to permeate all human coexistence, then it must be given flesh on the level of owning too; that if human love is to be the love of an embodied spirit, then it must manifest itself in the material possessions that are a necessary extension of corporeality.

### Creation Is for All to Use

The early Christian writers do not consider the right of private property as the basic norm in considering a Christian's relationship to material goods; rather, what is primary is that God created the world for the use of all. The human person is primarily the guardian and steward of goods; only secondarily is he or she their owner.

The *Didache*, written toward the end of the first century, clearly reflects the early Christian attitude toward property and its use: "Do not turn away from the needy; rather, share everything with your brother, and do not say: 'It is private property.'"

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215) strongly emphasizes the prime importance of the common destiny of material goods: "It is God himself who has brought our race to possession in common, by sharing himself first of all, and by sending his word to all alike, and by making all things for all. Therefore, everything is common, and the rich should not grasp a greater share."

Ambrose (339-97) also emphasizes the primacy of the common destiny of created goods. He argues from the natural order: "God has ordered all things to be produced, so that there should be food in common to all, and that the earth should be a common possession for all. Nature, therefore, has produced a common right for all, but greed has made it a right for a few." Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636) lists the common

**The universal destination of material goods has been part of Catholic Church teaching for centuries, though...it has often been a 'forgotten truth.'**



possession of material goods as a natural-law right, alongside the right to acquire goods.

In summary, it is clear that early Christian writers, while recognizing the right of private property, strongly emphasize the destiny of material goods for all; they see the social function of property as the primary moral norm. Ambrose and others stress this norm so much that they declare that material help is owed to the poor person in justice.

## Need Is Crucial

St. Thomas Aquinas reflects the same tradition. He writes that nature as such is indifferent to private ownership. But rational reflection shows the necessity of private property in our fallen state. In the *Summa Theologiae* he distinguishes between the right to private property and its use. Nature prescribes the preservation of peace, the maintenance of order and the encouragement of human industry as necessary ends. Reason shows that the best way of attaining these ends is through the institution of private property. Private property is therefore commanded by the secondary principles of natural law. Still, nature does not determine who shall own what. The determination of specific property rights is the concern of positive law.

It is noteworthy that this defense of private property is conditional. It sees the right to private property as necessary in our fallen state and as the most rational way of preserving peace. But in the same article St. Thomas adds forcefully: "The second thing that is competent to man with regard to external things is their use. In this respect, man ought to possess external things, not as his own, but as common, so that, namely, he is ready to communicate them to others in their need."

Aquinas's approach is subtle. His point of departure is the general necessity of material goods as a means for the human person's self-realization. The right of individuals to own material goods is a corollary of this, given our sinful human condition. But the right to the use of material goods is primordial and superior: each person, because he or she is a person, is entitled to a share of the means necessary for his or her well-being.

## The Social Aspect of Property

The social encyclicals "Rerum Novarum" (1891), "Quadragesimo Anno" (1931), "Mater et Magistra" (1961) and "Pacem in Terris" (1963) take up the theme with increasing force. At Vatican II, the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (1965) makes the strongest statement up to that time on the common purpose of created things: "God intended the earth and all that it contains for the use of every human being and people.... Whatever the forms of ownership may be...attention must always be paid to the universal purpose for which created goods are meant."

St. John Paul II defended the theme vigorously on many occasions, but especially in "Centesimus Annus" (1991). He calls the right to the common use of goods the "first principle of the whole ethical and social order" and "the characteristic principle of Christian social doctrine."

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, promulgated by St. John Paul II in 1992, summarizes this theme carefully:

The universal destination of goods remains primordial, even if the promotion of the common good requires respect for the right to private property and its exercise.... The ownership of any property makes its holder a steward of Providence, with the task of making it fruitful and communicating its benefits to others.... Political authority has the right and duty to regulate the legitimate exercise of the right to ownership for the sake of the common good.

## Some Implications of the Universal Destiny of Material Goods

From the evidence presented above, it is clear that Pope Francis' statements about the universal destination of material goods, while striking for their strength and urgency, are by no means revolutionary in a theological sense; rather, they echo a strong, though sometimes forgotten, strain in Christian tradition. But Francis' views are revolutionary in this sense: that their application would produce radical changes in social structures. In the interest of stimulating discussion, let me propose 10 considerations, some containing crucial questions.

First, to summarize the matter briefly, a long Catholic Church tradition about the universal destiny of material goods, described above, states that the right to private property must be conditioned by the right of all to have a just share in the universe's material goods.

Second, Pope Paul VI's statement in "Populorum Progressio" has played a pivotal role in recent official Catholic teaching on the universal destination of material goods. It has been cited again and again: "All other rights whatsoever, including those of property and of free commerce, are to be subordinated to this principle."

Third, even more forcefully, St. John Paul II calls the right to the common use of goods the "first principle of the whole ethical and social order" and "the characteristic principle of Christian social doctrine."

Fourth, ethics are crucial in guiding the economic and social choices that determine how various rights are to be balanced. Adequate solutions will be found only in ethical choices made by individuals, groups and governments. Such choices will inevitably incorporate concrete elements from various "systems." To address issues in general terms of systems like "capitalism," "socialism" and "communism" is of little

help. The bottom line is that no pure system exists and no “system” as such provides a solution. There is no pure capitalism, no pure socialism and no pure communism. In the concrete, all socioeconomic systems incorporate elements from other systems, though, of course, the mix varies considerably. If one condemns “unbridled capitalism,” for instance, the concrete question becomes: What “bridles” could make the system acceptable? If one condemns “totalitarian socialist governments,” then the question becomes: What about socialist states that are democratic?

Fifth, key questions requiring an ethical response are: What should the public sector (the state and the services it provides) and the private sector (N.G.O.’s, private firms, charities and individuals) do to provide a social safety net—that is, to prevent people who are vulnerable to disasters, displacement, unemployment and poverty from falling below a certain socioeconomic level? What can the public and private sectors do to reduce the huge gap between the rich and the poor within countries, and between rich nations and poor nations?

Sixth, one of the clearest optics for understanding Francis is the final document from the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Aparecida, Brazil, in May 2007. Pope Francis, serving as the chairperson of its editorial committee, was a key figure in preparing the document. He later described it as

“the ‘Evangelii Nuntiandi’ of Latin America.” “Laudato Si” echoes many of its themes. In the words of Aparecida: How might society “pursue an alternative development model, one that is comprehensive and communal, based on an ethics that includes responsibility for an authentic natural and human ecology...?” “Laudato Si” repeats this question and expands on it. How might society redouble its efforts to enact government policies and also promote private sector involvement to assure the protection, conservation and restoration of nature? What is the most appropriate forum for deciding how to monitor the application of international environmental standards within particular countries?

Seventh, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that goods of production—material or immaterial—like land, factories, practical or artistic skills, oblige their possessors to employ them in ways that will benefit the greatest number. It emphasizes that those who hold goods for use and consumption should use them with moderation, reserving the better part for the migrant, the sick and the poor. It asserts that for the sake of the common good, political authority has the right and duty to regulate the legitimate exercise of the right to ownership.

Eighth, to put the principle of the universal destination of material goods into practice concretely, we must further ask: How can clean water be made readily available to all? Basic health care? Basic education? How can all be provided with the opportunity to work at a just wage? Have access to adequate housing? What are valid criteria for land reform?

Ninth, might the Catholic Church, which is in fact a large landowner in many countries, be not only a thought leader in regard to the universal destination of material goods but also a leader of practice, as Pope Francis has suggested? While leadership through teaching is very significant, leadership through witness is all the more so.

Tenth, Pope Francis is convinced that a basic spirituality underlies this entire discussion. He regards such a spirituality as central to living out the biblical call to care for creation and to share material goods justly with our brothers and sisters in need. The pope calls for the creation of an ecological culture in which we adopt a “distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational program, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm.” In his recent trip to the United States, he emphasized the importance and interconnectedness of land, lodging and labor, all essential to a truly human life. He has consistently affirmed that a cultural transformation is the only lasting way to counter widespread poverty.

If we are convinced of the universal destination of material goods, a largely forgotten truth, such a transformation will be possible. ▲

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# School Choice Challenges

**D**issatisfaction with public school education has led many states to pass laws that facilitate school choice. Options include charter schools, scholarship and tuition tax benefits, and publicly funded education savings accounts. Each of these programs must comply with applicable federal and state constitutional provisions.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits government establishment of religion and protects the free exercise of religion. Thirty-seven state constitutions contain more restrictive provisions that, using various language, prohibit or limit the use of public money to aid private and/or sectarian schools.

## Charter Schools

Publicly funded but privately operated charter schools do not violate the establishment clause as long as they do not teach religious doctrine and are not run by religious organizations. They may, however, run afoul of state constitutional provisions. In 2015, the Washington Supreme Court cited a school tax funding limitation in the state constitution to invalidate the state's Charter School Act. The Legislature is working to provide alternative funding, but the case illustrates that school choice options affect public school budgets.

## Vouchers

The U.S. Supreme Court held in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* that publicly funded voucher scholarship programs that pay private school tuition

do not violate the establishment clause if they serve a public purpose, are neutral to religion, and if parents, not the government, make final voucher-use decisions. Various state constitutions, however, may prohibit publicly funded private school scholarships. The Colorado Supreme Court recently struck down a scholarship program based on the state's constitutional prohibition against the use of public funds "in aid" of sectarian schools. Now the State Board of Education wants the U.S. Supreme Court to declare this interpretation of Colorado's constitution unconstitutional. The state board argues that a scholarship program that discriminates against religious schools violates the free exercise clause.

Prior to Justice Scalia's death, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear a similar argument brought by a religious school in Missouri that was denied state funds for playground improvements. These cases call into question *Locke v. Davis*, a 2004 U.S. Supreme Court decision that upheld the right of states to deny public scholarship money to college-level devotional theology (ministry) students. Scalia wrote a strong dissent in *Locke* and would have voted in favor of equal treatment for religious schools. His death makes it impossible to predict the outcome of these cases.

## Tax Breaks

Tuition and scholarship tax credits and deductions granted to private school parents and benefactors steer funds away from public coffers but are not prohibited by the establishment clause if they meet the *Zelman* standard. The

Missouri playground case also may determine whether states that exclude religious schools from these tax breaks violate the free exercise clause. Whether private school tax benefits violate state law depends on the state. An Alabama school tax credit was upheld by its state supreme court; litigation regarding a similar Montana law is pending.

## Education Savings Accounts

Some states, like Nevada, are combining favorable tax laws with other school choice funding programs. As discussed in Kevin Clarke's blog post on America Media's website, "Nevada School Choice Program Threatened by 'Little Blaine' Amendment," the Legislature recently created a state-funded savings account program available to all children taken out of public schools. Nevada's program is unique in that it is not restricted to low-income households or children in low-performing schools and the funds may be used for a broad range of educational purposes, including online learning, tutoring and therapy. Savings accounts give parents far more choice and the public far less say in how state money is spent. Nevada's claim that parentally controlled savings accounts avoid the state constitution's prohibition against public funding of private schools also is being litigated.

Whether private school tax benefits violate state law depends on the state.

The U.S. Supreme Court is the ultimate arbiter of these cases. The court operates best when it is at full strength, as tied 4-to-4 decisions leave lower court rulings in place.

ELLEN K. BOEGEL

ELLEN K. BOEGEL, who teaches legal studies at St. John's University in New York, clerked for the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

# Restoring Right Order

The transforming power of tragedy and poverty

BY TRAVIS LACOUTER AND MACARENA PALLARES

In a jab at abstract theorizers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and bloodless systematizers like Carl Linnaeus, the Spanish thinker Miguel de Unamuno defined his interest as “the man of flesh and bone,” who “is at once the subject and the supreme object of all philosophy.” This concern for the fleshy man—for the person as subject—permeates Unamuno’s idiosyncratic brand of Spanish personalism. The best of Catholic fiction also places the “man of flesh and bone” at its center. And the church’s longstanding defense of “poverty of spirit” cannot be fully understood apart from this tragicomic personalism. For what the church means when it speaks of “poverty of spirit” is very much connected to a phenomenological experience of being that shapes and guides our spiritual identities prior to any reflective, rational project of theology or humanitarian *praxis*.

Our first task is to understand the Christian faith as animated by a certain tragic sensibility. This becomes apparent once we reflect on the Incarnation, which is fundamentally a sort of tragic grace. An understanding of salvation history is useful here, as it makes clear the unfolding reality of human fallenness and the relatively measured responses of an omnipotent God. Until the Incarnation, it seems God tended to maintain a regal distance from the brokenness of creation, a brokenness rooted in man’s capacity for freedom. Because God valued man’s freedom, humanity’s repeated failings elicited from God both severe condemnation and generous promises of clemency.

## A Radical Shift

Throughout the Old Testament and Old Covenant theology, we can trace a recurring theme of transactional grace, of God entering into contracts of various forms with his chosen subjects. However, as Pope Benedict XVI has taught, the New Covenant represents a replacing of the old “logic of exchange” with the “absolutely gratuitous” reality of God’s participation in creation. The radicality of this shift from transactional grace to incarnational *kenosis* cannot be over-

stated.

And it is indeed tragic. For Aristotle, tragedy by definition requires three steps: 1) The arousal of fear and pity in the audience, 2) with the aim of affecting genuine *katharsis*, or a cleansing purgation, which 3) results in a restoration of right order. So it always ends with some kind of cadence, so to speak, with a resolution, with right order.

This idea of tragedy as purgation continues past Aristotle and throughout the Western literary tradition. And in this sense, Christianity’s soteriological dimension is distinctively tragic. The need for the Incarnation begets fear of just punishment; the reality of the cross begets a sense of pity and scandal at the reversal of debtor and master; and an enfleshed God orients us toward a proper appreciation of humanity’s “fundamental poverty.” Divine grace is in a sense tragic because God, when faced with human sinfulness, chose not to destroy humanity (which would be justified) nor ignore humanity (which would preserve God’s pristine dignity) but rather entered into the fallenness of creation himself, even to the point of death on the cross.

Salvation history can thus be understood as God’s openness to the contingency of human freedom; this openness is rooted in love and is defined by its sacrificial character. Man’s freedom, and God’s respect for that freedom, moved God to swap God’s place *above* creation for a place *among* the beings of creation, putting an absolute end to the “logic of exchange” between God and man and giving birth to the “logic of gift.”

## The Logic of Grace

From the very outset of his ministry Christ took on a disposition of poverty. During the temptations in the desert, for example, Christ eschewed Satan’s various offers of worldly power. Johann Baptist Metz interprets the three temptations as three assaults on the “poverty” of Christ. Satan is baffled by the logic of grace; he tries to tempt Jesus by attacking his poverty because what he really fears is the power of powerlessness—that is, the powerlessness of God as a sort of “Trojan horse” that will open the human heart to its “native poverty[,]...suffer the misery and abandonment that is humanity’s, and thus save humankind.” This is, of course, exactly what happens.

It is important that the Greek word used for “poor” in our common translation of the beatitude “Blessed are the poor

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in spirit,” is *ptochoi*. In classical Greek from Homer on, this word has been closely associated with “beggarliness,” literally meaning “one who crouches or cowers” in a beggarly fashion. In this way, the word *ptochos*, “poor,” means much more than just a lack or deficiency of some kind. Poverty implies a more active (though receptive) disposition. The beggar, once he acknowledges his own deficiency, goes beyond it by accepting his condition and becoming actively open to receiving a gift.

Following Pope Benedict XVI’s exhortation for Catholics to “expand their understanding of poverty,” we choose to understand Christian poverty as primarily a phenomenological disposition toward a radical self-emptying openness—a condition of beggarliness similar to that which Christ assumed in the Incarnation.

The beatitudinal blessing cannot simply refer to a level of material poverty, for the question of salvation is not just a matter of separating rich from poor. Indeed, the fixation on material categories in order to determine questions of theological justice is precisely what caused the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to warn against materialist “concepts uncritically borrowed from Marxist ideology” in certain aspects of so-called “liberation theology.” Christ elsewhere reminds his disciples that the poor will always be with us, suggesting that the transformative love of God applies to internal conditions, not external, economic ones.

No, rather, Christian tragedy orients us toward a beggarly disposition in our own lives, an experience of our “native poverty” before all else. This is not a political stance but a disposition that practicing Christians inevitably take into politics. St. Augustine grasped this in a most profound way, by nature both of his own dramatic conversion from sin and his historical position at the end of the Roman *imperium*. As Pierre Manent has written, Augustine articulated a “half-practical...half-theoretical” disposition “that could be called affective or pathetic” for its emphasis on the tragic or transitory nature of human life.



“CRUCIFIXION AFTER MICHELANGELO,” MARCELLO VENUSTI, CA. 1550. PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/SALIKO

## The Radicality of the Cross

The Augustinian disposition is interior and personal since it gives pride of place to *conscience* rather than *reputation*. Christ’s sacrifice on the cross cannot be counted as a political victory, and only according to the rubrics of Christian love can it be counted as a victory at all. In fact, it would seem that in the crucifixion Christ faced total defeat. But at the Easter miracle, for the first time in history, we learn of a power greater than death. The radicality of the cross, then, and of Christ’s beggarliness generally, is that God transforms poverty into new life.

This tragic disposition is something distinct from an ancient pagan understanding of tragedy, which rests on external evaluations of “shame.” Pagan tragedy is political where Christian tragedy is personal; the pagan emphasis on rep-

utation, or shame, suggests how thoroughly pre-Christian valuations of worth and justice are decided by reference to external reality over conscience. We need only glance at various depictions of pagan greatness to see multiple examples of this.

Pagan pride, motivated by the power of shame, is a central theme of Homer's *Iliad*, for instance, as the driving force behind both Achilles' and Hector's actions. And Augustine addresses precisely this point when he evaluates the suicide of Lucretia, who stands even to this day as a model of Roman republican chastity. Lucretia erred in killing herself, Augustine argues in *City of God*, because she confused the external judgments of propriety with the truth of her own conscience; her inability to communicate the secret of her conscience ("*conscientiam demonstrare non potuit*") left Lucretia unable to defend her virtue even to herself. Under pagan rubrics of shame, then, her suicide was not just *understandable* but *necessary*.

For Augustine, Christianity endows conscience with a certain agency that "liberates the human soul from the tyrannical grip of honor and public praise," as Pierre Manent put it in his *Metamorphoses of the City*. The Christian looks to the example of the cross and concludes that death and dishonor do not in themselves constitute a moral failing but that instead what matters are the inner truths of the soul, which only God can know. Our native poverty makes us desirous of God's personal love, while our natural freedom ensures that any love between God and man is truly relational. This relationality is distinct from paganism's implicit sense of coercion. This empowerment of conscience is perhaps one of the most important and decisive revolutions in the history of thought.

Christianity destroys ancient pagan conceptions of tragedy, then, but we cannot say it forsakes tragedy completely. Instead it shifts the locus: rather than resulting from the conflicting obligations owed to desire and duty, tragedy becomes an internal process involving the dynamics of conscience and grace. That is why, for instance, the Christian tradition does not quite recognize Thomas More as a tragic figure: his conscience was clear. It is closer to the truth to call "tragic" figures like St. John of the Cross, Mother Teresa, or Augustine himself, who struggled at times to even desire Christ's love. The cross provides a distinct moment of genuine tragedy, when Jesus himself cries out in seeming despair, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

To be clear, pagan greatness of spirit is not wholly misguided. A healthy sense of shame and honor and a desire to see the external order reflect the eternal one are all constructive impulses. But in light of Christian revelation—and the Christ event in particular—shame and honor can no longer be normative. Justice, as the end of politics, has been displaced or superseded by love in the Incarnation. The

Christian experience is *prepolitical*, then, though it need not be *antipolitical*.

This shift in emphasis from the public to the personal is unavoidably demanding for the individual. Conscience purchases its agency at the price of the clarity that marked the pagan system of shame. Once the logic of exchange has been replaced by the logic of gift, the individual comes to occupy a space of relative freedom in which he must accept the proffered love of his creator, rather than defend himself against the predations of chance and demigods. This freedom is, as freedom tends to be, disorienting.

The Christian life, then, involves a unique degree of drama, even angst, since it requires a relational, organic and uncoerced act of love between creature and creator, a love which cannot ultimately be born of the pressures of shame.

## The Here and Now

And this brings us to a diagnosis of tragedy in present age. Christians in the modern world must relearn to do what Lucretia could not: to communicate the secrets of their consciences and to be sensitive to the anthropological realities that mark them as created beings.

But if the empowerment of conscience marked the pivotal break between pagan and Christian thought, then the destruction of conscience marks the break between Christian and modern secular thought. For conscience requires a healthy sense of sin, and the rise of ideology in the modern age has dismantled a formerly solid consensus about sin, goodness, grace and mystery. Eric Voegelin, who explained the mechanics of ideology with unique insight, understood that the ideologue ultimately seeks to control the world, to eliminate its tragic contingency. If the Christian attempts to use his natural freedom in order to reinforce his native poverty, the ideologue does the opposite, using his freedom to create an alternative reality—to reshape himself and the world around him. The ideologue cannot content himself with the alienating in-betweenness of existence, much less let it orient him toward heaven.

This results in a kind of self-imposed blindness as the ideologue looks to construct alternative universalizing epistemological systems to make sense of the world. These various systems share a rigidity that can be understood as what one observer called an "unwillingness to submit to the structure of reality, and to bear the evils of the world." It is precisely this same pretension to existential omnipotence that constitutes man's first sin and that motivates Satan's cosmic act of rebellion. It is also, as we have already mentioned, the opposite of God's kenotic openness to the contingency of human freedom as seen in the unfolding of salvation history.

We should note here with Voegelin that Christianity has had some role to play in enabling ideology: In "de-di-

vinizing” the pagan world (that is, by revealing its untruth), Christianity left an opening for nihilism to take root. In place of ancient pagan practices, which amounted to various forms of hedonism, relativism and brutalism but which undoubtedly captured the imaginations and dominated the external lives of pagan people, Christianity offers an interiorly focused—that is, experiential—call to personal holiness. The temptation to ignore the hard personalism of Christian holiness is one not easily resisted, even by professed Christians. Dostoevsky’s Grand Inquisitor voices this danger perfectly when he indicts Christ for not “giving a firm foundation for setting the conscience of man at rest for ever, [but rather choosing] all that is exceptional, vague and enigmatic.”

This shift from the pagan external to the Christian internal leaves a space in the political sphere for ideological speculation. Furthermore, the space between the Christian and ideological view of history is rather narrow. The Christian God’s salvific action in history lends coherence to time, establishing a beginning, middle and eventual end. The ideologue makes the fundamental if understandable mistake of thinking this structure is animated by anything other than divine love—by economics or racial superiority, for example—and simply works to effect the promised “self-salvation” ahead of schedule.

Thus Christianity has a crucial role to play in countering ideology and can do so only by maintaining an organic connection to the “man of flesh and bone” and by embracing a disposition of poverty of spirit that is in clashing tension with ideological self-glorification on one hand and pagan triumphalism on the other. It is precisely in understanding how a beggarly disposition gives way to charity that Christianity can “redivinize” the world.

### The ‘Mystery of Incompleteness’

This discussion begs for recourse to fiction. If our central contention is true—that is, that Christianity constitutes in its essence an experiential rather than a political or even intellectual reality—then fiction is the most appropriate medium through which to explore this truth. Fiction, rather than apologetics or academic philosophy, can mimic the interior, narrative nature of Christian revelation, and the best fiction invites us to test our consciences against the experiences of compelling characters.

In particular, Flannery O’Connor understood the power fiction has to open people to the transformative power of Christian tragic grace. “Drama usually bases itself on the bedrock of original sin,” O’Connor wrote, “whether the writer thinks in theological terms or not.... The novelist doesn’t write about people in a vacuum; he writes about people in a world where something is obviously lacking, where there is the general mystery of incompleteness and

the particular tragedy of our own times to be demonstrated, and the novelist tries to give you, within the form of the book, the total experience of human nature at any time. For this reason, the greatest dramas naturally involve the salvation or loss of the soul.”

O’Connor’s view of the Christian imagination both defeats pagan dynamics of shame and honor—since it takes our universal experience of “native poverty” as a starting point—and confounds ideological attempts to narrow and sanitize the scandalous nature of Christian love—by embracing the “mystery of incompleteness” particular to any given time. This tragic Christian love, which we arrive at by way of death, was modeled by Christ on the cross. It is by the same self-emptying stance of beggarliness that we come to authentic abundance, and by the powerlessness of death that we come to the fullness of life.

Tragedy requires a certain restoration of right order as its final cadence. In fact, acknowledging man’s native poverty is the restoration of the right order of things. And the Christian narrative and the serious work of fiction are essentially portraits of this tragicomic drama. Shakespeare’s tragedies always end in death, and his comedies in a wedding. The biblical story, in a way, ends in both. As a path out of our current state of moral confusion, we could start by pondering that central tragicomic Christian paradox. ■

## FOLEY POETRY CONTEST

Poems are being accepted for the 2016 Foley Poetry Award.

Each entrant is asked to submit only one unpublished poem on any topic. The poem should be 30 lines or fewer and not under consideration elsewhere. Poems will not be returned. Poems should be sent in by Submittable or postal mail.

Include contact information on the same page as the poem.

Poems must be postmarked or sent in by Submittable between Jan. 1 and March 31, 2016. The winning poem will be published in the June 6-13, 2016, issue of America. Three runner-up poems will be published in subsequent issues.

Cash prize: \$1,000

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# Spirit of the Desert Hills

Discovering God on the U.S.-Mexico border

BY SEAN CARROLL

About once or twice a week, I make my way across the U.S.-Mexico border from Nogales, Ariz., to Nogales, Sonora. I know the path well. As I approach the heavily fortified gate, I can see the high, serpent-like border wall on each side, undulating up and down the desert hills of Ambos Nogales.

I often think about my resistance to coming here in the first place. My Jesuit provincial superior had asked if I would be interested in being the director of the Kino Border Initiative, a new binational migrant ministry on the border, focused on humanitarian assistance to migrants. Being an obedient and faithful Jesuit, I told him no. I had projects I wanted to finish, and the idea of switching to another ministry did not excite me.

Weeks later, however, when talking about this project with a friend, I felt a deep movement in my heart, and as I paid attention to this deep desire, I could see that God was inviting me to this work, to this border, with all of its challenges and uncertainties. God had surprised me with an invitation I had never anticipated. I was both excited and scared. How could this be?

I had never been a director of a Jesuit apostolate, let alone a cross-border ministry. Yet I felt deeply that this was God's initiative. God had invited

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SEAN CARROLL, S.J., is the executive director of the Kino Border Initiative.



**TAKE THIS.** Sean Carroll, S.J., gives Communion during Mass at Tumacacori National Historical Park in Tumacacori, Ariz., Jan. 10.

me to become a Jesuit years ago, when, much to my surprise, I discovered Jesus walking next to me in a meditation on his appearance to Peter on the lake shore, asking me if I trusted him enough to accept this call. In spite of my own terror and fear, I had said yes. I could never have imagined the many blessings that God has poured into my life, all because I said yes. So if this invitation to the border was from God, I figured, then God would make it work somehow.

I pull up to the Kino Border Initiative's *comedor*, or soup kitchen. A corrugated roof covers a small, semi-enclosed boxlike structure, with stifling heat in the summer and bone-chill-

ing wind in the wintertime. A line of deported migrant men, women and children stretches down the sidewalk, many carrying their belongings in large plastic bags, compliments of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Their body language communicates everything they are feeling: fear from being in an unfamiliar place; despair at being deported and separated from loved ones in the United States; uncertainty about where they are and what to do next.

And yet, a profound change takes place when the migrants walk through the door. Their faces slowly brighten, as we welcome them and invite them to be seated at the table, where they are introduced to our staff and volunteers and participate in a presentation on human rights.

When the moment arrives to bless the meal, I step forward and look out over the migrant men, women and children. They remind me of others who have come to us over the years: the woman who was beaten by her guide and then raped and abandoned in the desert; the man who crossed into the United States hoping to be reunited with wife and children in California but died before reaching them; the man who was savagely kicked in the ribs by Border Patrol agents while attempting to surrender; the woman who was strip-searched while in Border Patrol custody and then left standing in a cold cell, naked, for hours.

At the same time, as I make the sign



of the cross, something powerful happens inside me. I feel a soulful and profound silence descend over the *comedor* and fill my heart. I watch heads bow, hands slowly folded together, eyes closing. The Spirit of God gently envelops me and all of us present. These men, women and children have every reason to be bitter, to be angry, to hate. Instead, I am amazed as they place themselves, their spirits, their lives, their beings in the hands of God.

Perhaps they recall how God has been present to them, through their

spouses, children and siblings far away, in their parents and grandparents who walked them to church in their hometown years ago, in the woman who tossed food to them as they rode on top of the train in southern Mexico. Maybe they feel what one migrant in our *comedor* has written, that "Jesus' footsteps and mine are the same." God's Spirit is palpable, and the Spirit that surrounds me now opens up in me, as I stand before them and begin to speak, while at the same time feeling that the migrants are really leading me

in prayer. In that moment, they show me how to place myself and my life into the hands of God, how to welcome the Spirit into my heart and in that place to find strength for the journey.

There are times when I want to flee this border filled with tragedy, disappointment, loss and injustice.

And yet, when those moments come, the migrants teach me how to discover the presence of God's Spirit, and how to live from that experience. Perhaps I am still on the border to continue to learn that lesson. ■

## GENERATION FAITH

# What We Built

## Faith and friendship at WorkCamp

BY MAURA NEWELL

That Sunday afternoon, when we walked onto the worksite, there were foul smells, piles of junk and dangling weeds that covered the wood and ground of the structure that was our assigned "house." After taking a second to look around, all I could think was, "How could someone live here?" When we walked toward the house, a lady came outside smiling to welcome us to her home. She introduced herself as Ms. J. and gave us a tour of her five-room house. The floors were nowhere to be seen, as they were piled with junk; the living room had a gaping hole in the ceiling that allowed you to see the sky outside; the roof was unusable; and the bathroom plumbing did not work. Yet Ms. J. was smiling and making jokes the whole time she

was giving the tour. She was so excited to welcome us into her home, displaying great pride in everything that she had. This was the beginning of my first real experience with our church WorkCamp.

WorkCamp is a program through the Diocese of Arlington, Va., that allows teens to come together through work and prayer. When my crew first saw Ms. J's house, we were amazed. There was lots of hard work to be done. It was the middle of the summer and sweltering hot. Now I am not a per-

son who loves doing things that I have no control over. I enjoy being a leader, being in charge and not necessarily branching out to others, but I realized that with WorkCamp this would not be the case. It took not only the opinions of all six teenage crew members to



**THE CREW.** WorkCampers on site above and at morning Mass below



**MAURA NEWELL** attends Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Ind. She is a 2015 graduate of Georgetown Visitation High School in Washington, D.C.

figure out what work needed to be done but also the help of our experienced, adult contractor. Slowly but surely we began our week filling dumpsters with weeds, rotted wood and fallen plaster.

At WorkCamp, every morning begins with a 6 a.m. wakeup followed by morning Mass. Prayer is a major part of the experience, with daily intentions, prayers before meals, adoration, talks and songs every night. Kids are encouraged to branch out of their comfort zones, use new tools that they have never seen before, talk to other campers that they may never have imagined being friendly with and leave the outside world for the week at camp. This experience of being open, honest and present is not always easy, especially if it is with a group of people that you have never met before and do not know.


During WorkCamp, I really began to see the virtues of faith, hope and love all put together. It was amazing to see others who really wanted to make a difference. Usually when you go to

something like this there is still a good portion of people who don't want to be there, but at WorkCamp, I saw that almost everyone was there because they wanted to help others.

My crew soon became a special part of my life. Every day we would wake up, go to Mass and breakfast together, then soon head out to our worksite, Ms. J's house. Every day we would make jokes while working, tell each other stories about our lives and friends back home and sometimes even squabble about the best way to complete a project. We would pray before lunch and all sit down together, take a break and talk all at once. This group of people became my family for the week.

I soon began to realize that not only was I with an amazing group of people, but I could see God shining through each and every one of them. Through J. T. in his hard, unrelenting work ethic; Kate in her gentle attitude, always being a positive motivator when things became tough; Peter with his friendliness,

always making sure that others were doing the task that they were best at or enjoyed the most; Maria through her motherly gentleness being the responsible leader of our crew; John as the patient contractor kindly helping us learn to use new tools and fixing our mistakes as we went along; and Declan, being a helpful presence doing everything asked of him and even taking on the grueling task of emptying the dumpsters. I learned positivity, loyalty, kindness and friendship through each and every one of these people in special ways that have affected me today.

Over the course of the week I watched as we tore apart the rotting deck, rebuilt the entire deck, weeded the yard, plastered the roof, created a wheelchair ramp and became close with new people in a way I never imagined possible. Though the work was hard it was rewarding, especially because I was able to open up in a new way by letting others lead and witnessing God through my encounter with them. 



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## BOOKS ON THE BIBLE

JOHN C. ENDRES AND JEAN-FRANÇOIS RACINE

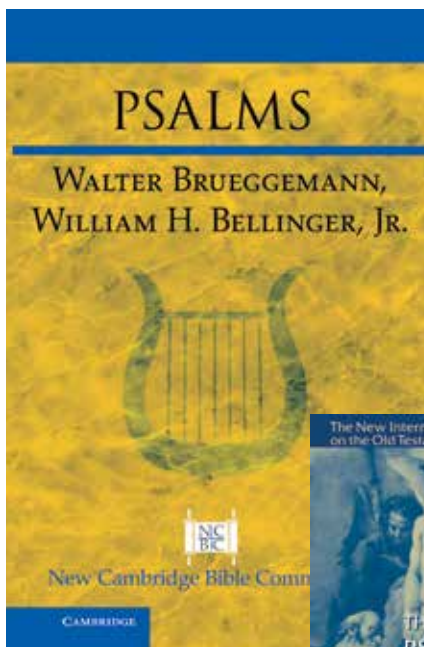
### OF CREATION AND COVENANTS

*Exploring Scripture today*

This selection of books on the Bible contains one offering for ordinary Catholic laypersons, especially those engaged in various church ministries who wish to begin deepening their knowledge of the Bible: Michael Cameron, **Unfolding Sacred Scripture: How Catholics Read the Bible** (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications). Bringing 13 years of experience teaching introductory courses in Bible, he divides his material into two parts: I, “The Catholic Way of Reading Scripture,” (four chapters); and II, “Unfolding Sacred Scripture: Touring the Texts” (10 chapters). Although concerned to distinguish Catholic from evangelical approaches (more personal and less focused on historical and institutional commitments), he urges Catholics not to reject anything good coming from various biblical study programs, but always to engage in a catholic both/and approach, which he holds as communal, sacramental, historical and flexible.

This section reflects well the Catholic approach to Scripture since the Second Vatican Council, reflected in practice and in church documents. For Cameron, a Catholic reading should embrace theological and scientific concerns, as well as those of contemporary culture. For this reader, however, Part II (“Touring the Texts”) proved more engaging. Here Cameron displays an uncanny ability to describe the different parts of the Bible (e.g., Pentateuch: Creation and Humanity; Exodus and Covenant; Kingship; Prophecy; Apocalyptic; Gospels—three topical chapters and treatment of each Gospel)

in a lively and perceptive way. Even though he highlights narrative texts, his approach to texts could also prove quite stimulating if applied to the Psalms and the Wisdom books. This part of his book well illustrates the tone and content of a Catholic reading that he previously described. In fact, it might prof-

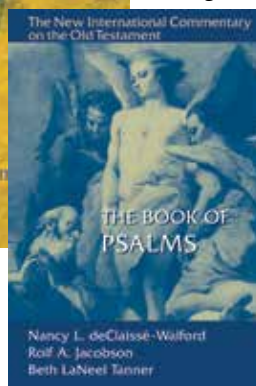


itably be read before Part I. This is an engaging little book, especially for those who wonder about the role of the Bible in Catholic life today.

Next I would like to turn to three books on the Psalms that enrich the interpretive and religious opportunities for readers. Two are recent commentaries (2014), which could not be included in last year’s review; one is an older book on the Psalms that has just recently been translated into English.

Walter Brueggemann and W. H. Bellinger Jr., **Psalms** (Cambridge University Press). Co-authored by two masters of Psalms-study, this is a very substantial commentary that uses the New Revised Standard Version translation, offers commentary on the entire Psalter, contains mini-essays on almost all significant questions and is aimed at an intelligent, educated, religion- and church-related audience. Its usefulness is quite clear, since usage of the NRSV is widespread in mainline Protestant congregations and seminaries, as well as many Catholic universities and seminaries. Although the text is focused for nonspecialist audiences (i.e., without extended philological, textual and critical academic discussions), specialists will quickly recognize its value for them, in the range of issues these authors incorporate.

After a remarkably concise but complete Introduction to the Book of Psalms, with matters of Hebrew poetry at the outset, the authors pay “attention to genre, liturgical connections, societal issues and the psalm’s place in the book of Psalms as a whole.” Societal issues both ancient and modern are treated, and readers of discussions titled “Bridging the Horizons” will be rewarded with thoughtful reflection on North American cultural, social and political issues as they intersect with the interpretation of Psalms. Examples are: “Adversaries and Allies” and “The Righteousness of God,” usually located in the first significant place where a Psalm features the term or issue. Many theological and historical topics that emerge in reading of Psalms are presented in the section title “A Closer Look” (e.g. “Job’s Similarities to the Psalmist”). Overall, these authors present a very readable and astute approach to Psalm reading; and members



of study groups, divinity students, pastors and biblical scholars will be well-rewarded for their attention to this commentary.

A second major commentary on Psalms was written by three scholars: Nancy DeClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson and Beth Laneel Tanner: **The Book of Psalms, New International Commentary on the Old Testament** (Wm. B. Eerdmans). Advertised as “the most complete and detailed one-volume commentary available on the Psalms,” it lives up to most expectations. The author of the commentary on each psalm is indicated, and together they provide a rich approach to Psalm study and interpretation. Indebted to Martin Luther’s view of the Book of Psalms as a “little Bible,” (as also for Bellinger and Brueggemann), their Introduction covers a similar range of issues as the previous volume.

Since the authors provide their own fresh translation of each Psalm, the introduction includes a detailed presentation of textual issues (Hebrew texts, importance of witness of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint and other versions) that guide their translation decisions. The commentary on each Psalm begins with a summary of its contents and literary structure, comment on the superscription (if there is one), translation (accompanied by very helpful notes on philology, other scholarly positions, other uses of words in the Psalter), followed by clear and rewarding commentary on sections (of verses) of the Psalm. Each entry concludes with reflections on the significance of the Psalm in contemporary society, dealing with issues both communal and personal, as well as theological.

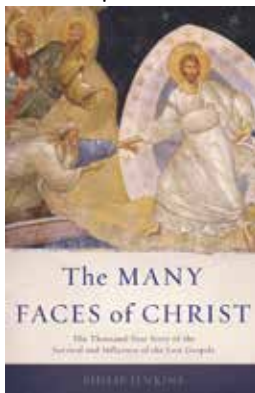
Two features are original to this commentary. Convinced that the aesthetic power of the language is part of its theological truth and power, they try to draw meaning from the poetic techniques of the ancient psalmists. They also attend to gender-inclusive language, though in a different way

than the NRSV. They do not transform masculine-singular nouns and pronouns into generic plurals, but use other terms, like “one,” in an attempt to stay closer to the poetic language. In the commentary sections, one soon notices that they shift from masculine to feminine pronouns whenever gender is not determined by the content. Overall, this commentary will attract a wide variety of readers; translation and commentary are quite accessible, notes and comparisons with other commentaries will reward scholarly readers.

Just released, by Paul Beauchamp, is **Psalms, Night and Day**, translated by Peter Rogers, S.J. (Marquette University Press, originally published as *Psaumes nuit et jour*, 1979). This volume is well worth the wait of 36 years for a translator. With neither a scholarly introduction nor treatment of the Psalms, these chapters, which originally appeared as talks during the 1970’s, during the great heyday of Scripture study after Vatican II, bear the stamp of a significant scholar in touch with nonscholarly audiences. Divided into sections on: The Psalms and Us, Supplication, Praise, Promise and Psalms and the World (with focus on Creation), each chapter consists of five to seven compact pages (originally addressed to a live audience). Footnotes are few, but the issues usually found in the footnotes of Psalm-study are treated here, in clear prose. Beauchamp has an intriguing way of introducing the questions that might concern us (e.g., imprecatory, cursing psalms) in a conversational way that builds on his view of the human issues in these texts, which demonstrate especially that the Psalmists’ world is not very “spiritualistic” but always concerns the “body”; his avoidance of the body-soul language of theology in the West keeps readers corporally focused.

Beauchamp also demonstrates a healthy way of reading psalm texts in the light of Christ. Jesus defines himself as one who has done the will of the Father, and that “will” for him was “discovered” in the Psalms that he himself knew, dictated to him through other people. I was prepared to read through an academic introduction to Psalm-reading, but continually learned

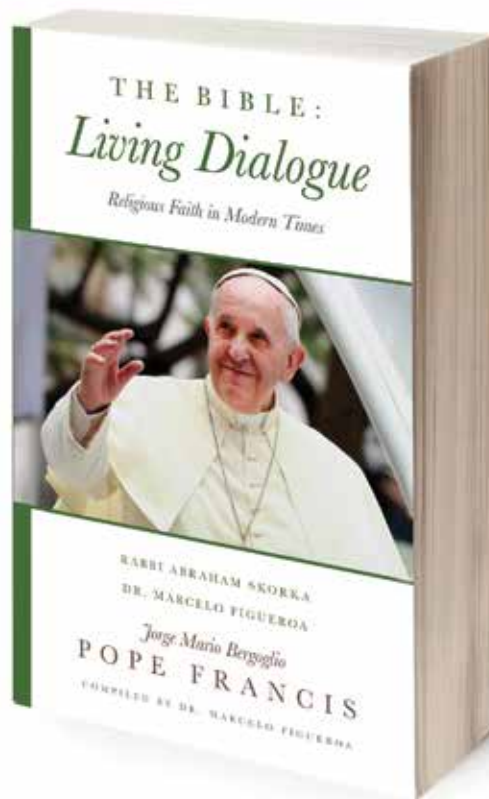
to slow down, read slowly and reflectively. Finally, it seemed that reading his text resembles spiritual reading, perhaps a *lectio* style, more than academic reading. The end result will be a deeper perception of Psalms and their power in our lives.



The next book constitutes a wide-ranging (chronologically and geographically) ‘story’ by the prolific historian Philip Jenkins, **The Many Faces of Christ: The Thousand-Year Story of the Survival and Influence of the Lost Gospels** (Basic Books). Jenkins argues against what he terms an alternative history of Christianity that views the disappearance of lost Gospels (many Apocryphal Gospels, especially Gnostic texts, etc.) as the result of narrow restrictions imposed by the church during Late Antiquity, probably from the fourth century A.D. New publications in the last 40 years, especially of Gnostic texts like the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Judas and others, attracted much media attention, presented as exposing truths that have long been suppressed by the “main church.” He surveys a wide swath of data—literary, liturgical, visual (e.g., church art)—from the era between 400 and 1500 (the Protestant Reformation) to argue that these so-called “lost” texts were anything but lost, if one looks carefully at the medieval church not only in Western Europe, but throughout the East, extending even to India.

The survey includes not only

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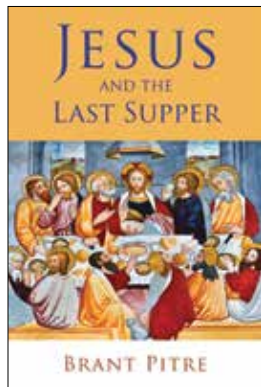


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Christian but also Muslim and Jewish sources that illustrate the complexity of the religious scene during these thousand years. For Jenkins, most of the heresies of these centuries were dualist (e.g., the Bogomils, Albigensians, Paulecians, etc.), and they witness to the ongoing life of those “gospels” and texts that had supposedly been suppressed. He provides a fascinating historical contextualization of many texts of the Jewish Pseudepigrapha, Apocrypha and other bodies of Christian and Jewish literature that have been studied more in recent decades. Readers will encounter historical tidbits that need saying in our era. For example, it was an Albigensian who claimed that Mary Magdalene was a concubine of Jesus and was the woman taken in adultery in the Gospels! Some traditions, for example about the church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, come from a little-known sixth-century Syriac text: that the cross of Golgotha, for instance was situated directly above the tomb—and skull—of Adam. Many other traditions abound, and this book is recommended because it reads so enjoyably, sometimes almost like a historical novel (but the mass of documentation belies any thought of a fictional account).



Thomas Römer has written several intriguing Old Testament studies translated into English. **The Invention of God** is the most recent, well translated by Raymond Geuss (Harvard University Press). In this book Römer traces the development of the notion of Yhwh as the only God, from its origins in southern desert regions, among Moses and the Midianites, into Jerusalem, its cult in Israel and then in Judah, its statue in Judah and Yhwh and his Asherah. He interprets developments especially after the fall of Samaria, the reforms of Josiah and the origins of biblical monotheism

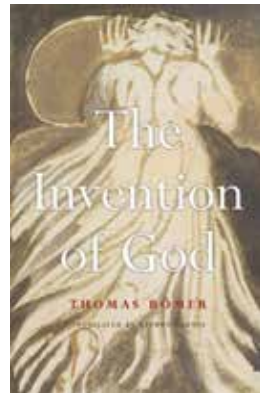
at the beginning of the Persian period, when Yhwh became the sole God of the monotheistic religions.

In his parlance, “invention” does not mean something contrived or made up, but a gradual invention or discovery by a culture as a whole. The crucial era for Yhwh’s development into the sole God was the aftermath of the Exile, when both priests and Deuteronomists described their God as universal and transcendent, a process that continued through the Persian era. His analysis hits on major themes in what has been known as the priestly document and the Deuteronomistic history, and then focuses on important parts of Isaiah 40–55. His grand story incorporates much of the recent discussion about the dating of these text traditions, demonstrates the implications of these studies and integrates it all with newer archaeological discoveries. In short, he tells a credible and recognizable tale, though not one that his scholarly colleagues will agree with in all details. It reads very well, is well translated and has a bit of the excitement of discovery for engaged readers.

With **Jesus Before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of the Savior** (HarperOne), Bart D. Ehrman has written a thought-provoking book prompted by his interest as a historian in the various traditions about Jesus. To conduct his inquiry, he uses insights from cognitive psychology about individual memory, from sociology about collective memory and from anthropology about the preservation of traditions in oral cultures. If New Testament scholars have for some time been interested in oral cultures and

collective memory, they have generally stayed away from cognitive psychology about individual memory and refrained from asking some hard questions about changing and distorted memories when it comes to Jesus.

Each chapter begins with contemporary situations—mostly from North America—which involve individual and collective memories. Each includes a brief exposition of findings and theories about memory and an investigation about the remaining memories about Jesus in the canonical Gospels, the rest of the New Testament, and peritestamental literature. These memories pertain to Jesus’ words and deeds, memories about his birth, childhood, trials and death. The book may help to reflect on the appropriateness of the common adequation made between historical exactness and truth and at moving beyond it. Its organization and lucid style make the book enjoyable to read for lay readers, seminary and college students.



If everyone loves Jesus, the spectrum of attitudes toward Paul is far more diverse. Patrick Gray has chosen to focus on the critiques formulated against Paul from the origins until now in his forthcoming book **Paul as a Problem in History and Culture: The Apostle and His Critics Through the Centuries** (Baker Academic). There is no risk of running out of material on this topic since critiques against Paul are as old as Christianity, as we see in Paul’s letters themselves, the earliest Christian writings to have been preserved. Paul indeed devotes much space to responding in his letters to critiques formulated against him, for example in 1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Philippians and Galatians.

Gray has read broadly to identify negative attitudes toward Paul. The book includes critiques with origins

in Jewish, Muslim and Christian traditions ranging from antiquity to our time. To establish such a rich collection is quite an achievement, but there is more. The second part of the work examines the contexts, subtexts and pretexts of all these critiques. In doing so, Gray describes, for instance, the traditional Western representation of Second Temple Judaism and how the post-Holocaust period has challenged it in the new perspective on Paul. The book ends by creatively addressing the perennial question of the relation between Jesus and Paul from the perspective of comparative religion. All in all, this volume covers an amazing amount of ground. Gray's lucid and at times humorous style makes this book accessible to a wide audience.

Most books on Paul aimed at a general audience deal with his missionary work and the theological character of his letters. Patrick J. Hartin's **A Window Into the Spirituality of Paul** (Liturgical Press) takes the less traveled path of studying the spiritual vision that emerges from Paul's letters. Hartin considers Paul's spirituality as a whole while paying attention to the context of specific letters and focusing on specific passages. He locates Paul as a Diaspora Jew immersed in the Greco-Roman world and the spiritual tradition of the people of Israel.

Next, Hartin follows Gustavo Gutiérrez's insight about significant moments in the development of a spiritual tradition. Accordingly, he begins with Paul's encounter with the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus and moves to the reflection it prompted and to its lasting effects in Paul's preaching. Hartin explains how Paul reconfigured his system of beliefs to place the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ at its center, redefined the terms of the covenantal relationship with God once Christ acts as its mediator, described the role of the Spirit and of the community of believers, all this while paying at-

tention to the eschatological context of Paul's spirituality. The final section discusses the enduring value of Paul's spirituality by focusing on some core convictions encountered in the lives of four North American witnesses: St. Kateri Tekakwitha, the Rev. Stanley Rother, Mother Antonia Brenner, and St. Katherine Drexel. This book is a valuable resource for Bible study groups, college students and independent readers looking for a deeper understanding of the spiritual message of Paul.

Research on the historical Jesus published since the 1990s has produced tomes, for example John Dominic Crossan's *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* and John P. Meier's five massive volumes of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, which total over 3,550 pages. Brant Pitre's **Jesus and the Last Supper** (Eerdmans) is consistent with this trend with nearly 600 pages of tightly knit prose that deals with the historical aspects of Jesus' Last Supper, a topic that has not received an extensive treatment in recent years and is replete with difficulties. Scholars are divided, for instance, about the likelihood that Jesus asked his disciples to drink his blood in a Jewish context, where it is forbidden to consume blood. In this context, Jesus' request sounds gross. Besides the historical plausibility of Jesus' words and deeds in a first-century Jewish context, Pitre investigates what the Last Supper reveals about Jesus' self-understanding, overall eschatological outlook and intentions toward the community of his disciples. Pitre suggests that Jesus en-

visioned himself as a new Moses, who would have launched a new exodus, set a new Passover, brought back the miracle of manna and gathered the tribes of Israel into the kingdom of God. Pitre's book makes an important contribution to the quest for the historical Jesus as it situates him well in his Jewish context.

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**JOHN C. ENDRES, S.J., and JEAN-FRANÇOIS RACINE** are professors at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University in Berkeley, Calif.

## XIII. Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross

This morning, I hauled to the street  
A heavy wooden pallet, so beat  
The workmen had left it behind:

Its boards, rough-hewn and splintering  
Against the asphalt. When I leaned  
It on the dumpster, with some twine

And flattened cardboard boxes, too,  
For the trash-man, a March gust blew  
And overturned what I had built.

The hard wood clattered on the road  
And split, exposed its secret load  
Of bent and rusted nails, now spilled,

Scattered like seeds, like teeth and bones,  
Awaiting tires, the feet of those  
Too lost in song to watch their step.

One nail stared up from the cracked wood.  
I plucked it out, just as they would  
Who returned you to your mother's lap.

---

**JAMES MATTHEW WILSON**

**JAMES MATTHEW WILSON** was a runner-up in the 2015 Foley Poetry contest. His most recent books are *Some Permanent Things* and *The Catholic Imagination in Modern American Poetry*.

# TRACES OF THE TRANSCENDENT

C.S. Lewis described it as a “stab of Joy.” A rabbi friend refers to it as the “burning bush,” and a priest colleague speaks about it in terms of a “4-o’clock-in-the-afternoon” moment. For me it was a song.

In my previous column, I described the frequent encounters I have had with people who have lost their faith. When those conversations are allowed to go deeper, I often find that their understanding of God as children was not able to grow up with them, and as a result, their childhood God no longer seems relevant to their adult lives.

I can’t help but wonder whether in those situations the hurdle to belief is less about information than it is about imagination, less about mystical knowledge than about noticing. I’ve come to believe that what some see as a loss of faith has more to do with the inability to build a bridge between a child’s catechesis and an adult’s experience. For these people, the notion that experiences in their daily lives could actually be a window into the mind and heart of God is a revolutionary concept. I tell them that—as someone who is allergic to piety and suspicious of the overly abstract—a relationship with God in my life would not be possible without my own experience of finding traces of the transcendent in the world around me.

“Jesus chided his generation for not ‘reading the signs of the times,’” Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I., once told me. “John of the Cross would recast that into this dictum: ‘The language of God is the experience God writes into our lives.’ We need to hear how God is speaking to us inside of our experience.... Scriptural

and church teachings only have meaning insofar as they relate existentially to our own experience. There is no sense telling people: ‘Here’s an answer, now go find the question!’”

Father Rolheiser directed me to a few lines from Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s poem “Aurora Leigh:” “Earth’s crammed with heaven,/ And every common bush afire with God;/ But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,/ The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.”

It is this ability to pay attention and see—not one’s intellect or level of study—that separates the blackberry pickers from those who recognize they are on sacred ground. Rabbi Dan Ayn, founder of the Brooklyn-based organization Because Jewish, cites rabbinic commentary on Moses’ encounter with the burning bush (Ex 3:3-4). Moses says, “I must turn aside to look at this remarkable sight. Why does the bush not burn up?” The passage continues: “When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to look, God called out to him from the bush, ‘Moses! Moses!’ He answered, ‘Here I am.’” Rabbi Ayn notes: “It is only when Moses decides to stop and pay attention to this burning bush that God calls out to him. His openness and awareness enable God to connect with him.”

In *Surprised by Joy*, C. S. Lewis describes his journey from atheism to Christianity as a growing understanding of the brief glimpses of clarity, or “joy,” he had experienced throughout his life. “Joy was not a deception. Its

visitations were rather the moments of clearest consciousness we had, when we became aware of our fragmentary and phantasmal nature and ached for that impossible reunion....”

John Collins, C.S.P., a Paulist mission priest, likes to use the story from the first chapter in John’s Gospel where Andrew and another disciple first encounter Jesus, who asks them, “What are you looking for?” They reply that they want to know where he is staying, and Jesus tells them, “Come, and you will see.” The episode ends with the line, “It was about four in the afternoon.”

A few years ago, Father Collins asked a congregation in upstate New York why the

Gospel writer included that last, seemingly pointless, detail. What happened at 4 o’clock? After several parishioners offered up some guesses about Jewish law or cultural norms, a retired state trooper raised his hand. “I know what happened at 4 in the afternoon” he said. “They fell in love.” Nodding to his wife, who was sitting next to him, he continued: “I can remember every detail from 35 years ago about meeting my wife: what time it was, what she wore, what the weather was like. The disciples’ first meeting with Jesus was when their lives changed forever. You remember the details of an event like that.”

One of God’s great gifts to us is the sense of wonder and beauty, love and longing that seems hard-wired into us as children. The challenge is not how we should remain children, but how we can grow up and dream again.

Belief is less about mystical knowledge than about noticing.

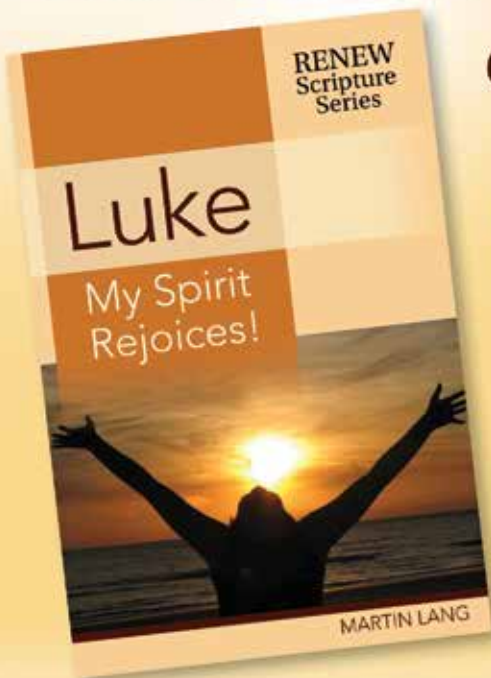


**BILL MCGARVEY**, a musician and writer, is the author of *The Freshman Survival Guide*, owner of *CathNewsUSA.com* and was the longtime editor in chief of *BustedHalo.com*. Twitter: @billmgarvey.



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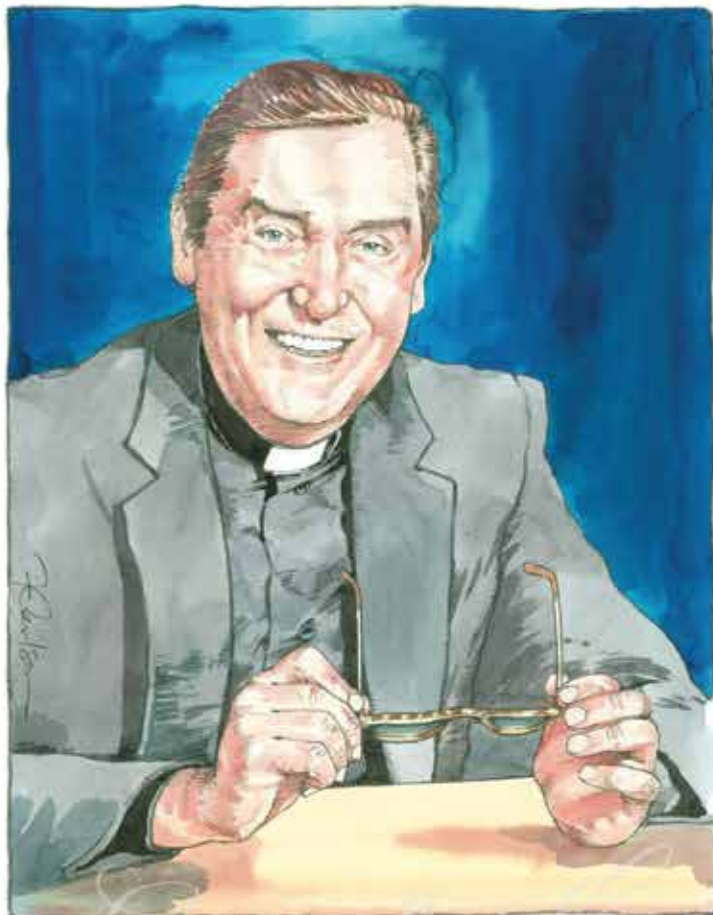


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## CRITERIA

The Hunt Prize is awarded annually to a single individual in recognition of his or her literary work. The 2016 Hunt Prize will be awarded to a journalist.

- Journalists are defined as those who generate regular written content for popular audiences and mass distribution (e.g., newspaper/magazine columnists and reporters; contributing editors/writers; editors, op-ed writers and bloggers, etc.)
- Topical areas include religion, the arts, sports, politics, economics and national/international public affairs.

Only English language works of which the nominee is the sole or principal author will be considered.

## ELIGIBILITY

Applicants must devote 50 percent or more of their professional hours to their work as journalists, primarily in print and/or written digital formats. Full-time broadcast journalists are not eligible.

- He or she must be 22 years of age on the day of nomination and no older than 49 years of age by December 31, 2016.
- He or she should be familiar with the Roman Catholic tradition and should have some appreciation for the intersection of faith and journalism and/or the literary arts.
- He or she should be a person of sound moral character and reputation and must not have published works that are manifestly atheistic or morally offensive.
- A person may be nominated more than once, if otherwise eligible.
- A previous recipient is ineligible.

## NOMINATIONS

Nominations for The Hunt Prize will open on George W. Hunt's birthday, at 12 a.m. on January 22, 2016 and the nomination period will close at 11:59 p.m. (EST) on March 31. All submissions may be made at: [huntprize.org](http://huntprize.org).

## FORMAL AWARD AND CEREMONY

The winner will be announced in Spring 2016, and will be awarded \$25,000. Formal awarding will take place at the Saint Thomas More Chapel and Center at Yale University in September 2016.

The recipient of the award will deliver a lecture that is related to his or her primary works, and the lecture will be published as a cover story in *America* within three months of its delivery.

For more information: [huntprize.org](http://huntprize.org)

# A TRULY TUNED HEART

*Meditations for troubled times*



One need not believe that ours are the worst of times to believe they are pretty bad. It's not just that the U.S. economy is making a slow recovery from a Great Recession and that many people are un- or underemployed or that wages are stagnant while top executive incomes soar astronomically; or that the United States leads the world in incarceration rates, mainly of minority populations, particularly of young men; or that we were terrorized on Sept. 11, 2001, and then launched a war of "shock and awe" on a nation that had nothing to do with the events of that horrible day, a war that has left thousands dead or maimed in body and spirit, both in the United States and in Iraq. It is not even that we are collectively altering the chemistry and physics of the planet, to our own ruin, or at least the ruin of the lives of our grandchildren. Any one of these crises would warrant deep concern and urgent action. Taken together—and other challenges could be added—it is easy to feel overwhelmed. But even

that is not what makes the case for this being among the worst of times.

What make this such a particularly troubled time are the intractability of the disputes, the endless assertions and counterassertions, the bawling and the din from entrenched ideological foes, the seemingly insurmountable divisions and recriminations. When I am particularly feeling the weight of all this, I often turn to a lovely poem from Walt Whitman for a reminder of a more expansive vision of human community.

## To Him That Was Crucified

Walt Whitman

*My spirit to yours dear brother,  
Do not mind because many sounding your name do not understand you,  
I do not sound your name, but I understand you,  
I specify you with joy O my comrade to salute you, and to salute those who are with you, before and*

*since, and those to come also,  
That we all labor together transmitting the same charge and succession,  
We few equals indifferent of lands, indifferent of times,  
We, enclosers of all continents, all castes, allowers of all theologies,*

*Compassionaters, perceivers, rapport of men,  
We walk silent among disputes and assertions, but reject not the disputers nor any thing that is asserted,  
We hear the bawling and din, we are reach'd at by divisions, jealousies, recriminations on every side,  
They close peremptorily upon us to surround us, my comrade,  
Yet we walk unheld, free, the whole earth over, journeying up and down till we make our ineffaceable mark upon time and the diverse eras,  
Till we saturate time and eras, that the men and women of races, ages to come, may prove brethren and lovers as we are.*

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was fond of saying, "The arc of the universe is long but it bends toward justice." To envision oneself on that arc may provide no small measure of consolation. But is it enough to transcend the hatreds and hostilities as if they were "symmetrical warfare"? Are there no discernments to be made among the disputers and theologies and worldviews? A pox on both your houses? Is the justice at the end of the arc not to be pursued passionately, if also compassionately and irenically in the meantime? Are we not called to take a stand when precious lives and essential values are at stake? But how do we do this in the spirit of Whitman's brotherly and sisterly love, not just for those we see as victims but also for those we see as victimizers? When I feel lost

amid the welter of competing and even vicious voices, I return to a magical poem by Seamus Heaney. To what or whom do we belong? What referent point gives us compass and rudder on a sea of troubles?

**From the Republic of Conscience**

Seamus Heaney

I  
When I landed in the republic of  
conscience  
it was so noiseless when the engines  
stopped  
I could hear a curlew high above  
the runway.

At immigration, the clerk was an  
old man  
who produced a wallet from his  
homespun coat  
and showed me a photograph of  
my grandfather.

The woman in customs asked me

to declare  
the words of our traditional cures  
and charms  
to heal dumbness and avert the evil  
eye.

No porters. No interpreter. No  
taxi.  
You carried your own burden and  
very soon  
your symptoms of creeping privi-  
lege disappeared.

II  
Fog is a dreaded omen there but  
lightning  
spells universal good and parents  
hang  
swaddled infants in trees during  
thunderstorms.

Salt is their precious mineral. And  
seashells  
are held to the ear during births  
and funerals.  
The base of all inks and pigments

is seawater.

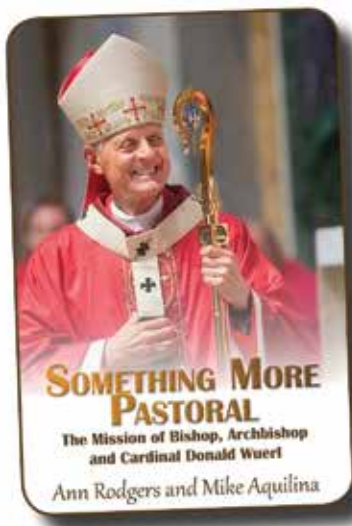
Their sacred symbol is a stylized  
boat.  
The sail is an ear, the mast a slop-  
ping pen,  
the hull a mouth-shape, the keel an  
open eye.

At their inauguration, public lead-  
ers  
must swear to uphold unwritten  
law and weep  
to atone for their presumption to  
hold office –

and to affirm their faith that all life  
sprang  
from salt in tears which the sky-god  
wept  
after he dreamt his solitude was  
endless.

III  
I came back from that frugal re-  
public

## READ THE PORTRAIT OF AN AMERICAN PASTOR: CARDINAL DONALD WUERL



"This book will be important for anyone who wants to understand the post-conciliar Church in America." — Bishop Robert Barron, *Word on Fire*

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— Fr. Thomas Rosica, CSB, *Salt and Light Television Network*

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with my two arms the one length,  
the customs  
woman having insisted my allow-  
ance was myself.

The old man rose and gazed into  
my face  
and said that was official recogni-  
tion  
that I was now a dual citizen.

He therefore desired me when I got  
home  
to consider myself a representative  
and to speak on their behalf in my  
own tongue.

Their embassies, he said, were ev-  
erywhere  
but operated independently  
and no ambassador would ever be  
relieved.

The Republic of Conscience is both familiar and strange, both intimate and distant, both calm and demanding. But if we were centered in that kind of gentle yoking of opposites, would we not be better equipped to enact the humanizing vision of Whitman's poem? Would we not be better able to promote both justice and peace? But such a lofty vision of the self may lose track of its humble origins, in sea salt and tears. Better, if we're feeling too grand, with our vision of a better world, to be reminded of our common humanity and the difficulty of knowing even ourselves in any definitive way. One of Emily Dickinson's sharp little meditations can help.

#105  
Emily Dickinson

To hang our head—ostensibly—  
And subsequent, to find  
That such was not the posture  
Of our immortal mind—

Affords the sly presumption  
That in so dense a fuzz—

You—too—take Cobweb attitudes  
Upon a plane of Gauze!

I don't think Dickinson's epistemological caution subverts the Republic of Conscience or the need to act boldly for whatever modicum of justice we might realize on that long arc of the universe, but it does remind us we are humble ambassadors, not mighty kings. But is this possible for mere human beings, greater than the beasts but lesser than the angels? Do we have exemplars who prove that even in the truly worst of times, human compassion can remain upright without succumbing to self-righteousness? Etty

Hillesum is the exemplar to whom I turn for an image of what a human can be even in the worst of circumstances.

**Equanimity**  
For Etty Hillesum, 1914-1943

An inner disposition of readiness;  
poise  
with ballast; more dynamic than  
mere stolidity;  
imperturbability without iron or  
rust.

The equanimous suffers surprise  
without panic, as a gyroscope spins  
and bobs



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in its groove, an inner-eye always  
attending,  
a watchman with night before him,  
and behind,  
a sleeping city, a mother dozing  
but alert to her infant's every  
breath.

What the hawk possesses, hungry  
but patient  
for prey; what the mouse or rabbit  
lacks utterly,  
all nerves, all scamper, the victim  
mentality.

The preeminent virtue of a young

Jewish woman,  
who found freedom in compassion  
for her fellow deportees  
on the way to the camps when she  
could have escaped.

As if death for her were the dwin-  
dling hum  
of a tuning fork, perfected in silence,  
a standard by which to set one's  
heart.

Equanimity sums up for me the psy-  
chic or spiritual or existential virtue that  
runs through the previous three poems.  
Whitman and his unnamed comrade,

Heaney's ambassador of conscience,  
Dickinson's self-effacing mind, all move  
toward a certain balance that can't be  
shaken, or at least not unhinged, even  
in and by the worst of times, of recrim-  
inations and counter-recriminations.  
Equanimity is the mark of Ignatius'  
contemplative in action, of Newman's  
educated citizen of philosophical mind.  
It is the life-giving hum of the human  
heart deeply and truly tuned.

**DR. ROGER BERGMAN** is director of the  
*Justice and Peace Studies Program at Creighton  
University and the author of Catholic Social  
Learning: Educating the Faith That Does  
Justice (Fordham University Press, 2011).*

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"This is going to be a Lent not so much of "Giving Up" as it will be "Giving In," that is, forgetting self while remembering others."  
BRUCE SNOWDEN, "LENTEN DUTIES: REMEMBER, THANK, SHARE"

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# Repentance for All

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT (C), MARCH 13, 2016

Readings: Is 43:16–21; Ps 126:1–6; Phil 3:8–14; Jn 8:1–11

*“Go your way, and from now on do not sin again” (Jn 8:11)*

Two stances toward our spiritual health stand in the way of repentance, and each of us might take either of these stances at various times. One is self-satisfaction, which can saturate our sense of spiritual worth: “What do I need to repent of? My relationship with God is fine.” Conversely, worthlessness can envelope us: “God could never forgive me; God does not want a person like me.”

When we reject our need for personal repentance, we convince ourselves that we are always in tune with God and only others need to change. The apostle Paul persecuted Jesus’ disciples because of his “zeal” for God and judged his “righteousness under the law, blameless” (Phil 3:6). Paul’s goal was to serve God by doing what he understood God and the Torah demanded.

In looking back on his previous behavior, Paul will say that he is “the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God,” invoking that humanly generated sense of worthlessness that can be felt when we reflect on our own sinfulness. But Paul does not stop there, for God’s call generated Paul’s repentance and the overwhelming power of grace that permeated Paul’s life and writing: “By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me

has not been in vain” (1 Cor 15:9–10).

Paul’s recognition of his personal sinfulness and his subsequent sense of worthlessness are redeemed by God’s grace in Jesus Christ. Once Paul experiences this grace, he recognizes the abundant forgiveness God lavishes on those who repent. Paul knows that the grace on offer to him, and to everyone, is not due to human achievements; nor is the offer rescinded because of overwhelming sins. It is presented to each of us as beloved creations of God. Repentance is our proper response to God’s mercy. All the human gains Paul achieved prior to his call on the road to Damascus can be described only as “rubbish” (*skybala*, a much earthier word in Greek that also means “dung”) in light of the saving act of Jesus Christ.

John’s Gospel also gives us a portrayal of God’s mercy for those who think they do not need to repent and those who might fear they are beyond it. Jesus encounters a woman who was said to have been caught in adultery by the religious officials who brought her to Jesus. The scribes and Pharisees took the woman to Jesus, however, not because of her sinfulness but because of their own. They wanted to “test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him.” This is a ruse intended to snare Jesus; but like Paul, they must believe they are fulfilling God’s law by seeking to accuse Jesus.

Jesus challenges the religious leaders

to cast a stone at her according to the laws governing adultery if any of them is “without sin.” Whether the charge of adultery against this woman is real or trumped up, the accusation against her simply hides their own motives and sins. Refusing to repent for their own sins, Jesus actually shows them mercy by allowing them to walk away to consider their need for forgiveness. It is not just the woman who is asked “not to sin again,” whatever her sins might be, but all of us. Jesus challenges all of us to reckon with our own sin before that of others.

Those who are overwhelmed by their own sinfulness often feel that their sins make them unfit to be called a disciple of Jesus. Those who refuse to acknowledge their own



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Reflect on God’s mercy and forgiveness. Do you sometimes feel that there is nothing for which you must repent? Or do you more often sense that you are not worthy of God’s mercy and forgiveness? What allows you to experience God’s overwhelming grace?

sinfulness see mercy and forgiveness as something others need. But just as none of us is unworthy to repent and to approach God for forgiveness, so we must be willing to acknowledge that we are all in need of God’s mercy.

If you believe God’s mercy is only for others or that you do not need it, heed the apostle Paul: “press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.” God’s mercy and forgiveness are constant, and repentance is the path that reveals God’s grace and allows us to press on to Christ, the goal itself.

**JOHN W. MARTENS**

**JOHN W. MARTENS** is a professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn. Twitter: @Biblejunkies.



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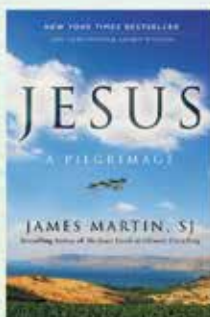
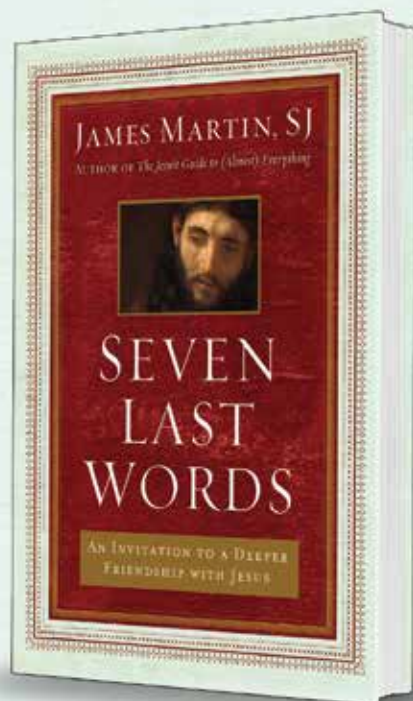
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