

BOOKS ON THE BIBLE

America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

MARCH 10, 2014 \$3.50

See the Person

A NEW STANCE ON HOMOSEXUALITY?

JOHN LANGAN



REMEMBERING
DANIEL J. HARRINGTON

You might expect a 92-year-old man who has lived through the worst of the 20th century to have a certain gloomy angst about the future of humanity. Not so with Ladislav Orsy, S.J., a world-renowned professor of law at Georgetown University and a frequent contributor to these pages. A couple of years back, I had the good fortune to attend a series of lectures Father Orsy gave at Oxford University on the thought of Francisco de Vitoria, O.P., and the origins of international law. Father Orsy, mind you, is no naïve idealist either. He has spent much of the last 20 years contemplating the 16th-century clash between European powers and the indigenous civilizations of the Americas.

The conquistadors, according to Orsy, did not think of themselves as brutish or ungentlemanly. The conquest of the Amerindians, in their minds, had rock-solid philosophical, legal and theological justifications. The gist of their excuse, of course, was that the Indians were neither rational nor responsible and were therefore not really people; they were no-ones. Since “no one” owned the land, the Spanish imperialists felt justified in claiming it for their king. Francisco de Vitoria, the 16th-century Dominican, thought that all the conquistadors’ justifications were just so much pap. “Vitoria,” said Orsy, “affirmed that the Indians were no less rational and free human beings than the Spaniards, and they were therefore protected by the *jus gentium*, the law of nations.” Vitoria “then elaborated on the norms and demands of such an international order, advocating universal freedom of religion.”

In addition to looking at what Vitoria taught, however, Father Orsy says we must also look at how he reached his conclusions, because his method reveals something equally important. Vitoria began his work, according to Orsy, not with ethereal philosophical concepts, but with empirical observation. To

borrow a phrase from Christology, Vitoria’s analysis proceeded “from below.” He looked first to the individual human person and then to the political community; then, through rational reflection on both, he drew conclusions and formed concepts. What is important about this method, according to Orsy, is that Vitoria’s analysis, even at its most conceptual, was never divorced from human experience, particularly the experience of those most closely affected by his ideas.

That is similar to the methodology that John Langan, S.J., employs in this issue. Father Langan would be the first to point out that he is no Vitoria, and no one is comparing 21st-century gay people with 16th-century Amerindians. Still, there is an echo of Vitoria’s method in the way Father Langan describes how the church needs to consider the experiential as well as rationalistic dimensions of its stance toward homosexuality. We need to place the person, in other words, at the heart of the question. In a certain sense, that is precisely what the pope has also been asking us to do.

In Orsy’s judgment, too many modern philosophers and legal scholars tend to philosophize “from above” and in their pre-occupation with the internal coherence of their ideas or the narrow grammatical exegesis of law, they lose sight of the very reason law exists in the first place: to safeguard the rights and dignity of the human person, not as he or she exists in some imagined platonic form but in the real world.

Here is where Orsy’s mildly astonishing optimism shines through: In the face of staggering injustice and violence, Orsy, like Vitoria, still has some faith in the power of human reason, married to empathy, to formulate moral and just positive laws. In the main, I tend to share this optimism. But it does invite an unsettling question: If we can do it, why so often do we not?

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Probation for Profit

Two people receive a \$400 citation for driving without a valid license. One mails a check to the court and moves on. The other, unemployed and unable to pay the fine in full, is placed on “pay-only probation.” The person is required to make smaller payments plus additional “supervision fees” over months or even years—under the constant threat of jail time for a missed payment—until the ever-growing debt is paid down. The poorer an offender is, the longer it takes to scrape together payments and the more fees accumulate. Private probation companies, working with over 1,000 courts across the United States, exploit this fundamental injustice in order to make a profit.

A report released by Human Rights Watch on Feb. 5 details abusive practices in Georgia, Mississippi and Alabama, where this offender-funded model of criminal justice prevails. Probation companies offer cash-strapped counties a deal that seems too good to be true: at no cost to the taxpayer, they will collect debts owed to the court by low-level offenders, who are required to pay supervision fees to the company as a condition of their probation. In 1983 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional to revoke probation because a person is unable to pay a fine. While it is the responsibility of a judge to determine a probationer’s ability to pay, in practice this decision is often delegated to the service providers, who have a financial stake in the outcome. According to Human Rights Watch, private officers routinely threaten and use incarceration to extract payments from indigent offenders and their families.

The report concludes that predatory practices are not the result of privatization of probation per se but are “inevitable without strong government oversight.” Unless courts can dedicate the public resources necessary for such oversight, private probation companies have no business dispensing justice.

Euthanasia for Children?

The Belgian Parliament has approved legislation to allow euthanasia for terminally ill children who are near death and in “constant and unbearable physical” pain. To be a candidate for euthanasia, a child must have a “capacity of discernment” and parental approval and must be interviewed by a pediatric psychiatrist or psychologist, who would then make a formal certification in writing. A 16-person commission established by the euthanasia law passed in 2002, half of whom are physicians, is to ensure

that the regulations are followed. King Philippe is expected to sign the measure into law.

The legislation has faced resistance. The proposal is rightly opposed by some Belgian pediatricians as well as Archbishop André-Joseph Leonard of Brussels. On Feb. 6, the archbishop helped lead a day of prayer and fasting in protest against the legislation. He said in a statement that the protest was intended to “wake up people’s consciences.”

The U.S. Supreme Court, in *Roper v. Simmons* (2005), ruled it unconstitutional to apply the death penalty to anyone under 18. The decision rightly pointed to the European consensus that it was barbaric to execute children. With the passage of the Belgian law, the tables will have been turned. If children are not to be held fully accountable for a capital crime, which might lead to their execution, should they be considered capable of making a decision about when to end their own lives?

Beyond Celebrity

Italy has a new prime minister, a charismatic politician who has been compared variously to Britain’s Tony Blair and to John F. Kennedy. Until recently, the 39-year-old Matteo Renzi was the mayor of Florence. On Feb. 17 he was appointed by President Giorgio Napolitano to form a coalition government following the “irrevocable” resignation of Enrico Letta, who tried to hold his government together for nearly 10 months. Mr. Renzi ousted Mr. Letta as head of the Democratic Party.

Mr. Renzi’s political rise has been extraordinary. At 29, he was Italy’s youngest provincial president. Then he became mayor of Florence, head of his party and prime minister. He is known as *Il Rottamatore*—“The Scrapper”—but his tenacity has brought him less flattering comparisons with another prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi.

The new prime minister is center-left politically and has vowed to get the country out “from the quagmire”—as he puts it—and set Italy on the path to recovery from its economic trials. With a youth unemployment rate of 40 percent, that will be an audacious undertaking. Mr. Renzi has also been compared to the Fonz, of “Happy Days” fame, with his fondness for leather jackets and white T-shirts, but he will need more than celebrity to tackle this job. If he lacks the political acumen to make real change in Italy, he could end up like other promising politicians whose luster dims after a while. A former winner of the Italian version of “Wheel of Fortune,” he will need the wheel to turn his way to help accomplish his goals as prime minister.

When the Law Is a Crime

With five now-famous words, “Who am I to judge?” Pope Francis offered a fresh embodiment of the Catholic teaching that homosexuals “must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity.” Tragically, we live in a world where people are not only judged harshly for their sexual orientation but are also targeted and punished for it. In Uganda, President Yoweri Museveni recently signed a bill that criminalizes and punishes “the promotion or recognition” of same-sex relationships. A first offense could result in a prison sentence of 14 years; repeated offenses could result in a life sentence. Nigeria had already enacted a law that prescribes a 10-year prison sentence for those who “directly or indirectly” make a “public show” of a homosexual relationship. The law also punishes those who are even marginally affiliated with gay clubs or similar organizations.

These laws have led to scores of arrests and have precipitated a wave of violence—often ignored by police—against anyone even suspected of being homosexual. The laws are so vague that anyone can be accused of being gay solely because of their speech, dress or friendships. Gay and lesbian people in these countries are living under a sword of Damocles, constantly afraid that they may be discovered and persecuted at any moment. Many are driven to despair, even suicide. It is clear that many factors have contributed to this situation: a deep-seated fear that homosexuality constitutes a mortal threat to society, a too-literal and highly selective interpretation of the Bible, popular African opposition to a neo-colonial imposition of “Western” liberal values and the interests of cynical politicians who want to strengthen their hold on power.

It is especially disturbing that such legislation is immensely popular in predominately Christian countries like Uganda, where 40 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and the Catholic bishops have sent mixed signals about the legislation. When the bill was first considered in 2009, Archbishop Cyprian Lwanga of Kampala, speaking on behalf of the Catholic bishops’ conference, said it was “at odds with the core values” of Christianity. When the bill was reintroduced in 2012, however, the Uganda Joint Christian Council, which includes Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox bishops, expressed support for the bill. Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama of Jos, Nigeria, meanwhile, has praised President Goodluck Jonathan for his “courageous and wise decision” to sign the new law in that country.

Christian concern for preserving the traditional institution of marriage cannot justify these excessive and punitive measures, which extend far beyond simply codifying a definition of marriage. It is not inconsistent, therefore, to support traditional marriage and to oppose these measures, which are unjustifiable assaults on the human rights and inherent dignity of gay and lesbian people. Lest anyone be led to believe otherwise, supporters of traditional marriage have, in fact, a special obligation to loudly denounce any unjust discrimination against homosexuals.

The church’s vigorous support for traditional marriage, moreover, must be accompanied by advocacy for the human rights of gays and lesbians in equal measure. This is required by the church’s own teaching. Indeed, a growing number of Catholic leaders have offered unqualified support for the decriminalization of homosexuality. In December 2009, the delegation of the Holy See to the United Nations said the church opposes “all forms of violence” and “discriminatory penal legislation” against gay persons. That same month, according to a diplomatic cable published by WikiLeaks, Cardinal Antonelli Ennio, then-president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, said that Catholic bishops in Uganda “or anywhere should not support the criminalization of homosexuality.” Most recently, on Jan. 29, an editorial in *The Southern Cross*, the newspaper of the bishops of South Africa, Botswana and Swaziland, urged Catholics in Africa “to stand with the powerless” and “sound the alarm at the advance throughout Africa of draconian legislation aimed at criminalizing homosexuals.”

We add our voice to this swelling chorus. Pope Francis has described gay people as “socially wounded” because “they feel like the church has always condemned them.” Catholics must examine how we contribute, perhaps even inadvertently, to a culture of fear and shame. In a field hospital after battle, a basic responsibility of the caregivers is to “do no harm.” The church must oppose violence against gay persons and should strongly advocate for the decriminalization of homosexuality. No one should be subject to a criminal penalty simply for being gay. If laws like these do not constitute the “unjust discrimination” against gay people that the church rightly denounces, then what possibly could?



REPLY ALL

Lack of Progress

Re “Talking Poverty” (2/3, Current Comment): I concede that the “war on poverty” resulted in programs that made poor Americans slightly more comfortable. They can get food stamps, medical care and a monthly check to keep their heads just above water. But that is all that we continue to accomplish today. I am not satisfied with the total lack of progress. In 50 years since the war was declared, poverty should at least be a transient state as opposed to a chronic one.

Like all wars, the war on poverty can only be won in the trenches. Small, private nonprofit agencies need resources and oversight, but they also need flexibility. The current big government, top-down approach stifles creativity. To win this war, agencies need to be small, creative and allowed a great deal of flexibility, as long as they are achieving results.

PAUL STOLZ
Online comment

What Data?

Re “Talking Poverty” (2/3, Current Comment): I find it puzzling that the editors can assert that they are puzzled that the worthiness of President

Johnson’s “war on poverty” is being debated.

The data, depending on how one interprets it, does not axiomatically demonstrate that this war has been either helpful or beneficial to the sick, elderly or poor. Further, how does anyone know they would be many more (or fewer) in number without this war? After all, not one shred of data was provided or even a reasoned proposition argued.

Instead, this is a case of “Don’t confuse me with facts. I have already made up my mind.” I’d expect much more from the Jesuit tradition.

KEN HERFURTH
Abilene, Tex.

Totality of the Marriage

Re “Life Lessons,” by James F. Keenan, S.J. (2/3): “*Humanae Vitae*” reaffirmed the traditional teaching of the church that bans the use of contraceptives in marriage. It seems to me, however, that the encyclical interpreted Scripture and natural law so narrowly that a commitment to a loving marriage is defined solely by each unimpaired sexual act.

Each sexual act is not isolated, but finds its validity within the context of a couple’s lifelong commitment to marriage. In that sense, the whole is great-

er than the parts. A couple is open to procreation within the totality of their marriage, although each sexual act isn’t necessarily open to having a child.

Responsible parenthood involves more than bringing children into the world. For example, how will parents care for their children, given the parents’ health or economic condition? And, paraphrasing Pope Francis, “who is the church to judge” whether a marriage is holy or selfish?

PATRICK T. DARCY
Columbia, Mo.

Extend the Logic

I admire Father Keenan’s enterprise in teaching “*Humanae Vitae*” to his students. He should be especially praised for using the pope’s encyclical to teach collegians “the rightness of chastity and the wrongness of sex outside of marriage,” a point not made often enough with today’s young adults.

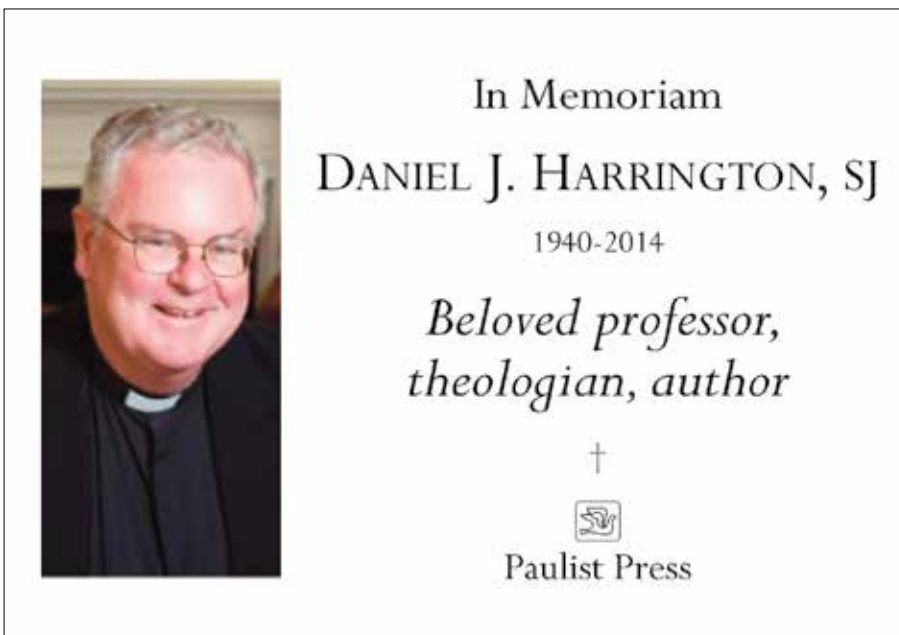
Another commendable feature of his course flows from his experience as a theologian working in the area of H.I.V./AIDS. He teaches that if one of the spouses is H.I.V. positive, the use of a contraceptive would be morally permissible because their motive is disease-prevention, not contraception. I agree with this positive interpretation, but I find it illogical not to grant the same positive affirmation to a faith-filled, loving couple, who for serious physical, economic, psychological or social conditions, would decide to limit offspring by using a contraceptive.

I think the blame rests with the papal commission on birth control, whose final report overwhelmingly advocated change but failed to note that the commission had thoroughly discussed the question of “intrinsic evil” and agreed that the term did not apply to contraceptive devices.

FRANK MAUROVICH
Ossining, N.Y.

Against Nature

About 50 years ago, a Chinese priest opined to me that if something is



contrary to human nature, common sense and the common experience of humanity, whether it is Catholicism or Communism, for example, then it won't work. "Humanae Vitae" proves this, as observed in the breach by millions of good, devout Catholics.

The Holy Spirit is my refuge. Though it works with glacial speed, I have hope because the spirit moves forward, inextricably always forward. I am 86 and will probably be driven crazy before I am driven out of the church.

ERNEST C. RASKAUSKAS SR.
Potomac, Md.

Save the Mothers

The Feb. 3 issue of *America* was one of the best ever. I was most impressed by "Life Lessons," by Father Keenan, and "Of Many Things," by Matt Malone, S.J., which included excerpts from "Standing for the Unborn," published by the Jesuits in the United States in 2003.

Taken together, these would be the perfect response to the disingenuous and unfair criticism recently directed by the United Nations to the Vatican. They encompass the beauty and logic of the Catholic commitment to human life in all of its forms and stages, and they jointly evoke the need for both a moral and a fair society as the underpinning of healthy families and, ultimately, our national civilization.

Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley, O.F.M.Cap., of Boston, in his homily at the opening Mass of the Vigil for Life in Washington, D.C., summed up this view succinctly when he stated, "The truth is that we can save those babies only by saving the mothers."

PAT FLANAGAN
North Grafton, Mass.

Open to New Ways

"Worship at Willow Creek," by Laurie Ziliak (2/3), certainly raises some challenges for us. We share people, ministers and the word with other Christians, but there is also a fourth dimension of our Catholic worship:

the sacrifice of the cross renewed in the body and blood of Christ.

The awesomeness of this mystery, celebrated splendidly or simply, always calls for some restraint, lest the human elements in our worship overwhelm and obscure the divine reality in whose presence we stand. Balancing all of this is a perpetual pastoral endeavor and requires us to be ever open to new ways of enhancing the sights and sounds of our Sunday Masses. In this regard, Willow Creek has something to teach us.

(MSGR.) NICHOLAS SCHNEIDER
Clayton, Mo.

Require Muskets

After reading "Stop the Shooters" (Reply All, 2/3), the letter from John Natale about gun violence, I cannot remain silent. His creepy fantasy of all U.S. citizens walking the streets as Yosemite Sams is downright unnerving. Gun violence in this nation is a fast-spreading contagion, but the answer to any epidemic is not more of the ailment.

If perpetual adoration of the Second Amendment is to become this nation's new golden calf, and everyone should be packing heat as Mr. Natale fondly hopes, then we must comply with the founding fathers fully and absolutely, and all the guns should be muskets.

(REV.) PATRICK M. JANKOWIAK
Bay City, Mich.

Our Responsibility

Re "A Home for Christmas" (Editorial, 12/23): Sadly, even though we know what works to materially assist the

homeless to get back on their feet and into safe and secure housing, our members of Congress and state legislators refuse to provide the necessary funding.

Every heartbreaking story is met with suspicion and then dismissed. The response seems to be that the homeless are suffering only from self-inflicted misery, so we have no responsibility to them. Shame on all of us.

MIKE EVANS
Online comment

Identify Both Mayors

In "A Home for Christmas," the editors write about homelessness, a worthy subject but addressed in an unworthy manner.

Chicago has twice as many homeless as New York, a much larger city, and homelessness increased by 10 percent in Chicago in 2013, a higher annual increase compared with the 12 years of the Bloomberg administration in New York.

Please report the facts impartially, fully and honestly. The editors name Bloomberg but fail to identify Rahm Emanuel, the president's confidant. If the editors are going to single out one mayor by name and place blame on him, honesty requires that you find out the name of the mayor of Chicago and publish that as well. Your editorial on the homeless reflects poorly on *America*.

JAMES R. MARTIN
Brookfield, N.H.

Editor's Note: Mr. Martin's point is well taken. America's view beyond the Hudson River is not always as clear as our view down Broadway. We are working on that.

WHAT YOU'RE READING at americamagazine.org

- 1 **How Can I Find God?** by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. (Vantage Point, 8/30/1997)
- 2 **Separation Anxiety**, by Anna Nussbaum Keating (2/17)
- 3 **Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., R.I.P.**, by James Martin, S.J. (In All Things, 2/8)
- 4 **A View From Abroad**, by Massimo Faggioli (2/24)
- 5 **Our Secular Future**, by R. R. Reno (2/24)

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SYNOD ON THE FAMILY

Survey Results and Civilly Remarried Figure in Cardinals' Dialogue

As some 150 cardinals from around the world gathered with Pope Francis to talk about the family, their two days of discussion focused particularly on three points: the Christian vision of people and family life, essential pastoral programs to support families and ministry to divorced and civilly remarried Catholics.

The consistory concluded on Feb. 22, the feast of the Chair of St. Peter the Apostle, as Pope Francis created 19 new cardinals, many from nations in the developing world, selections that emphasized his attention to the problems of poverty and development. The occasion became unprecedented when the ceremony was joined by Benedict XVI, the pope emeritus. The pope and the pope-emeritus embraced warmly and exchanged greetings before the ceremony began.

During his first ordinary public consistory to create new cardinals, Pope Francis encouraged the whole College of Cardinals to recognize their office as one of service and readiness for sacrifice. Calling on the cardinals to pray especially for suffering peoples and for all Christians suffering from discrimination and persecution, he said, "The church needs us also to be peacemakers, building peace by our words, our hopes and our prayers."

Although the discussions during the meetings over Feb. 20 and 21 were closed to the press, Federico Lombardi, S.J., the Vatican spokesman, provided an overview. Father Lombardi said the cardinals spoke broadly about Christian anthropology—the biblically based vision of people—and the challenge of living that out in the "context of a secularized society that promotes visions of the human person, the family and sexuality that are very different.

"The climate wasn't one of complaining, but of realism," Father Lombardi said.

Cardinal Walter Kasper of Germany, now retired, gave a two-hour opening presentation, laying out the biblical and theological basis of church teaching on marriage. He emphasized the challenge of finding ways to always fulfill two basic obligations: to remain faithful to Jesus' words about the indissolubility of marriage and to embody the mercy God always shows to those who have sinned or fallen short.

Cardinal Kasper referred to Pope

Emeritus Benedict XVI's work on this issue when he asked if, beyond rigor and laxity, the sacrament of penance could perhaps offer the path to accommodating difficult situations. Father Lombardi said several cardinals spoke about the church's process for granting annulments and possible ideas for improving the process or simplifying it.

The cardinals were not expected to make any decisions or vote on proposals during their meeting, Father Lombardi said. Rather, they were holding a discussion in preparation for October's extraordinary synod on the family and a meeting of the Synod of Bishops in 2015 on the same theme.

Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, general secretary of the upcoming synod, said on Feb. 21 that the responses to a Vatican questionnaire about Catholics' family life reflected a great amount of suffering around the world, "especially



ELEVATION. Cardinal Chibly Langlois of Les Cayes, Haiti, greets guests after he was made a cardinal by Pope Francis at St. Peter's Basilica on Feb. 22.

by those who feel excluded or abandoned by the church because they find themselves in a state of life that does not correspond to the church's doctrine and discipline."

As of Feb. 19, about 80 percent of the world's bishops' conferences and 60 percent of the Vatican congregations and councils had turned in formal responses to a questionnaire distributed by the synod office in October.

The volume of responses, which also include about 700 submissions from Catholic groups and individuals, demonstrates great interest in the synod's plans to discuss the family when it meets at the Vatican on Oct. 5-19, said the general secretary.

By urging bishops around the world to conduct the broadest consultation possible given the brief amount of time allotted, synod officials "sparked a spontaneous reaction that may seem surprising, but is actually proof of how



necessary it is to go out of our offices” to where people really live, he said.

The results compiled by the bishops’ conferences, he said, show “the urgency of recognizing the lived reality of the people and of beginning a pastoral dialogue with those who have distanced themselves from the church for various reasons.” Simply by distributing the questionnaire so widely and inviting everyone to respond, he said, “a process has been opened for restoring the trust many have lost.”

UKRAINE

Stepping Back From the Brink?

Security and police forces seemed to melt away from the embattled Independence Square in Kiev and throughout the city, as it awoke on Feb. 21, the day after opposition and

government forces signed an agreement that effectively ended turmoil in Kiev’s streets. In a rapid and remarkable series of developments the following day, the parliament of Ukraine voted to oust President Viktor F. Yanukovich and turned over the powers of the presidency to its new speaker, Oleksandr V. Turchnov.

Turchnov, who headed Ukraine’s state security service, is a close ally of former Prime Minister Yulia V. Tymoshenko, who was freed from prison on Saturday. The dizzying pace of change, as Ukraine appeared to step back from the brink of greater disorder, even civil war, continued on Feb. 23 as an arrest warrant was issued for the ousted president. Yanukovich’s own party denounced him because of the deadly crackdown on protesters—at least 82 people died in clashes between security forces and anti-government protestors—and Ukraine’s military vowed to support the new government.

The invigorated parliament then voted to nationalize the extensive private residence of the deposed Yanukovich.

Yanukovich, who has refused to resign, remained defiant—at least on television. He called parliament’s weekend maneuvers “a coup d’état” by “a group of gangsters,” adding that “Ukraine is witnessing the return of the Nazis.” Despite his strong words, Yanukovich attempted to flee the country on Feb. 22. His plane was stopped by border authorities, and his current whereabouts are unknown.

Leaders of mainly

Russian-speaking regions of eastern Ukraine gathered in Kharkiv to challenge the legitimacy of the national parliament. They also made clear they would take control of their territories in a move that appeared to increase the possibility of a split in the former Soviet republic.

The rapid political changes came at a price. On Sunday priests were praying with demonstrators as coffins were displayed in front of the crowd on Kiev’s Maidan (“Independence”) Square.

“There are too many deaths. They have given their young lives for Ukraine,” a demonstrator said.

Another agreed, saying she feared more bloodshed. “We should not destroy the barricades until we replace all authorities,” she added, “we shouldn’t bring them down under any circumstances. The beast is wounded but we don’t know what this wounded beast will be doing.”

On Feb. 22, a 28-year-old university lecturer killed in the explosion of violence in Kiev on Feb. 20 was laid to rest in Lviv. Bohdan Solchanyk, a lecturer in modern history at Lviv’s National Catholic University, was mourned



MAIDAN. An impromptu shrine by a barricade near Independence Square in Kiev, Ukraine, on Feb. 21.

by his family, friends and hundreds of weeping students and other young people.

Bishop Borys Gudziak, who heads the Ukrainian Catholic eparchy of France and the Benelux countries and serves as the university president, presided at the funeral. "Our community is broken up about this," he said, describing Solchanyk as a "man full of life, very much engaged in society, concerned for the future of Ukraine.

"The country in these days is profoundly traumatized," said Bishop Gudziak. Of the loss of life among the protestors, like Solchanyk, he said, "There is profound sadness, bewilderment, but also inspiration.

"What is very important for all of us to try to fathom is the mystery of this iniquity, raw evil that was confronted by innocent young people."

He added, "In this atmosphere of tension and emotion, it is important to be messengers of peace," he continued. "What will be very important is that the church is sacramentally accompanying the people with prayer for the departed, with blessings for the injured and with a healing touch to a society that has been traumatized."

The church has tried to be close to the people during this time of unrest, he said, though "we also realize that we control precious little. We don't pretend to be politicians or leaders of political movements."

New Secretariat For the Economy

Pope Francis announced on Feb. 24 the creation of a new financial structure to coordinate and oversee the finances of the Holy See and Vatican City State. This was the latest move in the effort to reform the scandal-prone Vatican Bank and other financial institutions in Rome. The announcement

NEWS BRIEFS

Cardinal Jorge Urosa Savino of Caracas told Venezuelan television on Feb. 20 that the church is willing to help establish peace, but reminded the government of its duty to **rein in armed groups** that are violently disrupting peaceful demonstrations. + Noting the proposed death penalty for the 20-year-old alleged Boston Marathon bomber, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men urged in a statement on Feb. 19 that prosecutors consider **restorative justice alternatives** that do not "deepen the harm and wounds" of Tsarnaev's alleged crimes. + The U.S. bishops' conference urged the Obama administration on Feb. 12 to finally sign on to the 1997 U.N. convention intended to **ban the use of land mines**. + Megan Rice, 84, of Washington, a member of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, was sentenced on Feb. 18 to **35 months in prison** for breaking into a nuclear weapons facility in Tennessee and defacing its walls in July 2012. + In an unusual video message, recorded on an iPhone and released on YouTube, the pope says all **Christians share blame** for their divisions, speaks of his "longing" for their unity and insists that God will bring the miracle of Christian unity to completion.



Megan Rice

comes after several days of meetings of both the council of eight cardinals, established by Pope Francis to advise on reform of the Roman Curia and governance of the universal church, and the committee of 15 cardinals that oversees the economic affairs of the Holy See. Cardinal George Pell of Sydney, Australia, will head a new Secretariat for the Economy, which will be responsible for annual budgets and have authority over all the Holy See's administrative activities.

N.Y.: Fewer Abortions Overall, Still High

In New York City's African-American community, more pregnancies ended in abortion than live births in 2012, and its 31,328 abortions—6,570 more than the 24,758 live births—represented a

shocking 42.4 percent of all abortions, according to a report released on Feb. 21 by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Thirty-one percent of abortions occurred in the city's Hispanic community. While the percentages of abortions occurring in the city's African-American and Hispanic communities were high, far outstripping their general population figures, overall the city reported far fewer abortions in 2012 than in recent years. Fewer New York City women are having abortions now than at any time since the procedure became legal in the state in 1970. Though it remains double the national average, the abortion rate in New York dropped 8.6 percent from 2011 and has fallen 22 percent since 2000.

From CNS and other sources.



When in Rome

President Obama will meet Pope Francis on March 27. The first African-American president will meet the first Latin American pope. Barack Obama and Jorge Bergoglio were outsiders, a new senator and an old Jesuit with, it appeared, little chance that they would lead the most powerful nation and religious institution on earth. Both were elected as reformers, committed to change in Washington and the Vatican. The president was Time’s person of the year and a Nobel Prize-winner, but that seems long ago. The pope is riding a wave of enthusiasm onto the cover of not only Time, but Rolling Stone as well.

Pope Francis is just entering his second year. President Obama is in his sixth year, and there is growing discussion about his successor. The pope has no term and benefits from contrasts, some unfair, with his predecessor. The president has been elected twice after long, grueling campaigns. The pope was elected in a quick, secret election with the only exit poll a puff of white smoke.

Mr. Obama comes to Rome with a hurting economy, immigration reform stalled and health care reform under attack. More people disapprove of than support his leadership. Pope Francis’ ratings are twice as high, riding a wave of public interest and approval. The president’s opponents are many and open in their disdain for him and his policies. The pope’s adversaries seem few in number and reluctant to voice their opposition.

The president, who came to change Washington, faces relentless partisan opposition, and Washington is still

JOHN CARR is director of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

dysfunctional. Francis comes with a mandate for reform. He has changed the papacy with simple acts and strong words, abandoning old ways and privileges. He is beginning to choose new leaders and renew Vatican structures.

The pope and the president should not ignore their fundamental differences over protecting unborn children and preserving traditional marriage. They should look for ways to collaborate in steps toward a more just and peaceful world, including the search for peace in the Middle East and, perhaps ironically, the protection of Christians and other religious minorities around the world.

President Obama has voiced his admiration for Pope Francis, calling him “somebody who lives out the teachings of Christ” with “incredible humility, an incredible sense of empathy to the least of these, the poor.” I suspect President Obama would advise Pope Francis to use his mandate and popularity to move quickly to reform the Vatican and to advance his priorities.

The president could also learn some lessons from Pope Francis. The pope’s vision is not Washington’s. He looks at the economy and all of life from the bottom up, from the fringes of society, through the eyes of those on the outside, not insiders. These perspectives should guide the administration’s new pursuit of opportunity for all.

Pope Francis’ first step after his election was to reach out and seek the advice of leaders outside the Roman Curia, creating an unprecedented global council of cardinals. The president

could bring new energy and perspectives to his administration by following the pope’s example.

Pope Francis said he would not be “obsessed” with abortion, marriage and contraception, offering not retreat but greater “context.” The Obama administration is adamant in support of “abortion rights” and has moved from opposing to supporting same-sex marriage. In the courts, they are opposing

The president could learn some lessons from Pope Francis.

the Little Sisters of the Poor, the University of Notre Dame and others who are seeking relief from the Department of Health and Human Services’ mandate for free contraception. They have granted waivers for some Catholic institutions, employers and individuals, but not for all Catholic ministries.

When will the administration make clear they are not “obsessed” with these issues?

By taking the name Francis, the pope made clear his priorities in public life: the poor, peace and care for creation, saying “the measure of the greatness of a society is found in the way it treats those most in need.” This would be a worthy criterion and legacy for the remainder of the Obama presidency.

This historic meeting will be full of symbolism and substance—and contrasts: a young president growing older and more frustrated and an old pope who seems to be growing younger and more empowered. The pope and the president could have a unique discussion on how to keep “hope and change” alive in their demanding offices amid challenging times. **JOHN CARR**

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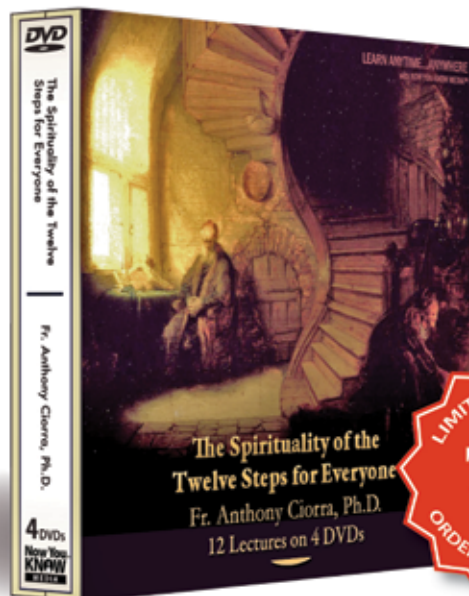
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UNDERSTANDING
POPE FRANCIS'
STATEMENTS ON
HOMOSEXUALITY

PHOTO: CNS PHOTO/PAUL HARRING



See the Person

BY JOHN LANGAN

Until recently, where the Catholic Church stands on homosexuality was regarded as obvious. The stance of the church toward gays and lesbians and their distinctive activities was seen as negative, leading to judgments and condemnations. Of decisive importance was the negative moral judgment on homosexual acts as intrinsically evil. Even though the magisterium had distinguished between homosexual acts and a homosexual inclination, the intrinsic moral evil of the acts meant that while the sexual orientation was not sinful in itself, it represented an inclination to do sinful things and so had to be resisted.

Recently, the church in the United States has strongly resisted the movement to legalize same-sex marriage, arguing that it would legitimize intrinsically evil homosexual acts, that it would have very negative effects on the institution of marriage, and that it would pose a serious threat to religious freedom. Recent comments by Pope Francis in this magazine and elsewhere imply that there may turn out to be more complexity to the Catholic position. Francis has declared on several occasions that he has no desire to challenge or change Catholic moral teaching on sexual matters or to innovate in church doctrine. Presumably, he does not want to contradict himself or the long tradition of Catholic teaching on this subject, which has biblical roots and has shaped legal norms in most Western countries for a long time. So, what is the pope up to?

WHO AM I TO JUDGE?
Pope Francis aboard the
papal flight from Rio de
Janeiro to Rome, July 28.

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Trying to decipher the mind of a sitting pope is a perilous enterprise, especially when he is opening up a highly controversial topic in both church and civil life. The most a friendly and admiring moral philosopher can do is read his words and actions and offer suggestions about how to construe them so that they form a coherent picture. This is something that should be done before people celebrate or condemn what the pope has been saying. It is important to keep in mind that on this topic the pope is not using the ordinary means of presenting and developing church teaching, which would normally be done by formal addresses, statements from Vatican officials and, in a more lasting form, through encyclical letters.

One way to characterize what the pope is doing is that he is prodding us to think about what the stance of the church toward homosexuality should be, rather than what it generally has been. Now the word *stance*, while common enough in English, is not a theological term. Theologians and most bishops speak of church teachings and doctrines, of norms and principles, of moral judgments and moral conclusions. Drawing on legal reasoning and moral philosophy, they aim at conclusions that can be applied consistently across a wide range of cases.

A ready starting point is the condemnation of homosexual acts as intrinsically evil. This approach is rationalistic rather than experiential, though those who employ it may turn to experience to support their arguments. For the moral rationalist, there is no need to encounter the people who perform the acts in order to learn what they experience or what the acts mean to them. This is not to say there are no emotional factors at work in the condemnation. They may be kept in the background, but such emotions can be quite powerful.

For many years a powerful set of forces shaped the rationalist approach. There were legal prohibitions against homosexual activity; experts in psychology saw it as a form of arrested or incomplete development; people were reluctant to recognize this inclination in themselves or in family or friends. Homosexuality was considered shameful, disreputable, dangerous and sinful. It was something to be shunned, denied, marginalized and condemned.

For a generation this severely negative set of social judgments and practices has been under attack. It has now come close to collapse in large areas of the world, though it is alive and vigorous in many other parts of the world. In an almost complete reversal, public opinion in the United States and many other Western countries has shifted to such an extent that homophobia has now become the reality to be concealed and denied. The traditional view is now widely

regarded as vulnerable, embarrassing and unpersuasive. It no longer serves as a norm that needs only strict enforcement and louder commitment in order to achieve full acceptance.

The Church's Response

In the face of such an unsettling change in society, what is the Catholic Church to do? If adamant opposition to homosexuality is unlikely to yield positive results at a time when the church's influence on society is generally declining, should the traditional teaching be abandoned? This would be craven, especially given the often admirable character of the church's critical

response to many socially dominant attitudes and practices over the centuries. Bishops are right to insist that church teaching is not to be determined by opinion polls or election results. It would, however, be wrong to think that such shifts in public perception do not raise serious difficulties, which are perilous for Christians to ignore. It is unlikely that lasting

good can come out of any stance on human affairs that in effect says, "We know what we know; what we don't know is not worth learning about; and what contradicts what we think we know is not worth thinking about." Such a stance is incompatible with the harmonious collaboration between faith and reason that Pope Benedict XVI saw as a characteristic strength of Catholicism.

What seems to be called for is a time of critical reflection on the tradition to clarify what strengths are to be preserved and what continuities are to be affirmed even while searching for the sources of limitations in the teaching and acknowledging the development of new questions and problems. Critical reflection also needs to be directed to public opinion and to those who would mold it in a new direction, who often harbor naïve, incoherent and immature views, even while they think of themselves as knowledgeable and progressive. Both kinds of critical reflection require time and support for research and careful dialogue that will assess what is known and what is not known, what is hoped and what is feared. There is an ongoing need to coordinate research and information across the fields of biology, medicine, social science and ethics as well as to look seriously at the development of Christian and other religious teaching on this topic down through the centuries.

A "stance," as contrasted with beliefs or theoretical positions, normally brings with it a realization that other factors are at work. It involves a response to positions or movements in the broader social and intellectual world rather than merely to arguments and criticisms in scholarly journals. Adopting or modifying a stance provides an opportunity to weigh other factors beyond a specific judgment on the moral rightness or wrongness of an act. One can consider alternatives to the

In changing a stance, one may not be changing or reversing church doctrine.

stance and think about how others will respond to it. One can consider changing factors in the social context. One can acknowledge the limits to knowledge and arguments once found persuasive.

There are signs that Pope Francis is in the process of thinking along some of these lines. In taking a critical view of the previous stance, one need not abandon it. In changing a stance, even one that has been widely held and is deeply persistent, one may not be changing or reversing church doctrine. Indeed, Francis has repeatedly said that he does not intend to change church doctrine. This produces disappointment in many journalists and advocates; but ignoring what he affirms will lead to more serious and lasting disappointment. There is also a risk that both those who hope for a radical transformation of Catholic teaching on homosexuality and those who dread such a change may miss the point of the more discerning, more compassionate stance that the pope seems intent on introducing. They may judge him by criteria that might be appropriate for legal, political and journalistic activities but that would distort the character of the church's pastoral relationship with those to whom it is called to minister.

Humility Matters

Four important elements should mark a new stance toward homosexuals and homosexuality. The first is humility. We must acknowledge what we do not know and what we do not understand about the contemporary situation of homosexuals. This is an important point both for advocates of alternative lifestyles and for social and religious traditionalists. It is especially needed as we explore the difficult questions about how to understand the causes of homosexual inclinations and actions and how biological inheritance, historical experience and personal choice come together in shaping sexual orientation. Difficult questions also surround the social consequences of giving legal acceptance to same-sex unions, especially the effects of such a policy on the institution of marriage in Western societies. Humility is appropriate not merely for debate on broad social issues but also in the settings of family and friendship and in the decisions to seek and provide counsel and care for persons who are uncertain and distressed about homosexuality in themselves or others.

Second, we must show respect for the dignity of homosexual persons as creatures of the one God and Father of us all, as members of the community of the redeemed and as fellow citizens of the city and the world. The affirmation of traditional views needs to take place within an ethic of dialogue and must be marked by civility, compassion and charity. Desires that homosexuals should cease to exist, or that they should disappear from public space, or that laws should be enacted that would deny their human rights are simply not acceptable. Precisely because the disagreements over the moral assessments of homosexual acts and the future of relevant social institutions are

real and are deeply felt, it is necessary to practice moral attitudes that will sustain conversation over time. This will help to bind the advocates of change and traditionalists. It should also restrain the mockery and denigration of people who in a spirit of honesty and faithfulness honor traditional social values. For in the church, we are called to show charity and mutual forbearance rather than to be victorious masters of cultural warfare.

The greater burden rests with those who, consciously or not, have been influenced in their attitudes and reactions by homophobia, by the fear and hatred of homosexual persons and acts. This can be manifested in schoolyard bullying, in malicious outing and violations of privacy, in blackmail and psychopathic violence. Many of those who are most critical of church teaching on sexuality have suffered wounds from homophobia, sometimes with the connivance of church members or, even worse, with their approval. For all these offenses against our brothers and sisters, there is need for repentance and conversion. As we turn to the future, there is a corresponding need to look critically at those who offer themselves as allies against gay and lesbian agendas.

Third, all parties need to show realism in acknowledging the problems of perception and trust that complicate our efforts to understand and collaborate with one another. We must be aware of the challenges to mature and responsible behavior that human sexuality presents to all of us, regardless of our orientation. There is a profound need for realism in acknowledging the ambiguities that mark our histories, both personal and social. God's judgment is not likely to yield a simple division between heterosexual sheep and homosexual goats, just as God's creation does not produce persons who remain consistently on one side of this divide. Expulsion of those with sexual differences from the sacred precincts of the church and expunging their acts and gifts from our institutional memory may express a detestation of intrinsic evil, but it also carries with it an effective denial of common humanity. We must not only be charitable with others, but also honest with ourselves. Realistic self-understanding leads to the abandonment of hypocrisy; realistic understanding of others prepares the way for acceptance in community. Looking seriously at the communities in which we participate will disclose a complex tapestry in which the multicolored threads of the rainbow catch and reflect light, increase splendor and range, and are to be gratefully received.

Realism also involves a recognition that the moral, personal and spiritual development to which we are all called in Christ is not identical with some form of legal or philosophical consistency or even with doctrinal orthodoxy. Nor, on the other hand, is it to be defined as the successful working out of one's sexual orientation. Both of these distortions involve a reduction of the human person to one or more favored aspects of what is a richer, more complex reality. They also involve the

substitution of an immediate, testable accomplishment for the movement of the soul toward the transcendent Other in faith, hope and charity.


Fourth, during this period of scrutiny and reassessment, we must be patient with ourselves, with each other and with the friends and allies of the contesting groups both in the public arena and in the life of the church. The tasks of sifting arguments, modifying laws and institutional arrangements, reshaping personal and social expectations and examining the effects of changes when they are proposed and when they are enacted are all tasks that are best done over time. The process of learning, listening, revising, beginning anew and encouraging participants on all sides and at all levels consumes immense amounts of time and energy. In the United States and elsewhere, the whole process is going to be conducted under the shadow of the sexual abuse crisis, which will be a continuing source of suspicion, fear and acrimony. The very American desire for quick and unambiguous outcomes will make the necessary patience shorter in supply and harder to sustain. We have to bear in mind that law and public opinion in the United States now understand and treat homosexual relations between consenting adults and the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable persons as significantly different realities.

Sexual Values

The new stance on the subject of homosexuality should open up possibilities for affirming the human dignity of homosexuals. It should also acknowledge their need for an appropriate form of pastoral ministry and should affirm a continuity of key values in a greatly changed social situation. For instance, the

traditional teaching and practice of the church has presented faithfulness and fruitfulness as two of the great goods closely connected with sexual activity. Critics of homosexual practice have been honestly unable to see the continuing place for these values in same-sex unions. The desire of some homosexuals to adopt children as well as the desire of many homosexuals to enter into permanent unions can be seen as evidence of the power and attractiveness of these traditional values, even if they are being achieved in previously unacceptable ways.

Assessing the possibility for homosexuals to achieve these values in a sustainable way requires us to go beyond the current arguments about equal rights and equal protection for personal preferences to look carefully at actual lives and the way values are articulated and practiced. This can be one way of defending traditional marriage. But it is also a way of requiring the proponents of same-sex marriage to acknowledge the incompleteness of their approach and their arguments. Good intentions and earnest declarations do not constitute effective guarantees of lasting fidelity. The principal change would not be in the teaching of the church on the moral acceptability of homosexual activity, but in affirming and practicing pastoral ministry for persons engaged in irregular or questionable unions. Ministry would be carried on in a more tentative, inquiring spirit; it would be more intent on providing care and encouraging growth for persons, many of whom have known many sorrows, than in implementing policies within bureaucratic and legal frameworks.

Here we might apply a favorite metaphor of Pope Francis: those carrying on the ministry would function in a way like doctors in a field hospital. They would proceed from a genuine desire to understand the personal and spiritual aspirations of the persons in their care instead of simply repeating the equivalent of a fatal diagnosis, which is how repeated reliance on the notion of “intrinsic evil” will likely be perceived. This is not a proposal for adjudicating the numerous issues now under dispute, nor is it a theological program for resolving the problems of implementing change in this troubled area of the church’s theology and practice. But it may serve as a partial model for addressing similar problems in areas where Catholic Christians have been putting more energy into denunciation than into dialogue, where disjunctions and fractures have been growing in scale and lethality. Perhaps it is best conceived as a submission for the notice board in the field hospital. 

ON THE WEB

Charles Camosy makes the case for Christian vegetarianism. americamagazine.org/podcast



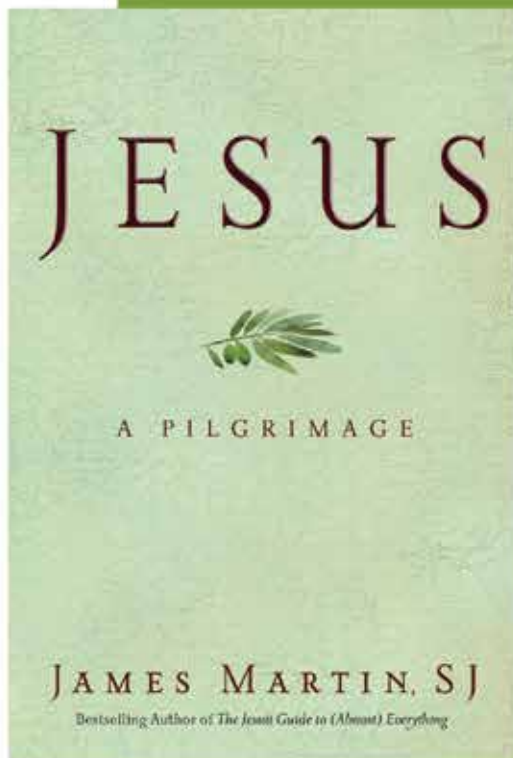
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Words That Heal

Finding strength in Scripture

BY KATHLEEN NORRIS

I suspect that most of us stumble in one way or another over the “scandal” of the Incarnation. In the “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” one of the principal documents of the Second Vatican Council, it is written, “The words of God, expressed in the words of men, are in every way like human language, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the flesh of human weakness, became like men.”

This statement is so radical that we might well ask: Did the authors really mean to say that just as God chose to come to us in mortal human flesh, so he chose the flawed vehicle of human language to reveal himself to us? Are the words of Scripture—ordinary words that are proclaimed in church, that we breathe in and out as we recite the psalms—holy because the written word of God is God’s self-communication, analogous to the Word incarnate? This is an almost unfathomable gift; and, as usually happens when we are blessed with such divine grace, we do everything we can to make it fathomable, to cut it down to size and even to reject it.

We regard language as a useful tool and have trouble accepting that God has chosen it to touch our hearts and convert us. While poets like Emily Dickinson pursue words that breathe, that strike emotional chords in the reader, most of us, most of the time, reject the incarnational power of language. Like Adam, we run and hide, opting for a safely tamed verbiage that serves not God’s ends but our own. George Orwell, in his seminal essay “Politics and the English Language,” captured the essence of this phenomenon by offering a translation of Eccl 9:11—“the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong”—in jargon that is all too common in academia and the business world: “Objective considerations of contemporary phenomena compel the conclusion that success and failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate ca-

capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must invariably be taken into account.”

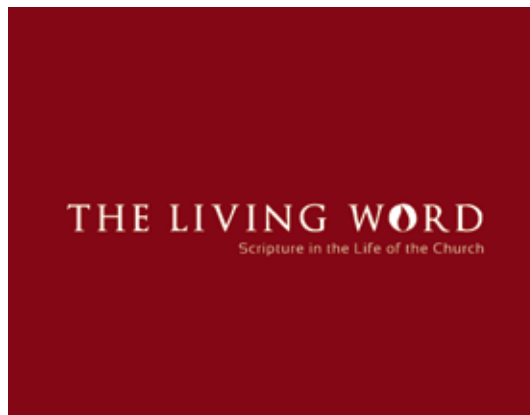
Small children appreciate the delicious mouth-feel of silly nonsense words and savor the daunting power of a straightforward “No!” But as we grow to adulthood, we become stiff-necked people who prefer fancy, impenetrable words that make us feel professional and important. We do not care that the words have had the life sucked out of them, because they give us power to lord it over the listener. With Scripture it is just the opposite. We recognize God’s authority to say to us, “Hear, O Israel” but have to accept that we are free to listen or not, to take God’s words to heart, or not. God has left this choice up to us, and all too often we choose to opt out of the conversation.

An Ongoing Dialogue

Our holy Scripture is intended to be a conversation, that sustaining force in any love relationship, of hearing and responding to the beloved. The best way for us to grow close to God

is to grow close to the Scriptures, to approach them in friendship and with respect, and also to endeavor to keep the lines of communication open on a daily basis. The observation by St. Jerome is as true now as when he wrote it over 1,600 years ago that “ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.”

The Scriptures are replete with assertions of God’s desire to hold us close, the omnipotent and eternal God bent on reminding us that he does not exist in some remote plane, but in our inmost selves. God’s love for us is portrayed as that of a mother for the life that is growing in her womb, or the mother willing to cuddle her weaned child who wants to be held again like an infant. Our holy writ is full of evidence that God desires to help and heal us. The prophets declare—repeatedly—that God wills to be our God, and that we are God’s people. In the Gospels we are reminded that each of us, like each and every sparrow, is worth God’s attention and concern. Threaded throughout the entire Bible, simple but stirring images convey the intimacy of God’s relationship with us. God takes us by the hand; God restores



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our weary spirits; even at night, while we are sleeping, God directs our hearts. Both in Isaiah and in the Book of Revelation to John we are told that at the end of time God will wipe every tear from our eyes.

And when we are overcome by tears in the here and now, the Scriptures give us hope. When Jesus meets his disciples on the road to Emmaus, after the sudden arrest, trial and execution of the man they had hoped was the promised Messiah, they are so disconsolate that they do not even recognize him. But then, beginning with Moses and the prophets, Jesus interprets the Scriptures for them, placing himself in the salvation story. When this stranger breaks bread with them and blesses it they finally recognize the risen Lord.

Like the disciples, we are asked to believe that the story of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus has not come to an end. Our job is to locate ourselves within that story and to continue to spread the word. The Emmaus narrative provides a good example of how the Bible can heal us, offering both sustenance and guidance for our spiritual journeys. No matter how dire our situation, Emmaus tells us that we can always find God in the Scriptures and in the sacrament of the Eucharist. And there is an invaluable message here for our narcissistic age. We may read and meditate on Scripture alone, and are indeed encouraged to do so, but we do not interpret it alone. Our sacred Scriptures are not only about us as individuals, but about the Christian community made possible by the sacrifice Jesus offered on the cross.

The incarnation of Jesus Christ is not only celebrated but actualized here and now for us at each Eucharist. The same is true with Scripture, if we will only sit with its stories for a while and try to silence the distracting voices within. The poet Denise Levertov once wrote that the “substance, the means of art, is an incarnation: not reference, but phenomena,” and I believe that the same is true of our sacred Scriptures. This can be difficult for us to accept; we prefer reference over phenomena because we can better control it. We place more trust in appraisal than in praise.

The world of the early Christian theologians cited in the council document on Scripture—Augustine, Irenaeus, Jerome, John Chrysostom—was no less complex and turbulent than our own, and the theological disputes they contended with make those of our own day pale by comparison. But in their relationship to Scripture they had certain advantages over us. They were accomplished biblical scholars



but did not lose themselves in abstraction. They had a foundational faith in the power of Scripture to do what it is intended to do that is difficult for us to maintain in a doubting age. They believed that the Scripture that God sends into our lives will return to God fulfilled.

If we make room for the words of Scripture, we become open to the possibility of experiencing what these early church fathers described as the diagnostic and medicinal power of the word of God, words with the power to change and heal us. The onus is on us to honor the words of Scripture enough to be willing to spend quality time with

them and allow them to work on us. It is all too easy to lose sight of God in our busy lives. But there are remedies. A retreat with a community that prays the Liturgy of the Hours is an immersion in Scripture that can shock us into fresh understandings of familiar Bible stories. Private prayer with the psalms and readings for the day helps many people to frame their daily lives, and keep the divine and mundane in proper perspective.

Keeping Scripture Alive

There are many methods that can keep Scripture alive for us and help us when we most need healing. When struggling through a spiritual crisis, a monastic scholar might turn to the *Antirrheticus* of Evagrius, which suggests Bible passages to pray when facing specific temptations. It is similar to what you find if you open a Gideon Bible in a hotel room. No doubt many people unfamiliar with Scripture have found healing there, using the index at the front that guides them to Scripture for those seeking “Comfort in Time of Sorrow,” “Courage in Time of Fear” or “Peace in a Time of Turmoil.”

We can find many methods to help us pay better attention to Scripture as it is being read in church. Before worship I use a plea from the Book of Common Prayer to be delivered from “coldness of heart and wanderings of mind.” And recall-

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ing St. Paul’s axiom that faith comes from hearing, I shun the text on the page and try to listen to the Scriptures being read. If they are being read badly, all the better; it means that I have to work harder to listen. But our methods will take us only so far. When our prayer becomes perfunctory, it is often a sign that we have forgotten that it is not our acts and intentions that matter so much as God’s power to work within us.

And sometimes we are hoping against hope in this regard. Once when I was deep in a “slough of despond,” I attended the Easter Vigil in a monastery and felt as if I were an observer from Mars. But I also knew that I was in the right place, because I believed that my being present as those Bible texts washed over me could allow God’s voice to penetrate my internal darkness, whether I was aware of it at the time or not.


The love that God reveals in Scripture can help us emerge from despair and even lighten the burden of grief. Three days after my sister Rebecca died I was scheduled to serve as lector and read the story of Paul raising Tabitha from the dead. Looking over the text beforehand, I had a bitter moment: Why didn’t

I try that in the emergency room: “Becky, get up!” But I also felt that it was important for me to read that passage on Sunday morning, even if it would be painful.

My sister had an exceptionally difficult life. Brain-damaged at birth because of medical errors, she was just intelligent enough to understand what had happened to her. This made her angry and resentful, frustrated in her often misguided and desperate attempts to fit in with others. But as she approached the age of 60, she finally figured out that, for people to like her, all she had to do was be herself. She changed so much that I doubt people who knew her as a young woman would have recognized her. She had gone from harboring a load of rage to someone whose primary virtue was gratitude.

When she was diagnosed with terminal cancer, I was the angry one. She had had such a hard time coming into this world, and now she would have a hard time leaving it. I was with her every day as she received palliative radiation, and we began plans for hospice placement. I accompanied her to a weekly art class at the cancer center, where she excelled at making vibrant paintings. One day she proudly painted flowers for a new grandniece, and a day later she was dead. The cancer had spread to her lungs, her breathing became labored and her heart stopped. She was spared months of misery and decline.


A few days later, I gladly read that passage from Acts in church because it was about a resurrection, and in telling it I could honor my sister’s own resurrection story. The Bible is like that. It is there for us when we need it most. It is full of surprises, grace and the power to remove even the heavy stone that lies on a grieving heart.



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Speaking the Word of God

A tribute to Daniel J. Harrington (1940–2014)

BY JAMES MARTIN

I do not think I can properly thank Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., for all he has done for me, for my brother Jesuits, for all of his students, for Catholic scholars and for Christians around the world—not to mention all the people who have ever heard him preach at Mass. Father Harrington has taught Jesus in his classes, in his books and, most of all, with his life. He was one of the finest Jesuits, finest priests and finest people I have ever known.

When I started out as a student at Weston Jesuit School of Theology, I was told by many Jesuits that I should take as many courses with Dan Harrington as I could. “Even when,” said one friend, “you’re not interested in the topic at all. If Dan is teaching a class on how to change a tire, take it!”

So I signed up for Dan’s course “Introduction to the New Testament,” NT 101, along with what seemed like half of Weston’s student body and half the students at Harvard Divinity School. His course changed my life. I had never seriously studied the New Testament before—and neither had some of my classmates—and blessed were we that our first exposure to studying the Gospels was through the eyes of someone who so loved them and knew them, and who so loved Jesus and knew Jesus.

Today I see the Gospels through Dan’s eyes. In other words, I see the Gospels with both the eyes of faith and a critical mind. Dan’s approach was sensible, moderate, scholarly, curious, just, balanced, cautious, generous and, above all, faithful.

Stories about Dan’s prowess in the classroom are well known. He often taught in threes, so I will give you three things I most remember.

1. Dan was always clear, which was

an immense asset to his students. During a course in Paul’s Letter to the Romans, he once summarized the theology of that entire text as follows: “Freed from sin, death and the Law; freed for life in the Spirit.” Perfect. Clear, simple, direct statements like this, backed up by vast learning, are most helpful to students and, as such, are often indelible. Clarity is an underappreciated virtue in the academy. It is a gift to students.

2. Dan was endlessly patient. Despite his erudition, there was never any question that was too basic or too elementary. He answered all of them thoughtfully, generously and of

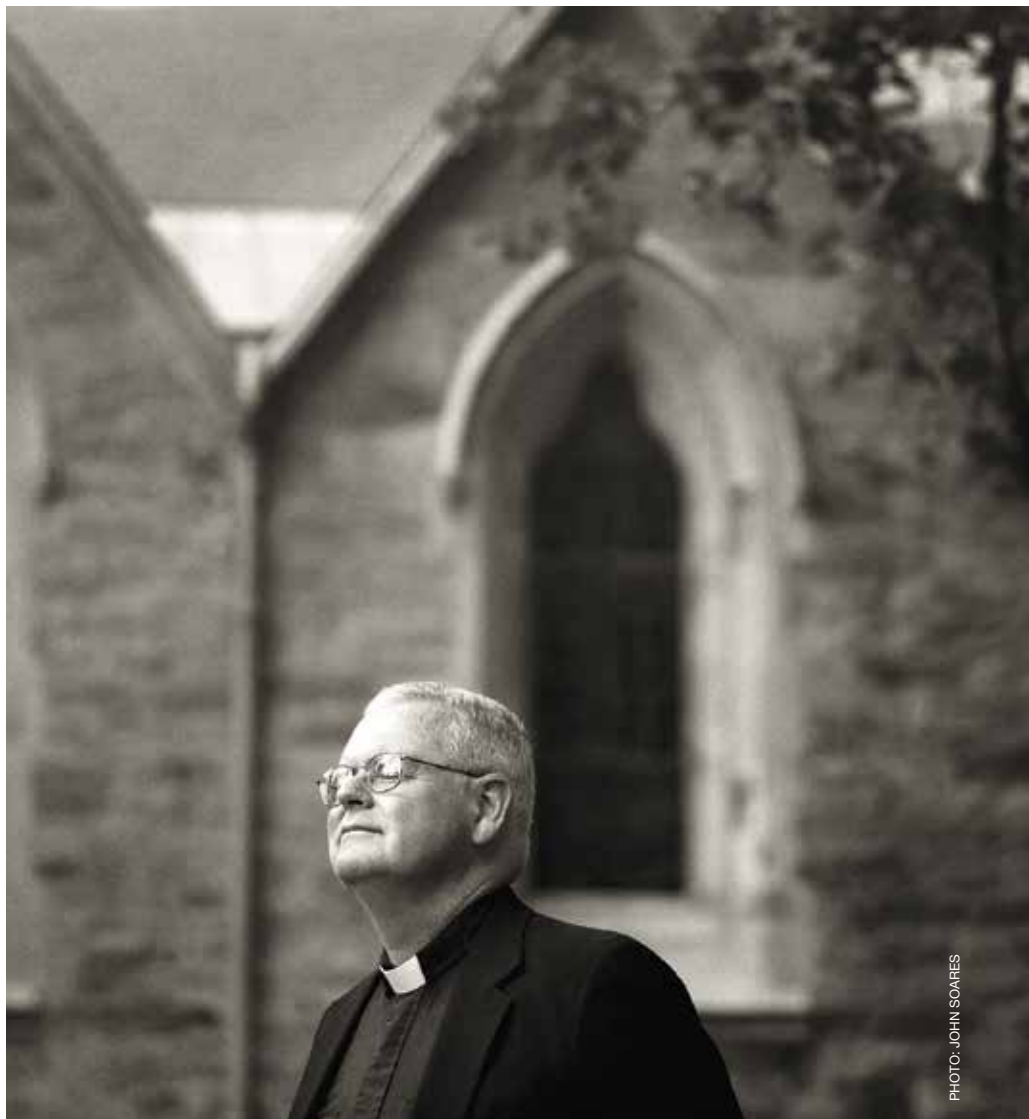


PHOTO: JOHN SOARES

JAMES MARTIN, S.J., editor at large of *America*, is the author of the new book *Jesus: A Pilgrimage* (HarperOne, March 2014), dedicated to Father Harrington.

course accurately, which meant that everyone felt respected and valued—another gift.

And no question was too far out. Dan was endlessly patient, even with students who occasionally seemed intent on trying to impress him, or, just as often, the rest of the class. One day in NT 101 a student stood up and said, “Father Harrington, considering what the Gospels tell us about Jesus’ prayer, and about his identity as the fully human Son of God, and in light of how Christian theology understands his relationship to the Father, and also of how human consciousness cooperated with what one might term divine foreknowledge, what was going on in Jesus’ mind at this point in the Gospels?” And Dan said, politely, “Well, we have no idea.”

Dan was part of a generation of Jesuits whose time is passing, and I say that less in a melancholy sense than in a grateful one. Because he entered the Jesuits at age 18, Dan had a great deal of time as a young adult to study languages and texts and traditions, to a depth and degree that Jesuits who enter later in life, as most men do these days, simply do not.

So behind Dan’s clear and direct statements, which he made easy for us to grasp, were decades of learning. In a sense, it was like Jesus’ use of the parables—communicating complicated truths to us in simple ways, ways that we could understand. As with Jesus’ parables, this was a great act of charity and love.

3. But the third attribute is, to me, the greatest mark of his love of the Gospels: Dan was a kind person. That is what I most admire about him. Dan was one of the kindest and most generous people I ever met.

About a year into my time at Weston, I developed carpal tunnel syndrome. It was very painful, and I could barely use my hands. Funny enough, I was in the middle of Dan’s course “Suffering and Salvation.” A Jesuit friend of mine said, “You should get extra credit.”

As a result, I found I couldn’t write, I couldn’t type, and, worst of all, I couldn’t figure out what to do. I briefly thought of asking my Jesuit provincial to let me take a leave from studies. When I was at the end of my rope, my faculty adviser said the only thing to do was to ask to take the tests orally and to finish my papers orally, which I saw as a huge embarrassment.

The first teacher I went to was Dan. I remember being extremely embarrassed, and even ashamed, and hemming and hawing and telling this scholar who wrote so many books, and who worked so hard, how I could not type. And I asked him, “How would you feel if instead of writing papers, I came in and delivered them orally?”

And he said, “That would be fine, Jim.” Then he added, “But I’ll really miss reading your papers.”

It was the kindest thing anyone could have said. Dan was not going to learn anything at all from my papers—nothing! But it was so generous and thoughtful and Christian. I have never forgotten that.

Later on, after my ordination, when it came to understanding the Gospels—whether for preaching, praying or writing—I used all the tools Dan had given me. And, as I said, I always saw the New Testament through his eyes.

Still later, I screwed up my courage and asked Dan to review the books I wrote for their Scripture content. Any time I used Scripture in any book, I would send the manuscript to Dan and back it would come, usually within a week or so, with a neatly typed-up list of the many errors I had made, along with suggestions for clarification. He did the same with every book, including a book on Jesus that I just finished, even in the midst of his illness.

Clear, patient, kind. Generous, friendly, mild. Prayerful, faithful, hardworking. The model Jesuit, to my mind. Let me end, though, with another story and with Dan’s own words.

Toward the end of my time at Weston, I edited a book on how people of different faiths find God. So I told Dan that I was looking for some Scripture scholars who would talk about finding God through the Bible. But I already had too many Jesuits in the book, I thought, so I wasn’t going to ask Dan for an essay. But all my friends said, “You idiot! Ask Dan!” And I said, “No, no, I have too many Jesuits already.”

So one day after class, I asked Dan if he could recommend one or two Scripture scholars. He did, and I wrote them letters and they sent back essays which were good, but did not seem to get to the heart of finding God in Scripture.

A few weeks later, Dan said, “Jim, have you found any Scripture scholars for your book?” And I said, “No, Dan, I’m still looking for one that will fit the bill. Do you know anyone else?” “Sure,” he said, and recommended another scholar.

In a few weeks I got another essay that was good, but still did not answer the question. Shortly afterward, I met him in a stairwell, and he said, “Have you found any Scripture scholars for your book?” I remember looking at him and thinking, “Jim, you idiot! Ask Dan!”

I said, “No, Dan. Would you be able to do it?”

And he said, “I’d love to.”

The next day in my mailbox box a little letter appeared, with a perfectly typed, very moving essay. It is the best thing I’ve ever read on Scripture.

Dan starts off his essay with his trademark clarity, “I find God largely in and through the Bible,” he writes. “Most of my academic, spiritual and pastoral life revolves around the Bible. It is for me the most important way to know, love and serve God.”

ON THE WEB

Writings by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J.,
in *America*.
americamagazine.org/harrington

Then he tells us a story. As a young boy, Dan stuttered. One day, he read in the newspaper something surprising: Moses had stuttered. Dan did not know that, but he looked it up in the Bible, and there it was: Moses says, "I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." Dan read that story over and over, he said, and it made a deep impression on him. In his essay Dan goes on to talk about the ways that he has been able to study and teach the Bible, and even offers as an aside a great little *précis*, in his clear way, of *lectio divina*. Then, at the end of the essay, Dan brings his life full circle:

The God of the Bible is the God of Jesus Christ. I experience God in and through the Bible and my life. It is my privilege as a Jesuit priest to study and teach

Scripture, to proclaim and preach God's word, and to celebrate the church's liturgies (which are largely cast in the language of the Bible). In the midst of these wonderful activities (which are my greatest joy), I occasionally stutter. And this brings me back to where my spiritual journey with the Bible began. Though I am slow of speech and tongue like Moses, I still hear the words of Ex 4:11-12: "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes the mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak."

Thank you, Dan, for allowing the Lord to teach you to speak.

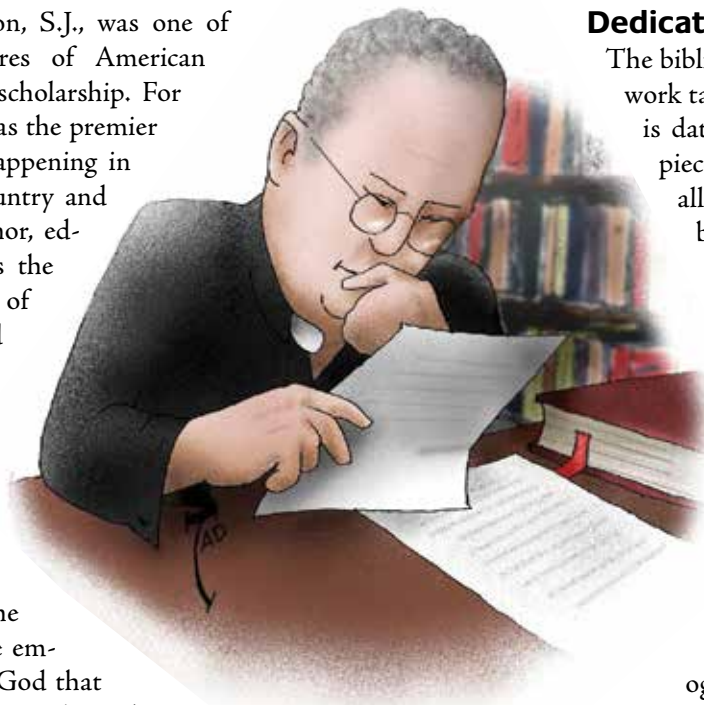
A Scholar's Life

BY FRANK J. MATERA

Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., was one of the great treasures of American Catholic biblical scholarship. For nearly half a century, he was the premier chronicler of what was happening in biblical studies in this country and abroad. As a teacher, author, editor and preacher, he was the embodiment of the kind of biblical scholar the Second Vatican Council envisioned in its "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation."

In addition to being one of the leading voices in American Catholic scholarship, he was, in the view of his colleagues, the embodiment of the word of God that he studied, taught and proclaimed. Gentle and respectful, humble and unassuming, he taught us by the example of his life as well as by his teaching and scholarship.

REV. FRANK J. MATERA is a New Testament scholar and author who recently retired after 24 years at The Catholic University of America, in Washington, D.C.



Dedicated Chronicler

The bibliography of Father Harrington's work takes up 49 pages. The first entry is dated 1961, when he published a piece in the *Classical Bulletin*. Like all bibliographies, it includes his books (more than 50), scholarly articles, essays in collected works and numerous book reviews. What it does not include is his contribution to *New Testament Abstracts*, of which he was the editor since 1972 and to which he contributed about 50,000 abstracts of scholarly articles and 25,000 book notices.

Whereas most other bibliographical tools simply list the titles of the articles and books written in the field, the distinctive contribution of NTA is the concise and informative summaries it provides for every book and article, enabling scholars and graduate students to decide what to pursue in their research. The task of assembling this project three times a year, every year, would overwhelm most people. But for Father Harrington it was a labor of love by which he served the scholarly community and chronicled what was happening.

Skilled Editor

Surely the most thankless task of scholarship is the work of the editor, and yet it is one of the most indispensable. The good editor gives unity and vision to the work of others. The selfless editor helps others to be their best. The generous editor is a master teacher who enables other scholars to do their work. As the editor of the 18 volumes of the “Sacra Pagina” series, Father Harrington showed himself to be the good, selfless and generous editor who enabled others to produce their best work.

To understand the scope of Father Harrington’s achievement, it is important to remember the historical situation in which this series was published. Although English-speaking Catholics had produced a number of popular commentary series on the New Testament, they had not yet produced a scholarly series like those published by their Catholic counterparts in Europe and their Protestant colleagues in this country. This changed with the publication of the “Sacra Pagina” series, which remains the best commentary series on the New Testament by Catholic scholars in the English-speaking world.

Insightful Interpreter

Daniel Harrington’s work as a chronicler and editor would have consumed the lifetime of any other scholar. But in addition to his achievements as chronicler and editor, he was an insightful interpreter of sacred Scripture, who argued the following theses.

1. *Second Temple Judaism is the proper matrix* for understanding Jesus and Paul, and early Christianity. In his books and articles on Jesus, Paul and the early church, Father Harrington repeatedly returns to the writings of Second Temple Judaism to clarify the biblical text. Judiciously employing a historical-critical approach and insisting on the incarnational nature of the Christian faith, he maintains that knowledge of the writings of this period is indispensable for interpreting the New Testament. In presenting the new perspective on Paul, he affirms that “without denying Paul’s cosmopolitan credentials the new perspective on Paul emphasizes his identity as a Jew living shortly before the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem.”

2. *The New Testament is not anti-Jewish.* Father Harrington’s reading of the New Testament within the context of Second Temple Judaism convinced him that the New Testament is not anti-Jewish, even though it has often been used in that

way. Father Harrington’s commentary on Matthew presents a detailed exegetical interpretation of the Gospel in light of Second Temple Judaism. His book *The Synoptic Gospels Set Free* makes his technical work accessible to a wider audience. He argues that while certain texts have fostered anti-Jewish sentiments, the Gospels themselves are not anti-Jewish. After all, the Gospels are Jewish books in the sense that their authors were Jewish by birth; their main character was a first-century Jew; their narratives are set in the land of Israel; and they are unintelligible apart from the Scriptures of Israel. To free the Synoptic Gospels from being read in an anti-Jewish way, Harrington reads them in

their first-century Jewish context. He examines texts from the Synoptic Gospels occurring in the Roman Catholic Sunday Lectionary that might be understood as anti-Jewish. By attending to the Jewish matrix of these texts, he presents a positive approach “toward reducing the anti-Jewish potential in certain Gospel texts.” He

was convinced that “the more we study the Gospels in their original Jewish contexts, the less we view them as anti-Jewish and the more we appreciate their richness and allow the word of God within them to speak to us.”

3. *The New Testament conveys a theological meaning.* The most pressing issue in biblical studies today is the relationship between history and theology. Whereas some would turn biblical studies into a historical discipline, and others would read the New Testament as a timeless theological tract cut off from its historical setting, Father Harrington finds the right balance between history and theology. On the one hand, he insists on the incarnational nature of Christianity, which requires the use of a historical-critical approach. On the other, he insisted on the need to interpret these texts as writings intended for the nourishment and growth of the Christian community to which he preached every week.

I have, I hope, highlighted the most important elements of Father Harrington’s work as a scholar, a priest, a Jesuit and a believer in Jesus Christ. He chronicled what we have been doing these past 50 years and made possible the most important commentary series on the New Testament produced by English-speaking Catholics. He taught us to interpret the New Testament in the light of Second Temple Judaism and instructed us to read the New Testament without being anti-Jewish. He savored the theological meaning of its text. In sum, he taught us how to read the word of God. ■

The ‘Sacra Pagina’ series remains the best commentary series on the New Testament by Catholic scholars in the English-speaking world.

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The Prison Class

A risk worth the investment

BY ANDREW SKOTNICKI

Manhattan College thought it would be a good idea to send a few students to jail. Soon after, we, a Catholic institution in the Lasallian tradition, opened our doors to young men and women formerly incarcerated on Rikers Island in New York City. It is a program unlike any other in the nation. Why do we do it? The answer has everything to do with fallibility and risk.

Ever since human beings began to reflect on the experience of what it is to be human, they have always come back to the fallibility of life. For Plato, the world around us is illusory; only the forms exist and can be contemplated—and thus life understood—by only the rarest and finest of the human species. For the author of Ecclesiastes, all is vanity, a chasing after the wind. Jesus insisted that the healthy, the holy and those satisfied with themselves could never understand or embrace his message. For Augustine, it was original sin: life is both a grace and a crippling burden, given our flawed natural condition. Philosophers like Martin Heidegger argued that if one looks honestly at his or her past, there is only one possible response: guilt. Sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists and even neuroscientists remind us of the durability of the old adage that no one stands taller than the generation in which they live, which is shorthand for saying that we make all our life decisions, as St. Paul said, staring into the glass, darkly (1 Cor 13:12). And then there are the poets. Leonard Cohen wrote, “There is a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in.” And from the inimitable Oscar Wilde: “Each [person] kills the thing he loves.”

Whether there is widespread agreement with the view of human nature just presented, I can assure you that the current system of criminal justice in the United States endorses it. A little known revolution was initiated in the turbulent years of the late 1960s and came to fruition a decade or so later. This revolution was sparked by the determination that the romantic image of police patrolling the streets and doing crime scene forensics—still wildly popular for many Americans—was a thing of the past; instead, the country needed a radical redirection of police energy into technology and surveillance. As a result, what the legal scholar David Garland calls “the criminologies of everyday life” were born. This shift was exactly

ANDREW SKOTNICKI is a professor in the department of religious studies at Manhattan College in New York City, where he founded and directs the program *Engaging, Educating, Empowering Means Change*, or E3MC. His most recent book is *The Last Judgment: Christian Ethics in a Legal Culture* (Ashgate, 2012).



MARGIN CALL. Andrew Skotnicki, far right, with his class.

what the late French philosopher Michel Foucault warned was about to come: a “disciplinary society” that controls not by stocks, whips and chains or, for that matter, special weapons and tactic teams, but with exquisite effectiveness by peering into the remotest corners of personal and social life.

We all know the results: the most aggressive and consistent escalation of criminal statutes, penalties and sentences in the nation’s history, perhaps in any nation’s history. Rates of imprisonment, as a result of what is termed “the new penology,” have increased more than 600 percent. More prisons were built in the United States between 1980 and 2000 than were built in the entire previous history of the nation. There are now over 300,000 laws in the United States addressing violations that could result in jail or prison time. The late William J. Stuntz wrote in 2001, while a professor at Harvard Law School, that we are fast approaching a state in which “the law on the books makes everyone a felon.” If I may quote Oscar Wilde again: “Each [person] kills the thing he loves. Yet each [person] does not die.” This is a poetic way of saying that we are all achingly fallible; we all break the law; but we do not all suffer the penalty for our crimes.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF AUTHOR

A System Based on Math

As one writer put it, the nets of the criminal justice system are calibrated mainly to catch only a certain kind of fish—namely, poor members of racial minorities. According to the Department of Justice, one in three black men and one in six Hispanic men in the United States will be incarcerated at some point in their lives, compared with approxi-

ums. In the case of those who are poor, this assessment usually translates into no coverage. Very smart people figured this out. And it works. It works so well that virtually every major institution in the country has reproduced it in one way or another.

This analysis leads us to reassess the fine tuning of the technology of crime control. In the deep end of the risk pool are poor people of color. Since their circumstances make them least likely to master the complex social, linguistic, cultural and educational requirements necessary for professional success, and since they are already, in many instances, without credit and without health insurance, they are further and further isolated in poor neighborhoods with inadequate social services. And their at-risk status is the single greatest factor ensuring that *their* human fallibility and *their* criminal behavior merits imprisonment.

Before the changes occurred in the methodology of crime control, our correctional system was based on what can be termed “penal welfare,” based on the belief that people who are incarcerated are not evil; rather, they are, as Plato, Augustine, Jesus,

Heidegger and Wilde would have said, fallible. And their mistakes could be corrected with counseling, job training and education, the most important factor. When the “correctional” system changed its operating philosophy from penal welfare to management of the at-risk population, there were over 300 prisons in the United States with higher education programs, in which incarcerated men and women, with the help of Pell Grants, could get a college degree. When President Clinton signed a bill 19 years ago to rescind these grants for prisoners, all but a few of the 300-plus programs

were eliminated. This law was passed despite repeated studies that show, again according to the Department of Justice, increased education reduces rates of recidivism. Two-thirds of the 675,000 people released from confinement this year will probably be rearrested within three years, while those who attended college have recidivism rates at least 30 percent to 50 percent lower than the national average.

In the new approach to criminal justice, oddly enough, these seemingly counterintuitive measures make sense to



We are all fallible; we all break the law; but we do not all suffer the penalty for our crimes.

mately one in 20 white men. Blacks and Hispanics make up less than 30 percent of the population in the United States, but they make up two-thirds of the people in our jails and prisons.

Why are they the ones in prison? I do not believe that deliberate racism or an exaggerated misanthropy provides the answer. The answer is that the criminal justice system, like the health care system, the banking and credit system and the array of standardized tests that disproportionately influence who is admitted into elite colleges and universities, have taken their cues from the actuarial methodology of the insurance industry. The criminal justice system relies on a mode of analysis not based on morality, and certainly not based on sentiment. It is, quite simply, mathematical.

The insurance industry calibrates everything in terms of risk. We are all what are termed “instances of the population,” and each of us has a place in the risk pool. If you are low risk, you get insured and pay low premiums. If you are high risk, you either receive no coverage or pay high premi-

ON THE WEB

Matt Emerson blogs at “The Ignatian Educator.”
americamagazine.org/educator

people. Why? Because it has already been determined that those who have been designated as high-risk do not merit the privileges that come with being low-risk. And so, upon release from confinement, these individuals return to the same neighborhoods but under even worse conditions. Just as they cannot get credit or insurance, now they cannot vote or gain access to public housing. With a criminal record, it is even harder to get a job because they are, of course, a bad risk. Unemployment rates for those who have once been incarcerated are over 50 percent. And to complete the vicious circle, when a person steals or sells drugs to get money, he or she not only is arrested and sent back to jail, but the prior actuarial determination that this person was too risky to help in the first place is confirmed.

Back From the Margins


This understanding of the human person and analysis of the criminal justice system is the background for Manhattan College's program called Engaging, Educating, Empowering Means Change, or E3MC, initiated in 2012. We wanted to do something to correct the tilt in the national ethos that poor people of color, especially those with a criminal record, are, as one sociologist termed it, "unmeltable" in the great melting pot of American society. For this reason, we sent some of our students to the Rikers Island jail complex to take a class with an equal number of prisoners. We wanted our students to come to know these unmeltable, risky people who have been judged unworthy of the social privileges our students enjoy. We anticipated our students would come to love their incarcerated brothers and sisters, and in their love begin to feel anger at the way so many millions have been dismissed, put on the margin and made to bear the weight

of our frequent arrogance that proclaims that we, the free, are the ones who are good, and they, the prisoners, are the ones who are evil.

The program also creates an opportunity for the incarcerated students, upon their release, to attend a fine private college. This enables these young adults to prove not only to themselves but also to our society that they are as naturally bright and talented as the young people who are given a similar opportunity because they can bounce a basketball, or because their parents made sure they mastered the technique of impressing college admissions committees.

Manhattan College is now conducting its fifth class at Rikers Island. Thus far 46 "outside" students and 46 "inside" students have participated in the program. It should come as no surprise that all the inside students are black or Hispanic. It should also come as no surprise that all of the outside students have had a life-changing experience. Two of the young women who graduated in May 2013 are currently working as interns at the jail. They are among the many who now want to spend their lives caring for the ones so few care for. Most important, nine of the inside students have now taken classes on our main campus. We hope this is just the beginning.

There is, to our knowledge, no other college or university in the nation that has done something this risky. Or, to put it more accurately, that has done something so decisive to challenge the prevailing attitude that men and women who are incarcerated are the risky people. So far, Manhattan College has either spent directly or sacrificed by means of lost income a quarter of a million dollars to help change the lives of these young adults. This unique program is well worth the investment.

We are not a large institution with vast resources. We are a small Catholic college with a very small endowment, a big heart and, may I say, a great deal of faith that people will agree with, support and perhaps duplicate our efforts to change the culture of criminal justice in the United States from one of stigmatization and punishment to one of opportunity and care. It is a way of saying, again remembering St. Augustine, that there are only two kinds of people in the world: the good but not very good, and the bad but not very bad. What separates us is not that some of us are better than others; it is that some of us never have an opportunity to show how good we can be when our fallibility merits not a criminal sentence and a jail cell but a second chance and a college education. 



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ART PATROL

'The Monuments Men' is no masterpiece

In many ways, we still live in an Adolf Hitler world. The Middle East is his legacy; so is the configuration of post-Soviet Eastern Europe. And while it may seem like a subordinate concern, his indiscriminate kleptomania and infinite bad taste continue to reverberate through the world of art.

To get a sense of this, take a look at the documentary "Portrait of Wally" (2012), which is also the title of a 1912 painting by Egon Schiele of his lover Walburga Neuzil. Stolen by a high-ranking Nazi from the Jewish art dealer Lea Bondi in Vienna in 1939, the picture was heisted again by Austrians in the post-war 50s and later exhibited by the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1997. There it became the center of a lawsuit that rocked the foundation of the museum world. People at the top of the curatorial hierarchy—including the cosmetics heir Ron Lauder, erstwhile champion of returning all Nazi art—suddenly were arguing that cultural institutions like MOMA could not possibly function if stolen paintings were going to be seized by U.S. authorities and given back to their rightful owners.

Art-seizing American authorities like those who originally rescued "Wally" are the servicemen celebrated in *The Monuments Men*, a war-time adventure yarn direct-

ed, or rather misdirected, by the actor George Clooney. Like the "Wally" doc, Clooney's movie is a true story. Sort of.

Based on a book by Robert M. Edsel (with Bret Witter), "Monuments Men" recounts the efforts of a ragtag band of art scholars who went in search of the millions of pieces of art with which Hitler intended to fill his planned Führer Museum, just as soon as he got his 1,000-year Reich safely off the ground.

"Monuments Men" was going to be released during the 2013 Oscar season, but cooler heads prevailed and banished it to the midwinter limbo through

which movie fans are currently suffering. It is a movie flawed in its DNA. In fact, its shortcomings are so obvious the film should be shown in film schools, especially as a case study in how not to handle comedy.

One can argue about the importance of art. There are some among us who, given the outlandish hypothetical of choosing our own survival over that of the Sistine Chapel, would pick

Michaelangelo's ceiling. But even though the religious capacity of art is never far from the discussion, Clooney does

not come close to making his case (he and producer Grant Heslov wrote the script), despite some earnest declarations about the investment of human beings in their culture and the insidious efforts of Hitler to erase not just peoples but their histories.

Besides, no matter how strongly

ON THE WEB

Photos from the restoration of St. Patrick's Cathedral.
americamagazine.org/slideshow



A FEW GOOD MEN. Dimitri Leonidas, John Goodman, George Clooney, Matt Damon and Bob Balaban in "The Monuments Men."

one feels about the Picassos that the Germans start torching as they realize world domination is going to be just another shattered Teutonic dream, it is a little difficult to generate dramatic tension about an art-salvage project when there is a world war going on around it.

Clooney certainly is not the director to do it, at any rate. It is clear that he is trying to recreate the feel of a 1940s war film, with a certain quotient of comedy arising from the comic boot camp sequence, the character-stuck-on-a-landmine sequence, the snappish rather than snappy dialogue and a soundtrack (by the estimable Alexandre Desplat) that is used like a cudgel. There is a sense of

dire calculation about the international cast of the characters assembled by Frank and thrown together in classic fish-out-of-water formation to find the art before the Nazis can destroy it.

One of the key pieces is Vermeer's "The Astronomer" (which apparently still has a swastika stamped on its back as it hangs at the Louvre). Another is the "Altarpiece of Ghent," described by Frank as "the defining monument of the Catholic Church," a statement guaranteed to start arguments, although in a movie so lacking in tension, we'll take it.

The point is made early in the film that by 1943 most of the young art scholars were already in Europe fighting the war. This allows Clooney to populate his movie with some charming oldsters, namely Bill Murray, Bob Balaban, John Goodman and Hugh Bonneville ("Downton Abbey"). The youngster in the group is Matt Damon, whose character, James Granger, has a "bad ticker," hence his 4-F status. He also seems a bit dopey to be a curator at the Met, but hey, it's the war years; there is a shortage of manpower. He has a fleeting flirtation with a Parisian art expert, Claire Simone, a fictional version of the remarkable real-life heroine Rose Valland, who has been trying in her quiet way to forestall the Nazis' Rape of Europa (also the title of another fine book on the subject). Claire is played by Cate Blanchett with a French accent she might have borrowed from Peter Sellers, and she is saddled with a suspicion of the *Monuments Men*—she thinks they are trying to

spirit the art away to America—that is both illogical and irksome.

The flatness of "The Monuments Men" can be illustrated by two scenes. One involves our token Frenchman, Jean Claude Clermont (Jean Dujardin of "The Artist"), delivering his heartfelt thanks to his fellow art detectives for coming to save the culture of his country. In the middle of his small speech, Clooney cuts to Bill Murray, who is sitting and listening. And that's it. Just sitting and listening. No one cuts to Bill Murray for no reason. Murray is perhaps the most inherently funny man in the movies. He's a serious actor, yes, but you don't cut to him to affirm a dramatic moment. You cut to him to relieve a dramatic moment. There's no such intention here. Has Clooney *met* Bill Murray?

A similar kind of moment takes place between Balaban's Preston Savitz and Goodman's Walter Garfield, who have had a fractious relationship all through the movie. We find Walter reading about one of the missing works in a document the team has found in one of the salt mines where the art has been hidden.

"How did you read that?" Preston asks.

"It's in English," Walter answers.

"I know," Preston quips. Pause. "I didn't know you could read."

And *that* is how not to deliver a joke. Had Balaban simply walked away on "I know..." the viewer would experience a moment of suspended understanding, then a chuckle. By adding "I didn't know you could read," the joke is explained and effectively neutered. You only make a lame joke lamer by hitting us over the head with the punchline. But that is the kind of thing "Monuments Men" does with regularity while, just by the way, putting a happy ending on a story that has never really ended.

JOHN ANDERSON is a film critic for *Variety* and *The Wall Street Journal* and a regular contributor to the Arts & Leisure section of *The New York Times*.

Nothing Can Compare

Seeing this we fall to our knees. We
Wouldn't be willing to stop being
Human he became willing to stop
Being wholly of light approachable
To become human and die as a
Helpless creature died in that
Jewish rite so that it's drenching
Blood could besprinkle in its
Deep cleansing.

*How can we
Understand this?*

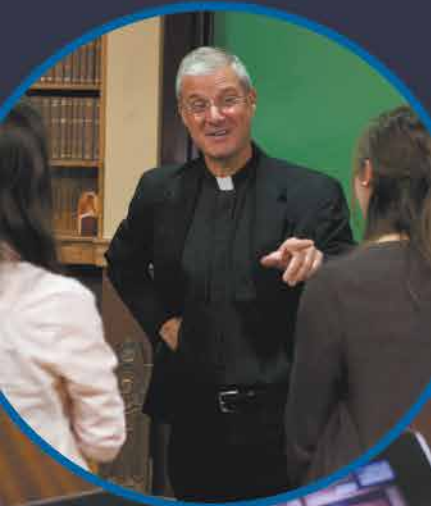
Being human what can we do
But bow, and believe now, or
When glory leaves all he made
Transformed, or stricken?

G. E. Schwartz

G. E. Schwartz, born in 1958 in Pottsville, Pa., is the author of Only Others Are: Poems and Living in Tongues.



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WHEN PROJECTIONS ATTACK

There are lies, damn lies, statistics and now, apparently, also Congressional Budget Office estimates. In January researchers at the C.B.O. released some new numbers about the expected long-term impact of the Affordable Care Act. To make their hard-to-parse estimates seem a little more real, the authors projected that by 2024, the health care act would lead to the loss of 2.5 million jobs as Americans left the U.S. labor force. That number proved irresistible to Obamacare haters, many of whom seized upon the report, even before reading it, in denunciations that scorched across Twitter feeds, conservative blog sites and the Bizarro World of cable news.

People who actually read the report quickly understood there was a little more nuance to the C.B.O.'s projection. Far from deathpanelling America's employment stock, the A.C.A. would "reduce the total number of hours worked...almost entirely because workers will choose to supply less labor."

What does that mean? The C.B.O. report suggests that health care reform would have the long-term effect of allowing people to leave work if their only reason for remaining employed was to keep a connection to health insurance. So the projection did not imagine employers erasing jobs, but workers freed from the bonds of health care insurers and perhaps following their bliss for a change. The media narrative quickly adapted. Now the C.B.O. report was not detailing job destruction caused by health care reform, but a new Hydra head of the Obama entitlement monster, a "disin-

centive" to work created by relieving mass anxiety over health care.

This new narrative attached itself to the resilient depiction of the "Obama-nation of takers" pitted against the stalwart "makers," those who are ruggedly individualizing out there in the U.S. economy, entrepre- neuring like crazy and creating wealth that the Obama sheeple are madly redistributing. Now, because of the A.C.A., a whole new cohort of takers too lazy to hang on to jobs in which they felt trapped are being liberated by a new entitlement.

There is, of course, more than a whiff of scolding Calvinism in this new reading of the C.B.O. projections. What might a more charitable interpretation of the same look like? In the Catholic tradition in the United States, work is a meaningful and rewarding aspect of co-creation, but so are things like raising a family and sufficient time to enjoy the beauty and blessedness of creation. We are not our best possible selves merely yoked to a job, producing income and propping up the gross national product. Holding a child, visiting with neighbors, painting a landscape and, yes, even leaving a job we hate to raise a child, care for a sick family member or start our own businesses are also valuable expressions of a fully realized life. In other words, it should be hard for a Catholic to think less of a working senior who seizes on the option granted him by the A.C.A. to finally

go ahead and retire or to admonish working parents who take advantage of the A.C.A. to be where they would rather be—at home raising their children.

How should health care be measured in a balancing of the common good? In a sharp contrast with the more communally minded members of the industrialized West, in the

United States it has become nearly an article of faith that health care is a commodity on more or less equal footing with other consumer choices. Some believe the privilege of accessing it is reserved to the consumer wily enough to prepare to afford it. Of course, the Catholic tradition considers access to decent health care not a social privilege doled out to the astute and salaried, but a basic human right, a minimum guarantor of a just society, offered to

all according to need.

In his second inaugural address, President Obama argued that "the commitments we make to each other—through Medicare, and Medicaid and Social Security—these things do not sap our initiative; they strengthen us. They do not make us a nation of takers; they free us to take the risks that make this country great." The new "entitlement," access to decent, dependable health care, may soon be spoken of in the same way, as a modest step toward—not a nation of takers—but maybe a nation of brother's keepers.

We are
not our
best possible
selves
merely
yoked
to a job.



KEVIN CLARKE is *America's* senior editor and chief correspondent.



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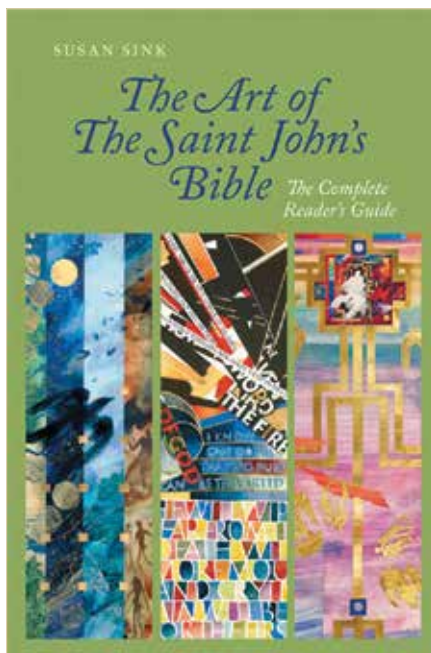
PHOTO COURTESY: ANDREW KAMINSKI

RECEIVING SCRIPTURE

Archaeology, art and faith

One recent and important development in biblical studies is called reception history, the study of the influences or effects that specific biblical texts have exercised on later interpreters. Many of the books described in this annual survey of books on the Bible show how various artists and writers have taken biblical texts as starting points for their own creative works.

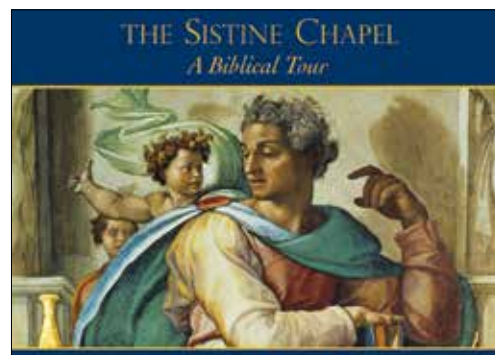
Conceived and overseen by the Benedictine monks of Saint John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minn., **The Saint John's Bible** project is a most ambitious undertaking pertaining to the Scriptures. Its seven volumes contain the text of the New Revised Standard Version in beautiful calligraphic script. The project was intended as a sample of the medieval tradition of illuminated manuscripts of the Bible. It has now appeared in both deluxe and popular editions. The English text is perfectly clear, as one would expect from an international team of skilled calligraphers. But the illustrations (or illuminations) may still puzzle many readers. In **The Art of The Saint John's Bible: The Complete Reader's Guide** (Liturgical Press), Susan Sink, a poet and writer associated with Saint John's Abbey and Liturgical Press, provides help in her explanations of the images accompanying the biblical texts. She offers not only basic information about the illuminations and their place in the Bible's story but also helps us to understand the intentions of the various artists. She writes in an engaging style, ever challenging readers to enter into both the texts and the artwork. She often reminds readers of the three great Benedictine themes that run through the project: hospitality, transformation and justice. If you have access to any of the seven volumes, Sink's fine work will



serve as the perfect guide. She shows that there are many more spiritual and artistic treasures in **The Saint John's Bible** than may first meet the eye.

The Sistine Chapel: A Biblical Tour (Paulist), by Christine M. Panyard, brings together key texts from the Bible and the artistic interpretations given them by the Renaissance artist Michelangelo. After explaining how Michelangelo the sculptor came to execute the paintings, Panyard, a professor of psychology at the University of Detroit Mercy, presents on facing pages beautiful photographs of them and expositions of their biblical roots. What emerges is what Michelangelo conceived as a spiritual pilgrimage from creation to the last judgment, with Jesus' death and resurrection at the center. To tourists who have rushed through the Sistine Chapel, this volume allows a better appreciation of the skill of a great biblical interpreter.

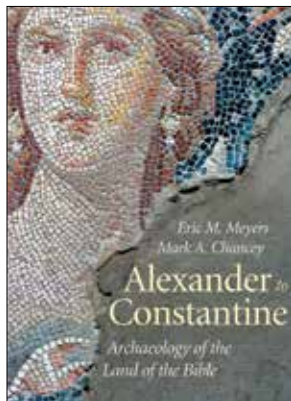
The book of Sirach is one of the longest and most wide-ranging writings in the Catholic and Orthodox canons of Scripture. It is a synthesis of teachings from "Yeshua Ben Eleazar Ben Sira," who in the early second century B.C. conducted a wisdom school for young scribes in Jerusalem. His Hebrew manuscript was then translated into Greek by his grandson in Egypt. Its author has opinions on almost any topic one can imagine, and they are all put forward with artistry and often breathtaking certainty. While conservative by nature, Ben Sira made a monumental theological innovation by integrating the biblical and the ancient Near Eastern wisdom traditions. I have often described it as my favorite book of the Old Testament. With the discovery of parts of the original Hebrew version in recent times, the book of Sirach has become a magnet for the work of an international band of very learned and productive scholars. Prominent among them has been the Rev. Jeremy Corley, who teaches at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Ireland. His contribution, entitled **Sirach: The New Collegeville Bible Commentary** (Liturgical Press), contains a brief introduction, the text



according to revised version in the New American Bible, and an exposition of each pericope in the book of Sirach. There he brings to bear not only the results of recent scholarship, but also his skill as a keen literary analyst, theological sensitivity and ability to place Ben Sira's teachings in the wider contexts of both the Old and

New Testaments.

Students of early Christianity and early Judaism have long sought an up-to-date, comprehensive and reliable synthesis of the results of archaeological excavations in the Holy Land around the time of Jesus. Now we have two! In **Alexander to Constantine: Archaeology of the Land of the Bible** (Yale University Press), Eric M. Meyers, professor of Jewish studies and archaeology at Duke University, and Mark A. Chancey, professor of religious studies at Southern Methodist University, synthesize archaeological evidence and ancient literary sources (including the Bible) to provide an overview of the intellectual and religious changes during the Greco-Roman period and their impact on world history. Thus they treat the following topics: the Persian period and the transition to Hellenism; the advent of Hellenism under the Greek kingdoms and the Hasmonians (140-37 B.C.); Herod the Great and the introduction of Roman architecture; Khirbet Qumran and the Dead Sea scrolls; from Herod to the Great Revolt; the Great Revolt and the Bar Kokhba Rebellion; the emergence of Christianity; early Judaism and the rise of the synagogue; the archaeology of paganism; the growth of Greco-Roman culture and the case of Sepphoris; and after Constantine—beyond the Roman period. Meyers is a veteran in the field of Second Temple archaeology, having directed several excavations and followed the scholarship closely for many years. Chancey has focused especially on the history of Galilee and its relevance for Jesus and his movement. In constructing their archaeological-historical synthesis, they rely heavily not only on the major structures revealed by excavations but also on coins, inscrip-



tions and pottery. Although they make their own views clear, they are fair in presenting other interpretations. Their timely work is a great achievement, just the kind of work we have needed for many years.

Jodi Magness's **The Archaeology of the Holy Land: From the Destruction of Solomon's Temple to the Muslim Conquest** (Cambridge University Press) is written in the classic textbook format. Professor of early Judaism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, she covers roughly the same historical periods as Meyers and Chancey do, and also provides abundant historical and literary context while explaining the archaeological materials. Her extensive and masterful treatment of the archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea scrolls is perhaps the centerpiece of the

book. She discusses in fitting detail the ambitious building program launched by Herod the Great in Jerusalem and elsewhere. She devotes a short chapter to the archaeology of Bethlehem and Galilee, which the Gospels describe as the setting for Jesus' birth and ministry. Her focus on Jerusalem throughout and especially her chapter on Jewish tombs and burial customs provide important background information for the biblical passion narratives. And her chapters on Jewish and Christian artifacts

in the early centuries of the Common Era show how the two religions coexisted and developed in the Holy Land.

Either book (or both) could serve not only as a textbook for university students but also as a guidebook for pilgrims to the Holy Land.

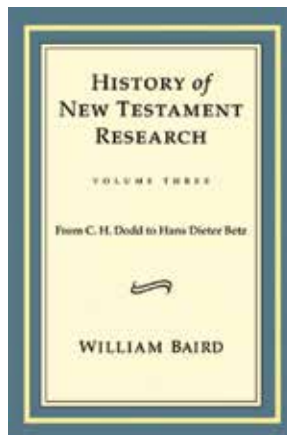
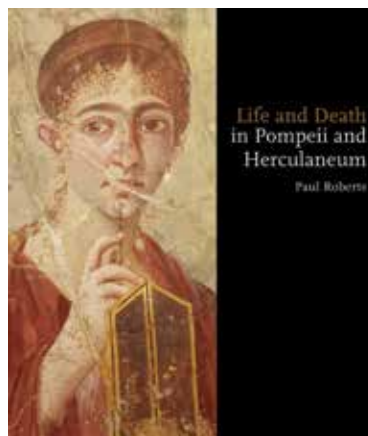
Early Christianity had its greatest success in the urban environments of the Roman empire.

One way to get a concrete sense of life in that context is through Paul Roberts's marvelous **Life and Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum** (Oxford University Press). In A.D. 79 Mount Vesuvius in the Bay of Naples erupted, and the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum were completely buried and thus "frozen" in time. Designed to accompany a British Museum exhibition in 2013, this lavishly illustrated volume looks at the daily lives of ordinary Romans through the lens of an extended and relatively wealthy *familia*. Thus it treats the streets, the atrium, sleeping quarters,

the garden, living rooms and interior design, dining, and kitchens, toilets and baths. This is social history at its best. The 400 color photographs are spectacular, and the accompanying text is concise and illuminating. Many fine books have been written about Pompeii, but it is hard to imagine a better one than this. Indeed it is the book bargain of the

year. Roberts is a curator at the British Museum, specializing in Roman art and archaeology.

If you want a comprehensive his-



tory of New Testament scholarship in the 20th century, William Baird's **History of New Testament Research, Volume 3, From C. H. Dodd to Hans Dieter Betz** (Fortress) is the book for you. In its almost 800 pages it covers a vast array of topics like the new biblical theology, the Bultmann school, new discoveries in archaeology, the development of scholarly societies, theological and hermeneutical developments, the necessity for historical criticism and so forth. Baird considers major works by major scholars; he is objective and courteous in his summaries, and respectful in his judgments. He focuses mainly on British, German, and North American male Protestant scholars. His coverage of Catholic scholarship is fair but somewhat thin. This third and final volume in the project caps off a great achievement on Baird's part.

Another great achievement in modern biblical studies is the completion of the English version of François Bovon's multivolume commentary on Luke's Gospel, titled **Luke 3: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28–24:53** (Fortress). Born and raised in Switzerland, Bovon (1938–2013) taught for many years first at the University of Geneva and then at Harvard Divinity School. A man of many scholarly interests, he specialized in Luke's Gospel and Acts, as well as the noncanonical apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. His commentary on Luke's Gospel appears now in the prestigious "Hermeneia" series. German and French editions have previously appeared. For each passage, he provides a full bibliography, a fresh translation, textual notes, synchronic and diachronic analyses and detailed comments, all supported by extensive footnotes to primary sources and modern scholarship. A distinctive and welcome feature is a sketch of the history of the interpretation of each pericope,

from patristic times to the present (with a special fondness for the work of Calvin). Its inclusion is a sign of the current interest in how specific biblical texts have been read throughout the centuries. While a technical commentary, it also contains homiletic nuggets that preachers and teachers can develop. Bovon was not only a brilliant teacher and scholar but also a gentleman widely admired by his colleagues and students. His commentary on Luke is a fitting memorial to the career of an extraordinary scholar and human being.

Not all receptions of biblical texts are good, as Mary C. Boys's **Redeeming Our Sacred Story: The Death of Jesus and Relations between Jews and Christians** (Paulist) shows. Boys, a member of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, and professor of practical theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, has lectured and written extensively on the history and present state of Christian-Jewish relations. In the

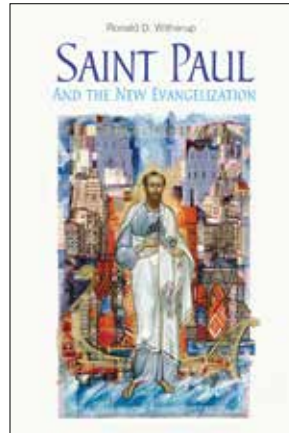
first part of what is her magnum opus, she shows how the New Testament's emphasis on Jewish responsibility for Jesus' death has led throughout history to the image of Jews as "Christ killers" and as deserving persecution, climaxing with the Holocaust. In the second part she calls on three recent developments in biblical scholarship to help Christians redeem their sacred story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection: the Roman empire as the critical backstory of Jesus' passion and death, the "new perspective on Paul" and his place within Judaism, and the reassessment of "Judaism" and "Christianity" as distinctive religions in the first three

centuries A.D. Though focused on exegesis and history, Boys also provides practical pastoral suggestions about the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius and the seven last words of Jesus.

The "new evangelization" did not end with the Year of Faith in November. As conceived by the recent synod and recent popes, it is an ongoing program for proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. There is no better guide for this than Ronald D. Witherup, S.S.'s **Saint Paul and the New Evangelization** (Liturgical Press). In it he explores the theme with information from official Catholic church documents and pertinent observations from

the letters of Paul. His thesis is that it is worth looking at Paul as a model for the new evangelization on the grounds that there has never been a more visionary, wide-ranging evangelizer than "the Apostle." An accomplished biblical scholar and current superior general of the Sulpicians, Witherup is the perfect guide to understanding a concept that many have found puzzling.

The New Testament books were written primarily to be performed orally. In fact, most other books in the Greco-Roman world of the time were intended to be read aloud by either the author or a trained reader before an audience (many of whom were illiterate). In **Bringing the Word to Life: Engaging the New Testament through Performing It** (Eerdmans), Richard F. Ward, a professor of homiletics, and David J. Trobisch, a New Testament scholar, have joined forces to explain clearly and concisely what we know about the culture of oral performance in the first and second centuries, to show what it takes to perform a biblical text, to suggest the benefits of performance for teaching and learning,



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The Catholic Book Club discusses a history of the North American martyrs. americamagazine.org/cbc

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and to offer practical suggestions for exploring biblical texts through performance. They first gather the evidence from various Greek and Latin texts that oral performance was a major mode for communicating the content of literary material. Next they explain some of the difficulties involved in reading aloud an early New Testament

manuscript: no word divisions, no punctuation, all capital letters, abbreviations and so on. Then they indicate how the act of performance today can deepen understanding of the text on the part of both the performer and the audience, and offer practical suggestions about engaging in biblical performance today. They conclude that when

we internalize and perform Scripture, the word comes to life and “becomes flesh” in our own existence.

Yiu Sing Lúcas Chan, a Jesuit from Hong Kong, has established his reputation as a pioneer in bridging the gap between modern biblical studies and theological ethics by his **The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes: Biblical Studies and Ethics for Real Life**. In his new volume, **Biblical Ethics for the 21st Century: Developments, Emerging Consensus, and Future Directions** (Paulist), he places his own work in the context of other scholarly efforts to bring together the two disciplines. Seeking to build on and update William C. Spohn’s **What Are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?** (1984; rev. ed., 1995), he contends that truly biblical ethics needs to include both the exegetical work of biblical theologians and the interpretive work of theological ethicists; and that a hermeneutic of virtue ethics (Who am I? Who ought I become? And what ought I do?) is a worthy method of bringing their findings to ethical expression. In dealing with the works of other scholars, Chan is admirably objective, critically perceptive, and invariably polite. In defending his own positions, he is informed, clear and persuasive.

DANIEL J. HARRINGTON, S.J., was professor of New Testament at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry and editor of New Testament Abstracts.

Editor’s note: The first essay by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., in America’s annual Books on the Bible roundup appeared in the issue of Feb. 9, 1991. This issue, 23 years later, brings his last. Father Harrington passed away on Feb. 7. Father Harrington had something good to say about everyone, an occasional twist included—e.g., “Though I sometimes find de la Potterrie unconvincing, I always find him stimulating and immensely learned.” That spirit of intellectual integrity and charity stayed with him to the end.

— R.A.S.

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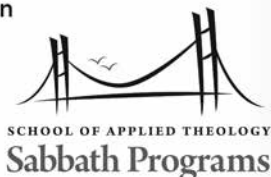
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America (ISSN 0002-7049) is published weekly (except for 13 combined issues: Jan. 6-13, 20-27, April 28-May 5, May 26-June 2, June 9-16, 23-30, July 7-14, 21-28, Aug. 4-11, 18-25, Sept. 1-8, Dec. 8-15, 22-29) by America Press Inc., 106 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019. Periodical postage is paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices. Circulation: (800) 627-9533. Subscription: United States, \$56 per year; add U.S. \$30 postage and GST (#131870719) for Canada; or add U.S. \$56 per year for international priority airmail. Postmaster: Send address changes to: America, P.O. Box 293159, Kettering, OH 45429.

Away With Fear

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT (A), MARCH 16, 2014

Readings: Gn 12:1–4; Ps 33:4-22; 2 Tm 1:8–10; Mt 17:1–9

But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid” (Mt 17:7)

Sometimes we can be held back from the spiritual renewal offered through Lent by a primal emotion that keeps faith from flourishing: fear. Fear is a crucial response in human life to protect us from physical, emotional and even spiritual threats, but misplaced spiritual fear can keep us from living out the Gospel call to faith. Debilitating spiritual fear can emerge from two seemingly disparate sources.

On the one hand, fear can emerge from the anxiety that the hard work, the penance, the suffering, the choosing of God’s way over our own way is simply not worth it. Concerns might surface that faith is a smokescreen for meaninglessness, for suckers who cannot accept the hard reality of nothingness at the core of human existence. On the other hand, there can exist a fear that does not question the reality of God, but questions whether we are worthy to stand before God, whether we are acceptable to God as we are and whether, finally, we deserve God’s love.

The Second Letter to Timothy presents Paul speaking to “my beloved child,” Timothy, asking him to “rekindle the gift of God” that was given to him. Timothy is reminded that “God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God” (1:7-8). Paul’s challenge

to Timothy gets to the heart of the first form of fear that can strike even the boldest of believers. Is it truly worth it to suffer? To be imprisoned, persecuted, or mocked for my faith and belief? Is it worth turning from the pleasures of wealth and success to serve those in need or challenge the engines of power? What if I am wrong about all this?

Whether Timothy had in fact lost the flame of his faith or adopted a “spirit of cowardice” or was “ashamed,” the context suggests that in light of human setbacks, loss and suffering, even established faith can be shaken by fear. The letter does not deny the possibility that such fears are at work in us but directs us to the experiences of power, love and self-discipline that emerge from faith in God. Fear is not countered with theological arguments, but by asking Timothy to “join with me in suffering for the Gospel.” It is in following the path of Jesus that faith dissipates fear through the experience of the reality of God’s grace.

Others, though, might not be stymied by down-to-earth human fears but by the power of God’s presence and glory. If it is the experience of God’s grace that casts out fear, would not an encounter with the living God allow us to grasp the promises of God without question and grow in faith? There is a proper fear or awe that emerges in an

encounter with God, but it, too, can lead to a sense of spiritual unworthiness. When the glory of Jesus transfigured shone before the apostles and they heard the voice of God identify Jesus as “my son, the beloved,” this spiritual experience drove them to their knees because they “were overcome by fear.” Divine glory drives sinful human beings to their knees, makes clear our weaknesses and sometimes makes us wish God would just leave us alone. Jesus, though, reaches out to his apostles saying, “Get



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

As Jesus reaches out to you and says, “Get up, and do not be afraid,” what fear keeps you from grasping his hand?

up, and do not be afraid.”

Whether we fear that faith is meaningless or that we are meaningless, it is ultimately our experience of God that reveals God’s love for us and burns away the fog of fear. These experiences might come in the most humble of circumstances, by serving someone in need or listening to a friend in distress or in the most profound encounter with the living God. But if our fears tell us either that our faith has no substance or that we are not worthy of God’s love, it is time for us to reach out and grasp the hand of Jesus. Have no fear, for his hand outstretched to us allows us to stand in the presence of God, for God has come to save us, knowing fully our weakness and sin.

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