

# America

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## Rediscovering Jesus

TIMOTHY P. SCHILLING



JOHN CARR ON THE  
LIVES OF DAVID CARR

**M**y first foray into Republican politics was in the winter of 1980, when George H. W. Bush was battling Ronald Reagan for the presidential nomination. At the invitation of Marty Flynn, a local Republican and an old Central Intelligence Agency chum, Mr. Bush made a whistle stop on Cape Cod en route to the New Hampshire primary. Well, it wasn't literally a whistle stop, but rather a quick speech at the Red Coach Grille near Barnstable Municipal Airport. My dad was a friend of Marty's and a fan of Mr. Bush and, with his 8-year-old son in tow, he set out in our yellow AMC Pacer to meet the future president.

I don't remember anything that Mr. Bush said that day, but I do recall some of the tidbits I picked up from the buzz that filled the room: "He's a family man, a true American hero," they said, "a guy who can put the country back on track." The "family man" talking point was in part a veiled critique of Mr. Reagan, who was divorced. The United States had never elected a divorced man as president, and many people were asking whether we could or even should. In any event, later that year we settled the question by electing the man who, with Mr. Bush as his vice president, inaugurated the Reagan Revolution.

This was all on my mind when I visited the George Bush Library and Museum last week in College Station, Tex., part of my effort to visit every presidential library before I shuffle off to the big Buffalo in the sky. Regrettably, but understandably, Mr. Bush's trip to the Red Coach Grille does not feature in his library and museum, nor does much of anything else from his unsuccessful run for the 1980 nomination. What's interesting, however, is how the museum's narrative is built on the very same themes he stressed that day on Cape Cod: duty, family, country. Is this a singular example of consistent political messaging across three-plus decades, or

is it simply an accurate reflection of Mr. Bush's true character?

I suspect that it's somehow both. To my knowledge, no one has ever really called his character into question. Sure, his worldview stems from an old-fashioned (some would say naïve) way of thinking about the world, one in which faith, know-how and neighborliness can tackle even the toughest problems: "There is a God and He is good, and his love, while free, has a self-imposed cost: We must be good to one another," he told us in 1988.

On the other hand, Mr. Bush has made some very questionable public choices, about war and peace and right and wrong, especially his decision to launch a barely credible, unrelentingly negative assault on his opponent, Michael Dukakis, during the 1988 presidential campaign. That wasn't very neighborly. It also helped to usher in our contemporary slash-and-burn politics, and it should be included in any discussion of Mr. Bush's public character.

No one should travel to College Station, however, expecting to see a balanced assessment of the politics of the Willie Horton ad. Fair enough. It's his library, and it reflects Mr. Bush's self-understanding. Still, he must have a regret or two, even about his public life. Why not share it with us? It might help us to understand better the people who govern our country. It would help us to see that while politicians like Mr. Bush might be decent folk, they are just as imperfect as the rest of us, and we should be reluctant, therefore, to invest in any one of them our messianic hopes, whether they originate with the duty-family-country crowd or with the so-called liberal elites. It's six of one, half a dozen of the other. As Dennis O'Brien writes in this issue: "The temptation of conservatism is that of wandering off into outmoded historical formulae that are as distant from living reality as the liberal's utopian projects."

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## ON THE WEB

Sean Salai, S.J., interviews **Camille Paglia**, right, and **Eric LeCompte** of Jubilee USA talks about **debt relief** on "America This Week." Full digital highlights on page 15 and at [americamagazine.org/webfeatures](http://americamagazine.org/webfeatures).



### Father Ted's Legacy

Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., popularly known as Ted, who died on Feb. 26, was one of the pre-eminent public figures of American Catholicism in the late 20th century, noted for his devotion to his twin vocations as a Holy Cross priest and a university educator.

During his 35 years at Notre Dame (1952–1987), he was a pioneer in stressing academic achievement, making the university coeducational and, most important, stressing greater lay participation in the university's governance. In 1967 he and other presidents of Catholic universities issued a statement at Land O'Lakes, Wis., that committed Catholic universities to standards of excellence and academic freedom that would equal those of any secular school. At Notre Dame, Father Hesburgh accomplished those goals and then some, while remaining committed to the importance of Catholic identity and scholarship.

His initial involvement in national affairs began when President Eisenhower appointed him a charter member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. He long held the view that university presidents must be involved in national affairs and lamented the dearth of such influence among educators in recent years.

Notre Dame's current president, John I. Jenkins, C.S.C., hailed Father Hesburgh as "a steadfast champion for human rights, the cause of peace and care for the poor." As William J. Byron, S.J., former president of the Catholic University of America, noted in an appreciation, Father Hesburgh wanted to be remembered among his colleagues for his friendship toward them and because he tried, "on our forward march," to be "fair and tried to make the place better." There could be no more fitting obituary than that.

### Venezuela Stumbles

The price of a barrel of oil is not the only thing in free fall in Venezuela. Standards of living are falling; employment is falling; hope is falling. On the rise are urban crime and how long Caracas residents have to wait for basic services, medicines and foodstuff. At stake is democracy itself. On Feb. 19 the embattled president, Nicolás Maduro, threw the mayor of Caracas, Antonio Ledezma, into jail, denouncing him as a *golpista*—a participant in a purported U.S.-led conspiracy against the "Chavist" government.

Indeed, some in the region see U.S. machinations at work in the remarkable decline of the economy and the Maduro administration's decreasing capacity to govern. But the Obama administration insists that the socialist regime is simply looking for someone to blame. Those

lingering anti-Washington sentiments have so far inoculated President Maduro from having to give a full accounting for his leadership, which is pressing Venezuela into political and humanitarian collapse. If the United States is scheming in Venezuela, it is failing. Maduro's challengers have yet to win over poor voters despite the economic and security chaos.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church in Venezuela has been engaging in full-throated denunciations of the Maduro government. Archbishop Roberto Lückert of Coro called the arrest of the mayor "proof" of dictatorship. Fair enough under the circumstances, but the church is already estranged from the government in Venezuela. A clear alignment with the opposition will obliterate any hope that it could play a mediating role. Venezuela's problems—and the cast of characters leading the nation—are not going away soon, and Venezuela's bishops should consider toning down the rhetoric and reaching out more to help get the nation through this crisis. Another state teetering on the brink of an abyss is the last thing this hemisphere needs.

### Deliver Them From Evil

"First of all, I thank God Almighty. I thought I would never be safe. God has saved me," said Alexis Prem Kumar, S.J., freed in late February after eight months in captivity. Before his abduction by the Taliban, the Indian Jesuit priest had served as the country director for the Jesuit Refugee Service team in Afghanistan.

Father Prem exemplifies the commitment and courage of the many bishops, priests, sisters and brothers who regularly face danger in their daily ministries. While the mainstream media may focus on heroic individuals working with secular aid organizations in harm's way, the heroism of those who work with religious organizations often goes unsung. Yet the threat to religious workers may be greater, given increased religious tensions worldwide. Today Catholic sisters work in refugee camps amid fierce ethnic rivalries; brothers minister on the borders between warring countries; priests choose to stay with their parishioners rather than flee the threat of violence; and bishops speak out against oppression and terrorism—all aware that they could be beaten, kidnapped or killed. In 2013, for example, another Jesuit priest, Paolo Dall'Oglio, S.J., was abducted from the city of Homs in Syria. He is still missing. That same year, the Greek Orthodox Bishop Boulos Yazigi and Syriac Orthodox Bishop Yohanna Ibrahim, both leaders of their churches in Aleppo, Syria, were also kidnapped.

Let us pause and pray for all these men and women, whose day-to-day ministries include the possibility of offering up their lives for the sake of the Gospel.

# Ars Moriendi

‘A moral seduction.’ That is how our late friend and columnist John F. Kavanaugh, S.J., described the debate around physician-assisted suicide in 1997.

“We have succumbed before,” Father Kavanaugh wrote, “in our always justifiable wars, in the treacherous bargain with capital punishment, in the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision to dehumanize unborn children. But now the stakes are higher. The ‘slippery slope’ of diminished human value is in deep descent.”

What would Father Kavanaugh say today, with several states considering bills to legalize assisted suicide? Oregon led the way in 1994, and now California and New York are following suit, prompted by the very public death of 29-year-old Brittany Maynard last year. Ms. Maynard decided after being diagnosed with cancer to end her life and moved to Oregon for this purpose. The “right to die” movement had been largely moribund, at least in the United States, but sometimes all it takes is a single episode to rekindle a seduction.

A ballot initiative proposing the legalization of assisted suicide failed in Massachusetts in 2012, but the question will not go away. It cuts to the heart of many issues that are important to our society: the rising costs of health care; personal liberty; questions of human dignity. As more baby boomers enter their elder years, and fewer turn to religion for consolation and guidance, more states will begin to consider assisted suicide as a legitimate path for those who suffer.

Is this the solution? The medical community places the utmost importance on individual agency. Decisions made by a patient or proxy on questions of nutrition, pain management and resuscitation are accorded full authority under the law. Why should it not be so for the ultimate decision, when to end our lives?

Marcia Angell, a respected Harvard physician and former editor of *The New England Journal of Medicine*, speaks for many when she argues in favor of legalizing assisted suicide “for terminally ill patients whose suffering cannot be relieved in any other way.” Some of the most ardent supporters of assisted suicide laws are those who work with people who have ALS, who face a painful physical decline. These are people who care deeply for patients under their watch. It is people like these the church must address when it makes the case for caring for patients until their natural death.

The focus, for ALS patients and others in distress,

should be on alleviating suffering. Much can be accomplished with proper treatment. Consider the late work of the historian Tony Judt, who died of ALS. As Dr. Michael J. Brescia, the executive medical director of Calvary Hospital in New

York, a widely respected palliative care facility, says in a new video produced by the New York State Catholic Conference ([catholicendoflife.org](http://catholicendoflife.org)): “The physical aspects of suffering are the easiest to control; the hard part is the emotional suffering.”

Here lies the primary danger with expanding legal assisted suicide. Patients, not wishing to be a burden on their friends and family, may seek to end their lives out of a sense of loneliness or desperation. Safeguards can be set up, as they have been in Oregon, to make sure patients are making the decision for the “right reasons.” But they are an insufficient solution to what remains a much larger problem.

Our society must re-evaluate its notion of personal freedom and how far it extends. Do we not have obligations beyond ourselves? What if we began to think about death not as a moment to assert our personal autonomy to its fullest extent, but as a moment to teach our sons and daughters, our nieces and nephews, about what it means to suffer and, finally, to die with dignity? As Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I., writes in his book *Sacred Fire*, this is the final challenge we face as Christians. We cannot shy away from it.

But what is dignity? The term is widely misused, as evidenced by the title of Oregon’s Death With Dignity Act. In our secular culture, dignity means living as you would want to live, being seen as you wish to be seen, not in a degraded state and certainly not in diapers. But this is the moral seduction: to think we can avoid suffering, or at least limit it—to control our lives to the very last moment.

We believe that dignity is deeper than that. Viktor E. Frankl, a Holocaust survivor, wrote, “Every human person constitutes something unique; each situation in life occurs only once...a man’s life retains its meaning up to the last—until he draws his last breath.” This is our starting point as believers. It is why Catholic health care workers excel at palliative care, and why they must continue to model this service to the whole medical community. Who knows when moments of grace may come for us and our families? Our job is to care for one another, at all moments of our lives, and trust that our loving God will shelter us in the end.



## REPLY ALL

### To Cuba's Credit

Re "A 'Francis Effect' in Cuba" (Current Comment, 2/23): Having served as the pastor of two parishes in Santa Clara, Cuba, from 1994 to 1998, I think I ought to point out some errors in this commentary. The editors write that "conditions in the country first started to change after the 1998 visit of St. John Paul II." The marked increase in religious tolerance in Cuba actually began in the early 1990s, when the Communist Party changed its statutes to allow believers to become members. Reprisals against workers for attending church services were prohibited, and the local Religious Affairs party officers were instructed to intervene in such cases. Harassment of students by their teachers for having gone to religious instruction was greatly reduced. Churches were repaired (with some difficulty), although new churches were still not permitted. University students were permitted to form Christian campus associations.

God be praised for the wonderful efforts of St. John Paul II and Pope Francis. But also give the Cuban government credit for the major self-corrections it made long before any pope came to visit. And to attribute today's improved religious freedom to the

recent resumption of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba is, in my opinion, a stretch. Permission to construct a new church building is a good step forward, but it is part of a continuum of improvements that have been happening for years.

PAT SULLIVAN, O.F.M.CAP.  
*Naha, Okinawa*

*Editor's Note: In addition to the corrections noted in this letter, there are several more. Bishop Serpa is the bishop of Pinár del Río; Sandino is not a diocese. Christmas has long been celebrated publicly; the change was that it was made once again a national holiday.*

### Restoring Justice

"Prison Addiction" (2/23), Bishop Dennis Madden's powerful exposition about the mass incarceration of young offenders, mostly African-Americans and Hispanics, for nonviolent and drug-related offenses, sounds an alarm for all urban centers. As I read about his experience in Baltimore, I kept thinking, "This is Houston."

Bishop Madden speaks to the failure of the juvenile justice system that contributes to a subclass of uneducated citizens who are disenfranchised from voting or have great difficulty finding gainful employment. Among the horrific social problems facing ur-

ban America, this surely ranks very high.

I hope clergy and faithful citizens will take seriously the challenge to craft solutions to the mass incarceration of our youth. A reform of the juvenile judicial system is needed, as are ways to rescue young people from becoming a permanent subclass and to restore to them their God-given dignity and confidence that they can be productive citizens in their communities.

(MOST REV.) JOSEPH A. FIORENZA  
*Houston, Tex.*

*The writer is archbishop emeritus of the Diocese of Galveston-Houston.*

### Holy, Not Perfect

"Saintly Sinners, Sinful Saints," by James Martin, S.J. (2/23), is a column well worth reading. I suspect that what has happened in the modern era is that a form of moralism has taken over the popular imagination. It is an attitude that cannot accommodate the notion that God's love can infuse a person who is endowed with less than a perfectly agreeable personality or that someone who acts in accord with his or her own day's standards but not ours could be deeply in love with God and human beings.

Before the 20th century, few Europeans could escape their culture's belief systems, systems that considered Europe the epitome of high culture. In that worldview, you were doing a favor by chastising members of "less fortunate races." Alas, we too will be judged harshly by people several centuries from now—unless misdeeds resulting from our blindness pollute the planet to an extent that Gaia does away with humanity. Serra was a good holy man, not a perfect holy man.

WILLIAM BURROWS  
*Online Comment*

### The Wrong Message

Should Junípero Serra be made a saint? Absolutely not. The treatment of the people of the California missions is so odious an event in the history of the



## STATUS UPDATE

*Readers respond to "Raising Peter: What my son taught me about my faith," by Mary Beth Werdel (2/23).*

I have a 25-year-old daughter with severe autism, and bringing her to church before age 9 was at times the hardest, most humbling thing I did most weeks. Like the author I had an episode in which, because of my daughter's behavior, the woman in front of me at Mass refused to shake my hand at the greeting of peace. I kept my daughter away from Mass for six months following that episode. But there was another time, when a woman gave me a hug after Mass and told me I was a wonderful mother.

I feel my daughter has become a treasured and loved member of our

parish as she has gotten older. Her face absolutely glows during Mass as if the angels or perhaps our Lord is speaking to her. She flaps her hands and rocks back to the pew after receiving Communion. My sweet, mostly non-verbal daughter is the happiest one at Mass, and all those years of struggling were worth it. I wish I had a platform to encourage other mothers to bring their children with disabilities to Mass.

NANCY JOHNSON ANTONINI

While our boys have been largely accepted, and their sensory issues have lessened over the years, I still recall some exceptionally difficult Sundays. I also find it frustrating that our local Catholic schools have no obligation to accommodate special needs. We

have an excellent public school system that accommodates their needs most wonderfully, so they are getting a great education, but before having children, we had been committed to Catholic schooling.

CATHY FARMER EARLY

I was recently hired by a Friends Church in Portland, Ore., to provide inclusion services for the children's ministry program. What I love about it is that the pastoral team has a good understanding of disability justice, and we approach inclusion as a community practice of removing barriers. As a person with a disability myself, I pray that people of faith will be liberated from ableism.

KITT REIDY

church that canonizing Serra would send a deathly message and counteract any efforts to evangelize. If it were recognized, instead, that it was not Serra but his predecessors, Bartolomé de las Casas, a repentant Dominican, and Father Eusebio Kino, a Jesuit, who made California a multicultural region that is more accepting and embracing of racial, religious and cultural diversity than any place in the past—that would be a positive and evangelizing message. Missionaries like Las Casas actually struggled through their encounter with the people of the New World and came to champion their rights as human beings deserving of respect.

CHRIS NUNEZ  
*Online Comment*

### What Cannot Die

"The Annulment Dilemma," by Msgr. Paul V. Garrity (2/16), was a good article until the last paragraph. Monsignor Garrity concludes, "The fact of a divorce should be proof enough that something essential was missing in a marriage or that the marriage has died." This statement is, in my opinion, hogwash at best. It is like saying, "The

fact that I punched my friend 'should be proof enough that' he deserved it." If we use this faulty logic in reverse, we are forced to conclude that if a couple does not divorce, then their marriage must in fact be valid. I think not.

Further, based on Catholic teaching, it is not possible for a valid marriage to "die." If a marriage could "die," then so could a baptismal seal, a confirmation seal and an ordination—and all that would be needed for "proof" of those deaths would be a loss of faith. By this logic, we are forced to conclude that if someone loses faith, then obviously his or her baptism and confirmation didn't "take." Or, if a priest leaves his ministry, he must never have been ordained.

Feelings can be allowed to die. A relationship can be allowed to die. But sacraments cannot die because Christ is their guarantor, and he conquered death.

MARK LOYET  
*Online Comment*

### Synod 'On the Streets'

As the father of seven adult children, I was dismayed by "We Have a Lot of Work to Do," an interview with

Cardinal Reinhard Marx by Luke Hansen, S.J. (2/16). So much of the focus is on reform of the Vatican, so little on change in doctrine regarding family issues, as if the church merely needs to teach so that we laypeople understand better.

The need for more involvement of women in church administration is acknowledged, but recognition of their wisdom and perspective, particularly on family matters, is overlooked. Is there no hope for substantive change regarding second marriages, premarital cohabitation, long-term loving gay relationships, birth control? These are realities families deal with day by day.

Pope Francis urges a church that is "bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets." Unfortunately, it seems the synod is being conducted only within the antiseptic halls of the Vatican, unable to grapple with the gritty realities families face in our fast-changing world. Happily, most are at peace with our Lord; unfortunately, many are finding little solace in our church.

ART MAURER  
*Rochester, N.Y.*



JUST POSTED

Of Many Things

When it comes to building a just society for the poor, the question is simply "What works?"



Nine Days of Prayer for Roe v. Wade

The annual March for Life will take place in Washington on Jan. 22



Turmoil in Michoacan

Mexican bishop rebukes government after crackdown on self-defense groups



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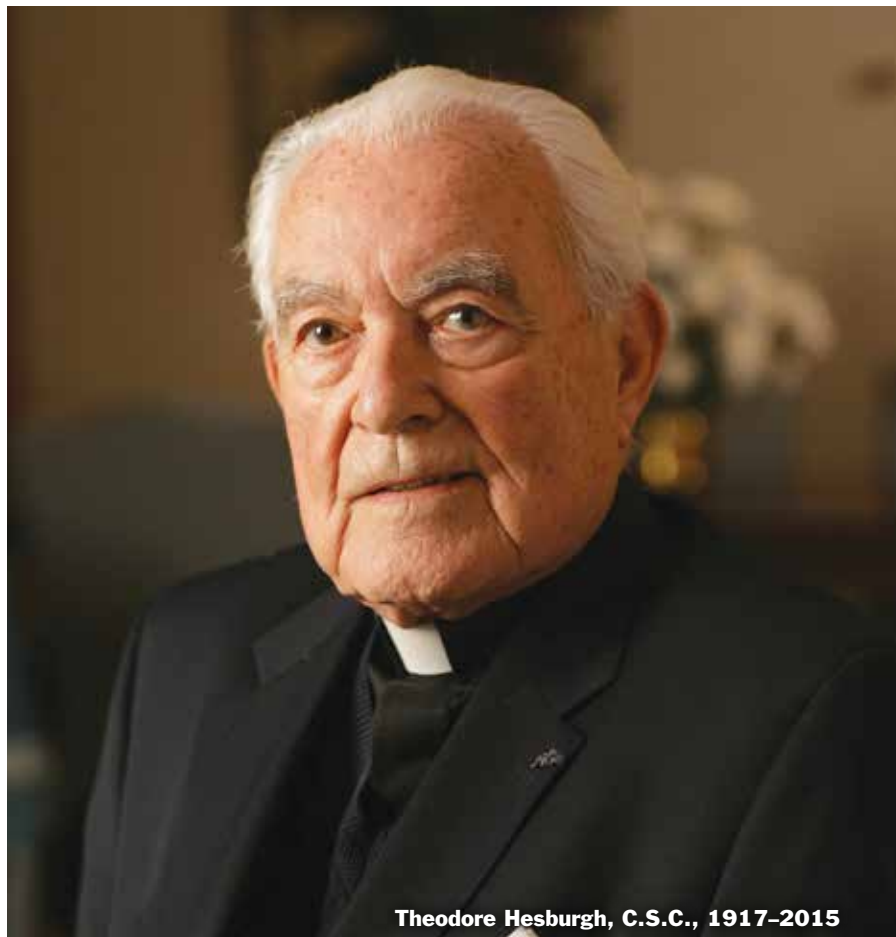
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CATHOLIC LIVES

## Notre Dame's Hesburgh Recalled As a Leader of Courage and Vision



Theodore Hesburgh, C.S.C., 1917-2015

The University of Notre Dame website went dark on Feb. 26, its usually lively front page replaced by an image of Theodore Hesburgh, C.S.C., and a quotation from him: "I never wanted to be anything but a priest, which is in itself a great and unearned grace. I hope to live and die a priest, nothing more, but nothing less either."

Father Hesburgh, among the most influential Catholic priests in the history of the American church, had passed away at Holy Cross House on the campus of his beloved university at the age of 97, a priest of the Congregation of Holy Cross for 71 of those well-packed years.

As a Catholic leader in the U.S. civil rights movement, a social activist and advisor to presidents and popes, a consistent innovator in higher education and, at 35 years, the longest-serving president of the University of Notre Dame, Father Hesburgh had an influence across a remarkable array of social, educational and economic developments in contemporary U.S. life.

The University of Notre Dame's current president, John Jenkins, C.S.C., said in a statement announcing Father Hesburgh's passing, "Notre Dame lost a piece of

its heart today, but Father Ted's spirit lives on at Notre Dame and among the millions of lives he touched around the world."

Father Hesburgh was born on May 25, 1917, in Syracuse, N.Y. He was educated at Notre Dame and the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and was ordained in 1943. Hesburgh became president of Notre Dame in 1952. By the end of his tenure he had transformed the university, nearly doubling its student body, moving it to mixed lay and religious governance in 1967 and in 1972 admitting women students to the university for the first time, noting in his wry way, "If we say we are educating for leadership, we ought to educate the other half of the human race."

Father Hesburgh rose to national prominence because of his vanguard role on civil rights. He was a founding member of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission in 1957 and was photographed joining hands with Martin Luther King Jr. at a civil rights rally in Chicago in 1964, singing "We Shall Overcome." His efforts to promote lay leadership and academic independence at Catholic universities was also groundbreaking, while literal groundbreakings came to be regular occurrences at Notre Dame under his leadership, including the groundbreaking for the 14-story library that today bears his name.

So wide were his social interests—from nuclear proliferation to civil rights to economic development—and so numerous his Vatican and political appointments that a joke regarding the globe-trotting university president began to circulate on campus: "What's the difference between God and Father Hesburgh? God is everywhere. Father Hesburgh is everywhere but Notre Dame."

In a statement on Feb. 27, President

Obama wrote: “Father Hesburgh inspired generations of young men and women to lead with the courage of their convictions. His deep and abiding faith in a loving God, and in the power of our shared humanity, led him to join the first-ever United States Civil Rights Commission, and join hands with Dr. King to sing ‘We Shall Overcome.’ His belief that what unites us is greater than what divides us made him a champion of academic freedom and open debate.”

A warm remembrance from former President Jimmy Carter on Feb. 27 suggests the great breadth of Father Hesburgh’s interests and pursuits on behalf of peace and justice: “Father Hesburgh has devoted his long and consequential life to serving humanity, always taking courageous stands on the serious moral issues that have

faced our nation and the world—from his fight for civil and human rights and against nuclear proliferation and global hunger to his ongoing efforts to seek peace among people in conflict.... His vocal concern regarding the treatment of immigrants led me to name him chair of the Select Committee on Immigration and Refugee Policy, and his recommendations served as the basis of crucial congressional reform legislation.”

President Carter added that Father Hesburgh helped “spearhead relief efforts that averted mass starvation among Cambodian refugees” and served for him on U.N. development and technology conferences. He said, “Father Hesburgh has made the world a better place—for those of us whose lives he has touched directly and as an inspiration for generations to come.”

kept him going.”

Father Kumar was abducted from a J.R.S.-supported school in Herat Province in western Afghanistan on June 2, 2014. In India on Feb. 26, Father Kumar told reporters that he was released with a warning by his captors: “I was told that I will be shot if I choose to come back to Afghanistan.” Father Kumar said his abductors kept him in chains most of the time, and he was never left without an armed guard.

According to Father Balleis, the first eight days after his kidnapping were perhaps the hardest on Father Kumar. He was kept in handcuffs and shackles in a cave during this period.

Why Father Kumar was taken in the first place may never be clear, said Father Balleis, nor could he speculate on the terms of his release. “Normally most of the people are taken for ransom or for the exchange of political prisoners,” he said, adding, “we don’t know what the negotiations were with the Indian government.”

Father Balleis said that prior to Father Kumar’s abduction, Indian Jesuits had worked in Afghanistan for years without being targeted by Taliban or criminal gangs active in the region, and a degree of complacency may have set in regarding the inherent risks of working in such a troubled region.

Ironically Father Kumar had been attempting to leave Afghanistan because of a security alert. His flight out was canceled and he had returned to the school “without people realizing it.” At that time, Father Balleis believes an “informer” at the school contacted kidnapers and alerted them to Father Kumar’s presence.

The kidnapping has not led to any diminishment to J.R.S. activities in Afghanistan or other conflict zones, like Syria

## AFGHANISTAN

### Jesuit Captive Released; Abduction Ordeal Leads to Beefed-Up Security

**T**he international director of the Jesuit Refugee Service, Peter Balleis, S.J., said, J.R.S. staff in Afghanistan and around the world were elated to have Alexis Prem Kumar, S.J., home in India and recuperating after almost nine months of captivity. “He’s in good spirits, physically well; [though] he lost a lot of weight....We are happy to have him back,” Father Balleis said.

Describing Father Kumar’s ordeal, Father Balleis said the Indian Jesuit had not been mistreated by his kidnapers, presumed to be members of the Taliban, who frequently told Father Kumar they intended to release him. “He had in the

morning time to pray, which was very important to him,” Father Balleis said. “Trusting that J.R.S. will look for him and will do what is necessary to get him back,” Father Balleis said, “that



**FREED AT LAST. Alexis Prem Kumar, S.J., in India after his release by a group in western Afghanistan believed to be associated with the Taliban.**

and Iraq, where J.R.S. operates. Father Balleis said, however, that J.R.S. did begin a review of its security protocols. "Our security concern and preparedness has come to another level," he said. "We are running now in all regions where it is risky security training for our teams because a few things you can avoid and save lives. They're sometimes very simple mistakes [that can put humanitarian workers at risk] and that we can really improve."

J.R.S. is working with a former U.N. security officer to improve its procedures. That officer told him that he had seen "too many colleagues dead because some small rules weren't followed."

According to Father Balleis, however, the new security measures would not mean hiring armed guards or escorts for J.R.S. programs or officers. "That's not our way," he said. "We are very much a grassroots organization, very much community based in general. The community is our best protection."

Father Balleis added, "The one reality is that humanitarian work is much more at risk now than before, and church personnel, humanitarian workers, are not respected [anymore]."

## Christians in Syria Seized by Islamic State

On Feb. 26, the Melkite Catholic Patriarch Gregoire III Laham said, "It is shocking that the whole world" has not responded in a proper way to the ongoing crisis in Syria. He called for international unity against the Islamic State to protect Assyrian Christian villages in northeast Syria. As many as 400 Christians may have been seized during attacks by Islamic State extremists. "It is time for the international community to work very closely with Syria and also with Iraq, who are really the real victims of these *takfiri* and jihadist groups," Patriarch Laham

## NEWS BRIEFS

"There is a need for immediate action similar to what took place in Kobani," said Bassam Ishak, president of the Syriac National Council of Syria, **urging coalition airstrikes** to aid Christian and Kurdish fighters battling Islamic State militants on Feb. 26. + On Feb. 25 a Greek Orthodox seminary in Jerusalem was **damaged by arson** and "anti-Christian" graffiti were found at the scene of what Israeli police said could be a hate crime. + The Rev. Jean-Paul Kakule Kyalembere, a diocesan priest in Congo's North Kivu province, was **shot to death** on Feb. 25 in an apparent attempted robbery. + The Federal Communications Commission's vote on Feb. 26 to **safeguard net neutrality** was welcomed by Bishop John C. Wester of Salt Lake City, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Communications, who called the Internet "a critical medium for religious speech," since other media are "closed to noncommercial religious messages." + Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron of Detroit led employees of the archdiocese into a **new chancery building** in downtown Detroit's Capitol Park on Feb. 9. + The National Demographic Survey of American Jewish College Students, released in February, found that **54 percent of Jewish students** experienced anti-Semitism on campus in the first six months of the academic year 2013/14.



Escaping ISIS

said. In a statement on Feb. 25, Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II of Antioch condemned the killings and terrorist acts that targeted the Christians of the Khabur region. He called upon the international community to work for the "immediate and unconditional release" of all kidnapped and detained people.

## Cardinal Pell Defended by Vatican

The director of the Holy See Press Office, Federico Lombardi, S.J., came out swinging on Feb. 27 in response to a collection of articles published in the Italian weekly *L'Espresso*. The articles purport to show internal struggles within the Vatican on ongoing economic reforms. "Passing confidential

documents to the press for polemical ends or to foster conflict is not new, but is always to be strongly condemned and is illegal," Father Lombardi said. "The fact that complex economic or legal issues are the subject of discussion and diverse points of view should be considered normal." *L'Espresso* reported that Cardinal George Pell's economy secretariat had run up a half-million euros in expenses in its first six months of its existence. Vatican watchers suggest the leak was intended to discredit Cardinal Pell, who has been aggressively seeking to reform Vatican financial institutions and processes. "The article makes direct personal attacks that should be considered undignified and petty," Father Lombardi said.

From CNS, RNS and other sources.

DISPATCH | JOHANNESBURG

## Democracy in Disarray

The chaos in South Africa's Parliament on Feb. 12—the expulsion of one party and the walkout of a number of others during President Jacob Zuma's annual State of the Nation address—was arguably the worst moment in the history of South Africa's legislature. The spectacle was rooted in deep discontent with the president and the ruling African National Congress.

The left-wing Economic Freedom Fighters, an emerging political rival to the A.N.C., vowed to use the address to challenge Mr. Zuma on the use of \$20 million in public funds to renovate his private home at Nkandla, Kwazulu Natal Province. Zuma has refused to respond to opposition questions about the scandal and ignored E.F.F.'s call to "Pay back the money!"

Just before Zuma's address, a number of parliamentarians from E.F.F. and Democratic Alliance—a center-right party and the official opposition—were harassed, arrested and then released. Riot police with water-cannons were deployed outside Parliament to deal with possible protesters, and cell phones within the building were temporarily jammed.

Even before Zuma could begin, E.F.F. members interjected as promised. After a few minutes, the speaker of the house ordered parliamentary security, augmented by armed plainclothes police, to expel the 25 E.F.F. members. They were dragged out, some of them sustaining minor injuries in the process.

**ANTHONY EGAN, S.J.**, a member of the Jesuit Institute South Africa, is one of *America's* Johannesburg, South Africa, correspondents.

The D.A. immediately challenged the speaker's actions, charging that it was a violation of Parliament to use armed police in what is a "gun-free zone." When no satisfactory response came from the speaker, the D.A. walked out, followed by a number of smaller opposition parties. In effect, 30 percent of South Africa's Parliament had left or been ejected.

Throughout this process President

Zuma's address was arguably the worst moment in the history of the legislature.

Zuma barely reacted, apart from giggling. He made no mention of the incident in his speech, apparently unconcerned that in effect the State of the Nation address had become a presidential pep-talk to his own party.

The illegality of E.F.F.'s initial actions notwithstanding, this incident reflects the grave divisions in South African politics. On a symbolic level, the two major parties that walked out represented sections of South African society that already feel marginalized. The Democratic Alliance represents mainly white voters and the middle class as well as sections of the business community not affiliated with the ruling A.N.C. and its so-called "patriotic" elite. (In this usage, "patriotic" suggests unreserved support for the A.N.C., not love of country or support for the constitution, the rule of law and the Bill of Rights.)

The E.F.F. claims to speak for the increasingly radicalized under- or unem-

ployed urban poor, who have not benefited from almost 21 years of A.N.C. rule and who have decided they will no longer rely on Zuma's increasingly hollow promises. It's an unlikely alliance by any estimation—a party dedicated to Obama-style social market capitalism and a socialist movement that offers few clear policies other than wealth redistribution.

What united them on Feb. 12 was disgust at the high-handed and self-serving practices of the A.N.C. and Jacob Zuma. In the aftermath of the address, the D.A. parliamentary leader, Mmusi Maimane, has described President Zuma as a disgrace to the office and called for his dismissal.

This will almost certainly not happen. Holding 63 percent of the seats in the House, the A.N.C. can block any such attempt. The party leadership will also not remove him—unless they think ordinary voters will turn against the A.N.C. at the next election.

Though the majority of A.N.C. supporters do not seem to care about Mr. Zuma's possible misdeeds or the breakdown in Parliament or—fearing in some cases for their welfare grants—feel they cannot do anything about it, many former A.N.C. supporters, and even a few A.N.C. members, agree with the opposition's analysis. They see the ruling party as a corrupt organization dedicated to its own enrichment, willing to flout the rule of law and use organs of state for its own purposes.

Noting the use of riot police outside Parliament, armed police within and the attempts to block cell-phone communication during the address, many are concerned that South African democracy is heading toward a police state. They fear that this, not the conditions depicted in President Zuma's speech, is the real state of the nation.

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# The Lives of David Carr

Even in Washington there are things more important than politics. There are losses more profound than an election defeat or the failure of a piece of legislation. When we lose someone who reminds us of what is important and what is not, there are lessons for personal, public and religious life. For me, and apparently many others, my youngest brother, David Carr, was such a person.

On Feb. 12 I got a stunning call that David had collapsed and died at the age of 58 in the newsroom of The New York Times, where he served as a media columnist. As I tried to reach our family, the terrible news was already on our phone and TV screens. I was horrified. But minutes later, we saw the beginning of an outpouring of memories and reflections on the Internet, in the media and later at his wake and funeral.

David's life was far too short, but it was very full, with so many unbelievable downs and ups that even he had to fact-check it for his book *The Night of the Gun*, in which he reported his hellish life as a coke addict and his rise to become a loving and loved father, a respected journalist, valued mentor and friend. David did not hide his failings and mistakes; he documented them in his book and acknowledged them in his column. But the overwhelming responses to his passing focused on the good he had done and the lessons we can learn from his unique journey.

*There Are Second Chances.* We could have lost David decades ago in

an alley in Minneapolis or from an earlier bout with cancer. At the wake of a beloved cousin who died of a drug overdose, my dad whispered to David, "Is this what you have planned for us?" With the help of God, and many others, David took a different path. His rise and recovery were made possible by second, third and fourth chances and by his faith, hard work as a reporter, AA partners and good friends, and especially by his wife Jill and three daughters, Erin, Meagan and Madeline. Though he had no distinguished degrees nor an establishment résumé, The Times took a chance on David, and he became, in the words of the publisher, "one of the most gifted journalists who has ever worked at The New York Times."

*Family Comes First.* David's twin daughters saved his life and gave it purpose. He brought his infant twins to the local parish seeking baptism, saying that he could be a bad son, employee, friend, but not a bad father. The pastor simply said "welcome home." Our parents and family never gave up on David, which made his recovery and achievements sources of enormous relief and gratitude.

*Loyalty Counts.* David challenged the media status quo and his own paper, but he was a fierce defender of good reporting in The Times and beyond. David was a demanding, often profane boss, but also a mentor who offered young reporters chances to fail and grow and his enduring loyalty and encouragement. Being his friend or colleague was not always easy, but it was never dull and often rewarding.

*Respect Matters.* David was a tough reporter and often a critical columnist, but many of those he covered and worked with recalled the respect and fairness he brought to journalism. He made judgments in his column every Monday, but, given his own failings and wounds, he was rarely judgmental. He treated interns, waiters, taxi drivers and homeless people like they were Pulitzer Prize winners.

*Faith Gives Hope.* David was a believer, a product of his strong Irish



David's life was far too short, but it was very full.

Catholic family and his reliance on God in recovery. Neither pious nor self-righteous, he found strength and direction from his Catholic faith. He once addressed a group of bishops on the church and addiction: "The unconditional love of the church could possibly mean the difference between somebody living or dying.... By demonstrating a willingness to minister to those afflicted with this disease, the church becomes better." I'm grateful David lived to see Pope Francis and hear his calls for greater mercy, a humble church and a loving faith.

In his consoling and challenging homily during the funeral Mass, America's James Martin, S.J., reminded us that David was not a saint, but he was a miracle—an example of how God's grace, a family's love, honest work and loyal friends can lift all of us sinners to live with faith, hope and love and leave our piece of this world a better place.

JOHN CARR

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

PHOTO OF DAVID CARR: CHESTER HIGGINS, JR. / THE NEW YORK TIMES

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# Rediscovering Jesus

Pope Francis wants you to get personal.

BY TIMOTHY P. SCHILLING

**W**hat is the lifeblood of the church and its service to the world? Pope Francis says nothing new in “The Joy of the Gospel” when he stresses the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. What is striking, however, is the passion with which he makes his case and the fullness of his account of what that relationship involves.

As a Catholic working in one of the world’s most secularized countries, I am acutely aware of the timeliness of this exhortation. Here in the Netherlands, the recent 50-year decline in church involvement has been accompanied by a proportionate decline of belief in the divinity of Christ and of attestation to a personal relationship with God. I cannot help but wonder about the relationship between these developments, especially given Christ’s reminder, “Without me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). I am also intrigued by the fact that signs of new life here in the Dutch church have come most visibly from ecclesial communities that strongly emphasize a personal relationship with Christ. For this reason I would like to draw attention to the pope’s treatment of this theme in “The Joy of the Gospel.”

Since papal teachings arrive steadily from Rome, we may be tempted to treat them as *pro forma* exercises—as just another sign the pope is doing his job. But Francis warns repeatedly against indifference. The main reason for “The Joy of the Gospel,” he makes clear, is not to close the Year of Faith and summarize perspectives from the 2012 Synod on the New Evangelization but to serve a suffering humanity. The human race suffers physically and mentally. It suffers from poverty, disease, thwarted opportunity and violence; from loneliness, emptiness and the fear of death. In his analysis the pope ranges widely but also gets specific—mentioning, for example, the current plights of refugees and victims of human trafficking. In his view, no one is free of suffering. Even those who insulate themselves against it know fear within, feel the decline of the body and see the pain borne by others if not by themselves.

“The Joy of the Gospel” reminds us, however, that we do

not stand empty-handed before this pervasive suffering. We may address it with a healing love that casts out fear. This love comes from God, and we have recourse to it thanks to Jesus, the Son of God, who died that we might embrace it. In his Gospel we find an answer to “our deepest needs” (No. 265). “Those who accept Jesus’ offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness” (No. 1).

## What Gets in the Way

Unfortunately, we Christians sometimes forget what we are about. In “The Joy of the Gospel,” Francis perceives that we (he explicitly includes himself) at times shut God out and lose our enthusiasm for sharing and proclaiming his love. How can this be? In a particularly insightful section (Nos. 76-109), he describes the temptations faced by those who work in and for the church. As I read this account of how worldliness undermines the would-be evangelist, my first thought was, when did the pope start stalking me? Time and again, he cites examples of blasé egoism that I recognize from my own life.

The underlying problem, of course, is that while Christ has definitively “saved” us, we still have to accept that salvation and allow it to flower within us. Meanwhile, we are beset by influences that urge us to do otherwise. The nature of this social pressure, Francis observes, varies from religious persecution and the lack of religious freedom in some countries to more subtle forms of resistance to the Gospel elsewhere. The latter applies in both my native country, the United States, and my current European home, the Netherlands, where highly secularized market economies preach competitiveness and materialism. In thoroughly capitalist environments, the highest choice (one is led to believe) is the choice for oneself. All else is relative. As for salvation, a range of options is on offer, and invariably the alternatives are more easily and cheaply had than the one proposed by the church. Within such a context it is not surprising that faith corrodes, turning the (aspiring) loving giver into a demanding consumer. Compounding the problem is widespread suspicion and cynicism toward the church’s message—some of it understandable in light of the sex-abuse crisis, for example—that induces many Christians “to relativize or conceal their identity and convictions” (No. 79).

I recognize myself in this description of the self-conscious proclaimer. How hard it is to speak of Christ in a country

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TIMOTHY P. SCHILLING writes from the Center for Parish Spirituality, Nijmegen, the Netherlands. The center is sponsored by the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament.



where the faith has been largely abandoned! How hard it is to get children to church when none of their classmates go! How hard it is to recommend discipleship in a rich country that excels at meeting immediate needs! One tires of answering for and defending the church. It is so much easier to keep quiet and fit in.

I see myself, too, in the pope's warning against "an inordinate concern for personal freedom and relaxation" (No. 78). And not only myself: this pre-occupation thrives in Dutch society. Few concepts resonate more winningly in the Western world than self-actualization, and this is increasingly associated with autonomy ("I alone decide about my life") and comfort-based approaches to "wellness." It amazes me how much time, energy and money can go into self-care. Yes, certainly, we must nourish the body and mind God has given us. But far too often I see myself putting self-indulgence ahead of loving service. Francis, bracingly confrontational, calls self-absorption "slow suicide" (No. 272).

I could go on. Let us just say I find the pope's analysis of the situation (far more extensive than I have presented here) to be persuasive—painfully so.

### Renewing the Relationship

So what to do about it? How are we to emerge from our self-centeredness, that we might welcome again and share God's love? According to Francis, the key lies in "a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ" (Nos. 3 and 8). We must hear again—or for the first time—the *kerygma*, the core of the Gospel message: "Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you" (No. 164). And not only hear it. We must experience in a profound, existential way that Christ's resurrection is not an event of the past but "a vital power...an irresistible force," by means of which beauty is every day born anew in the world (No. 276). We must make room in ourselves that he might live and reign through our lives.

Happily, Francis does not leave it at a lovely image. He goes on to specify reorientations of thought and practice that will help us to grow in communion with Christ. What follows is a brief summary of his recommendations.

*A reorientation of thought.* The essential first step in this process of rediscovering Christ is, of course, to acknowledge our full dependence on God in coming to know God. Only God can bridge the



**THE POPE AT PRAYER.** Pope Francis prays before an icon of Mary, Salvation of the Roman People, in a chapel of the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome the morning after his election.

gap between him and us. Renewal of the personal encounter with Christ thus begins with an appeal to the Holy Spirit, that he might lead us to Christ. Such an appeal is indeed already a sign of the Spirit at work within us (God is ever the initiator). And Francis encourages us with his observation that Christ always meets us more than halfway. “Whenever we take a step toward Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms” (No. 3).

If a willing heart is the essential precondition to a vibrant friendship with the Lord, Francis points out that we need to engage our minds as well. The mind allows us to focus on what is truly important and to imagine unforeseen possibilities (always helpful when dealing with God). We Christians easily get bogged down in “secondary” matters—church politics or lesser points of doctrine, for example—“that do not convey the heart of Christ’s message.” The pope reminds us that we recognize a hierarchy of truths in our tradition (Nos. 34-37) and that love of God and love of neighbor are the points Christ himself put at the top of the list (Mk 12:28-31). Getting to know Christ better involves learning to think as he does—to join him in seeking what he seeks and loving what he loves (No. 267).

Expanding our minds is also necessary, because, as Francis notes, we enclose Christ in “dull categories” of our own making (No. 11). Instead of letting God “bring us beyond ourselves to attain the fullest truth of our being” (No. 8), we either detach ourselves from God or reduce God to our size. One finds startling manifestations of this in the Netherlands, where increasingly “God” is understood (even by large numbers of Catholics) to be an impersonal, higher force. According to the latest numbers in the research project God in Nederland (1966-present), 55 percent of Catholics fall into this category. Sadly, for these Catholics God is an abstraction, and—as I often remind people in parishes here—you cannot have a relationship with an abstraction. The same survey shows only a slight majority of respondents (55 percent) calling Jesus “the Son of God or sent by God,” with the rest saying he was “an extraordinary person with extraordinary gifts” (30 percent), “an ordinary person” (12 percent) or “did not exist, is a legend” (3 percent).

This research confirms my impression from 11 years of work with Dutch parishes—namely, that Arianism, the denial of Christ’s divinity, is hardly a thing of the past. In answer to this challenge, the pope urges us to rediscover the Jesus of the Creed: the crucified one, now seated at the right

hand of the Father.

*A reorientation of practice.* But knowing Christ is more than a mental exercise. Above all it is an existential encounter that remakes us. For it to occur, we need spiritual practices that invite Christ into our lives. Francis recommends to this end the tried and true: listening to God’s Word (at Mass, but also in Bible study and *lectio divina*), receiving the Eucharist, turning to him in prayer (particularly in contemplative forms like eucharistic adoration), receiving spiritual direction, finding support in a small Christian community and performing

works of mercy and reconciliation. Interesting to see in the Netherlands is how helpful new ecclesial movements and small Christian communities can be in promoting a vital relationship with Christ. The Focolare movement, Sant’Egidio, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the Emmanuel Community and many others prioritize the personal relationship with Christ and send forth believers who are ready to share their faith with others. At the national resource

center for parishes where I work, we are looking into how parishes can do more of the same.

*With Jesus in the world.* To Catholic ears, “a personal relationship with Christ” may sound like a private, unworldly encounter. But Francis says it is the opposite. While acknowledging that in trying times the church may be tempted to reject the world and retreat into a closed-off friendship with the Lord, he warns that doing so is a betrayal of the Gospel: “True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others” (No. 88). In fact, Jesus calls to us *from* the world, where he is present “in the faces of others, in their voices, in their pleas” (No. 91). Being church, Francis says, means participating in God’s great plan of fatherly love. It means “proclaiming and bringing his salvation into our world, which often goes astray and needs to be encouraged, given hope and strengthened on the way” (No. 114). Just as much, it means recognizing that God is already out there, active and alive, for heaven and earth are full of God’s glory.

With Christ we need not fear the future, for in him all things are “gathered up—things in heaven and things on earth” (No. 181; cf. Eph 1:10). He reconciles “God and man, time and eternity, flesh and spirit, person and society” (No. 229). Our world is ever in his hands, and his is a tenderness that never disappoints (No. 3). This is the joy that Christians know and gladly proclaim. **A**

## Getting to know Christ better involves learning to think as he does—to join him in seeking what he seeks and loving what he loves.

# Who Speaks for Islam?

Muslim authorities call for an end to militant violence.

BY ELIAS D. MALLON

“Why don’t they speak out?” Faced with the savage persecution of Christians and other religious minorities in Syria and Iraq, that is a question one often hears as the atrocities of the so-called Islamic State continue in the name of Islam. Why aren’t moderate Muslim leaders speaking out against the Islamic State (also known as ISIS or ISIL)? Until recently the response to this question has been that Muslims are indeed speaking out, and loudly. But there have been two major obstacles to their voices being heard.

First, Islam is not a centralized religion like Catholicism; there is no single person or institution that speaks for all Sunnis or all Shiites, much less for all branches of Islam. When the pope speaks out, he speaks for more than a billion Catholics. There is in Islam no person or structure parallel to the pope or the secretary general of a religious body. Second, many of the voices raised against crimes targeting

religious minorities have appeared in newspapers and languages rarely picked up by news agencies that publish in Western languages. It has not been the case that no one was speaking out but that no one in the West—for various reasons—was listening.

## Voices Raised

The situation has changed considerably in recent months, and the non-Muslim world needs to take notice. Muslim scholars as well as official and unofficial organizations have been issuing significant condemnations of the movement called the Islamic State and its self-declared caliphate. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani, the leading Iraqi Muslim authority, issued a brief *fatwa* in June condemning the persecution of Christians and Yazidis and inviting them to seek refuge in southern Iraq.

On the Sunni side, Muhammad Haniff Hassan and Mustaza Bahari, two Muslim scholars, published a list of 86 organizations and individuals that have spoken out against the Islamic State. The list contains statements made by the Grand Muftis of Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia and the polit-

ELIAS D. MALLON, S.A., is external affairs officer at the Catholic Near East Welfare Association in New York, N.Y.



**FINAL REST.** Men place a headstone at the grave of Seydo Mehmud Cumo, 44, at a cemetery in Suruc, Turkey, Oct. 11. Cumo was a Syrian Kurdish fighter killed in clashes with Islamic State militants in Kobani, Syria.

CNS PHOTO/UMIT BEKTAS, REUTERS

ical leaders of Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Iran, together with numerous Islamic universities, societies and individual scholars.

The Vatican News Service (07/26/14) and Eurasia Review (10/1/14) ran articles on the many different Muslim groups that are responding to the challenge of the Islamic State, declaring it illegal by the standards of both Islamic and international law. The most detailed and perhaps most devastating critique and condemnation of the Islamic State, however, was released in English in September in an open letter to “Dr. Ibrahim Awwad Al-Badri, alias ‘Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi,’ and to the fighters and followers of the self-declared ‘Islamic State.’” Al Badri is the leader of the Islamic State who declared himself caliph on June 29, 2014. He has changed his name several times, each time giving himself a grander pedigree, ultimately linking himself to the tribe of the Prophet by taking on the name Al-Qurayshi. The letter pointedly acknowledges none of his recently assumed names, to say nothing of his title as caliph.

The letter was originally written in classical Arabic and is clearly intended first and foremost for Al-Badri and the fighters of the Islamic State. Even a cursory reading indicates that the document was not produced primarily for media distribution. For the average reader, especially in the West, the document is ponderous, detailed in the extreme, foreign

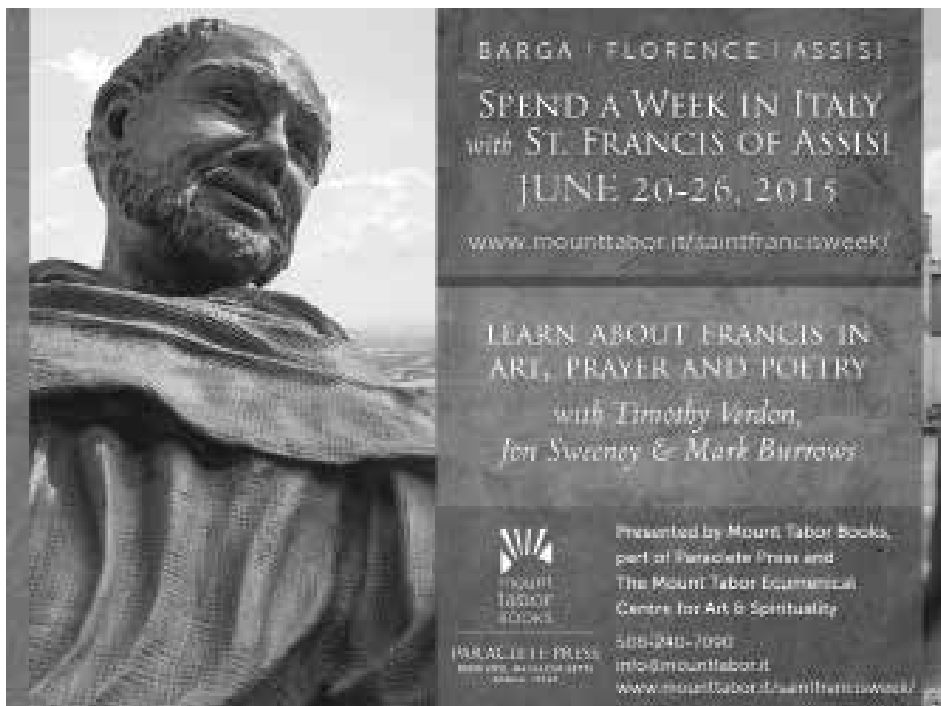
in tone and ever so slightly reminiscent of the language of papal encyclicals. It is most assuredly not a document that translates well into sound bites. This is precisely what makes the document so extremely important. Muslim scholars and non-Muslim scholars of Islam will be studying this document for some time.

## Islam is not a centralized religion like Catholicism; there is no single person or institution that speaks for all Sunnis or all Shiites, much less for all branches of Islam.

It is often said, with some justification, that Islam does not presently have a discipline similar to what Christians call theology. Instead, Islam has developed a highly sophisticated system of jurisprudence called *fiqh*. For Muslims, jurisprudence is not merely law; it is the systematized guidelines for living a life in conformity with the will of God. Never purely theoretical, Islamic jurisprudence is geared toward solving practical problems and balancing a 1,400 year tradition with modern exigencies. Both Sunni and Shiite Muslims have developed over the centuries an extremely complex set of principles (the “pillars of jurisprudence”—*usūl al-fiqh*) to help scholars address contemporary problems. There is a hierarchy in the application of the principles of jurisprudence that is clearly evidenced in the letter.

### By the Book

The first principle of Islamic jurisprudence is, not surprisingly, the Quran. A sophisticated exegesis searches the Quran for guidance, taking into account the language, the circumstances in which the verses were revealed and their context within the entire Quran. In second place is the Sunna. The Sunna is a vast collection of sayings by the Prophet or stories about the Prophet related by his closest companions. There are several “canonical” collections of the Sunna and an exacting science of determining the value and relevance of any given tradition. There are traditions that are “strong” and those that are “weak.” This difference appears in the letter. Therefore, traditions have to be carefully sifted out and evaluated before they are included in an argument. Third, there are the examples from Islamic history—a type of precedent. Last, there are interpretive principles that help the scholar



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deal with situations for which there are no clear precedents. These are in decreasing order of authority. The Quran is the highest authority, followed by the Sunna. History and analogous reasoning in unprecedented situations are of a lesser authority.

The letter deals with 24 topics. The opening topics lay the ground for or against the Islamic legitimacy of the Islamic State. As would be expected, *jihad* receives considerable attention, with subtopics like rules of conduct of *jihad*, intention, goal, killing of innocents, killing of emissaries, etc. Each topic is treated in detail, starting with the Quran and working down through the contemporary situation.

The letter declares the killing of innocents to be *mūbiqat*, a mortal sin (No. 6). The killing of emissaries, a category that includes reporters and aid workers, is *haram*, or totally forbidden (No. 7). In dealing with Christians the letter states: "These [Arab] Christians are not combatants against Islam or transgressors against it, indeed they are friends, neighbors and co-citizens. From the legal perspective of Shariah law, they fall under ancient agreements that are around 1,400 years old, and the rulings of *jihad* do not apply to them" (No. 10). The paragraph after that declares that the Yazidis, whom the Islamic State fighters consider "devil worshippers," are, in fact, "people of the Scriptures," together with Jews and Christians, and hence protected.

The language of the letter, especially in English translation, contains expressions and references that readers not familiar with Islam could easily overlook. In the paragraph dealing with slavery, the letter recognizes that the Islamic State has taken and sold human beings as slaves. The letter states, "You have revived strife and sedition, and corruption and lewdness on the earth" (No. 12). The word *sedition* in the English text has the Arabic word *fitnah* after it in parentheses.

The notion of *fitnah* in Islam evokes very powerful feelings. *Fitnah* is rebellion, the breakdown of all social and moral norms and total chaos. After the death of the Prophet, some Arabian tribes abandoned Islam and fought against the Muslims. That was called the First Fitnah. Islamic law provides for the relaxation of many rules in order to avoid *fitnah*. In Islamic jurisprudence, *fitnah* would never be the lesser of two evils.

The second expression is "to spread corruption (*fasād*) on the earth." Several times in the Quran the expression "to spread corruption on the earth" appears, and it is looked upon as the greatest of crimes and the crime subject to the harshest penalties (5:32, 34; 7:57, etc.) Anyone familiar with Islamic legal language would recognize that this is the harshest accusation one Muslim can make against another.

At its publication in September 2014, the document was signed by 126 Muslim leaders and scholars. Several Muslims have added their names since the publication.

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## An Alert From Authority

It is important to keep several things in mind when reading the document. First and foremost, it is an intra-Muslim document. It is not an Islamic statement on worldwide terrorism, a judgment on *jihadis* all over the world or a judgment on any global issue, regardless of what non-Muslims in the West might want it to be. It is addressed by a large number of Muslim scholars to a particular Muslim and his movement. While by no means the only Muslim judgment against the Islamic validity of the Islamic State, it is by far the most specific, the most concrete and the one in the most traditional form. There is a 24-point executive summary for those who do not wish or are not able to follow the tight reasoning of an Islamic *fatwa*. The 10th point is: "It is forbidden in Islam to harm or mistreat—in any way—Christians or any 'People of the Scripture.'" The seventh point is: "It is forbidden to kill journalists and aid workers."

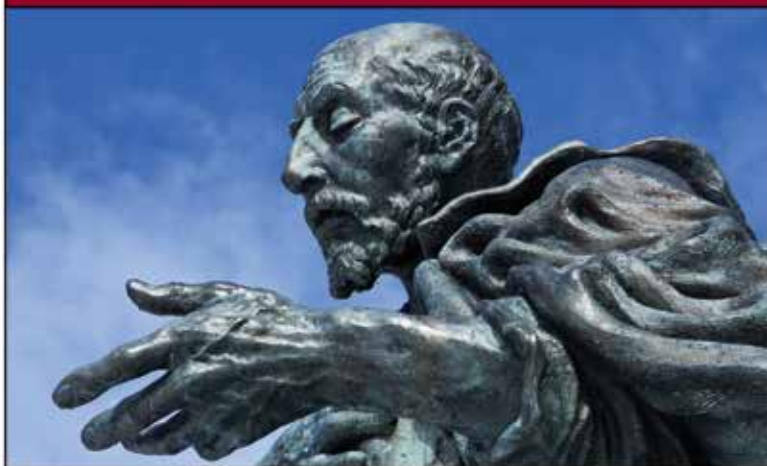
As a religious ruling and as an intra-Muslim document, it would be unfair to look in the document for any support of things like U.S. policy in the Middle East or the civil war in Syria. Muslim religious documents are no more obliged to approve of U.S. foreign policy than are documents issued by the Vatican. In point of fact, in the last 15 years the Vatican has on several occasions disagreed with U.S. policies in the Middle East. It would be unrealistic and unfair to expect more of Muslims.

While the document is extraordinary by any standard, it would be unwise to either overestimate or underestimate its authority. As mentioned earlier, there is no one person or institution that speaks authoritatively for all Muslims. It is to be expected that there will be Muslims who disagree with the document or reject it entirely. Nevertheless, there is in Islam a principle called *ijma'*, "consensus," similar to the Catholic principle of *sensus fidelium*.

According to this principle, if Muslims agree on something, they are immune to error. Of course, the vast majority of the instances of *ijma'* are judged after the fact—the community came to an agreement on something in the past and it has become common practice. There are, however, no criteria as to exactly how or when an *ijma'* is achieved. Nor is there any given number of Muslims or percentage thereof who must agree on something for it to constitute a consensus. Nonetheless, the unusually varied and large number of Muslim leaders and scholars who have come out against the Islamic validity of the Islamic State and who have condemned its atrocities must carry great weight in the Muslim world.

While there may be some who do not agree with everything in the document or some who do not think it goes far enough, it remains a masterpiece of Islamic juridical thought and procedure and a document eminently worthy of the respect and attention of all religious people who are committed to interreligious understanding. 

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# On Dying Well

A paradoxical relationship with death

BY JESSICA KEATING

Last year Brittany Maynard's controversial decision to "die with dignity" captured the national imagination and rekindled the contentious debate over the right to die. She was lauded by many for what they called her courage. The Washington Post columnist Richard Cohen praised her suicide, calling it "admirable," "sensible" and "dignified." Others have derided Ms. Maynard for what they considered cowardice, calling her "selfish" and "prideful." Nearly every angle of this story was exhausted as Ms. Maynard increasingly became a prop for argumentation. Though in many ways she was an outlier among those who have chosen assisted suicide, her case is important because our rapacious consumption of her suffering and death has revealed just how deeply conflicted we are about these profound human realities.

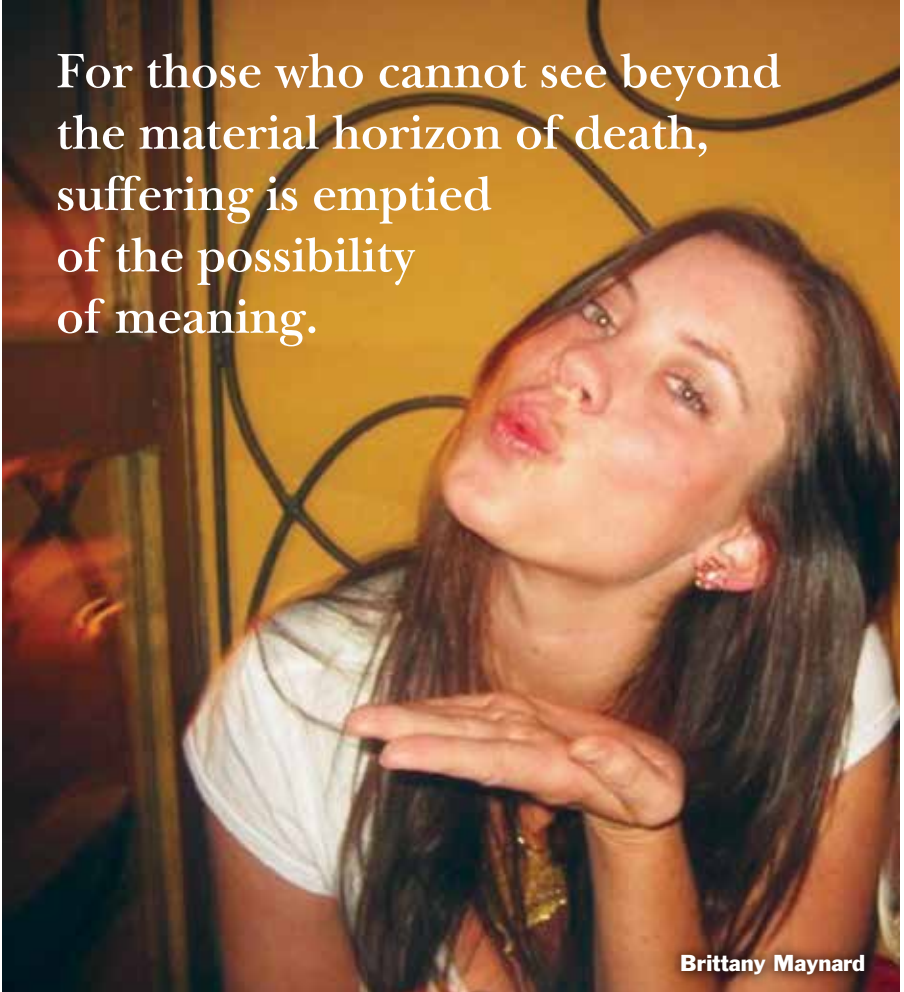
On the one hand, we naturalize death. We make it just another point on the continuum of life. At the same time, we fear death and push it to the margins of lived experience. The dead are gotten out of the house—or more often the hospital bed—and into the ground as quickly as possible. Yet on the other hand, death continues to be experienced as an evil, as a break, a foreclosing of the possibility to love a particular somebody. But the more we push death and dying to the peripheries, the more we consume the spectacle of death. Such a contentious and contradictory relationship is only exacerbated by the fact that suffering so often accompanies death, and we are as ill-equipped to encounter suffering as we are to face death.

For those who cannot see beyond the material horizon of death, suffering that does not appear to have proximate material benefit is emptied of the possibility of meaning.

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JESSICA KEATING is the program director of the Office of Human Dignity and Life Initiatives at the University of Notre Dame.

Despite modern efforts to deny death's sting and to excise it from the daily goings-on of life, we remain keenly aware of death's nearness, fearful of its capricious cruelty. Indeed, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide are as much about unseemliness and fear of suffering as they are about death.



For those who cannot see beyond the material horizon of death, suffering is emptied of the possibility of meaning.

Brittany Maynard

## A Peaceful Death?

Euthanasia is currently prohibited in the United States, but physician-assisted suicide is legal in five states. Oregon led the way in 1994, followed by Vermont, Washington, New Mexico and Montana. New Jersey and Connecticut are currently considering legislation that would legalize the practice of physician-assisted suicide. In Europe, the Netherlands was the first country to legalize voluntary active euthana-

sia, amending its Penal Code in 1985. Voluntary active euthanasia is distinct from physician-assisted suicide in that the doctor, and not the patient, administers a life-ending injection. Belgium and Luxembourg have since introduced similar legislation. In 2004, a Dutch doctor euthanized a Catholic nun, who was dying of cancer, against her will because he believed her religion prevented her from rationally assessing her situation.

In February of last year, the Belgian parliament voted to legalize euthanasia for terminally ill children with parental consent. Belgium legalized euthanasia for adults 12 years ago and now leads the way in expanding euthanasia laws to include children. In Lithuania, the health minister has recently proposed the possibility of euthanasia for poor people who cannot access palliative care. The logic of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide tacitly asserts that suffering necessarily devalues human life. In an attempt to radically reconfigure and domesticate the mystery of death, a “death with dignity”—that is, a death without suffering—becomes preferable to a life that remains open to the possibility that suffering can intersect with love.

Arguments for euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide typically invoke the grammar of compassion, peace and dignity. We all hope the dying have a peaceful death. In fact, in the Liturgy of the Hours, Night Prayer ends with the petition, “May the all-powerful Lord grant us a restful night and

a peaceful death.”

With the advance of utilitarian idealism and medical technology, it seems that nothing but a peaceful death will be acceptable, wherein peace is reduced to the absence of pain, emotional and physical suffering or the loss of cognitive and physical abilities. This understanding of peace empties *compassion* of its original depth of meaning as co-experiencing, suffering with. This logic cannot account for the martyrs or for anyone who endures great suffering all the way to the end. Rather, the use of this grammar masks the insidious affirmation that the one who stands to lose all her abilities and suffer greatly is better off dead. Indeed, so thin an account of peace means that the Catholic nun who was euthanized against her will was in fact incapable of rationally assessing her situation.

The use of the term *dignity* to describe this death is deeply problematic, since it masks the reality of fear and equates dignity exclusively with radical autonomy, choice and cognitive capability. The result is the not-so-subtle implication that the person who chooses to endure diminishment and suffering dies a less dignified death. While the mendacious logic of this narrative of dignity is largely unexamined, the logic of absolute autonomy remains unquestioned.

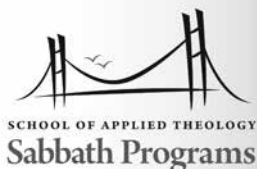
Yet not all narratives are equal, and there is another narrative that is routinely neglected or, worse, rejected out of hand, a narrative grounded in the logic of the Cross. This is a narrative in which suffering unto death can be penetrated and transfigured by the mystery of love—particularly in cases like Ms. Maynard’s, when one is surrounded by loving family and friends. This transfiguration occurs in hidden intimacies. Choosing to die early forecloses such possibilities. Had she not taken her own life with the assistance of a physician, she, like many who suffer terminal illness, almost assuredly would have been stripped bare of her abilities, perhaps even her mind. Indeed, there was nothing material for her to gain in suffering, only loss. Almost assuredly there would have been no inspiring recovery story to tell at the end. Rather, Ms. Maynard might have become unproductive, unattractive, uncomfortable. She would just have been. But she would have been present in a web of relationships. Even had she fallen unconscious, she likely would have been read to, washed, dressed and kissed. She would have been gently caressed, held and wept over. She would simply have been loved to the end. **A**

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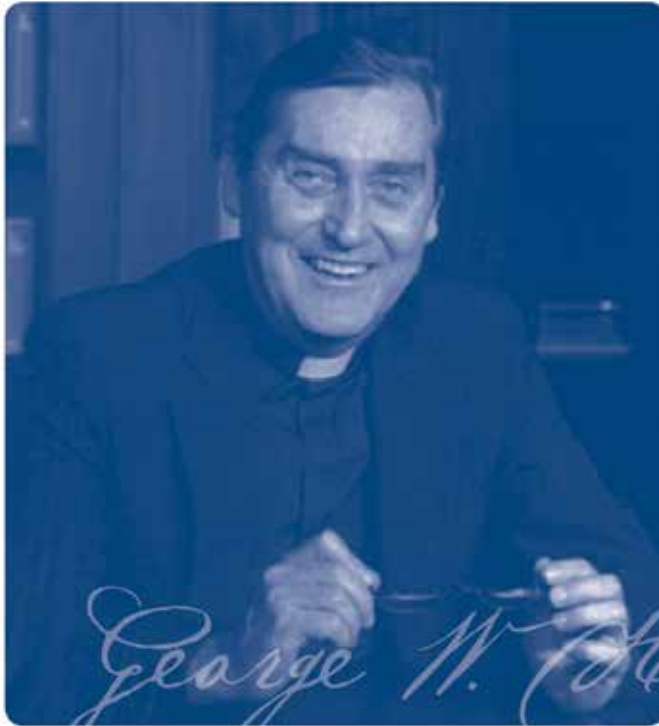
# GEORGE W. HUNT, S.J., PRIZE

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## THE LIFE OF GEORGE W. HUNT, S.J. (1937-2011)

George W. Hunt, S.J., served as the 11th editor in chief of *America*, the national Catholic review published by the Jesuits of the United States. A native of Yonkers, N.Y., Father Hunt entered the Society of Jesus in 1954 and was ordained a priest in 1967. He earned a theology degree from Yale Divinity School in 1970, later remarking that his decision to study Kierkegaard with Professor Paul Holmer was “the best and most fruitful decision in my entire academic life,” for it set the stage for a life-long study of the literary arts.

George W. Hunt, S.J., retired as editor in chief in 1998, at the conclusion of the magazine’s most prosperous year to-date. He remains the longest serving editor in chief in *America’s* history. Later that year, Father Hunt was named director of the Archbishop Hughes Institute for Religion and Culture at Fordham University, where he dedicated himself to “exploring the relationships between religion and other aspects of contemporary life.” George W. Hunt, S.J., Jesuit priest, author and friend, died in 2011 at the age of 74.

### THE MISSION OF THE GEORGE W. HUNT, S.J., PRIZE

The Hunt Prize is to be awarded annually and is made possible through the vision and generosity of Fay Vincent Jr., former commissioner of Major League Baseball, who sought to honor his long-standing friend, Father Hunt. The mission of the Prize is five-fold:

- I. To promote scholarship, the advancement of learning and the rigor of expression;
- II. To support and promote a new generation of journalists, authors and scholars;
- III. To memorialize the life and work of George W. Hunt, S.J.;
- IV. To forge a lasting partnership between *America* and the Saint Thomas More Chapel and Center at Yale University;
- V. To support the intellectual formation of Catholic young adults.

### CRITERIA

The Hunt Prize will be awarded to a single individual whose body of work has focused on one or more of the following topical areas:

- Catholicism and Civic Life
- Catholicism and Arts and Letters
- Modern American Fiction
- U.S. Sports
- U.S. History
- Jazz or Classical Music
- American Film and Drama
- Poetry
- Spirituality & Literature

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

### ELIGIBILITY

Recipients of the George W. Hunt, S.J., Prize must dedicate a substantial portion of their professional energies to writing and must fulfill the following additional criteria:

- He or she must be 45 years of age or younger on the day the prize is awarded;
- He or she should be familiar with the Roman Catholic tradition;
- He or she should be of sound moral character and reputation and must not have published works that are manifestly atheistic or morally offensive.

### NOMINATIONS

Nominations for The Hunt Prize will open on George W. Hunt’s birthday, at 12 a.m. on January 22, 2015 and the nomination period will close at 11:59 p.m. on March 31. All submissions may be made at: [huntprize.org](http://huntprize.org).

### FORMAL AWARD AND CEREMONY

The winner will be announced in June 2015. The winner will be awarded a gift of \$25,000. Formal awarding will take place at the Saint Thomas More Chapel and Center at Yale University in September 2015.

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

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



# Partners in Protection

The Center for Child Protection, based at the Jesuit-run Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, is at the forefront of the Catholic Church's global response to prevent the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable persons.

This pioneering venture offers assistance, particularly through education, to churches and religious and nongovernmental organizations, especially in Africa, Asia and South America, to enable them to deal with and prevent abuse in their fields of responsibility. It also provides formation for priests and seminarians studying in Rome and courses for members of the Roman Curia and for new bishops.

Established as a pilot project in January 2012, through collaboration among the Gregorian University, the Archdiocese of Munich and Freising, and the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Psychology of the State University Clinic of Ulm in Germany, the center was originally based in Munich. Now, after three years successfully conducting an e-learning course that includes online training in awareness and prevention of sexual abuse of children and care for survivors, it has relocated to the Gregorian University, where the inauguration ceremony was held on Feb. 16.

In a message for the occasion to Hans Zollner, S.J., a German Jesuit who is president of the center, Pope Francis praised and encouraged the center's work.

Cardinal Seán O'Malley, O.F.M.Cap., head of the Pontifical

Council for the Protection of Minors, welcomed the outreach of the center, which provides support for the work of his commission. "We are painfully aware of the many places in the world where the issue of clerical sexual abuse in the church has not been adequately addressed and we hope that the pontifical commission and the outstanding work of the center will make a difference," he said.

"We must render justice to the victims, but we must also do all we can to prevent abuse from happening," Father Zollner stated at the opening ceremony.

He said the center draws on the expertise of psychologists, psychiatrists, social scientists, theologians and canon lawyers. It provides "a platform for best practices" and "a structure of assistance based on the principles of subsidiarity." The partners share responsibility for the project and contribute to the development of the program.

Since 2012 it has cooperated with partners in Argentina, Ghana, Germany, India, Indonesia, Kenya, New Zealand, Spain and Uruguay, and some 1,000 persons have participated. But, Zollner said, it is vital to reach out more widely, "in a culturally sensitive way," to churches and religious institutions where there is little awareness of the problem and few resources to address it.

The center's e-learning program was developed in the period 2012 to 2014 and is currently being revised in collaboration with Georgetown University to develop an interdisciplinary practical, interactive online course based on the Jesuit learning model of experience-re-

flection-action. The online qualification program sensitizes those who work with minors to the problem of sexual abuse and trains them to relate to victims/survivors of abuse.

In addition to all this, Baroness Sheila Hollins of the United Kingdom, chair of its scientific advisory board, said the center is stepping up its research and teaching activities and envisages the creation of a network of academic institutions engaged in research concerning safeguarding minors.

Gregorian University is at the frontline of efforts to prevent the abuse of minors.

As part of the Institute of Psychology, the center is integrated into the Gregorian University's academic structure and collaborates with its faculties of theology, canon law and social sciences. It conducts interdisciplinary research and doctoral programs. Its executive director, Prof. Karlijn Demasure, a Belgian, announced that beginning in 2016 it will offer an annual one-semester diploma course on safeguarding of minors and vulnerable persons for students who want to work in this field.

And Father Zollner said he is discussing with the Dominicans and Salesians the possibility of cooperation with their Roman universities.

In these years, the Gregorian University has shown vision and courage by working at the frontline of the church's global effort to prevent the sexual abuse of minors. After hosting the symposium "Toward Healing and Renewal" in February 2012, which was attended by representatives from 100 bishops' conferences and 30 religious orders, it is now home to this important center.

GERARD O'CONNELL

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

# Paying Our Respects

Life, death and the home country

BY BRIAN DOYLE

The wedding was on Saturday afternoon, between an American Irish woman and an American Irish man. Both vast clans were in nearly full attendance and there was a great deal of dancing and laughing and dandling of babies. I counted four young women who were enormously pregnant and, as a priest said to me, if God is in high humor today one or more of those women will deliver during the wedding reception and we will welcome new guests to the feast.

Sunday everyone slept in and then went to late Mass.

Monday morning was the funeral of the bride's beloved bachelor uncle. More than 50 of the people who had been at the wedding were at the funeral. Three of the four pregnant women were there also and the priest said it would be good for one to deliver here because we have a lovely baptismal font in this church.

None of the pregnant women delivered during the funeral, although one of them said to me later she thought she was going to deliver right there in her pew because she was laughing so hard when the deceased uncle's nephew did a spot-on hilarious imitation

of the uncle's famous soft-shoe dance while singing in pubs, which he loved



to do and did very well and fairly often.

At the funeral a number of people laughed so hard they wept.

Because so many of us at the wedding and the funeral were American Irish, there was Gaelic in the air and most of the older men wore the black suits that every American Irish male of a certain age has in his closet for wakes and funerals. Most of the younger men wore suits of many different colors and sheens. The priest and I noticed this and he said with a smile that it is the nature of traditions to change, this is normal and natural, and we would be foolish to gnash our teeth about the loss of the old ways, but I do like the way so many of us of a certain age are

in our blacks, for I am reminded of my forebears, and that is a warm and welcome memory. We waked the dead in the old way in our family, the wake going all night long over the casket and then everyone off to Mass in the morning, several men trundling the casket down the steps of the house to the church.

There was a moment at the funeral, just after one of the pregnant women read aloud from the New Testament and before the older brother of the deceased spoke a wry and heartfelt eulogy, when a small great-niece needed to go to the crying room, and her lanky father carried her down the aisle, through the massed rank of the clan of both the bride and the deceased, and as the father and the child walked down the aisle several hands, male and female, rose up to touch the man and the child, just for an instant, without any drama or even conscious intent, I think, and I stood there, in the back of the church, near the baptismal font, and wept, for reasons that are not wholly clear to me even now as I try to speak them with my fingers. Life and love and death and laughter and black suits and babies on shoulders and Gaelic in the air and your beloved bachelor uncle opening his mouth to sing in the pub of a Friday evening.

It was long ago our people left Ireland, and well they should have, fleeing famine and savagery at the

BRIAN DOYLE is the editor of *Portland Magazine* and the author, most recently, of *A Book of Uncommon Prayer* (Ave Maria Press).

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hands of the imperialist slavemaster, and finding peace and joy in America, where they were free to speak their minds and worship as they please; and not one of us at the wedding and the funeral would choose to return to the wet green rocky island from which so many of our forebears came, for our beloved America, despite its greed and violence, is a nation unlike any other in its verve and roar, its creativity and courage, its sweep and scope, the nation where our people came to harbor after many a storm at sea; but very many of us at the wedding and the funeral these last few days were proud that we were *Meiriceánach Ghaelach*, American Irish, and the only thing that would have made it an even more deliciously American Irish triad of days is if two of the pregnant women had delivered their babies, one as a sudden wet gift to the newly married couple and one as a vigorous squalling prayer in memory of the deceased, may he rest in peace. 



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FILM | JOHN ANDERSON

## CLIMATE CHANGE ARTISTS

*'Merchants of Doubt' play scientists on TV.*



ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT. James Hansen, adjunct professor in the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at Columbia University, in "Merchants of Doubt"

Imagine the climate-change debate as a Wagnerian opera, and what we are hearing now—as Pope Francis prepares his encyclical on the environment—is the overture: the rising and swelling of clangorous themes and motifs, i.e., talking points, about a socialist pope and a leftist church, all of which will set the stage for a full-throated assault on the integrity of the papacy, a chorus of faux-theological rebukes, Rick Santorum carrying a spear and, ultimately, the bluntest attack on Rome since the Visigoths were at its gates.

It may also be, for all Francis' noble pronouncements about first world greed and third world need, perhaps his sharpest rebuke yet of pure evil.

For those who consider that some kind of gross overstatement, we offer **Merchants of Doubt**, Robert

Kenner's don't-we-wish-it-were-fiction film about the lushly financed disinformation industry at work on behalf of U.S. coal, gas and oil and all its attendant industries, working to deny that climate change exists. Peopled by many of the professional liars who used to work for Big Tobacco and now work for Big Oil, it is a business that has, for years, used the ignorance and biases of the American public against it. Grievous enough, as sins go. But the crimes catalogued by Kenner include the rape of creation itself. The film eventually leads its viewer to the new oil fields of the Arctic, areas of exploration that have been made accessible only by global warming and are now coveted by the likes of Exxon-Mobil.

Wait a minute: You mean the deniers—and those who finance them—have been arguing that climate change

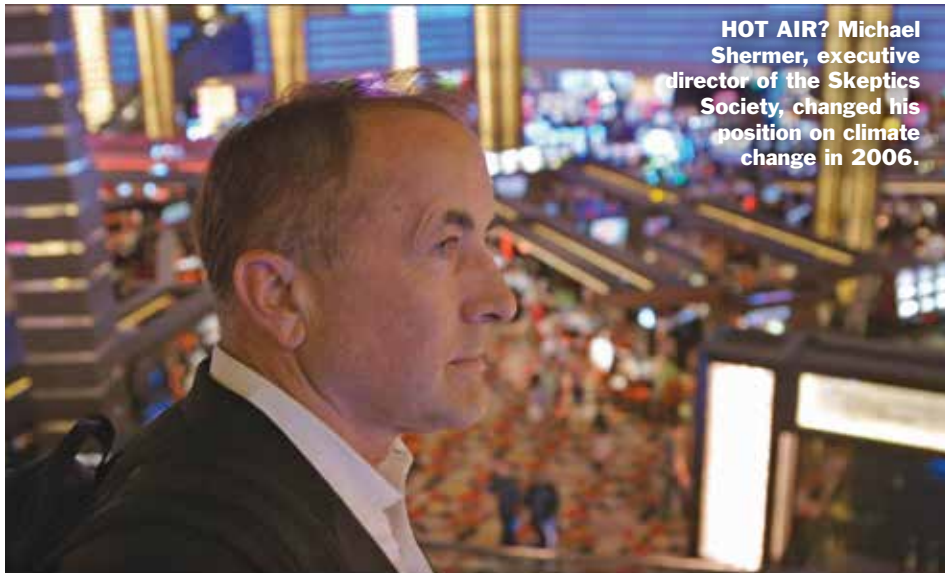
does not exist in order to give global warming enough time to melt the ice caps and make them more money? Don't anyone leave this room; I can't find my wallet.

Right now, there are readers saying, "But isn't there some question about whether climate change exists?" And as the film reveals, that's precisely what the eponymous "Merchants" are paid to achieve. And they don't even bother denying it.

"I'm not a scientist, but I play one on TV, occasionally," laughs Marc Morano. "O.K., more than occasionally." Morano is one of the well-paid "experts" who regularly materialize on places like CNN and FoxNews and insist in the face of actual science, and genuine scientists, that the earth is not getting warmer—and if it is, humans are not to blame. (That Kenner got Morano, and got him to say what he says, is a minor miracle.)

It was much the same with cigarettes. As those old masters of disinformation at the public relations giant Hill & Knowlton told their clients at Big Tobacco years ago, all you need to create is doubt. The public and its politicians will do the rest. Because they really don't want the truth.

That money is the root of all evil is hardly news, but Kenner's documentary is more than just a plaint against corruption. He is, for one thing, a first-rate filmmaker, who has created—no, conjured—a work of engaging cinema out of what is largely whole cloth. The cloth consists of archival footage and talking heads, but also a lot of visual mischief that keeps the eye as engaged as the mind. Opening the film at Hollywood's Magic Castle, with the magician Jamy Ian Swiss dazzling the viewer with some sleight of hand (and making some pointed remarks about



**HOT AIR?** Michael Shermer, executive director of the Skeptics Society, changed his position on climate change in 2006.

honest deception versus outright fraud), Kenner employs a palette of manipulated images—playing cards floating through the air, incriminating documents levitating their way to a Xerox machine—to keep the viewer amused as well as appalled.

There are some arguments to be made with the film, which is based on the book of the same name by Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway. Oreskes is a bright, intelligent presence on screen and in one sequence addresses the cases of the Freds—the physicists Fred Singer and Fred Seitz, who have become the poster boys for climate-change denial because they are actually scientists. Oreskes says that some years ago she and her colleagues set out to compile a list of all the scientists who, according to deniers, claimed that global warming was a hoax. They collected all the scientific papers published between 1992 and 2002 that mentioned “global climate change” and read them. None disputed that the environment was under assault by humans. Which does not keep people like Singer and Seitz from claiming otherwise.

Or, for that matter, claiming whatever serves their purpose: As Kenner shows through particularly delicious series of clips, Singer’s case has evolved over the years from “the earth isn’t

warming,” to “the earth is warming but it’s not caused by humans” to “the earth is warming and it’s caused by humans, but to do anything about it would cause economic collapse”—which, he says revealingly, “is what many of the enviros want.”

What are the motives of these men? “Most people would assume the answer is money,” Oreskes says. But no; both Freds, each of whom at one time worked for a tobacco company, are also old Cold Warriors who see the environmental movement as part of a leftist-cum-communist conspiracy.

But that doesn’t necessarily mean their case is not about money. The anti-big-government interests in this country are not against accepting Medicare; they’re just against regulation, because it means government oversight of business, which means—possibly—imperiled profits. The people who keep the likes of Singer and Seitz afloat, Kenner more than implies, people like the Koch brothers, want to smear the eco-movement as left-leaning political liberals, which many are. And what does this have to do with believing in climate change?

Probably the most important theme of “Merchants of Doubt”—important, that is, with respect to the soul of America—is articulated by Michael Shermer, founder of the

Skeptics Society and onetime climate-change denier himself. He doesn’t quite say it, but what turned him off to the global-warming mission was the smugness of its missionaries. But he read all the data, questioned his own skepticism and now tries to convert people at, say, a libertarian convention in Las Vegas, where he is attacked as a Communist.

Why are so many on the political right seemingly immune to the theories about global warming? Because what’s more important to many, Shermer says, is “being a consistent tribal member.” They see themselves as member of a col-

lective, a tribe, and what the tribe believes is that global warming is a hoax.

You see the same thing when one of the film’s real heroes, Bob Inglis—a former South Carolina congressman and dyed-in-the-wool political conservative-turned-environmental activist—visits a Mississippi radio station. The host is, predictably, aghast. “As a conservative I’m supposed to accept this?” the radio guy says in response to Inglis. And while Inglis is too polite to say it, what the viewer has to ask is, “Since when does being a political conservative mean you have to deliberately ignore the truth?” Inglis has not, as far as we know, embraced every other position of so-called “liberal America.” He does not keep a picture of Elizabeth Warren, say, on the dashboard of his S.U.V.—he just accepts the well-established stuff about the dying planet we live on, which is home to many, many well-paid people willing to sell it out and sell their souls. It is very early in the year, but “Merchants of Doubt” certainly looks like the most important movie of 2015, although, somehow, it is hard to imagine that radio host in Mississippi running out to see it.

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

# THE SOUNDS I LIVE BY

On the long ride home, driving south on the New York State Thruway, I marked the time by listening for the slow transition of local radio stations. I listened for a bit to Albany's local NPR affiliate, but I was eager for the moment, near New Paltz perhaps, when I could pick up WFUV, a public music station broadcasting from Fordham University in the Bronx. I had only been away a short time, but I looked forward to my return, and the crackle of New York City radio was the first signal that I was close to home.

Radio has always served as a homing signal for me. I think it dates to my days in high school when I kept the radio tuned to 92.3 K-Rock (Meg Griffin in the evenings) as I toiled away on my Latin homework. The background noise helped me to concentrate, though I guess I should not be surprised that while the opening lines of the *Aeneid* now elude me, the opening chords of "Smoke on the Water" are still immediately recognizable.

I went to college in New Jersey, only an hour and a half from home, but I was displeased to find that I was in Philadelphia radio country. The difficult transition to freshman year was made worse by my inability to tune in to Alison Steele or Pete Fornatale. Later, when I moved to Connecticut for a job, I lived alone, but I could still hear WFAN in New York, which allowed me to fall asleep to Mets games or the monologues of Steve Somers. Today, I don't feel I have arrived home from an airplane trip until I climb in a car and hear the familiar rat-a-tat-tat of 1010 WINS.

If I were in college today, I could listen to my hometown stations on

my phone or laptop. Apps like "I Heart Radio" give almost unlimited access to radio outlets from across the country and around the world. Many commercial radio stations may sound similar these days, but stations like WBEZ in Chicago and WHYI in Philadelphia still offer plenty of local flavor. I like tuning in now and then, but the variety is both heady and disorienting. There is almost too much to listen to. Throw satellite radio into the mix, and the choices for today's listener are almost limitless—Frank Sinatra radio, Grateful Dead Radio, E-Street Radio; the list goes on.

I have experimented with satellite radio, and with Spotify and Pandora too, but I find myself returning to my local radio stations again and again. One reason is habit. The radio hosts on WFUV and WNYC help to set the rhythms of my day. I also respect their judgment, whether they are picking new music or reporting new stories. Pandora is a formidable force, but music by algorithm, while enjoyable in certain circumstances, ultimately feels inadequate to me. Without a human voice to guide me through the rivers of song, I am unmoored.

So I like traditional radio because it's tied to a person but also because it's tied to a place. Satellite radio enthusiasts sometimes refer to old-fashioned radio as "terrestrial radio." That is not meant as a compliment; local radio outlets are aligned with a place and are therefore limited. Their signals reach

only so far. But I think that is one of their charms, and one of the reasons I keep tuning in. Listening to satellite radio I could be anywhere in the world. Listening to WFAN or WNYC, I know I am close to home.

Traditional radio is also precious because it is fragile. Your radio can break; the transmitter can be damaged. A struggling station can go off the air at a moment's notice. But there are also moments of serendipity. Sometimes, when you are lucky, you can catch a signal from a faraway station.

This is one of the plot points of the successful novel *All the Light We Cannot See*, by Anthony Doerr. Two characters, a boy in Germany and a young girl in France, are tied together by radio, which inexorably brings them together during World War II. Growing up in an orphanage, the boy,

Werner, comes across a mysterious radio signal, and listens with rapt attention to the lessons of a nameless French science teacher. For Werner, the radio is both a mechanical object, which he learns to master, and a vehicle for grace, which opens up his life to a new world of knowledge.

Because it is portable, because it focuses attention on the human voice and because it emanates from a specific place, radio holds a special place in the crowded media landscape. It is both intimate and communal, a comforting voice in the dark and a symbol of the ways we are all tied together.

**MAURICE TIMOTHY REIDY**

Without a human voice to guide me through the rivers of song, I am unmoored.



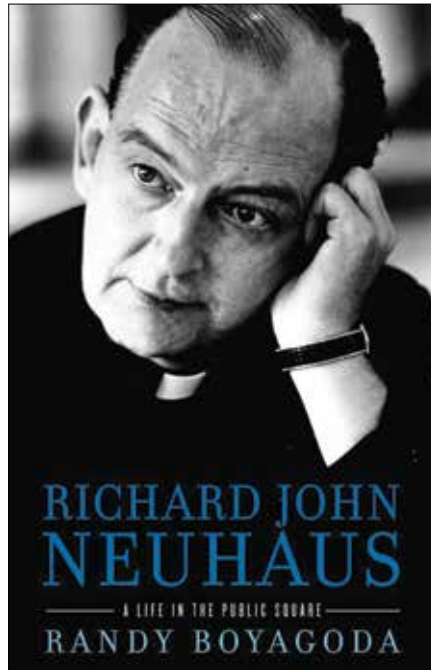
## FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

### RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS A life in the Public Square

By Randy Boyagoda  
Image. 480p \$30

Using an upturned chair as a makeshift pulpit on the front porch of his house, Richard John Neuhaus, age 5, early established himself as a preacher, instructing his 3-year-old sister, Johanna, in the articles faith. Through the rest of a long career as a Lutheran pastor, Catholic priest, author, editor and public intellectual, he never left the pulpit. His message, however, took some surprising turns: from left-wing crusader with Daniel Berrigan, S.J., in the anti-war movement, to apologist for George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq; from Missouri Synod Lutheranism to Catholic priest. His final pulpit as founder and editor of *First Things* established him as an influential spokesman for what can properly be called "conservative" positions in church and politics. Randy Boyagoda, professor of American studies at Ryerson University, Toronto, has written a thorough chronicle of Neuhaus's life and work, relying on Neuhaus's own autobiographical writings and extensive interviews with family, friends and colleagues.

Richard John Neuhaus, the seventh child and sixth son of Clemens and Ella Neuhaus, was born May 14, 1936, in Pembroke, Canada, where his American-born father was a Lutheran pastor. His educational history was spotty. His first teacher regarded him as "uneducable." He earned a reputation as a prankster at Pembroke High. When sent to a Lutheran boarding school in Nebraska, he was asked not to return. A year in Cisco, Tex., with distant relatives followed, where he avoided school altogether and spent the year reading and shooting jack



rabbits. When Neuhaus applied to Concordia-Austin, facing two registration lines, high school or college, he chose college. In 1955 he entered Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, the premiere school of Missouri Synod Lutheranism. After graduation and several apprentice appointments, he received assignment to St. John the Evangelist in Brooklyn, N.Y., with a dominantly black congregation. Neuhaus served as a successful and much valued pastor for 17 years.

New York, if nothing else, is an ideological hotbed, the home of major publishing houses, journals of opinion and "the paper of record," *The New York Times*. For a pastor who loved argument, it was an ideal environment. And the times were right: the civil rights movement was shaking social assumptions and the law; the Vietnam War brought protest even to sedate establishment colleges. Richard Neuhaus marched with Martin Luther King Jr. and he joined Abraham Heschel and Daniel Berrigan in a peace fast as "a call for repentance"

for the "madness" of the war. In 1969, Neuhaus and Peter Berger published *Movement and Revolution*. Neuhaus wrote, "The Movement is the cluster of persons, organizations, world views and activities located on what is conventionally called the Left and acting in radical judgment upon the prevailing patterns, political, economic, social and moral of American life." The statement could serve as a manifesto for the rest of Richard John Neuhaus's life as political actor and commentator, with one minor change: substitute "Right" for "Left."

Neuhaus's rightward drift contains several significant markers. In 1975 he and Berger organized the Hartford Appeal, a meeting of prominent theologians and religious leaders from across denominational lines. Participants included the Jesuit Avery Dulles and the pacifist Stanley Hauerwas. The appeal offered a 13-point criticism of liberal Christianity's capitulation to secular fashion. It rejected the mistaken notion that "[m]odern thought is superior to all past forms of understanding reality, and is therefore normative for Christian faith and life." *Time* called the Hartford Appeal document "bone-rattling." Neuhaus kept up a steady stream of critical comments about main-line churches in articles and books, culminating in his most well known and influential publication, *The Naked Public Square* (1984). In 1989, Neuhaus's then primary financial supporter, the conservative Rockford Institute, literally threw him out in the street after he had sharply criticized anti-Semitism in the institute's publications. Fortunately, his secretary escaped with the office Rolodex. A few phone calls to old supporters provided the funding for *First Things*, the venture that was to occupy Neuhaus until his death in 2009.

In 1990, Richard John Neuhaus, in his own words, was "received into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church." Two years later, he was or-



dained as a Catholic priest. This conversion was not as surprising as his political change. At Concordia Seminary, he was deeply influenced by Professor Arthur Carl Piepkorn. Piepkorn held strongly to the view that Luther was truly a reformer and had no intention of breaking with the Catholic tradition. Known affectionately as Father Piepkorn, he not only encouraged students to study Catholic theology; he led them to participate in traditional liturgies. Much later, Neuhaus created his own “monastic” community complete with evening prayer in a communal residence at 338 East 19th Street in Manhattan.

Boyagoda’s biography is an invaluable account of the political and ecclesiastical controversies in which Neuhaus played a central, influential and controversial role. For all the care and detail of the biography, Neuhaus’s transition from liberal activist to conservative commentator remains puzzling. Boyagoda suggests the problem when he notes “there is no single event that comprehensively accounts for and solidifies Neuhaus’s intellectual and political migration from Left to Right.”

What was it about “liberal” views that dismayed Neuhaus? The disruptions at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago were an initial turning point in his migration to the right. He was appalled by the anarchic behavior of supposed allies. They were on the right side, but their reasons—or lack thereof—were destructive. I recently asked a long-time “liberal” sparring partner of Neuhaus about the rightward shift. He commented that Neuhaus often seemed to look behind an issue to its advocates. Good or bad as the issue might be, the ideology of the advocate could be even more telling.

Neuhaus’s opposition to abortion is a case in point. Anti-abortion was a premiere and persistent issue for Neuhaus; it helps explain the attraction of Catholicism and his deep ad-

miration for John Paul II. The single specific quotation about abortion in Boyagoda’s biography suggests, however, that disdain for a prochoice advocacy enhanced his opposition. Neuhaus

described a conversation with “a distinguished medical proponent of abortion,” stating the doctor claimed that “many...of the people who live in our horrible slums would...agree with

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me that it would have been better for them not to have been born.” Neuhaus countered that by that policy most of his Brooklyn parishioners would have been aborted. To Neuhaus, the “liberal” doctor was advocating an abstract utilitarian utopia utterly detached from the reality of love, care and heart-ache he experienced as a pastor.

The best part of Richard John Neuhaus’s conservative allegiance was this concern for the reality of our everyday communities of family, neighborhood and church. It is the heart of his distinction between liberal and conservative in *The Naked Public*

*Square*. The temptation of conservatism is that of wandering off into outmoded historical formulae that are as distant from living reality as the liberal’s utopian projects. Neuhaus in the Hartford Appeal properly chastised “liberals” for thinking that “modern thought is superior to all past forms.” He might also have remembered the value of the movement “acting in radical judgment upon prevailing patterns”—including some “conservative” dogmas.

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DENNIS O'BRIEN, a philosopher, was the president of the University of Rochester.

CHRIS HERLINGER

## HELPING THE POOR PROSPER

### THE TYRANNY OF EXPERTS Economists, Dictators, and the Forgotten Rights of the Poor

By William Easterly  
Basic Books. 394p \$29.99

### THE BRIGHT CONTINENT Breaking Rules and Making Change in Modern Africa

By Dayo Olopade  
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 272p \$26

Twice this year, in separate assignments to Africa, I have been confronted with the issue of generational leadership.

In South Sudan, there was hardly a person I spoke to who didn't feel that their national leaders had let them down. Hopes for the world's youngest country—only three years old—have been dashed because a long-standing political conflict between President Salva Kiir and his former vice president, Riek Machar, accused by Kiir of plotting an attempted coup. Their conflict turned ugly, prompting violence that spawned ethnic tensions and escalated into a serious humanitarian and political crisis that has yet to be fully resolved.

The basic complaint I heard was this: both leaders—in their early 60s and veterans of South Sudan's protracted war of independence from Sudan—were playing the type of old-style (and bloody) power games that South Sudan had come to expect from their former overseers in Khartoum. The sense of frustration and world-weariness was most acute among women, who seemed particularly frustrated about shouldering the civilian fallout from yet another war between men.

The other moment came during an assignment in Uganda, when I asked a young medical worker in his 20s about his take on Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act (since overturned by the nation's constitutional court). He framed it as a generational issue: whatever their feelings about homosexuality (and some were uncomfortable with it), he and others his age were

generally embarrassed by the legislation, which had called for life sentences for those found guilty of “homosexual acts.”

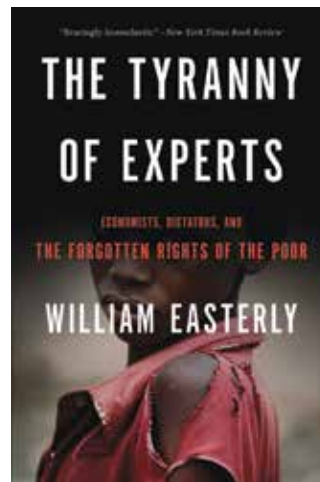
The older generation (which dominates Uganda's national parliament) had passed a law that the medical worker and others felt had not lined up with their growing sense of cosmopolitan values. The worker even used the term “more civilized” to describe his generation's outlook in contrast to an older group that is often seen as corrupt, not particularly nimble and loath to accept new ideas.

In their separate ways, William Easterly, a veteran economist at New York University, and Dayo Olopade, a young Nigerian-American journalist, would recognize this young man, as well as the reaction to the ongoing conflict in South Sudan, for what they are: signs of a changing continent, and changing from the grass-roots up. Both authors have written fine—though very different—books that explore some of the themes undergirding these changes.

First, Easterly's book, in which Africa plays a prominent, though not the only, role. *The Tyranny of Experts* is a “big-think” volume in which economics, global history (with stops along the way not only in Africa, but in Latin America, Asia and the United States) and philosophical debates all get a hearing. And to what end? Easterly, a well-known figure in

development studies circles, argues that since the end of World War II, the world has yet to debate fully what “development” really means.

“The conventional approach to economic development, to making poor countries rich, is based on a technocratic illusion: the belief that poverty is



a purely technical problem amenable to such technical solutions as fertilizers, antibiotics, or nutritional supplements,” Easterly writes. This technical illusion has led to a situation Easterly calls “authoritarian development.” By that he means autocrats, perhaps even well-intentioned ones but autocrats nonetheless, are being advised and tacitly supported by key humanitarian players, including the World Bank and the Gates Foundation, two of the groups Easterly names critically as disrespecting the poor.

In one of the most vivid examples Easterly cites, the World Bank promoted and financed a 2010 forestation project in Uganda that uprooted 20,000 farmers at gunpoint from their homesteads. In the case of the Gates Foundation, a relatively new but powerful player in global efforts to improve childhood health, Easterly cites the foundation’s cozying up to Ethiopia’s authoritarian government because of the government’s goal-based, numbers-driven campaign to lower child mortality.

“The sleight of hand that focuses on technical solutions while covering up violations of the rights of real people is the moral tragedy of development today,” Easterly argues in what some would say is an unfair and overly political attack on groups and foundations “doing good.” Put another way, the absence of political and economic rights for the poor, Easterly says, is not an issue at the sidelines—it is the actual cause of poverty itself. “The dictator who the experts expect will accomplish the technical

fixes to technical problems is not the solution; he is the problem.”

Authoritarian governments make troublesome appearances in *The Bright Continent* and, in some essentials, both authors make similar arguments. But in Olopade’s telling of the story, African governments are viewed by Africans much as my medical worker acquaintance views them: as flat-footed anachronisms that are hopelessly out of step, particularly with Africa’s young people. They are best ignored.



If Easterly’s is a provocative traverse of history and philosophy, Olopade’s book has to it a sense of discovery and almost contagious optimism—though the optimism sometimes overlooks the reality that states and governments aren’t going away and,

as in the case of South Sudan or Uganda, can’t always be dismissed. Governments can still produce mischief. Or much worse.

Still, Olopade’s belief that many in Africa simply work around inefficient and corrupt governments is winning. “Look,” she almost seems to be saying to the reader, “This is Africa today. It is an exciting and dynamic place, and I am eager to be sharing this news with you.” Certainly *The Bright Continent* can help counter what Olopade describes as “the depressing top-level narratives that have held the region back.” (And about which there is already a mountain of literature.)

Sharing Easterly’s suspicion of experts and governments, Olopade writes that one of the problems of the world’s view of Africa has been “a preference for interactions be-

## True Believer

“What men truly want is peace,”  
Says the last one true prophet.  
Peace feels so like submission  
Good prophets can fool most men.  
For the rest, there’s the hammer,  
Followed by a gentle tongue

To sweet-talk the wounds. A tongue  
Works wonders keeping the peace,  
But wonder-workers keep hammers  
Handy. Ask any prophet  
Who’s spent some time among men:  
Supervising submission

Is no humble lamb’s mission.  
You must learn to scold in tongues.  
The cold acumen cold men  
Make war with is of a piece  
With the poet’s and prophet’s.  
Sometimes words, sometimes hammers,

Sometimes words shaped like hammers  
Bring about the submission  
So cherished by all prophets,  
Heart of gold or golden-tongued.  
Submission has a certain poise,  
A certain beauty. What men

Want is the same thing women  
Want: That is, a sound hammer  
Against the skull, and the peace  
That sees stars. True submission  
Begins in the throat, the tongue.  
No God but this. No Prophet

But this. You see the prophet’s  
Quite wise when it comes to men:  
Simple thoughts in a simple tongue,  
And, just in case, the hammer.  
Some men call peace, submission.  
Some men call submission, peace.

The prophet nods and strokes his piece.  
His yes men are on a mission.  
Stick out your tongue, says the hammer.

AMIT MAJUMDAR

*Amit Majumdar, a diagnostic nuclear radiologist, lives in Columbus, Ohio. His poetry and prose have appeared in The New Yorker, The Atlantic and The Best American Poetry 1988-2012.*

tween governments, or between formal institutions, when the most vibrant, authentic, and economically significant interactions are between individuals and decentralized groups.”

Anyone who has traveled to Africa in recent years will recognize some of these changes and the kind of excitement Olopade chronicles. Some of that is due to technological change—a continent whose land-line telephone service was often poor or nonexistent has embraced the cellphone and Internet service in all corners, among rich and poor, urban resident and vil- lager alike.

Olopade makes much of the concept of *kanju*, a term she defines as the act of creativity, or improvisation, that emerges from the difficulties of the African context. In one notable example, a group of African computer programmers transformed old, low-frills computer monitors—so-called “castoffs” no one in the West wanted—into usable “up-cycled” hardware for use in hospitals and clinics throughout Malawi. *Kanju* transformed junk into life-saving equipment.

In the realm of entertainment, Olopade cites the case of Kenneth Nnebue, a one-time electronics dealer in Nigeria who, with thousands of empty VHS tapes on his hands, began making films with his friends. The b-grade films proved popular beyond measure and helped create Nollywood, the film industry that produces the second largest number of films in the world after India’s Bollywood. (“The N stands for Nigeria,” Olopade patiently explains. “It’s hard to believe that many millions of people haven’t heard of Nollywood.” I have to confess I hadn’t until I read Olopade’s book.)

Olopade makes no excuses for her enthusiasms. “It may be easy to read this book as a libertarian celebration of hustling, hacking, and free-form development in sub-Saharan Africa. And it is,” she writes. And that is the

way it has to be, she argues, as necessities like “health care, electricity, and education flourish outside the reach of the African state—and even roads and sanitation are increasingly the province of private ambition.” (In my travels, it’s been hard to miss the role Chinese are playing in building up Africa’s infrastructure.)

In short: “Public institutions are not maturing at the pace the region deserves.”

Olopade is right. But the unanswered question here is: O.K., now what? Though optimistic, Olopade knows there are still major obstacles ahead for the “bright continent,” a fact borne out by some of Africa’s still-grim

educational statistics. In Malawi, the average size of a first-grade class is 100 students. Of those, 7 out of 10 won’t make it past primary school, the author notes. And in Kenya, she writes, 3 out of 10 third-graders still cannot read at a second-grade level.

African youth, Olopade argues, “are ready to go” and embrace the future. But in order to do that, they need education “grounded in risk-taking and rejection of conventional pedagogy.” Absolutely. But can *kanju* do that alone? I’m not sure. But I hope so.

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J. GREG PHELAN

## LEAVING QUEENS

### WE ARE NOT OURSELVES A Novel

By Matthew Thomas  
Simon & Schuster. 620p. \$28

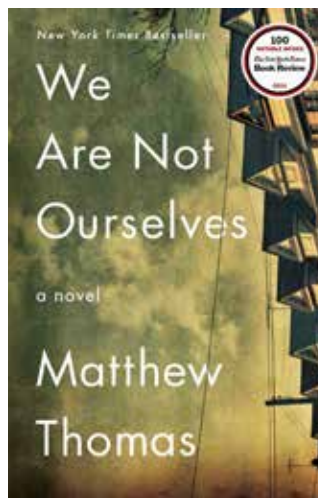
Recommending any novel is a hard sell in our smart phone-addled culture, but how about a 620-page doorstep about early onset Alzheimer’s? A book with no high drama or plot twists or (dare I say) any lasting insights into the human condition, but rather merely a story about an ordinary family dealing with this horrific disease? Where faith offers little or no consolation?

From the first line of *We Are Not Ourselves*, by Matthew Thomas, God is felt by his absence: “Instead of going to the priest, the men who gathered at Doherty’s Bar after went to see Eileen Tumulty’s father.” It’s 1951, we are among the immigrant Irish Catholics

of Woodside, Queens, where we meet the fourth grader Eileen at the bar admiring her father holding court. “There was something clarifying in her father’s authority; it absolved other men of embarrassment.” Indeed, when one of the petitioners confesses he’s been cheating on his wife, Eileen’s father, after making sure he has the facts straight, absolves the man with severe efficiency: “Swear before God that’s the end of it,” and the man does, glad to admit he is a damn fool.

Ah, this is good and satisfying. We are eager and willing to embark on this family epic as we watch Thomas, like an expert bricklayer, carefully lay his foundation, beginning with Eileen’s observations of her father.

Everyone called him Big Mike. He was reputed to be immune to pain. He had shoulders so



broad that even in shirtsleeves he looked like he was wearing a suit jacket.... If you caught him in a moment of repose, he seemed to shrink to normal proportions. If you had something to hide, he grew in front of your eyes.

Yes, this is good. The clarity, specificity and concreteness of the detail—it's all here, beautifully written and necessary, but then Thomas attempts to summarize Eileen's observation of her father and his admirers:

She wasn't too young to understand that the ones who pleased him were the rare ones who didn't drain the frothy brew of his myth in a quick quaff, but nosed around the brine of his humanity awhile, giving it skeptical sniffs.

"Frothy brew of his myth?" "Brine of his humanity?" "Skeptical sniffs?" So early in a long book, these overwritten abstractions—attributed to a fourth grader no less—are enough to sow a seed of disappointment that the book will not fulfill its promise. Regardless, if we don't have a text to reply to, we press onward.

Eileen spends her childhood nursing her alcoholic mother while longing for a way out of her one bedroom apartment in Queens. She is resourceful and goal-oriented, convinced her ticket out is to study hard, become a nurse administrator and marry an intelligent, kind and (she hopes) ambitious man, like Ed, a quirky scientist. But Eileen's life doesn't proceed as planned: Ed turns down lucrative job offers to leave his position at the community college. He doesn't want to move—as she so desperately does—to Westchester, but stay in their decaying neighborhood of Jackson Heights. And as the years go on, he becomes increasingly eccentric in maddening ways that frustrate Eileen and their

one son, Connell, neither of whom see that Ed's quirks are signs of his impending disintegration. It's like reading a very real horror story as we witness the increasing strains on their family until at last Ed's diagnosis becomes evident, then for many years more, we watch as Alzheimer's increasingly erodes his ability to function in terrible and unpredictable ways.

During his erratic wanderings in town, Ed finds his way into the church between Masses because it's quiet and calm. Though the thought of him alone in a big church oppresses Eileen, who has given up on the faith of her youth, she writes out a prayer for him.

"Dear God," she wrote, "I will offer this up to you without complaint, but please protect all I know and love." She copied it out neatly onto an index card that she folded and put in his wallet.

Groping to understand why this happened to her husband, Eileen doesn't care for the secular answers, that "it was random, senseless, genetic, environmental," nor can she "sign up for any system that said it had all happened for a reason." She's more pragmatic, or so she tells herself.

It hadn't happened for a reason, but they would find something to glean from it anyway. There didn't have to be a divine plan for there to be meaning in life. *People's lives will be better because of his illness*, she told herself. *They'll appreciate life more. He'll remind them that their lives are better than they think.* It was as good a story as any, and it had the virtue of often seeming plausible, though never when she lay awake at night, when the public life faded away, and other people vanished, and she was left star-

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ing at the back of her hand and thinking, *All of this is an illusion, even the consolations.*

Yes, the novel is long. And at times, like life, it is sometimes hard to understand where the story is going. And while the writing is consistently a pleasure to read, every so often you trip on another patch of overwrought prose like this one—"they gave out no man-

ual for when you get married, no emergency kit with a flashlight for when the power went out. You had to feel your way around in the dark for the box of matches." But the more these lives seep into you, the harder it is to find fault. On the contrary, there seems something right and true and even comforting about even these awkward passages, however trite they may be. Isn't that what we all do in times of crisis, grope

for meaning? Yes, of course, there is no manual for when you are married, for when your family faces a crisis or for when your loved one gets a terrible illness. But however trite it may sound, a rare novel like this that convincingly tells the story of a very real tragedy might be the next best thing.

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**J. GREG PHELAN** has written for *The New York Times*, *The Millions* and other publications.

## CLASSIFIED

### Positions

**PASTORAL ASSOCIATE.** Newton, Mass. A large, vibrant, Catholic Collaborative of 3,600 families outside of Boston is seeking a Pastoral Associate to serve on the Pastoral Service Team for the Collaborative of Sacred Heart and Our Lady Help of Christians Parishes. The position will develop according to individual strengths, gifts and experience, as well as according to the needs of the collaborative. Those needs include, but are not limited to: developing young adult and Adult faith formation ministries; overseeing some outreach ministries,

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Please do not submit poems by email or fax.

Submissions must be postmarked between Jan. 1 and March 31, 2015.

Poems received outside the designated period will be treated as regular poetry submissions and are not eligible for the prize.

The winning poem will be published in the June 8-15 issue of *America*. Three runner-up poems will be published in subsequent issues. Notable entrants also may be considered for inclusion on our poetry site, [americalliterary.tumblr.com](http://americalliterary.tumblr.com).

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106 West 56th Street  
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# Following the Servant

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT (B), MARCH 22, 2015

Readings: Jer 31:31–34; Ps 51:3–15; Heb 5:7–9; Jn 12:20–33

*“Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also” (Jn 12:26)*

When we hear of the martyrdom of Christians, like the 21 Coptic Christians killed in Libya recently, we identify with them immediately as disciples of Jesus and as our brothers and sisters in Christ. However little we might know about the history of the Coptic Christians, in their suffering witness we recognize them as family, servants of Christ. Martyrdom purges the ephemera of human life to reveal its cruciform meaning.

We recognize in their suffering the witness and model of Jesus. It is through sharing in our human suffering that Jesus is able to sympathize with us. The Letter to the Hebrews tells us that “when Christ Jesus was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death,” desirous, as are we all, to avoid suffering if possible.

Yet the Gospel of John explains that when Jesus acknowledged “my soul is troubled” as he waited on the cusp of suffering, he also asked, “and what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour?’” For our sake, Jesus remained a servant to the will of the Father and offered a yes to his destiny because “it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.”

What was this reason? “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.” What

Jesus’ death offers, unlike any other death, is the possibility of salvation for humanity. Through his death, Jesus offers to us the model of the faithful witness, but more than that the model witness is the source of salvation. The path of Jesus, Hebrews says, was the process through which “he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.”

This is why Jesus warns that “whoever loves his life loses it,” for the gains and power of this world can entrap and distract us from the weight of discipleship. Instead, “whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be.” Discipleship might indeed entail suffering and loss now, but whoever follows Jesus is tracking the path he has cleared to eternal life. For all who face suffering, as Jesus did, the desire to be saved from suffering is profoundly human. Nevertheless, the humanity of Jesus is real and the choice he made on our behalf was freely chosen.

And yet a most profound difference exists between us and our model, Jesus: sin. We have it; Jesus did not. This is why our prayers and supplications are offered to God in the key of repentance. Repentance emerges when we recognize the suffering we create when we sin and the broken relationship with God sin produces. When we cry out to God our sincere desire that we might turn from sin, we echo the plea in today’s psalm: “A clean heart create for me, O God,/  
renew within me a steadfast spirit.” We have constant need to renew ourselves along the path of discipleship.

renew within me a steadfast spirit.” We have constant need to renew ourselves along the path of discipleship.

We have a means of salvation and through Jesus the means also to repent when we fall away from it. Through confession, prayer, fasting, almsgiving and all the other spiritual and corporal works of mercy, we can seek to have God’s law before us at all times, inscribed on our hearts. We can seek to have our hearts most crooked straightened again by the love and mercy of God.



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Meditate on the example of Jesus. How has following Jesus shaped your response to suffering?

And even more, by shaping our lives in the model of Jesus, even when it entails the possibility of suffering which might lead even to death, we can become models for others. As the psalmist calls out, “Restore to me the gladness of your salvation;/ uphold me with a willing spirit./ I will teach the wicked your ways,/ that sinners may return to you.” A constant willingness to repent and to turn back to God’s mercy is a model of steadfast faith seen in martyrs ancient and current. They teach us that discipleship offers us a sure hope that death, suffering and violence are not the last words, but instead a sign of the fading powers of this world, conquered through the service of the Son, who leads us to eternal life.

JOHN W. MARTENS

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