

BIBLE AND FAMILY

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Holy Families

LOOKING TO THE BIBLE FOR NEW MODELS OF MERCY

JULIE HANLON RUBIO

From the third-floor corner balcony of the Gran Hotel Ciudad de México, I enjoyed a panoramic view of at least seven centuries of human history. From the ghostly ruins of the Templo Mayor, to the Baroque splendor of the 16th-century cathedral, to the mammoth Palacio Nacional, from which a vast swath of North America was once governed, this teeming, cacophonous square in the heart of Mexico's capital tells the story of several empires won and lost: the Aztecs, the Spanish and the French. The successive imperialists who built this place, like their Roman or British counterparts, no doubt thought that each of their earthly paradises would last a thousand years or more. Such is the hubris of earthly schemers.

I had come to Mexico City to interview the new apostolic nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Christophe Pierre, a French-born career papal diplomat who had just completed nine years as nuncio in Mexico. Popes have traded ambassadors with the world's major powers since at least the Middle Ages; in that sense, the news that Pope Francis had selected a new man to represent him in Washington, D.C., was hardly news at all. What makes the archbishop's arrival newsworthy is the fact that the United States of America presently bears the mantle of global leadership; we are, for good or ill, the successors of the Aztecs, the British and the Spanish. As the archbishop reminds us in the interview reported in this issue (page 9), the United States is the pre-eminent power in the world today. Every aspect of life on earth is affected by our actions, noble or otherwise. The people of Mexico know that reality in a way few others do, for the destiny of our immediate southern neighbor is especially intertwined with our own. In such an intimate relationship, as President Obama has said, there should not be "a senior partner or junior partner. We are two equal partners, two sovereign

nations that must work together in mutual interest and mutual respect."

It will be useful, then, to have as the pope's representative to the United States a man who has experienced the U.S.-Mexico relationship from the other side of the Rio Grande, someone who can help us understand what it might mean to build a wall between us. It will also be useful to have in Washington a diplomat who represents the vicar of Christ, the one who breaks down walls; the one for whom charity, reconciliation and justice are the only standards of human action. "Basically, when you listen to the Gospel," says Archbishop Pierre, "when you follow Christ, Christ is asking you to be very radical. Christ is asking us to be close to the people, to be close to the poor."

Such radical closeness requires actions that are the very opposite of building walls. We should also bear in mind that the American empire, like the Aztecs and the Spanish before us, will one day go the way of all things mortal, that we too will be judged at the bar of history. More important, the King of Kings himself, the only one who can rightly claim to reign forever and ever, will also call us to account for our actions. "Christ is not an idea," says Archbishop Pierre. "Christ is a person who came and offers us the Gospel.... The values of the Gospel are not ideas. They are behaviors. We know from experience that this is quite demanding."

The view from the Gran Hotel appears to confirm that fact.

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MATT MALONE, S.J.

106 West 56th Street
New York, NY 10019-3803
Ph: (212) 581-4640; Fax: (212) 399-3596
Subscriptions: (800) 627-9533
www.americamedia.org
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EDITOR, THE JESUIT POST Michael Rossmann, S.J.

EDITORIAL E-MAIL
america@americamedia.org

PUBLISHER AND CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

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M. Del Saz **VICE PRESIDENT FOR ADVANCEMENT**

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Goleski **BUSINESS OPERATIONS STAFF** Khairah

Walker, Glenda Castro, Katy Zhou, Frankarlos

Cruz **ADVERTISING CONTACT** ads@americamedia.org;

212-515-0102 **SUBSCRIPTION CONTACT AND**

ADDITIONAL COPIES 1-800-627-9533 **REPRINTS:**

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Cover: A circus performer cradles a child in a baptismal gown before Mass in the center ring of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus at George Mason University's Patriot Center in Fairfax, Va., in April 2015. CNS photo/Bob Roller

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ON THE WEB

Elizabeth Dias of Time has been named the 2016 recipient of the **George W. Hunt, S.J., Prize for Excellence in Journalism, Arts & Letters**. Plus, **Stephen P. White** talks about his new book *Red, White, Blue and Catholic* on "America This Week." Full digital highlights on page 25 and at americamagazine.org/webfeatures.



The Libertarians Step Up

Over Memorial Day weekend, an American political party held a contested convention and the roof did not fall in. There were no riots and no thrown chairs, and the Libertarian Party nominated a pair of former two-term Republican governors—Gary Johnson of New Mexico and Bill Weld of Massachusetts—for president and vice president. While the Republicans seek to ensure a smooth, debate-free national convention by rallying around a man who has never held political office, a so-called fringe party has chosen experience over novelty.

It took two ballots for Mr. Johnson to secure the nomination over several rivals with no governing experience. Some Libertarians questioned his commitment to making government as small as possible; he got some boos for saying he would have signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Mr. Weld faced tougher scrutiny, partly for his support for gun-control laws when he was governor of Massachusetts. This is not surprising at a gathering where many feel it is oppressive for the government to require driver's licenses.

The party's slogan, "Minimum Government, Maximum Freedom," is simplistic, but perhaps no more so than the idea that a wall across our southern border will make America great again. It is too early to say whether the Libertarians deserve to be included in this fall's presidential and vice-presidential debates, but it is encouraging that the party has chosen two qualified, even-tempered candidates and is making an attempt to appeal to voters beyond its narrow base. The two major parties deserve the competition.

Obama's Nuclear Contradiction

It was not the apology critics pre-emptively denounced nor the concrete call for disarmament that anti-nuclear activists had hoped for. The speech given by President Obama at Hiroshima on May 27 was instead a somber reflection on "humanity's core contradiction": that what sets us apart as a species, our ability to imagine a better world and to fashion the tools to build it, "also give us the capacity for unmatched destruction." Standing at the site where one unrestrained technological innovation reached its deadly conclusion, Mr. Obama called for a moral revolution, one that requires more than "mere words."

It was an honest and challenging speech, worthy of the historic first visit by a U.S. president to the city leveled by the United States in 1945. But it also highlighted what may be the core contradiction of the Obama presidency: His soaring rhetoric has at times been in direct opposition to his

policy agenda. He came into office determined to put the United States on a course toward disarmament. But today the U.S. nuclear arsenal is being modernized to the tune of \$1 trillion over the next three decades. Nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles are being made smaller and more precise—which may make them more tempting to use.

But even if the United States were never to employ these diabolical weapons, the risks and costs associated with possessing and maintaining a nuclear stockpile are unacceptable. Popes from St. John XXIII to Francis have condemned the squandering of national wealth on arms while millions live in extreme poverty. Seven years ago in Prague, President Obama promised to "take concrete steps towards a world without nuclear weapons." He has seven months left to follow through on that commitment.

'Not Peanuts'

Later this year, the Department of Agriculture will ship 500 metric tons of peanuts, packaged into individual servings for school children, to Haiti. Instead of celebrating, 61 aid groups working in Haiti have signed a letter calling for the immediate cancellation of the shipment. They are concerned that it will become "the latest in a long history of U.S.-sponsored programs that have destabilized Haiti's agricultural sector, driving the nation further into poverty while increasing its dependence on foreign aid."

Haitian farmers already produce plenty of peanuts, and a local supply and processing chain employs many Haitians; the aid groups estimate more than half a million Haitians derive income in some way from peanuts. In the 1990s, domestic rice production in Haiti was crippled after U.S. rice flooded the market through aid programs and because of lowered tariffs. Food imports are cheaper than Haiti's domestic crops for a number of reasons, including greater efficiency from mechanization in the United States and decreased crop yield in Haiti due to environmental degradation. Many U.S. crops are also federally subsidized, with the federal purchase of excess production leading to stocks of food that need to be distributed somehow.

This link between food aid and farm subsidies is both economically and morally problematic. The U.S. government distorts the market at home while it undermines the ability of Haitian farmers to produce income for themselves. The current "solution" to this problem is to package peanuts for consumption as school snacks so they will not leak into the local market. A far better solution would be to package aid according to what might actually be best for Haiti rather than U.S. industrial agriculture interests.

The AIDS Epidemic at 35

On June 5, 1981, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released its “Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.” The report described five cases in which young, previously healthy gay men were diagnosed with a rare lung infection—a report that would eventually become the first official publication on the H.I.V./AIDS epidemic in the United States.

By 1989 the number of reported AIDS cases in the United States had reached 100,000. During the following decade, the epidemic continued growing. By 1992 AIDS was the leading cause of death for U.S. men ages 25 to 44; and just two years later, it was the leading cause of death for all U.S. citizens in that age group.

As the crisis grew, programs were implemented to deal with the epidemic. Initiatives included the passing of the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act, the largest federal program for people living with H.I.V./AIDS. A number of Catholic organizations also cared for those who were infected. The National Catholic AIDS Network was created in 1989 to provide “education, technical assistance, and a support network for HIV/AIDS service providers as well as individuals and groups affected by HIV.” The African American Catholic HIV/AIDS Task Force is a network of national African-American Catholic organizations focused on community outreach, ministering to people living with H.I.V./AIDS and mobilizing locally and nationally within black Catholic communities.

The Catholic Church’s presence, however, has been most felt in the developing world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, a region that accounts for almost 70 percent of the global total of new infections each year. As of 2014, there were over 25 million people living with H.I.V. in this part of the world. Organizations like Caritas Internationalis and Catholic Relief Services have been critical players in the fight against H.I.V./AIDS internationally.

Today more effective treatment allows H.I.V.-positive individuals to lead long and productive lives. Thanks to prevention efforts and medical advancements, the United States saw a 19 percent decline in the number of diagnosed cases from 2005 to 2014. But coping with H.I.V./AIDS remains a physical and financial struggle for many people. A recent report from the C.D.C. predicts that half of black gay men and a quarter of Latino gay men will be infected in their lifetimes. At the end of 2012—the most recent year for which information on the virus is available—at least 1.2 million

people in the United States were living with H.I.V. and/or AIDS.

Most at risk are African-Americans and the poor. Despite making up less than 20 percent of the population, African-Americans account for almost 50 percent of all new diagnoses. As new treatments are developed, the costs rise as well. As we better manage infections, impoverished citizens living with H.I.V. and/or AIDS face an additional burden. We encourage Congress to approve the additional funds included in President Obama’s 2017 budget for H.I.V./AIDS treatment and prevention, which includes additional funding for the Ryan White Act, treatment and care completion services for people living with H.I.V., and housing for individuals and veterans living with H.I.V./AIDS.

Tensions remain as to what degree condoms can be accepted as a preventive measure. In 2010 Pope Benedict XVI stated that condoms could be used in some cases to prevent the spread of disease, though not to prevent pregnancy. The focus on condoms, however, should not obscure the enormous contribution of Catholic ministries and programs in supporting people living with H.I.V./AIDS, both in the United States and the developing world. Churches can continue to advise against complacency and expand efforts like the African American Catholic HIV/AIDS Task Force, N.C.A.N. and programs of Catholic ministries worldwide.

America’s editor in chief, Matt Malone, S.J., writing about World AIDS Day in 2013, said that the H.I.V./AIDS crisis “brought out the best and worst in the church.” Even those who overcame the fear of contagion to minister to the afflicted were at times more concerned with pressing church teaching on homosexuality and drug use upon the sick and dying than with accompanying them in their illness. Fortunately, the prejudice that marked the early days of the H.I.V./AIDS crisis has diminished, while the good work of the church continues. Today, no less than 35 years ago, it is incumbent upon us to provide spiritual support to the sick and to aid those fighting drug addictions or seeking to resist the cultural pressure to engage in behavior that may put them at risk of H.I.V./AIDS. This epidemic, which disproportionately affects the most vulnerable among us, continues to require our vigilant attention.



REPLY ALL

A Gift to New Mothers

Re “Life After Birth,” by Kerry Weber (5/23): Congratulations to Kerry Weber. My heart is with her. If only I had known, especially after my first child, that I was not alone. Indeed, it felt as though I was. My mother helped me, but she was not prepared to listen to my laments—many of which Ms. Weber eloquently describes in this column. After giving birth, I felt as if giving voice to the hardship meant I was not grateful for being a mother, which I was.

Now that I am looking forward to the birth of my first grandchild in September, I feel torn. I don’t want to sugarcoat the truth to my daughter, but I do not want to frighten her, as she is already apprehensive and worried. If my worries and difficulties had been validated as a new mother, it would have been such a relief. I hope that is a

gift I can give to my daughter.

MAUREEN WEBER

Online Comment

A Painful Beauty

Being an unmarried, celibate Catholic priest, I appreciated Kerry Weber’s reflections on life as a new mother very much. They reminded me of how much I enjoy watching “Call the Midwife,” a very involved British-produced television series set in East End London of the 1950s. By watching it I have come to appreciate the very many nuances, the beauty, pain and surprises of pregnancy, birthing and childbearing. Ms. Weber’s comments certainly fit into this multifaceted reality, the wonder and practicality of it all. Thanks so much for sharing. I hope she continues to enjoy the ride.

(REV.) GEORGE SCHROEDER

Scottsdale, Ariz.

Prophetic Solidarity

Thank you for publishing “Bridging the Racial Divide,” by Bishop Edward K. Braxton (5/16). I believe that our baptism calls us to act on the anointing we received to be “priest, prophet and king” in imitation of Jesus. This is the time for us to act on our prophetic call as members of the body of Christ and call for the gift of life to be affirmed through the Black Lives Matter movement. As an African-American Catholic, I believe it represents another moment in history, like the civil rights movement, when the church can stand as a beacon of light by joining in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. As Dr. Martin Luther King wrote in his book *Why We Can’t Wait*, “The bell of man’s inhumanity to man does not toll for any one man. It tolls for you, for me, for all of us.”

BORETA SINGLETON

Online Comment

A Time for Action

While Bishop Edward Braxton is a superb writer and preacher, he engages us in a totally disconnected discussion

of some hot-button church issues that do not seem to be in the domain of the Black Lives Matter movement at all. There is not a single concrete suggestion to move people to action to remedy the overall situation covered in this piece. There is a great deal of the sort of spiritual pablum that could not possibly be useful in a “hospital on the field of battle.” The wounds experienced by those injured by prejudice are not only spiritual in nature. Visit any impoverished school district in our land to see that the wounds are real, the sores are open, and the remedies are few and far between.

Pretense has no place in confronting the problems that exist when it comes to the racial divide in our country. What is known to help is for real persons of all races to come together and live together and work together to see to it that the words we actually use and the actions we take reflect our best nature and our fondest dreams. What does work are real communities, like those created in the Cristo Rey schools, where young men and women are nurtured and educated to be people for others. They serve as bridges we can all walk across with confidence.

BARRY FITZPATRICK

Online Comment

School Stratification

In “Ship for the Rich” (Current Comment, 5/16), the editors raise concerns about the exclusive amenities available to high-paying customers aboard Norwegian Cruise Line’s *The Haven*. There has never been a time in history or a place anywhere in the world that has not had social stratification. Some people live in large suburban homes with good suburban public schools and others live in cramped, substandard housing in areas with poor schools. Some suburbanites and urbanites send their children to public schools, and some send them to extremely pricey private schools. The tuition at the Jesuit school a few miles

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For those of us who travel fairly often, “social stratification” in transportation, accommodations and restaurant choices is a given, starting with the purgatory of airline travel. I would say that social stratification in education is a far bigger issue than is social stratification on a cruise line.

SANDY SINOR
Online Comment

Remembering Differently

“The Rising Revisited” (4/25) reveals Pádraig Ó Tuama’s gift as poet and writer. He crafts together frontier words that invite broader application. His description of “remembering” is a mini-course on the Eucharist. It speaks to the sadness of our church’s “empty pew syndrome.” “To remember is to re-present...something in the past is not gone; it is here and now.” When Mr. Ó Tuama writes, “We remember we are a people broken by ourselves and by our relations with our closest neighbors,” one can almost hear a Judean lawyer asking Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

“The Rising Revisited” could be a template for the church: “The falling revisited” is a story of the modern church, “alive and strong,” whose arrogance and power permitted unthinkable abuse and human violation. We may not have reached a time of commemoration, but we remain damned to limbo (and continue to fall) until we begin to remember in ways that truly measure the pain; and that happens by including the voices of those “who remember differently.” Where does that story begin?

GREGORY CORRIGAN
Wilmington, Del.

The Roots of Incivility

In “Our Political Mandate” (4/25), John Carr writes “we

need to return civility...to politics.” The root of today’s incivility, I often think, is economic insecurity. Scarcity makes us crazy, and since 2007 it has become impossible to ignore how many of us are terribly vulnerable. The bishops have focused so much on sexual ethics for the last quarter century that the moral implications of these economic realities have gone (mostly) unarticulated; today it is difficult for church leaders to find a way into the debate. The challenge is for the church to bring attention back to what Catholic social teaching tells us about our economic lives. Only that, I think, can lead us back to a politics that is focused on reality, one more susceptible to reason.

STEVEN MILLIES
Aiken, S.C.

Education, Not Inflation

Re “Make Work Pay” (Editorial, 4/18): Is there any evidence that a \$15 minimum wage will lift folks out of poverty? I think not. It might make the cost of hamburgers go from \$3 to \$5—so it is really not helping, since the higher minimum wage is a major factor in inflation.

The solution for poverty in most cases is education. In the United States our public education in poor areas remains poor, so the cycle remains un-

broken. Programs like the Cristo Rey schools are proven methods of fighting poverty. Instead of mandating a minimum wage, the state or the federal government should make up the difference between the workers’ wages and \$15. Use this wage subsidy to create a fund that a person can use for further education and job training.

There are exceptions, people who are not able to work, and we as a church, as well as the government, need to make sure that these exceptions do not fall between the cracks. No one should go to bed hungry.

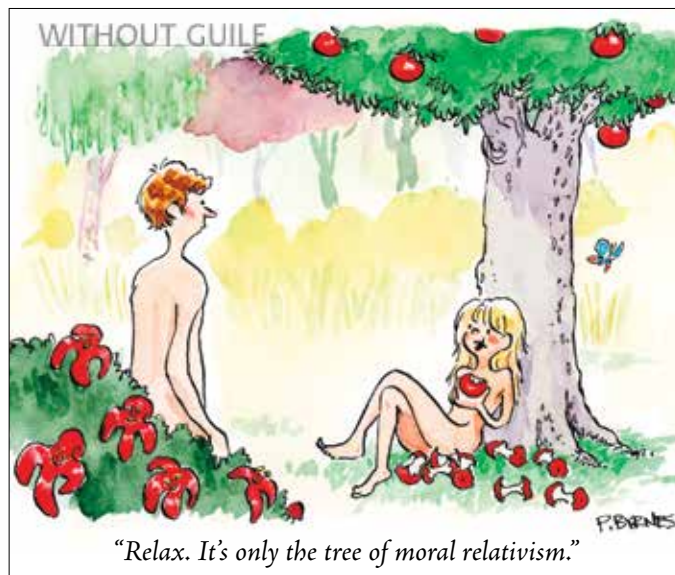
RICHARD HUG
Online Comment

White With Benefits

Re “It’s Been a Privilege,” by Daniel P. Horan (3/14): Anyone who denies that both overt and institutional racism still exist in America should spend some time getting to know African-Americans and other people of color. Go shopping with them. Try to catch a cab at night with them. Listen to their stories. Examine statistics on drug use among the different races and the percentage of people from each race who are incarcerated for drug use as opposed to having access to rehab. Institutions and laws are geared toward the benefit of white people. I am white, and I see it and experience it.

Leaders of white communities of faith need to be bold and blunt about the sin of racism when they preach and should develop ways to connect with black, Latino and other ethnic churches. Teachers need to foster cooperation and harmony between students of different ethnicities. And families need to seek out multiethnic neighborhoods and school districts in which to live and open their homes to guests from different ethnic groups.

KATHY WAGLE
Online Comment





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VATICAN

New U.S. Nuncio Calls for Church To Embrace ‘Discipleship of Christ’

Letting actions speak for words and ultimately for truth seems to be the intention of the new apostolic nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Christophe Pierre, as he begins his latest North American appointment. In an exclusive interview with *America* conducted in Mexico City on May 31, Archbishop Pierre suggests he is not interested in engaging in a cultural battle when he begins his new assignment in the United States.

“Should we fight our truths against other truths?” he asks. “No. I don’t think so. I think what we have [to do] is to let Christ transform us, tell us what is the way of the truth.”

Pope Francis, he adds, is helping us discover “that the way to know the truth is also love, charity, the kind of deep tolerance that is not relativism. It’s something different.”

In a rapidly secularizing society, he believes that evangelization through Christian witness should be a primary obligation of the church. He warns against the temptation “to close ourselves in ideology” and urges a church that encourages all its members to serve as exemplars in society, as “disciples of Jesus.”

“Our faith is the encounter with a person,” Jesus Christ, “who changes our life and opens a new perspective in our life,” Archbishop Pierre told *America’s* editor in chief, Matt Malone, S.J. “Otherwise, we will reduce our faith to an ideology. Ideology will die, but the person of Christ will never die.

“I think the pope is asking us to become Catholics in all senses of the word,”

Archbishop Pierre said. “The Catholic is not the person who just defends a position and ideology, a moral. The Catholic is a disciple of Christ. This quality of discipleship of Christ will change the life of the person, make this person a missionary and organize his life, I would say, according to his faith.”

To serve as effective evangelizers, the impact of Christ on our lives should be obvious to all. “People will say, ‘This man, this woman, this child, is a believer. You see it through his behavior.’ The pope impresses the people precisely because they say, ‘This is a man of God.’”

Archbishop Pierre added: “I think a priest should be a man of God. Not just a bureaucrat.”

The archbishop said he kept a keen eye on Pope Francis during the pope’s visit to Mexico last February. The pope has always been careful, according to Archbishop Pierre, to pay special attention to people who suffer. “This is a priority in the church,” he said. The societies he has lived in as a church

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diplomat, primarily in Africa, “produce many people who suffer.”

“There are many injustices, many poor, many people who are unjustly treated. The church should be there. The church should be near to the poor. This is where Christ wants us to be.

“If we do [that], we shall serve the society,” Archbishop Pierre said.

“When we speak about the social doctrine of the church, we always say the church is about the centrality of the human person. It’s about solidarity, it’s about humanity, about justice. These are not ideas; these should be behaviors. The church should practice social justice” in all senses of the phrase. “Respect life from the beginning to the end,” he said, “but respect also work for justice, work against inequalities. All these things.”

As for his new appointment, Archbishop Pierre told Father Malone that he looks forward to learning about the United States “from the inside,” after years of watching it from societies tremendously influenced by policies and events in the United States. He added, “I’m a bit afraid because I know that I have to discover a lot.”

Why he was selected for this pivotal position for the global church, Archbishop Pierre could not say. But he was certain that evangelization has become a primary concern of the pope, an evangelization driven by closeness, by being with people rather than over them. “I’ve seen a pope who is very concerned about getting near to the people.”

He added, “This is very coherent with his main documents, particularly, ‘*Evangelii Gaudium*.’”

What Pope Francis wants, he said,

is a church “open to the people in order to announce the Gospel.”

Archbishop Pierre has for the last nine years served as papal nuncio to Mexico. He comes to Washington as an experienced diplomat, with first-hand knowledge of the dramatic plight



of migrants from Central America and Mexico to the United States, and will be able to give voice to Pope Francis’ concern for them. A native of France, he was ordained in 1970 and first joined the church’s diplomatic service in 1977. He has served in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Cuba and Brazil and at the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations in Geneva.

In July 1995 St. John Paul II named him an archbishop and appointed him as apostolic nuncio to Haiti. He served there until 1999 and then was named nuncio to Uganda. He remained in Africa until 2007, when he was appointed to Mexico. The Vatican announced his new appointment to the United States in April. He will succeed

Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganó, who has been the U.S. nuncio since 2011.

Archbishop Pierre believes evangelization through encounter will characterize his mission in the United States, something he believes Pope Francis is modeling for all members of the church. “You have to be with the people, to know them, to be close to them,” he said.

Very often, he said, “we fall into the temptation to put our ideas first, to adjust the Gospel to our ideas.” But it is the contrary that should be true.

“Christ is not an idea. Christ is a person who came and offers us the Gospel. We have to listen to his word. We have to be transformed by the Gospel. Many of us basically, we forget about... the Scripture. We forget about listening to Christ. We have to be told, not by ideology, but by the Word of God.”

Gospel values, he adds, “are not ideas,” but “behaviors.”

There is a method to understanding the Word of God, the archbishop said: listening to it in prayer. “It is letting ourselves be converted. Only people who have been converted by the word of God will be able to offer to the world what God, through Christ, wants us to be.” That, he believes, is to serve as “witnesses.”

“We are the presence of Christ in the daily life, in this society. We are being sent to be the witnesses of his presence, of his love, of his values, the values of the Gospel,” he said.

And when “you listen to the Gospel, when you follow Christ, Christ is asking you to be very radical,” he said. “Christ is asking us to be close to the people, to be close to the poor. To leave

everything. To have God at the center of our life," the archbishop said. "These things are not very easy.... I think the Gospel is challenging everybody."

KEVIN CLARKE

Bishops' Accountability

Pope Francis issued a decree on June 4 that makes it possible now to remove diocesan bishops for neglecting their duties, in particular in regard to protecting minors and vulnerable adults from sexual abuse. The decree comes in the form of an apostolic letter issued *motu proprio*, responding to many calls to hold bishops fully accountable for failing to act to protect children and vulnerable adults. In his decree Pope Francis recalls that already "canon law provides the possibility of removal from ecclesiastic office for grave reasons" and this applies also to "diocesan bishops, eparchs and those who are equivalent to them in law." In the decree he explains that he wishes "to specify that among those 'grave reasons' is included the negligence of bishops in the exercise of their office, in particular in relation to the cases of sexual abuse committed on minors and vulnerable adults," explaining that this had been envisaged by earlier decrees on this matter.

In the apostolic letter, "Come una Madre Amorevole" ("As a Loving Mother"), the pope emphasizes that "the church loves all her children but cares for and protects with most particular affection those who are small and defenseless." Aware of this, he said, "the church dedicates a vigilant care to the protection of children and vulnerable adults." Francis said this task of protecting and caring belongs to the whole church, "but it is especially through its pastors that this is exercised." For this reason, he said, "diocesan bishops, eparchs and others who have responsibil-

NEWS BRIEFS

Maria de Lourdes Ruiz Scaperlanda, a writer and author in the Catholic press since 1982, received the 2016 St. Francis de Sales Award from the Catholic Press Association during its annual conference in St. Louis, Mo., on June 3. • The treacherous Mediterranean Sea crossing from Libya to Italy **claimed the lives** of over 1,030 migrants in the last week of May, as overloaded and barely seaworthy smuggling boats foundered and sank despite calm seas and clear skies. • India, with more than 18.5 million people trapped in modern slavery—40 percent of the total of 45.8 million—topped a **global slavery index** released by the Walk Free Foundation on June 3. • "Nothing unites us to God more than an act of mercy," Pope Francis said at a **Vatican retreat for priests** on June 2, adding, "for it is by mercy that the Lord forgives our sins and gives us the grace to practice acts of mercy in his name." • European funding for Catholic aid agencies based in the United Kingdom could be withdrawn if the British people vote on June 23 **to leave the European Union**, Auxiliary Bishop William Kenney of Birmingham warned on May 28.



Maria Ruiz Scaperlanda

ity for a particular church must exercise particular diligence in protecting those who are the weakest among the persons entrusted to them." The decree also says that before giving his definitive decision the pope will draw on the assistance of "a college of jurists" established for this purpose.

Hope Against Human Trafficking

Speaking to judges and prosecutors at a Vatican summit on human trafficking and modern slavery on June 3, Pope Francis said, "You are responsible for executing justice," the ones "called to give hope." The pope had been given a warm welcome by some 100 judges and prosecutors from all over the world. They had spent the day sharing experiences dealing with cases of human trafficking and making proposals for national and transnational action

to combat these crimes, which have made victims of an estimated 40 million men, women and children. After thanking them for the work they are doing in this field, often in difficult and sometimes dangerous circumstances, Pope Francis encouraged them "to fulfill their vocation and their crucial mission—to establish justice—without which there is neither order nor sustainable and integral development, nor social peace." He emphasized the importance of their work in defense of "the dignity and freedom of men and women today" and in particular "to eradicate human trafficking and smuggling and the new forms of slavery such as forced labor, prostitution, organ trafficking, the drug trade and organized crime." He denounced these forms of modern slavery as "real crimes against humanity."

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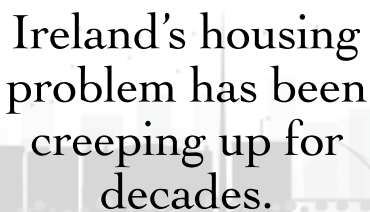
When Archbishop Diarmuid Martin spoke in Rome in May to promote the 2018 World Meeting of Families, which will be held in Dublin, he listed housing as one of the main challenges facing Irish families. As in many countries, housing has become Ireland's most glaring expression of social inequality, a vicious cycle that has spun full circle in the last decade. The inflated housing market of the Celtic Tiger era precipitated the devastating economic crash of 2008 and cost thousands their homes and livelihoods. Now, with a recovering economy, Ireland is faced with a contradictory problem: a steep housing shortage after several years of stunted capacity growth.

In a small country where homelessness has never been a significant problem, the figures are striking. Focus Ireland, a charity for the homeless, reported that 366 families became homeless in Dublin in the first four months of this year. The charity found that the overwhelming number of homeless families had their last stable home in the private rental sector and were forced out by rising rents, landlords "selling up" what had been rental units and a shortage of properties to rent.

Most had never experienced homelessness before and were now being accommodated by local authorities in shelters and hotel rooms. The waiting list for government-subsidized "social housing" has swollen to 90,000 people, meaning some Irish families will have to wait more than a decade for a home.

RHONA TARRANT is *America's* correspondent in Dublin, Ireland.

The victims of Ireland's housing crisis appear on every step of the property ladder: overstretched renters, first-time buyers, owners caught in negative equity. Rents in Dublin are now higher than they were at the height of the Celtic Tiger period, while the lack of housing has made competition fierce. The arrival of U.S. "vulture funds," swooping in on Ireland's property market during the bust, is another problem that rent-



Ireland's housing problem has been creeping up for decades.

ers and homeowners have to contend with. The master of the High Court, a quasi-judicial figure in Ireland with the power to intervene in civil judgments, suggested in April that the government buy back homes sold to vulture funds after hundreds of renters in Dublin were given notice to leave from a fund run by Goldman Sachs.

Ireland's housing problem has been creeping up for decades. In the 1970s, social housing made up over 30 percent of new houses in Ireland. That number dropped to 5 percent in the 1980s, while rent controls were deemed unconstitutional and abolished. The trend continued through Ireland's economic prosperity, with policymakers slow to recognize and respond to the emerging housing problem. The new Fine Gael-led government, formed in May, has promised decisive action rather than the halfhearted and inadequate response of the past. The minister for housing, Simon Coveney, called

the housing problem a "national emergency" but also said people will need patience.

Perhaps the most glaring irony of the crisis is that 230,000 homes, the majority privately owned, currently stand vacant all over Ireland. In addition, social housing in some areas has been left empty for more than a year between tenancies because of inefficiency on the local level. The government has also traditionally offered some social housing tenants the opportunity to buy their properties at a hugely discounted rate. While a worthy program, it adds another hole to the housing reserve's already leaking bucket.

A challenge for the new government will be to coordinate the many proposed solutions to the housing crisis into a workable national plan. So far, the government has pledged to increase social housing significantly and to develop nonprofit "cost rental" housing while also addressing mortgage arrears. Perhaps most significant, the government has said it intends to press for the inclusion of a right to housing in the Constitution. More than anything else, this measure confronts the root of the issue, treating housing as a right however the economy may ebb or flow. Prior housing policy created a fundamental shift, one that has allowed markets to overrule the special place of the family in the Irish Constitution.

President Michael D. Higgins last year urged those in authority to apologize publicly for not valuing social housing in the past. He said that while newspaper headlines proclaim that the economy is roaring back in Ireland, inequalities are roaring back much louder. Which one the government pays attention to will make all the difference for keeping economically vulnerable families in their homes.

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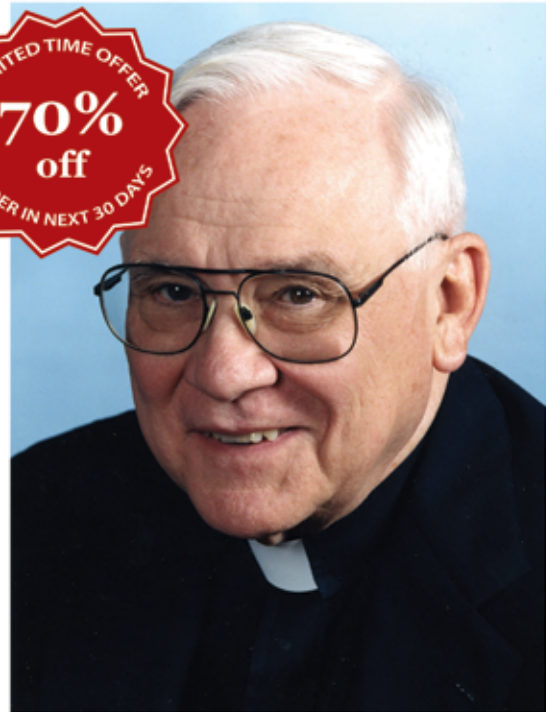
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Care for the Person

What's so great about a Jesuit education?

It's a fair question, given the bills parents and students face these days. That's not to say that Jesuit colleges are more expensive than comparable institutions of higher learning. The cost of tuition, room and board also varies widely from school to school. Still, the price tag for any Jesuit college might prompt anyone to ask: Is it worth it?

It's also a common question for people unfamiliar with Jesuit education: What's the big deal? Last year my nephew, now a high school senior, was musing aloud about what college he'd like to attend. Not surprisingly, my first question for him was whether he had considered any Jesuit schools. He was noncommittal, as were his parents. Since neither my nephew nor his parents attended Jesuit schools, they wondered what the fuss was about. And why go out of your way to explore something, much less pay a premium, if you don't know what you're getting?

Over the past few years, I've been happy to be invited to speak at Jesuit colleges and universities, and events like the Ignatian Family Teach-In. By now I've probably met hundreds of young people from "our" schools. And last month I visited three Jesuit schools at commencement: Gonzaga University in Spokane, Creighton University in Omaha and Canisius College in Buffalo. In light of all these experiences, I want to say this: I'm amazed by what happens at Jesuit colleges and universities.

JAMES MARTIN, S.J., is editor at large of *America* and the author of *Jesuit: A Pilgrimage (HarperOne)*. Twitter: @JamesMartinSJ.

Much of my amazement comes from meeting not just administrators, faculty members and staff, or fellow Jesuits, as helpful as that is, but another group: students and their parents. Admittedly, on commencement weekends I'm seeing the kids on one of the happiest days of their lives.

Nonetheless, what I hear is best summed up by what a young woman from Gonzaga said to me: "I loved, loved, looooved my Jesuit education!" When pressed, they have named for me three things that stand out.

First, *cura personalis*, the educational goal of caring for the "whole person." Every college worth its salt cares for the intellect, and perhaps the body, but Jesuit institutions are committed to the care of the whole person—which includes the soul. By encouraging students to attend to their spiritual lives, inviting them to Masses and retreats, as well as offering them service opportunities rooted in faith, they try to care for the whole person. In that way they help them become whole people.

Second is the rather elusive concept of the *magis*—the more, the better, the greater for God. It comes from the Jesuit motto *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* ("For the Greater Glory of God") and, more fundamentally, from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola. If you would be willing to work hard to follow a "temporal" leader you admire, wrote Ignatius, "how much more" would you be willing to do to follow Jesus? In Spokane, I asked a smiling young graduate what most defined his time at Gonzaga. He threw his head

back, looked skyward and shouted, "Magis!"

Third is the idea of being men and women for others. The original expression, from a talk to Jesuit alumni by the former Jesuit superior general Pedro Arrupe, was "men for others." Sometimes it's rendered "men and women for and with others," which is a bit of a mouthful. It means that a good life is an other-directed life. During the commencement at Canisius, all the students who had signed up for a year's service after graduation—in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, the Mercy Corps, Teach for America and other service organizations—were asked to stand and be recognized for their commitment. It was an admirable number.

After the baccalaureate Mass at Creighton University, I met the beaming parents of a soon-to-be graduate. They gushed about the education their daughter had received and told me how much it had meant to them as well. It was moving to listen to them. The night before, they had asked their daughter what she would change about her last four years. "Nothing," she said.

The students I meet with may not be a representative bunch. (I've heard a few stories of students at Jesuit colleges who don't know what a Jesuit is.) And I am biased, of course. But the more I meet with Jesuit college students, the more I am convinced that there is something special here.

Happily, my nephew agrees. He's starting at Fordham in September.

I'm amazed
by what
happens
at Jesuit
colleges and
universities.

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Ordinary, Holy Families

Looking to the Bible for new models of mercy

BY JULIE HANLON RUBIO

The recent meetings of the Synod of Bishops on the family were in part an attempt to invite families to join in the church's work of evangelization. Instead of the judgment many Catholics associate with family life, the synod documents spoke of a "Gospel of the family" and a God of mercy. The Gospels, however, offer a more complicated and hopeful message about ordinary families.

Families sometimes see the church as a place of rules and judgment rather than wisdom and mercy. The Holy Family gets in the way of efforts to invite families to take part in the work of the church. It is not just the seemingly perfect family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, but the images of families that tend to grace the covers of Catholic magazines and the actual families that are most likely to be asked to carry up the gifts on Sundays. These iconic and real-life models of holiness can alienate those who feel their households will never compare.

And yet the Gospel provides a diversity of models of faithfulness and mercy. It is not limited to allegedly ideal families who provide mercy to less than ideal families.

The Gospel of the Family

When the phrase "Gospel of the family" surfaced in discussions prior to the synod assemblies, many were confused. Cardinal Walter Kasper spoke on the topic at the Vatican in the fall of 2014 and later published the text of his remarks as a short book. He claimed not to be breaking new ground but only to be expressing something that is ancient and yet "always new."

In a sense, this is true. Many church documents link together the creation accounts in Genesis, the Golden Rule (Mt 7:12, 22:40; Lk 6:31), the Ten Commandments, the Holy Family, the story of the wedding feast at Cana (Jn 2:1-12), images of Jesus as bridegroom, Jesus' teaching on divorce and the household codes in the Pauline letters (Col 3:18-4:1, Eph 5:21-6:9, 1 Pt 2:18-3:7). Yet there is something new about calling all of this a "Gospel of the family," especially since it seems to imply that family life is central to the Gospel. Even Cardinal Kasper admits that the import

of earthly marriage is "relativized" because Jesus "demanded a readiness to forsake marriage and family (Mt 10:37) and, from those to whom the gift was given, celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 9:12)."

But not much is made of this remarkable lack of focus on the family in the Gospels. Cardinal Kasper simply claims that members of a "new family of brothers and sisters (Mt 12:48-50; 19:27-29)" are there to support and carry one another, and moves on. In a cultural context in which marriage has become more difficult to choose and sustain, it may be crucial to find and emphasize all of the affirmation of family the Gospel has to offer. Still, the cardinal's reading seems to gloss over what is most distinctive in the most foundational of Christian texts.

In fact, even the most familiar and oft-quoted Scripture passages are not quite as affirming of family as one might imagine. The Genesis creation narratives give us hints of marital intimacy ("one flesh union"), equality ("bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh") and generativity ("be fruitful and multiply"), but not a compelling portrait of lifelong marriage or a vision of a close and loving family, nuclear or otherwise. The famous household codes of Colossians, Ephesians and 1 Peter paint a positive picture of the well-ordered home that seems designed to fit into a well-ordered society, while softening the authority of male heads of household with Christian compassion. Children are to submit to parents, wives to husbands and slaves to masters, though all earthly submission is modified by the ultimate submission of believers to Christ.

Whether this instruction is taken as a departure from the discipleship of equals preached by Jesus, progressive in its context or timeless (scholars disagree), it does not quite capture the reality of contemporary family life, which is probably why few contemporary brides and grooms choose it for their wedding liturgies.

Families today are ordered more by loving activity than by submission. The lives of families are marked by meals at a table or in a car, basketball games, dance lessons, school picnics, child and elder care, parish festivals, homework and big screen televisions. Family life might include date nights for parents who are expected to grow in love; bedtime reading rituals for parents and children who, it is hoped, develop strong bonds; graduation ceremonies, birthday parties

JULIE HANLON RUBIO is professor of Christian ethics at Saint Louis University and the author of *Family Ethics: Practices for Christians* (Georgetown University Press, 2010).



LOVE IN ACTION. A father holds his daughter at the Festival of Families with Pope Francis in Philadelphia on Sept. 26.

and anniversary celebrations all designed to celebrate the love that is only briefly alluded to in the best-known passages of Scripture.

Cardinal Kasper works with this tradition by emphasizing the positive and adding what we might call stories of mercy to the canon of the Gospel of the family. He affirms the ideal and adds mercy. We have Genesis and Ephesians, but we also have the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11) and the woman at the well (Jn 4:1-26). For Kasper, to understand the Gospel as it relates to family is to see the beauty of the ideal while remembering Jesus' ministry marked by mercy. Placing both together allows for a full picture of the Gospel of the family.

Models of Mercy

This approach is helpful yet limited. It is helpful because people yearn for mercy, especially in relation to an ideal family life. This is why Pope Francis' insistence on accompaniment as the mark of the church's approach to families is so right and so well received. The church ought to be walking with all who are heavily burdened, offering light and companionship. It is limited because the imperfect or "irregular" re-

main subjects of mercy. In the Gospels, they are often models of mercy.

As Pope Francis points out in "The Joy of Love," the Gospel is full of the messy reality of family life. He notes examples of anger, betrayal and separation. But it is also important not to miss the diversity of characters in the Gospel narratives, including singles, children and the church itself.

There are many singles in the Gospels: single adults, single parents, widows and vowed celibates. The disciples who are called to leave work to follow Jesus must also leave family behind (Mk 1:16-20). Both critics and sympathetic historians of early Christianity report that early Christian communities included vowed celibates and celibate married couples. Wealthy widows are known to have been sources of financial support and hospitality for apostles charged with traveling and spreading the faith (Lk 8:3).

Even our most familiar stories fail to fit into a neat "family" box. Are shepherds and wise men married? Where is the mother of the prodigal son (Lk 15: 11-32)? Does the woman who searches for the lost coin have a family (Lk 15:8-10)? The infancy narratives tell of a Messiah born into an atypical family. Joseph drops out of the Gospel after stories of Jesus'

youth, leading tradition to assume Mary's early widowhood. Martha, Mary and Lazarus are strong siblings whom Jesus loved, but they do not seem to have spouses (Jn 11). Paul, of course, is single, and so, it seems, are many of his co-workers: Barnabas (Acts 11:27-30), Thecla (in the apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla) and Phoebe (Rm 16:1-2).

Other than the young Holy Family and missionary couples like Aquila and Priscilla (1 Cor 16:19), married couples are far rarer than singles in Scripture. And adults who appear to be single, like Jairus who seeks healing for his daughter (Mk 5:21-24), the father of the prodigal son, the woman who searches for the lost coin and the widow who offers her two very small coins (Lk 21:1-4), are often models of mercy.

When Jesus speaks of children, he holds them up as models of faith (Lk 18:15-17), associates himself with them as he does only with the poor, tells his hearers to care for them (Mk 9:36-37) and suggests that those who fail children are guilty of grievous wrongdoing (Mt 18:6). But nowhere does he speak of parents' responsibility for children or of children's for their parents (though of course he would have assumed these duties). Worthy of attention in themselves, children are models of faith and mercy.

The early church community was not exactly a "family of families." While some baptisms involved whole families, in other cases, faith, like a sword, divided families (Mt 10:34-

36). The fact that sometimes women, slaves and children converted on their own was controversial for some critics of early Christianity, for whom religion was inextricably tied to the patriarchal household. Christians were known for prizing single-hearted discipleship, not "family values." Some labeled them "homewreckers."

The church is the most significant family in the Gospels, the place where followers address each other as brother and sister. Its strength is the only thing that makes the hard sayings of Jesus on family comprehensible (Lk 14:26). Discipleship to Jesus always comes first, before burying a dead father (Lk 9:59-60) and loyalty to one's family of origin (Mk 3:31-35). In the Gospels, the people of faith, those who "hear the word and keep it," are a new kind of kin, a radically inclusive community bent on mercy.

Learning From Real Families

The Gospel "on" the family (perhaps not "of" the family) should be the context for contemporary Christian thinking about family. Our sense of what family means, why it is significant and how to approach it should flow from this place, with full recognition of its strangeness in its own time, as well as its strangeness in relation to our own.

And yet the church also moves in the world, learns from the world and develops. The Christian community has the ongoing task of discerning what to take in and what to by-

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pass. The Christian tradition has grown in its esteem for the intimate love of spouses, parents and children, and that is a good thing. Pope Francis' "The Joy of Love" continues that growth in appreciation for familial love and offers a more inclusive vision by taking from the Gospel an emphasis on mercy for the imperfect. But if the Christian community seeks to be truly welcoming, it might also learn from the Gospel recognition of the modeling of mercy in "imperfect" families.

When I was in Nicaragua with students in 2008, I stayed in a home with four young girls, their mother Lidia (not her real name) and their grandparents. During my first night in their home, I brought out a picture of my own family to share with them. Lidia complimented me on my beautiful family—a mother and father, three sons perched on a sofa in a living room. Then she told me about her family. She expressed her great shame at being without her husband, who had left her for another woman. "I wanted what you have," she explained, "but it didn't work out that way." I listened as she spoke for hours about the difficulties of life as a single mother in Managua.


Yet during the whole two weeks I was there, I observed a welcoming, loving family. Lidia rose before dawn to cook breakfast, iron clothes and get her daughters out the door in time to catch the bus to school. The grandmother blessed all of the family members as they left the house, and me as well. Lidia went to work and came home to cook dinner. In the evenings the family often gathered to watch telenovellas or comedy shows on television. There was a lot of laughter and a lot of love. I never heard Lidia raise her voice, even in the morning rush, which struck me because mornings at my house in those days were not nearly so calm.

On the feast of Corpus Christi we helped to decorate altars throughout the neighborhood, walked in a long procession and went to Mass together. When I was embarrassed in church because I had forgotten to bring money for the collection, Lidia handed me a coin to place in the basket.

Was this family broken and in need of mercy? Perhaps. But like many of the households we encounter in Scripture, it was also a model of mercy. Lidia, like the woman searching for her lost coin and the father of the prodigal son, loves beyond measure.

The synod on the family will be significant if the takeaway is not only a renewal of the church's commitment to welcome everyone to the table in spite of imperfection, but if it allows Christians to remember that the paradigmatic meal in the Gospels is not the family meal. It is a meal celebrated at a table where prostitutes, tax collectors and friends eat and talk with Jesus. There is no father or mother at the head of the table, only an odd assortment of seekers, sinners and disciples gathered to share fellowship. This is the Gospel of family. This is the Gospel of mercy. 

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Supreme Indecision

Advocates for religious rights hoped the Supreme Court's decision in *Zubik v. Burwell*, the Affordable Care Act's contraceptive mandate case, would determine the scope of protection afforded by the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. Instead, the court remanded *Zubik* and its companion cases to allow the litigants to resolve their disputes in a manner that provides contraceptive coverage without invoking religious objection. The court's promotion of self-help conciliation may be an exercise of Solomonian wisdom or merely an effort to avoid a 4-to-4 split that would have left conflicting lower court decisions in place. The expected pronouncement of a standard for determining the substantial burden requirement of R.F.R.A. would have given clarity to the law's reach.

R.F.R.A. prohibits the federal government from substantially burdening a person's exercise of religion unless doing so is the least restrictive means of furthering a compelling government interest. R.F.R.A. has been asserted creatively, and with varying results, to transfer assets from bankrupt dioceses, protect tithes given by bankrupt congregants to their churches and shield "fictitious profits" generated by Bernard Madoff's Ponzi scheme. The application of R.F.R.A. to every federal law guarantees numerous opportunities for the court to revisit its breadth, with a likely scenario being a challenge to federal anti-discrimination law enforcement.

Employment Discrimination. Title VII prohibits discrimination and ha-

arrassment in the workplace but exempts religious employers from religious discrimination claims. The Supreme Court has not determined the extent of this exemption, and the lower courts are not in agreement on a proper test to determine which employers are "religious." Some courts apply a laundry list of factors, including whether the entity operates for a profit, produces a secular product or is affiliated with a formal religious entity. Others rely on a "general picture" of an organization as "primarily religious" or "primarily secular."

R.F.R.A. challenges brought by nonexempt employers involve the clash of two sets of religious rights: the right of employers to use their businesses to promote their religious beliefs and the right of employees to be free from hostile workplaces and religion-based employment decisions. Each case requires a careful factual analysis, and the law encourages "mutual accommodation" of conflicting religious practices.

Nevertheless, the government has a strong interest in preventing religious discrimination. Thus, even ardent believers whose religious exercise is substantially burdened by Title VII must yield to the extent necessary to protect employee rights. In one case, a nonexempt home health care company with a fundamentalist mission was found liable under Title VII when the owner refused to hire an otherwise qualified Unitarian, ridiculed her Catholic employees' faith and forced participation in "born again" prayer.

Except with regard to ministers, even religious employers are not exempt from laws that prohibit discrim-

ination on the basis of age, disability or sex. Judicial acceptance of the Justice Department's interpretation of "sex" to include transgender identity may lead religious employers to assert R.F.R.A. defenses. As one federal trial court recently stated, "though most of the earliest cases held that Title VII does not protect gender identity, the weight of authority has begun to shift the other way."

Discrimination in Education. Title IX prohibits sex-based discrimination in education. Religious schools are exempt when application of the law "would not be consistent with the religious tenets of such organization." This exemption is quite narrow and is rarely invoked with success. Nevertheless, at least one Catholic school has alleged that enforcement

of Title IX against it would violate R.F.R.A. by substantially burdening the school's religious rights. A lower court rejected the argument, but the case is still ongoing and that decision may be appealed.

As with employment discrimination, the application of Title IX to transgender students could yield a plethora of R.F.R.A. lawsuits. The federal circuit court that has jurisdiction over North Carolina has determined that the U.S. Department of Education's interpretation of the law "as it relates to restroom access by transgender individuals" is controlling. Until the Supreme Court "decides to decide," the lower courts and litigants must do their best to apply R.F.R.A. as Congress intended.

ELLEN K. BOEGEL

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

Family Bible Study

Five lessons from Scripture for parents

BY JAKE KOHLHAAS



DETAIL OF "CHRIST BLESSING THE CHILDREN," BY ARTUS WOLFFAERTS. PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/BONHAMIS

The Bible is not a handbook on parenthood, or morality, or any number of other things for which handbooks are perfectly suitable. The Bible is a written testimony to the persistence of God's grace throughout centuries as experienced by a particular people, in particular times and places. Scripture presents ancient families doing things that ancient families did and presuming things that ancient families presumed.

Viewing Scripture as a direct source of parenting advice disregards the complexity of the biblical witness as well as that of our own lives. Such an approach leads to sentiments that are comforting on the surface but lacking in depth and substance. Coming to terms with the distance between Scripture and our own experience is an important first step

in recognizing the parallels that may actually exist.

Values, knowledge and beliefs change significantly over time and across cultures. Yet some basic experiences still unite human families. Family members are generally marked by affection for one another, new caregivers are often deeply anxious about their duties, and parents must negotiate child-rearing within the constraints of external forces and their own abilities. Encountering the biblical testimony with an honest and critical eye to both its complexity and our own experiences permits encounter with the counsel it may offer.

1. *Families are complicated.* Even the most cursory review of families in Scripture reveals their complexity. In the first family, Cain's jealousy provokes him to murder his brother, Abel (Gn 4:8). A few chapters on, Noah curses his own grandson, condemning him to slavery (Gn 9:25). Later, Abraham fathers Ishmael with the concubine Hagar (Gn 16) and eventually abandons both in the desert (Gn 21:14). Abraham's grandson, Jacob, marries the wrong sister (Gn

JAKE KOHLHAAS is an assistant professor of moral theology at Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa. His research interests include theology of children and parenthood, sexual ethics, and environmental ethics.

29:25) and eventually fathers children with four separate women (Gn 30). This list could be much longer.

Biblical families are characterized more by intrigue than wholesomeness. While such families certainly add to the drama of Scripture, they also carry an important lesson. Within the complexities of life, families often fall short of our ideals. The chaotic families recorded in Scripture do not speak to the sort of families we wish we had but to the sort of families we actually do have. In Scripture, God pledges loyalty and enduring presence to a lineage that is marred by infidelity, jealousy, thievery and more. None of these vices ultimately interfere with God's will, which works often in spite of our own efforts.

2. *The Gospel challenges families.*

Jos 24:15 adorns the walls of many Christian homes: "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

Inspiring though it may be, the verse resonates with prevailing assumptions of family autonomy and privacy in contemporary culture. But the vocation of the Christian family is both inwardly directed toward its members and outwardly directed towards mission in the world. It is often difficult enough just to get uncooperative children to church consistently and on time, let alone engage as a family in meaningful work toward the social good. But such is the vocation of the Christian family.

Scripture does not just challenge individual families to fulfill their Christian calling; it challenges their existence itself when families neglect this mission or interfere with the Christian vocation of individual members. In the Gospels, Jesus clearly and repeatedly rejects commonly held familial obligations (Mt 8:22, for example). At times, he pits true discipleship and family allegiances against one another as conflicting and incompatible alternatives (Lk 11:27–28, 14:26).

In Mk 3:31–35, for instance, Jesus sharply rebukes his family in order to assert the primacy of his mission. More gracious options for engaging his family seem to have been possible, but Jesus capitalizes on the opportunity to make a clear statement about the relative value of family commitments in light of the call to discipleship.

These tensions do not indicate that Jesus or early Christians were anti-family. Instead, they explore allegiances and loyalties. The New Testament recognizes potential conflict between familial obligations and faith commitments and clarifies family obligations as subordinate. Following the Gospels' lead, the early Eastern theologian John Chrysostom explained family obligations while insisting on the centrality of the Christian call to serve one's neighbors. Parents are

to educate and raise their children as Christians, he wrote, not because they are bound by biological ties but because Christians are called to serve their neighbors. Children simply happen to be their parents' closest neighbors in need.

With the high valuation of family privacy and autonomy prevalent today, the tension between present conceptions of family life and the New Testament's message is significant. It is comforting to believe that there is something very special about our own private families apart from the busy world of work, school and social obligations. Yet Scripture suggests that when Christian families become too inwardly focused, they are not just failing in their Christian social obligations; they are failing to be Christian families.

3. *The Gospel creates families.*

The lengthy genealogies scattered throughout the Bible attest to the importance of family descent in the minds of its authors. Two Gospels place Jesus in history and suggest their author's interpretations of his mission by providing genealogies (Mt 1:1–17, Lk 3:23–38). But despite this emphasis on biological descent, Scripture's view of kinship is complex. Various forms of group dynamics persist throughout Scripture. Scripture is particularly hostile toward neighboring groups that are known to be related to Israel (the Canaanites in the Old Testament and the Samaritans in the New). While Jesus follows these mores on various occasions, he is also willing to transgress them (Jn 4:4–38).

One of the most perilous moments in Jesus' ministry comes when he recounts for the people of his hometown how God had chosen foreigners to receive blessing while Israelites suffered (Lk 4:16–30). The parable of the good Samaritan is among the clearest examples of Jesus' willingness to break down the barriers of group identity (Lk 10:29–37). As seen above, this willingness applies to family relations as well. Jesus rewrites the rules of kinship in view of the decisions and actions of individuals rather than their biological relatedness or social identity. Even on the cross, Jesus creates kinship obligations where none existed before (Jn 19:25–27). It is no accident that Paul takes up the family as his preferred analogy for the Christian community. The commitments of an active faith create networks of relatedness and obligation.

4. *Jesus welcomes children.* One obvious reason why Jesus is often seen as unilaterally pro-family stems from his rebuke of his own disciples and insistence that children be allowed to come to him. Indeed, Jesus' interaction with children is rather remarkable for his time. Within a culture that did not regard children as having inherent value, Jesus contended

Biblical families are characterized more by intrigue than wholesomeness.

that there is something characteristic about childhood that should serve as an inspiration for adults (Mt 19:13–15).

It remains unclear, however, if Jesus' statements about childlikeness relate to any essential quality of childhood or children themselves. The message may be connected primarily to the low social status of children, which made them fitting symbols of powerlessness. Jesus' interactions with children push back against cultural expectations but do not entirely break the mold. Jesus does not romanticize childhood, nor does he generally seek out interactions with children.

Parents consistently mediate contact between Jesus and children. In each of the accounts of Jesus welcoming the children, it is the parents who are rebuked as they bring children forward to Jesus. Jesus frequently encounters parents who request healing for their children, and repeatedly accepts. The Gospels present a God who responds to parents in times of both joy and distress.

5. *Scripture teaches fidelity and stability.* Families in Scripture are diverse, complex and messy. The Gospels seem as inclined to challenge family allegiances as to construct new forms of kinship. Scripture does present several ideals for family life, but these rarely play out within the families actually encountered. In spite of it all, families in Scripture, biological or not, tend to hang together. Despite their failings, the patriarchs do, in fact, become the ancestors of a nation. Despite Paul's admonitions to dysfunctional Christian

communities, the Christian family has persisted.

Like the families of Scripture, our own families are shaped by stories of difficulty and persistence. One notable area in which the teaching of the Catholic Church and contemporary social scientific research are in agreement is on the benefit of family stability as a singularly important factor for child well-being. Stability in the social scientific sense generally refers to low-conflict families without divorce, separation or other significant shifts that affect caregiving arrangements. Catholic teaching links stability to marriage and the nuclear family, though Catholic social teaching extends this to factors like wages and housing. But while the risk factors are significant, there is no magic recipe for long-term family stability. All families face challenges, hardships and losses. Those families that hang together, even as partial or reconstructed units, provide the surest foundation for well-being and also attest to the loving fidelity of God as recorded throughout Scripture.

Christian parents are right to look to Scripture for guidance. But Scripture does not provide us a handbook on how to do parenting right. Instead, it presents us with a God who works through the complications of human experience. Our own families certainly participate in their own levels of complexity and drama. We should be comforted that Scripture tells us the story of a God that has done great things through challenging circumstances. ▲



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Next Stop Cairo?

When will Pope Francis go to Cairo? That is the question now being asked in Rome following the invitation given by the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar during their historic meeting in the Vatican on May 23.

The imam, Sheik Ahmed al-Tayeb, the highest religious authority in the Sunni Muslim world, invited the pope to visit Al-Azhar during their 25-minute private conversation, Vatican and Egyptian sources told *America*. The invitation is particularly significant since 85 percent of Muslims are Sunnis, and Al-Azhar, founded in 969 C.E. in Cairo, is the most prestigious center of learning of Sunni Islam. Each year it provides formation for thousands of imams from many countries.

The invitation came as conflict rages in Syria, with persecution of Christians and other minorities by the Islamic State, and as Islamophobia spreads in Europe and in the United States. It is a sign of Al-Azhar's openness to cooperation with the Holy See in the search for peace and respect for human dignity in the region and in rejecting the use of religion to justify violence and terrorist acts.

To gain an insight into the significance of the May 23 encounter and invitation from an Islamic perspective, I spoke with Omar Abboud, a friend of Francis for many years and director of the interreligious center in Buenos Aires, who has been working behind the scenes to make it happen. The pope

invited him to join him, together with Rabbi Abraham Skorka, on his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in May 2014.

Mr. Abboud hailed the sheik's meeting with Francis as "a historic encounter, like that of the Sultan Malik al Kamil and St. Francis of Assisi during the Crusades some eight centuries ago." Although "the context of this era is different, it too was an epoch of tensions in relation to religion and in the same geographic scenarios," he said, referring to St. Francis' visit to the sultan of Egypt in 1219, opposing the culture of war and enmity in the Crusades.

The Argentine Muslim director described the meeting as "the most significant encounter that Francis has had with the Muslim world," as "Al-Azhar is the most important institution of the Muslim world because of its tradition, history and the esteem in which it is held in all Muslim countries." Furthermore, the sheik of Al-Azhar "is respected not only in the Sunni world but also, though to a lesser extent, in the Shiite world. His responsibility is great in the Muslim world; his words carry weight."

He recalled that this was the first time ever that a sheik of Al-Azhar has visited the Vatican to meet a pope. Francis invited him; he accepted. That encounter reflected "the desire for unity over conflict" and marked "a new stage in Al-Azhar's relations with the Holy See, which had been interrupted for several years," Mr. Abboud said, alluding to the breakdown in relations under Pope Benedict XVI.

Although Pope John Paul II visited

23 Muslim countries and made a courtesy visit to Al-Azhar and met Sheik Mohammad Sayyid Tantawi during his pilgrimage to Mount Sinai in February 2000, Mr. Abboud believes that Francis' approach, words, gestures and visits to Muslim countries and his concern for refugees and an end to the war in Syria have taken Catholic-Muslim relations to a new level.

He revealed that on his travels to many Islamic countries and his conversations with Muslim dignitaries, he has "found great respect for Pope Francis everywhere in the Muslim world." He added, "I would dare to affirm that he is the pope that is the most loved and most present in the history of the Muslim world."

He shared Francis' view about the May 23 encounter: "The meeting is the message." Indeed, "it is a symbol in itself, and it is now up to the collaborators on both sides to build an agenda of true dialogue."

He affirmed that "we know perfectly well what are the difficulties and the problems" and declared, "This is the time to move out from the era of analysis and to begin concrete actions." He thinks the best place to start is in "the field of education" because "to bring the positions closer together, there is a need for mutual cooperation in eliminating prejudices."

Mr. Abboud is confident Francis will accept the sheik's invitation to Al-Azhar and believes this can foster closer Christian-Muslim cooperation in the future.

'This is the time to move out from the era of analysis and to begin concrete actions.'

GERARD O'CONNELL

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



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—"Steering the Ship of State," Henry George

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Valerie Schultz

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WHAT YOU'RE READING

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Steering the Ship of State
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Wham! Thump! Yahweh!

Are your kids ready for “The Action Bible”?

BY KEVIN CLARKE

What is that ratty-looking, dog-eared thing they’re trooping up and down the stairs with, clamping under an elbow and carrying everywhere? It’s dragged out to the family not-so-mini van for long car trips and down to the bus stop to read on the way to that dreaded place of doom, middle school. Pored over at night before bedtime, overly loved, pages turned and pulled so often they’re finally falling loose from their gluey mooring. Is it *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*? Maybe it’s a Harry Potter book or *How to Train Your Dragon*? Is it *Percy Jackson*?

None of the above.

Shockingly, over the last few years in the skeptic-rich Clarke household, the most well-thumbed book has been the Bible. Don’t fear, this is not a my-family-is-holier-than-thou humblebrag. I am in no position to Bible-thump anyone with my superior parental Scripture skills, but my kids did read the Bible with nary a carrot nor a stick in sight. The secret was simply the choice of Bible.

My kids aren’t King James fans; they have never opened a North American Standard. But all four have devoured *The Action Bible*, a comic-book-style Bible illustrated by the Marvel and DC Comics artist Sergio Cariello.

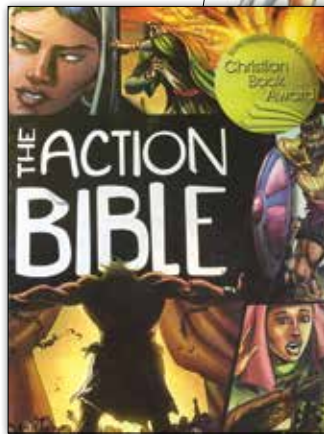
Upon its unveiling in our house, I viewed *The Action Bible* with sectarian suspicion. All those gaudy graphics and bright colors? Surely there was something, well, evangelical about the

darn thing. But I can’t argue with the results. Each of my children in turn has run through *The Action Bible*, and they all consistently return to it—completely without any parental scolding or pleading. It is as near a painless introduction to Bible reading as I can imagine. Sure, the kids come for the comic-book storytelling, but they stay for the Gospel lessons and they remember their Scripture. *The Action Bible*’s images—and the Bible stories—simply stick with them.

The children maintain a largely inexplicable process (at least to me) for harmoniously sharing the house’s sole copy. I have yet to hear a major dispute about “whose turn it is” to read it. Yet *The Action Bible* remains in heavy rotation in various reading nooks around the house.

My wife, Megan, has been a catechism teacher in our parish and is the director of Christian service in a Manhattan high school, so she does bring some educator chops to this project. She bought *The Action Bible* because she had noticed the older boys enjoyed reading books “that were not quite graphic novels” but were close, like the aforementioned *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and, yuck, *Captain Underpants* (I am not a fan).

“When I saw that they had a comic-book style Bible,” she says, “I thought that was perfect because it’s highly visual and the kids would be interest-



ed in reading and seeing it and understanding it, especially since the Old Testament has all sorts of armies battling one another. I thought it might

keep their interest.”

That it did.

My oldest, Eoin (that’s “Owen” for you Irish-challenged), is now 13. A few years back he was the vanguard reader of *The Action Bible*. He tries to explain its appeal, beginning with the fact that, well, it’s like a regular comic book: “Unlike a normal Bible, which it’s really just words, this one also has pictures, so it’s a bit more descriptive and you can get into it more than just reading a Bible.

“Plus it’s in contemporary language, where other Bibles, they’re really complicated and they go like, ‘And then God said, “Thy must go to

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

COVER AND PANELS FROM “THE ACTION BIBLE” © DAVID C. COOK

the mountain.” But in this it just says, ‘And then God told Moses to go to the mountain,’ and it shows Moses walking to the mountain.”

Eoin’s favorite book in *The Action Bible*?

“I kinda like the Acts of the Apostles,” he says. “It shows a little rebellion, if you think about it, because they’re going up against a huge empire which did not want them to exist, did not care about them, just wanted them gone. [The Romans] outnumbered them like a million to one and they seemed to stand no chance. They would have been gone, and they end up winning.”

His sister, Elaine, 10, is also enthusiastic about *The Action Bible*. “I like how there’s a lot of pictures,” she says. “There’s not a bunch of words and it really interested me since I would get bored if I read the Bible, but when I read *The Action Bible* I don’t get bored because there’s a lot of colors and ‘whatsonot.’” (This is Ellie’s word for “other stuff.”)

“My favorite story is Esther’s story,” Ellie adds, “when she saves the Jews from.... I forgot his name.” Ellie stumbles around a bit before Eoin conjures up “Haman” from his past reading of the *The Action Bible*. (Yes, it’s that sticky.)

Declan, 8, liked “all of Noah’s stories,” especially the “one where he’s building an ark and rain.”

Aidan, 11, is pretty straightforward: “I like it cuz it’s a comic and I like comics.”

Some favorite stories from *The Action Bible*? “The part where God sends an angel to punish someone for beating up their donkey.” Aidan is a big animal lover.

He’s also a fan of “the part where after the Hebrews get free from Egypt.”

“They finally make it back to Canaan, then they start worshipping idols and then they get conquered by another kingdom, then they finally start worshipping God again and God sets them

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free, but then they stop worshipping him and it just keeps going in a repeating cycle,” Aidan says. He grins diabolically. “I thought that was hilarious,” he says. Future theologian?

I overheard Aidan harrumphing through Genesis a few months back, lying on the floor of his bedroom. He was just not buying that “seven day” creation story. “Where are the dinosaurs?” he muttered. “Where are the volcanoes and the eruptions?”

Skepticism may come naturally to him, but he did get through the whole book and learned what *literal*, *allegory* and *metaphor* meant. Asked how it ended, he replied, “God saw that it was good.” Not a bad takeaway.

The Action Bible is not without its drawbacks. As Eoin points out, some of



the drawing might seem “kinda racist,” with Semitic folk of the Old Testament or Jesus’ time appearing a little too fair-skinned to be credible. And so far we haven’t seen a significant transition from *The Action Bible* to the Actual Bible, but Megan remains confident that is coming.

“They’re still young,” she says. “I’m actually pretty amazed. There’s a lot of stories that they can recount to me that I, as a theology major, don’t remember or don’t know. They read it over and over again, and they definitely know the stories and learn about them much better than just going to Mass or going to religious ed.

“It reminds me of C. S. Lewis and his idea with the Narnia novels,” she adds. “You sort of want to imprint your kids with the possibility and the Christian themes so that when they get older it becomes something that is part of their own understanding of life and story structure.

“Knowing the stories,” Megan says, “is always the beginning.”

Bouquets for My Father

BY B. G. KELLEY

Sons are often defined by their fathers and necessarily reflect on the man who gave them life: Here he came up short; here he came up full. For me, there was much more gained than lost by his fatherhood.

For 50 years my father worked in his tiny flower shop in a section of Philadelphia called Paradise, 10, 12 hours a day, seven days a week, unless, of course, it was a holiday—Christmas, Easter, Valentine’s Day, Mother’s Day. Then he would work around the clock. He had to; he had six kids to feed.

He was slightly more than 5 foot 8, muscular and sinewy, and, boy, could he play football—he was a halfback. As I was growing up, his friends would



GROWING SEASON. The author and his father in front of his flower shop.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

tell me, “Your father was not only the best but the toughest football player I ever saw.” They were referring, of course, to the times he played with a broken nose or several teeth dangling from their roots. Villanova University

recruited him, but his father died when he was in high school, and he went to work digging graves in a cemetery to help support his mother and five siblings.

The last time I saw him play foot-

B. G. KELLEY is the author of *The World I Feel*, a book of poetry, and was a writer for the television film “*Final Shot: The Hank Gathers Story*” (1992). He is a regular contributor to *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

ball I was 8 years old. He was 34 and still playing in a club football league in Philly. It was his last game; he was retiring from the sport. Late in the fourth quarter, with his East Falls team trailing the Frankford Club, 14-13, he took a pitch out and cut, as if on ice skates, to his left, just out of reach of a flailing tackler, and raced down the sideline, feet ablaze, all the way to the end zone—a 62-yard game-winning touchdown run. When the gun sounded, his teammates hoisted my dad on their backs and carried him to the locker room. On the way, he tossed me his helmet, and I caught it. “It’s yours,” he said. I wore it in every football game I played.

In later years, whenever I mentioned to him that someone had told me what a terrific football player he was, my father would simply, and succinctly, reply, “I was okay.” That statement distills the essence of my father: He was humble.

And much more to me.

It seems to me these days that

many sons are born blank and limitlessly malleable, seeking new identities apart from their fathers. I never wanted to disconnect from my Pop, particularly from his values—honesty, hard work, perseverance, an undying faith in and love for his family and church. Every Sunday I would see him walk to Communion with my mom in our parish church, Corpus Christi. At Christmastime he would donate red poinsettias to decorate the altar; at Eastertime he would do the same with huge gold vases of white chrysanthemums. I know. I would tote them across the street to the church and decorate the altar with them. Those values called to me like a famous proverb: “Blood calls to blood.”

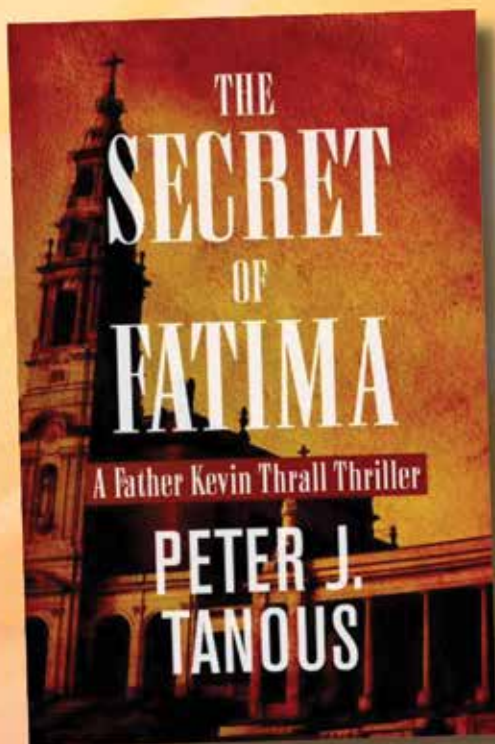
Now my father was not a saint. He could be demanding—it was his way or the highway many times. He was the quintessential patriarch who changed tires instead of diapers, who did the handywork instead of the laundry, who put a cap on his emo-

tions instead of letting them gush out. The only time I saw him cry was when Mom died. He was the old-time father who paid the bills, put food on the table and provided a Catholic education for his children. Today nearly 50 percent of children have no such father around to do these things.

I confess: There were times I wandered here and there from his ways. Disagreements are not unusual between fathers and sons. Once he kicked me out of the house because my hair was too long—he thought I was a hippie and he didn’t care much for hippies. Another time he wanted me to wear a suit and tie to a family function; I wanted to wear jeans and sneakers. I didn’t go. And some Sundays when I wanted to sleep in instead of going to Mass, he roused me and said, “As long as you live in this house, you will go to Mass.” I went.

Wanderers need an anchor.

Once when I was full of myself after scoring 29 points in a high school



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— Nassim Nicholas Taleb, author of *The Black Swan*

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basketball game (he never missed any of my games) to put the team into the playoffs, I blurted, "I was the star." He stared me square in the eyes and firmly told me, "That's not for you to say."

He was right.

He was usually right, particularly the time he hit a bull's-eye on the biggest and best decision of my life. As we were working side-by-side in his shop one Valentine's Day, he turned to me and said, "She's the only one for you," referring to a girl I was dating. "Give her these." He handed me a dozen American Beauty roses. I gave them to her. Not long after that I married her.

And she carried a bouquet of American Beauties down the aisle on our wedding day. Arranged by my Pop.

So, yes, I have been greatly enriched in so many ways by being the son of a florist. Even now, 20 years after he's gone.

Each day I walk along the banks of the Schuylkill River in Philly's famous Fairmount Park I think of him. He had rowed along this river in the autumn and spring when he was in his 20s, and he always drilled into me that those seasons along the riverbank were about sensory experiences. In fall, there was a bite to the air, a rip to the river, a sun dropping down like a gold coin, the changing colors of the leaves—yellows, golds, reds and rusts that formed on the boughs of the trees, like bouquets we once made side-by-side in his tiny shop. In spring,

the cherry blossom trees blushing, the geese frolicking along the banks, the warm sun flashing off the water like diamonds, the balmy air replacing the cold, spare winter.

My father's gone now, to another paradise, but there is a photograph of him I keep in my office. He's 21, on the beach in Wildwood at the Jersey Shore in a bathing suit, with a crop of wavy black hair, thick as cable wires, looking full of life in a Kennedyesque way. I often stare at it and become even more certain of this: My father, though not perfect, as none of us are, knew exactly who he was.

I may not have turned out exactly like him; but, for sure, there is much of his soul in me.

Truth, Then Love

An Eastern priest's vision for Catholic-Orthodox relations

BY JAMES DOMINIC ROONEY

I recently encountered an Orthodox priest who was taking a group of well-known Russian iconographers to look at religious art at the St. Louis Art Museum. I had met him a little earlier when visiting his parish. He introduced me to the group, in Russian, as a "uniate priest." He likely never intended anything disparaging by this, but the label rang in my ears.

The term *uniate*, while sometimes used by Eastern Catholics themselves, originally carried a disparaging connotation. It was used after the Union of Brest (1596) by Orthodox people to identify those previously Orthodox members of the clergy and laypeople who had agreed to the "union" with Rome. Its foreign-sounding character



The Rev. Miron Kerul-Kmec and the author at St. Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church in Barberton, Ohio.

connoted submission to the "Roman foreigners." Today, given the term's history, it is avoided in any official discussions, even though it continues to

be used without any ill will by some Orthodox.

But those past tensions continue to play out in Catholic-Orthodox dialogue and in the popular Orthodox mind. A historic Great and Holy Synod—a synod of all the worldwide episcopal primates of the Orthodox churches—will take place at the Orthodox Academy of Crete from June 16 to 27. While not an ecumenical council, it is in some ways parallel in significance to the Second Vatican Council. There has not been such a meeting among the Orthodox for many hundreds of years, and the synod, like Vatican II, will deal with the church's relations to the modern world.

But the release of a preparatory synod document on relations with non-Orthodox Christians occasioned what might seem to outsiders a surprising amount of criticism among

JAMES DOMINIC ROONEY, O.P., is a priest and a doctoral student in philosophy at St. Louis University.

some Orthodox. There is a significant and vocal minority of Orthodox who fear that any ecumenical activity will involve compromising the doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Orthodox Church. This has been termed the “pan-heresy of ecumenism,” insofar as these people perceive ecumenism to rest on doctrinal indifferentism and disregard for truth. Catholics familiar with the history of the Second Vatican Council will likely recall similar criticisms voiced by Catholic traditionalist groups in regard to ecumenism. It is not an unfitting comparison in tenor or mentality.

As an adopted son of the Eastern Catholic churches, I have a vested interest in the success of the Holy and Great Synod.

Becoming Byzantine

My acquaintance with the Eastern Catholic churches began when I was in elementary school. Our home in Ohio was relatively close to many Eastern Catholics, both in our city of Toledo and in nearby Detroit. My father frequently took me to a nearby Byzantine-Ruthenian Catholic Church, and, because my Hungarian relatives lived in Cleveland, an émigré hotspot, I was often able to visit the Melkites and the Maronites located on either side of my grandparents’ Latin parish. Before finishing high school, I had become acquainted with almost every liturgical tradition among the 23 Eastern Catholic churches.

My oldest memory of an Eastern liturgy is not of the clouds of incense, however much that might give a mystical glow to everything else, but the use of terms like *consubstantial* and *unapproachable light* in church. It struck me that the people I visited believed something important and life-affecting—something that involved truth. I was being exposed to a whole field of theological belief held in common. This encounter with a single, omnipresent truth set me on an inevitable

path toward either theology or philosophy. What surprised me, though, was how I would become a part of the Eastern churches later in my life.

After joining the Dominican friars, I maintained connections with the Byzantine parishes I came upon. Few Dominicans serve the Byzantine liturgy, and I did not personally expect to do so. Near our priory in St. Louis, where I spent my time in study for the priesthood, is a small mission of the Ruthenian Catholic Church, which has its roots in modern-day Ukraine. It is a vibrant little group of around

and their relations with both the Latin and Orthodox worlds, I have come to a profound appreciation for something beyond the standard terms of engagement. This is best described as the unifying force of truth—that same truth I encountered as a boy. Typically, we might think of love as the great unifier. But love by itself cannot exist without a definite object. We have to be able to conceive rightly of what we love; otherwise, we love an idol, a fiction. But if we jointly acknowledge the right of something to our love, the power of that recognition brings us together.



EASTERN CATHOLICS. Members of the clergy, servers and parishioners at the Byzantine Catholic Mission in St. Louis, Mo. Center: retired Bishop John Kudrick of the Byzantine Ruthenian Eparchy of Parma.

150 people, many of whom have to drive quite far to attend an Eastern liturgy. After I began to attend sporadically, a parishioner asked if I had thought of becoming biritual—that is, receiving faculties from a Byzantine bishop to celebrate the Divine Liturgy and sacraments. They noted that there are few priests in service, and many do not have replacements if they take vacations or fall ill. Before I knew it, I was celebrating my first Mass as Divine Liturgy after my priestly ordination.

The Great Unifier

Perhaps it is not surprising, therefore, that my perspective on the Orthodox-Catholic divide is different from that of many others or that I take a particular interest in ecumenism. But through my experience with Eastern churches

The union that is an effect of love is, in turn, an effect of a shared grasp of some truth about the world.

It is easy for most Catholics to see their shared faith with the Orthodox. We have almost every belief in common, and modern theologians have hammered out agreements on the *filioque* (the Latin creedal declaration that the Holy Spirit proceeds from God the Father “and the Son”) and other issues. The nature of the papacy is practically the only serious theological issue at stake, from the Catholic perspective. The Second Vatican Council brought much of this home to the Catholic faithful, with subsequent recommendation from our popes that the church “breathe with two lungs,” East and West.

But for many Orthodox it remains difficult to look at Catholics and see

anything other than innovation, with heretical overtones. In the aftermath of the historic meeting in February between the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and Pope Francis, I read and watched some Orthodox register their protest against the patriarch's affirmation in a joint declaration that the Greek Catholics have "a right to exist." In response, some said explicitly that there is no such thing as a "legitimate" Eastern Catholic. Orthodox "fundamentalism" was out in the open.

What encourages me in the midst of this is that I have found, aside from the many intelligent Orthodox theologians and laity, that those most opposed to dialogue often carry rather absurd misconceptions about the Catholic faith: that "indulgences" are licenses from the pope to be allowed to commit a certain number of sins; that Catholics believe Mary's immaculate conception means she was not a real human being like Christ; that the use of unleavened bread at Mass is

part of a plot by the pope to make us all Jewish.

Here, though, I think the truth will ultimately set us free. I have no interest in syncretistic views of ecumenism that would deny the exclusive nature of salvation or discard Orthodox or Catholic doctrine for the sake of a false unity; such is the Catholic Church's official view as well. Much of the distrust, however, is built on misapprehensions about Catholicism. I have faith that dialogue can dissolve ignorance, even if it takes time. In the world of modern communications, we no longer have the Mediterranean or imperial legates to keep our people from seeing what we all really believe.

Martyrs of Unity

At the time of the Union of Brest, when many Orthodox united in communion with the Bishop of Rome, some of these who united were killed for their commitment. While they were seen as traitors to their brothers

and sisters among the Orthodox, we Eastern Catholics continue to commemorate St. Josaphat, for example, as the heroic martyr who claimed that he would be happy to give his life for the people who killed him. Josaphat, and all the others unnamed, died not for the pope, but to preserve the Catholic ideal of one shared apostolic faith and one Eucharist. St. Paul's dictum can be applied here: Peter is only a "servant through whom [they] came to believe" (1 Cor 3:5); it is Christ, head of the church, for whom they died.

Eastern Catholics struggle for our faith from both sides—from Westerners who do not understand us and from Easterners who think we are traitors—but this has only made Christ's church stronger. If Eastern Catholics had abdicated to either party, the affirmations of Vatican II in regard to the East would never have occurred. It was the sacrifices of Eastern Catholics for unity without compromising the truth that led to true love.

When I was introduced to the iconographer museum visitors as a "uniate," I felt a subtle tinge of pride. I might not have initially planned on it when I became a Dominican friar, but I was now being identified with the same people that produced those martyrs of unity. What my experience with the Eastern Catholics has taught me is that to suffer and die for love of our brothers, for unity in the faith and for the communion of the Holy Spirit has always been the best answer to ecumenical differences.

While I cannot speak for them, I believe in the same faith I hear in my Orthodox brothers and sisters, and I pray for them to discover the same in me. I will be praying for the success of their synod this June, and I will be praying every time I celebrate the Divine Liturgy for unity between East and West. Commending ourselves, one another and our whole life to Christ our God, we look for the mercy of God upon our churches. Our Lord surely despises not a good uniate. ■

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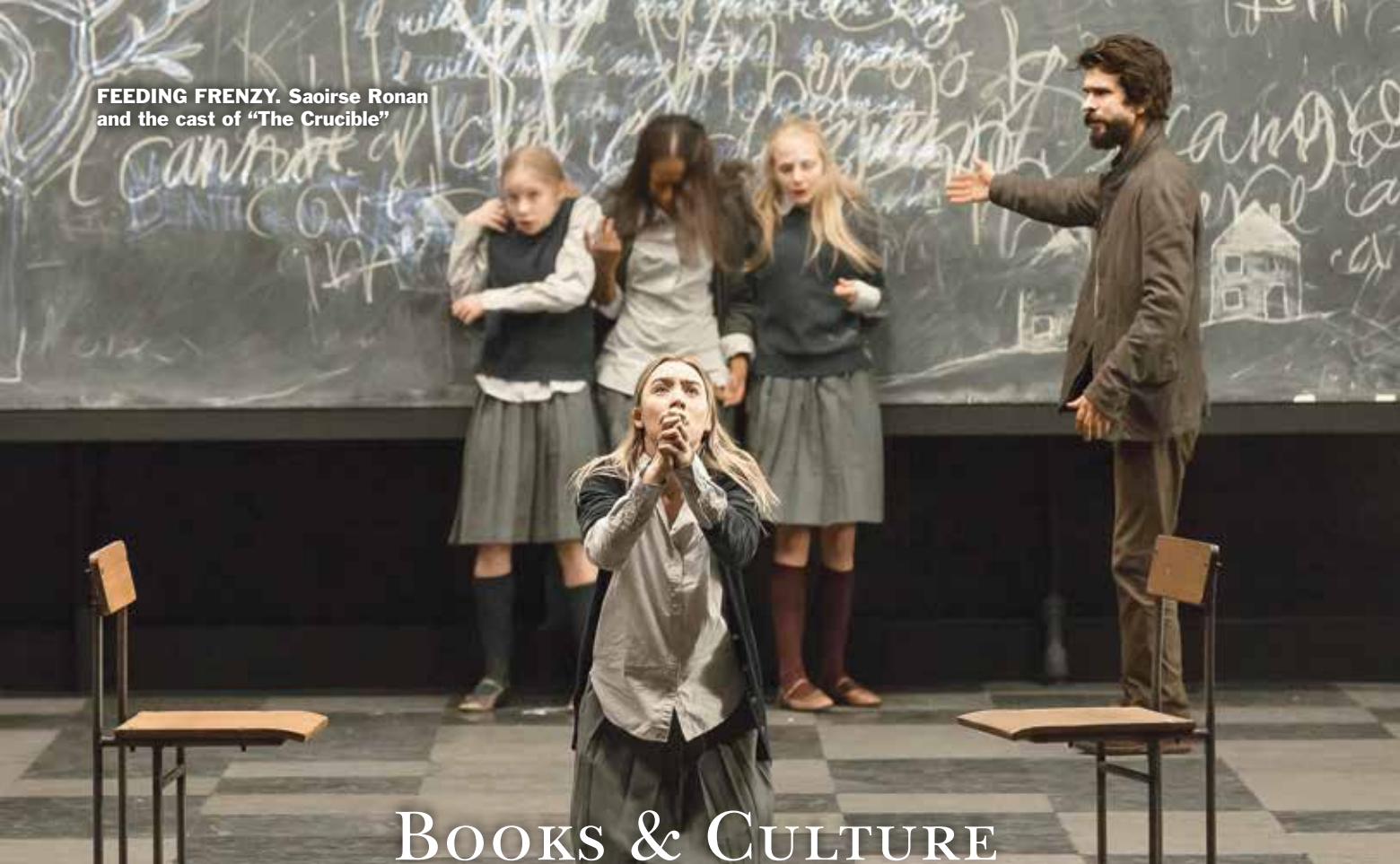
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BOOKS & CULTURE

THEATER | ROB WEINERT-KENDT

DANGEROUS LIAISONS

Soured relationships, tragic consequences

HELL hath no fury like a woman scorned, William Congreve once (almost) wrote, but on Broadway currently, it is young women, especially, whose spurning reaps a virtual whirlwind. In two productions—a revival of Arthur Miller’s 1953 classic *The Crucible*, and a 2005 play called *Blackbird* by the Scottish playwright David Harrower, both nominated for several honors at the recent Tony Awards—intimate transgressions among unevenly consenting partners have world-shattering consequences. And while both plays ultimately generate more heat than light around the large and small sins they consider, the intensity that animates both is reliably unsettling.

That is because underlying the fe-

ver and driving the plot of each play is an inappropriate sexual relationship between an older man and a girl, and the central tension in both springs not only from the hovering threat of exposure but, more disturbing, from the volatile, frighteningly untamed forces unleashed by thwarted female desire. Both Abigail Williams, in “*The Crucible*,” and Una, in “*Blackbird*,” have felt what they thought of as love for the men who took advantage of them; and the betrayal of that tender feeling, as much as the violation of their bodies, is the wound they can neither forgive nor entirely heal.

In “*The Crucible*,” as we all know from our required high school reading, 17-year-old Abigail’s jealousy and hysteria metastasizes into a witch hunt

in 17th-century Salem, Mass., which ends up claiming many more victims than her intended targets: her one-time lover, the farmer John Proctor, and his wife, Elizabeth. Such is the terrible logic of a moral panic, in which the circle of assumed guilt always widens, accusations might as well be indictments, and resistance is worse than useless—it’s just more fuel for a fire that must be burned out before reason prevails.

But while Arthur Miller famously pressed the real historical trials of colonial Salem into service as an allegory for what he saw as the anti-Communist hysteria of the McCarthy era, that resonance has receded. What we’re left with now is a play about a group of schoolgirls whipped into a preternatural frenzy that so terrifies the men in power that they turn on each other and their wives in a descending spiral of recrimination and retribution. In 2016, in other words, it plays a bit like “*Fatal Attraction*” meets “*The Bacchae*,”

marbled with thick layers of supererogatory speechifying about dignity and truth.

Directed by Ivo van Hove, this new production tunes into the play's girls-gone-wild wavelength, setting the action entirely in a grim, fluorescent-lit classroom, dressing the cast in more-or-less modern clothes, and—most boldly—taking the girls' pretense of demonic possession at face value. In this "Crucible," the teen witches have real power: A body levitates, lightning flashes, winds roar, writings on a chalkboard swirl. Next to these special effects, the rest of the play, frankly, is a tediously preachy inquest, despite the fine efforts of an excellent cast, including Saoirse Ronan (star of "Brooklyn") as an icy Abigail, Ben Whishaw as a slow-burning John Proctor and, most memorably, Bill Camp as the anguished inquisitor-turned-dissident Rev. Hale. As with his staging of Miller's "A View From the Bridge" earlier this season,

Mr. van Hove has found a bracingly fresh perspective on this canonical American playwright and, at the same time, managed to point up the bagginess of his writing.

At an intermissionless 90 minutes, and centered on just two main characters, Harrower's "Blackbird" is considerably leaner and sharper; there is no allegorical overlay and little obvious moralizing. The twentysomething Una (Michelle Williams) has confronted a fiftyish man called Peter (Jeff Daniels) at his workplace with his former name, Ray, as well as with the reason for the new alias: He had a relationship with her when he was 40 and she was 12. While he did prison time and has ostensibly moved on, Una has had a far rougher time of it, spending her adolescence in the purgatory of shame and anger all too familiar to the sexually abused. Indeed, she is still clearly processing this trauma as she squares off with Ray across a conference room ta-

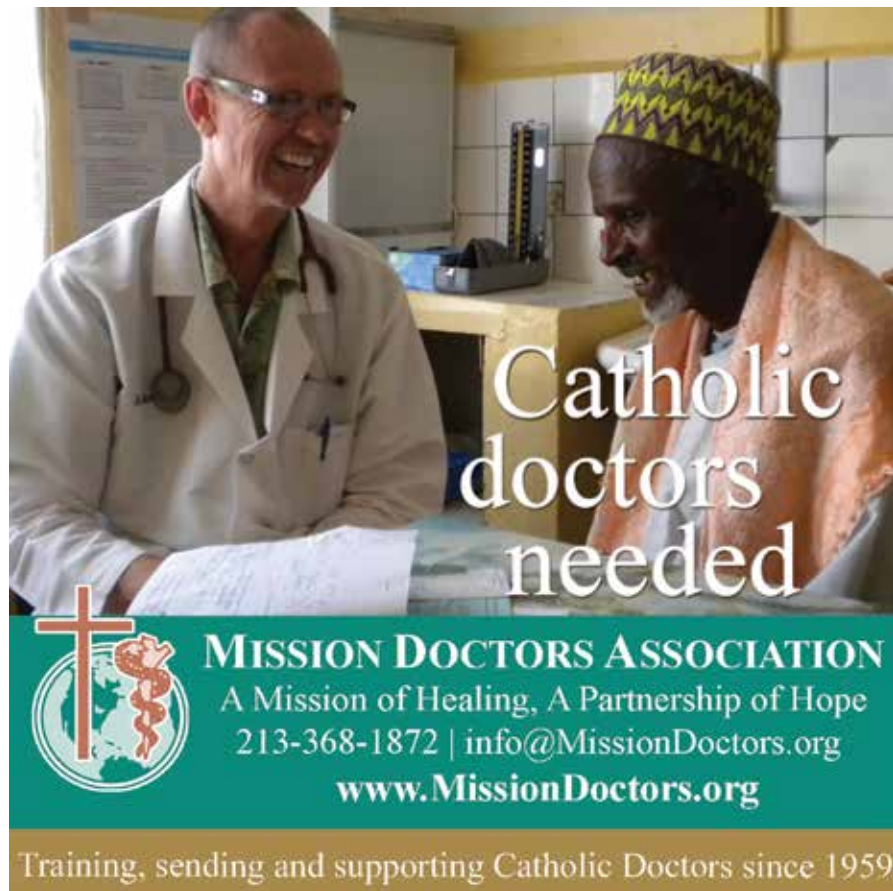
ble in his company's awful breakroom.

She is also angling for something else from Ray—but what? An apology? A pound of flesh? A reset, even a rekindling of their romance? Her agenda is not clear from moment to moment, though in the course of the play she does manage to break down Ray's defenses and reach moments of queasy communion, heartfelt confession and reluctant attraction.

The playwright's agenda, on the other hand, is quite transparent: to shift the ground under the play every 10 minutes or so, and thereby give his actors, and the audience, a kind of extreme emotional workout. It's a skillful if somewhat spurious achievement, as the result of all these tectonic shocks is that the play's moral and psychological landscape is distorted beyond recognition by the end. Harrower may want us to consider the troubling notion that Ray and Una's relationship was somehow both abusive and genuine, and to interrogate the essence of the animal impulses we often exalt with the name "love," but it doesn't come off—perhaps partly because Williams's jagged, jarring performance only exposes the play's fault lines.

Daniels's smoldering thaw, meanwhile, is a wonder to behold, and there is no question that "Blackbird," expertly directed by Joe Mantello, offers vivid sensations and provocative jolts, as roller coasters are meant to do. The play has been widely acclaimed and produced and will soon be released in a film version titled "Una," starring Rooney Mara. Like "The Crucible," though, "Blackbird" derives its power from the dubious spectacle of young women lashing out, vengefully and ineffectually, at men in power. Perhaps we haven't come so far since the time of the Puritans.

ROB WEINERT-KENDT, an arts journalist and editor in chief of *American Theatre* magazine, has written for *The New York Times* and *Time Out New York*. He writes a blog called *The Wicked Stage*.



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When the envelope arrived at my house five days later, slim and slight and full of what I knew,

When I slid the little volume out, smelled the sharp scent of book mold, traced the creases on the cover and opened it,

What I hoped for was her familiar hand.

What I found, instead, was her face.

What I picked up with my fingers, charily, warily, was a photograph, faded with age.

What I saw were her eyes, the eyes I'd known, deep and questioning and full of life, looking into the future,

What I read on the back of the photo was “Deborah at 3 years old,” my teacher as a child, her bangs cut straight across, her Peter Pan collar crisply pressed as the collar on the

cloth doll she clutched so closely.

How I knew it was true?—those eyes,

Who she'd become already contained within, her spirit clear and shining, the child mother to the woman

Who would teach me to love William Wordsworth, to fear William Blake, to know Percy Shelley for the beautiful madman he was, to argue “inexorably” and to value inordinately the words of the poets and the prophets—

Where that soul had gone, Who could say?

Who would teach me patience and sacrifice—her lifelong care for her disabled sister, her loss of her fiancé, a boy named Will, a World War II pilot who left and never returned—the woman

Who would never age and never marry,

Who would never have children of her own, except for us, young people she would teach with such passion.

How she astonished us?—by walking briskly up 8 flights of stairs to our 8AM class, never losing her breath, while we took the elevator. For “an early-morning walk is a blessing for the whole day.”

How she inspired us?—by speaking of the (many) books she was (forever) reading, while we jotted down the titles, creating a reading list that would occupy us for decades. For “energy is eternal delight.”

How she moved us?—by being present to the word, to the world, and all the blessed creatures in it, including ourselves. “For Mercy has a human heart, / Pity a human face, / And Love, the human form divine.”

Where that soul had gone,
Who could say?

Who she had loved and who loved her also gone, most likely, except for me,

Who had searched for her for the sake of memory,



Who discovered her long out-of-print collection (so wonderfully) titled *The Paradise of the World*,

Who had waited for its arrival on the doorstep,

Who had hoped for the unlikely, the less than possible, for the signature and sign, half a century old,

Who received, instead, a relic of her teacher-poet-saint, that miraculous face, those telling eyes, imaged on paper, tucked among her words,

Who treasured the gift, unasked for and undeserved, that arrived like a letter from beyond *the World*, like grace in the mail, like redemption,

When she received the envelope of surprise,

When she opened the book of *Paradise*.

ANGELA ALAIMO O'DONNELL is a writer, professor and associate director of the Curran Center for American Catholic Studies at Fordham University. Her book, *Flannery O'Connor: Fiction Fired by Faith*, recently received a first place award for excellence in biography from the Association of Catholic Publishers. Twitter: @AODonnellAngela.

MUSEUM OF THE MIND

THE WHOLE HARMONIUM The Life of Wallace Stevens

By Paul Mariani

Simon and Schuster. 496p \$30

Incorporating the title of Wallace Stevens's first collection of poetry (*Harmonium*, 1923), this is Paul Mariani's sixth literary biography, preceded by his lives of Hopkins, Berryman, Lowell, Williams and Hart Crane. Mariani adds his seasoned wisdom and remarkable narrative skills in capturing a poet's ethos to earlier and current Stevens biographies by Joan Richardson, Alison Johnson and Al Filreis.

Mariani's impeccable research and perceptive readings of the Stevens canon make *The Whole Harmonium* essential reading on Stevens's place in American and world poetry. According to Mariani, Stevens is "among the important poets of the twentieth and the still-young twenty-first century, sharing a place with...Rilke, Yeats and Neruda." But *The Whole Harmonium* is more than a biography; it is a history of high modernism that Stevens helped to create, define and exemplify through his poetry, aesthetics and friendships with figures like Harriet Monroe (the founder of Poetry magazine), Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, Carl Van Vechten and James Latimer.

In fascinating detail gathered from a wealth of documents, including letters, speeches, journals, interviews, business reports, genealogies and photographs, Mariani reveals a Stevens who was as complex a human as he was a poet. He plumbs Stevens's family background, personality and influences more insightfully than other biographers have done. Mariani claims there were two sides to Stevens: "the unhappy Stevens," who nonetheless devoted his life without cynicism to seeing things through

the lens of the sublime, and the worldly connoisseur who "caught the gaiety, the parasols and chocolate, the complacencies of the peignoir, even the blaze of the tiger's eye."

A paradoxical, domestically troubled Stevens emerges. A large man (in a linebacker's frame) with a tiny scrawl, intensely private, "abrupt" and "dismissive," he was estranged from his own family, especially his father, who disapproved of his marriage. He was caught in a loveless marriage to the "steely cold" Elsie Kachel Moll, whom a niece described as a "church mouse without a sense of humor" and who banished Stevens, suspecting him—without grounds—of adultery, first to the attic and then to his own bedroom, where his poetry, Mariani contends, served as an imaginative substitute for the woman he had lost. It was the Rev. Arthur Hanley, a Catholic chaplain, who administered the sacraments to Stevens (this poet who had once described himself as a "dried-up Presbyterian") on his deathbed. And it was Hanley who learned firsthand that Stevens clearly "lived on a higher or different plane than she did."

Educated as a lawyer, Stevens switched to the insurance business (a career more suited to his personality) and eventually became vice president for surety claims at the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company, a position he held for the last 20 years of his life. For him, poetry was an "affair of holidays and weekends," something he did walking to and from work.

Yet the writer inside the man

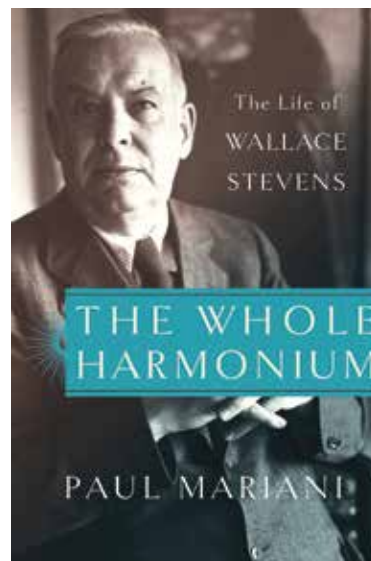
was imbued with a different spirit. As Mariani put it, the "Stevens of *Harmonium*...[was] the mandarin poet, the Frenchified dandy, the lawyer-poet of inscrutable edifice" who searched for and celebrated the sublime through his poems. Imagination became the true reality for Stevens, the very oxygen he breathed. In an early chapter, "An Explosion in a Shingles Factory," referring to The New York Times's derogatory description of Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase," Mariani takes us on a colorful tour of Stevens's muse-

um of the mind. Living life to the fullest, the younger Stevens entered the world of sultanas, tambourines and sapodillas, indulging himself in surf baths, "the sun and martinis," exotic teas imported from Ceylon, Cuban cigars, the arts, gardening and long walks when "the green evenings were clear and warm."

In the "paradise green" of Key West, where Stevens went

yearly for the winter vacations he combined with business trips, he enjoyed card games, fishing and drinking bouts, and once "broke his fist in two places" in a fight with Ernest Hemingway. Yet even in this Arcadia, he was concerned with the two major concepts that shaped his life and work—order and the sublime. "How does one stand/ to behold the sublime/ To confront the mocker/ The mickey mockers/ And plated pairs," he asked in "The American Sublime." Music in particular charmed him; it was something he always played at home and played with in his poetry as well. In one of his most famous poems in *Harmonium*, "Peter Quince at the Clavier," he declared that "Music is feeling, then, and not sound."

Mariani does an exemplary job of



capturing this zestful Stevens through the publication of his *Man With the Blue Guitar & Other Poems* (1937). But no less compelling or sensitive is Mariani's biography of the prodigious Stevens in his 50s and beyond, asserting that later in life Stevens the dandy "assumed the New England conscience of a Dickinson or Hawthorne." Mariani is at pains to show how Stevens's later works differed from those in *Harmonium*. Drawing upon a wellspring of correspondence, talks and journals, he provides studied analyses of Stevens as thinker and theorist, ever mindful of Stevens's burgeoning reputation and legacy.

Poetry for Stevens was not personal, ideological or political (though he was horrified by wars and despised Fascism). Though Mariani scrupulously contextualizes people and events in Stevens's life (e.g., cocktail events, parties, trips, literary tastes) that inspired or float through his works, he rightfully insists that it would be misleading to tag Stevens an autobiographical poet in the accepted sense, for, as Elizabeth Drew, a reviewer for *The Atlantic Monthly*, speaking for many readers, phrased it, Stevens intended poems to be "beautifully phrased and condensed enigmas." Even Robert Frost quipped that Stevens's poetry was too hard because "it made him think." But as Mariani emphasizes, the poetry is autobiographical in the sense that it is "an activity of the mind equal to and even greater than philosophy." If Stevens's poetry was difficult, abstract and intensely intellectual, it was because, like Picasso and Braque, he kept trying to locate the real within "the inaccessibility of the abstract," for what was "there in life except one's ideas?"

Ever the metaphysician, Stevens placed inestimable value on how we see and perceive things; "13 Ways of Seeing a Blackbird," "Yellow Afternoons" and "Women Looking at a View of Flower" are proof texts of his ontology. A poet steeped in philosophical axioms ("Let be finale of seems" in "The Emperor

of Ice-Cream"), he eschewed the crusty pathetic fallacies that encumbered generations of earlier poets. Though he spurned being labeled "a dated Romantic," he formulated an *Ars Poetica* for his own brand of Romanticism, since "there was no going back, copying... Shelley or Wordsworth or Keats or Whitman." In "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon," he locates "the golden raiment" (the poet's powers) inside the poet himself and not in nature: "Out of my mind the golden raiment rained,/ And my ears made the blowing hymns they heard./ I was myself the compass of the sea:/ I was the world in which I waked, and what I saw/ Or heard or felt came not but from myself/ And there I found myself more truly, more strange." And yet, despite his heady abstractions, many of his poems are beautifully lyrical, filled with haunting scenes from nature.

Stevens, no lover of organized religion, was nonetheless drawn to the

spiritual. He defended the idea of a merciful God and often visited churches, especially St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City for its peaceful sanctity. Heavily influenced by his Harvard philosophy professor, George Santayana, Stevens saw poetry itself as a religion. With almost vatic powers, the poet was "the maker of a thing yet to be made" ("Blue Guitar"). Poems express and are themselves "the essence of reality," because "Poetry should be the subject of the poem." Stevens prayed through his poems, the vehicles by which he sought the Supreme Fiction, the poetic equivalent of God and grace. "God is Good, It Is a Beautiful Night" from *Transport to Summer* (1947) reflects Stevens's strong sense of the transcendent caught in listening to the "brown bird" whose "thin music" rises from the "stump/ Of summer." Dying of stomach cancer and still believing that the imagination was the gateway to the Sublime, Stevens, Mariani argues, could be satisfied only

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by “coming into the fold” and joining the Catholic Church, receiving baptism and Communion at St. Francis Hospital in Hartford. Ironically, his last poem prophetically welcomes the Holy Spirit’s entrance into his life with the image of “fire fangled feathers dan-

gling down.” Mariani’s magisterial biography is a tribute to one of America’s most profound poets.

PHILIP C. KOLIN is an emeritus distinguished professor of English at the University of Southern Mississippi. His most recent book is Emmett Till in Different States: Poems.

ELIZABETH WEBB

PONTIFF ON A PEDESTAL

POPE FRANCIS AMONG THE WOLVES The Inside Story of a Revolution

By Marco Politi
Columbia University Press. 288p \$27.95

There is much written about Pope Francis today, especially the pontiff’s public life of service. People from different religious and nonreligious backgrounds concede his public acts of kindness and inclusive rhetoric are admirable. Marco Politi’s *Pope Francis Among the Wolves: The Inside Story of a Revolution* reiterates Francis’ venerable public life but also sheds light on the pope’s revolution within church institutions. At times Francis’ public life seems quite simple, but his knowledge of and ability to maneuver within the inner workings of the Vatican are complex. By helping the reader understand the institution Francis is reforming, Politi inspires even greater estimation of the Bishop of Rome.

Politi’s title alludes to the story of St. Francis, who tamed a wolf that was terrorizing a town. Francis disciplined the wolf and made him change his ways, but he also asked the townspeople to forgive the animal and help feed him. St. Francis was a great arbitrator, doing the difficult work of bringing two warring sides together—paving the way for a new dynamic to emerge where former opponents work toward mutual support. Politi aptly presents the story as the foundation of his tribute to Pope Francis—who seeks not

only to root out corruption and greed in the Vatican but to forge a new reality of humility to take its place.

Politi begins by painting a vivid picture of Archbishop Jorge Mario Bergoglio’s humble service in Buenos

Aires, putting the reader by his side in a shantytown. The scene shows us that today’s Pope Francis is rooted in the Bergoglio of Buenos Aires—a genuine man, humble, yet bold and calculating. “Francis’ humility is not folklore; his unconventional ways reflect his personality.... [The] idiosyncratic style is part of a coherent design to dismantle the imperial character of the papacy.”

Politi presents Francis’ simple and humble acts as purposeful and well-planned. In his home of Buenos Aires, Bergoglio preached that his parish priests should visit the shantytowns—a noble endeavor of serving the poor, to which all Christians are called. Bergoglio went a step further and shifted the paradigm to focus primarily on the poor instead of treating them as an aside: “Before his arrival, priests who had a parish in the city would also be assigned some portion of the outskirts to look after. Now it is the opposite, he gives parish priests from the shantytowns a second parish in a middle-class sector.” All too often “simple” is equated to naïve

or rushed. Politi excellently presents Francis’ simplicity as deliberate.

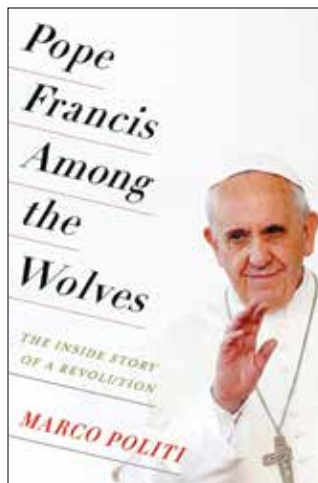
Many admirers of Francis look to his acts of kindness: embracing people he encounters, washing feet and visiting the homeless. Some of Francis’ critics within the Roman Curia disparage his simple speech and claim he needs help with his theology: “Francis is more attentive to pastoral positions than to doctrinal ones, the exact reversal of before.” The vice dean of the College of Cardinals added, “His style of great simplicity doesn’t please those who like to imagine the pope always on his throne with a miter on his head.”

But when it comes to his revolution at the Vatican, Francis’ positions are

not simplistic, but rather deliberate and complex. Francis shakes up the Vatican by cracking down on money laundering, misuse of funds and abuse of power. His appointments to positions of power and newly formed committees foster collegiality and decentralization. Even his seemingly simple decision not to reside in the papal apartments

in the Apostolic Palace but opt instead for a modest room in the apartments for guests at the nearby Domus Sanctae Marthae was a purposeful act to reject the exclusivity associated with those who have access to the pope. “By choosing to reside at Santa Marta, Francis at one stroke undercut the charmed circle of insiders who, in every pontificate, claim to relay snippets of the papal thinking thanks to their privileged access, real or pretended, to the apostolic apartment.”

For admirers of Francis, it might be easy to place him on a pedestal of unachievable import. Francis may suspect this himself. In a speech before the U.S. Congress in September 2015,



the pontiff highlighted the work of Dorothy Day—who provided services to the homeless through her Catholic Worker Movement—in an effort to call U.S. Catholics to acknowledge local inspiration. She famously said, “Don’t call me a saint. I don’t want to be dismissed that easily.” Her biographer, Robert Ellsberg, adds that Day expanded, “When they call you a saint,” she said, “it means basically that you are not to be taken seriously.” By no means did Day dismiss the lives of the saints, but rather the notion that they are to be put on pedestals, stripped of humanity, with common people unable to follow in their footsteps.

Politi gives us much with which to extol Francis, but also reminds the reader that Bergoglio is still a human being. Politi relates that Bergoglio was often asked to hear their confessions by his fellow passengers aboard public transportation, to which he replied, “Yes, of course.” “Once on a bus he finally had to interrupt a man whose

catalog of sins was interminable with the polite remark, ‘Bueno, I get off two stops from here.’” Francis is generous with his time and attention, but also, he doesn’t want to miss his bus stop. He is not on a pedestal, but seated right beside you.

It may already be that some find Francis’ way inimitable. “Pope Francis realizes that he remains fairly isolated within the structure of the Curia and that in Rome and beyond Rome many midlevel ecclesiastics applaud him while hesitating to walk in his footsteps.” However, there are signs that suggest the will already exists. After all, Francis was elected by a conclave. Even some within the Curia itself were ready for change upon Francis’ election. “The majority of curial prelates were against the excessive degree of power [...] and saw the change of popes as the occasion for reducing it.” Pope Emeritus Benedict himself paved the way for a Francis figure to step in and make the reforms the German pontiff’s health

did not give him the energy to carry out. “Benedict XVI wanted to sweep the board clear of all the entrenched positions of power in the curia. By resigning, he triggered [their] automatic resignation.... His decision to abdicate amounted to a sort of coup d’etat, a virtual ‘reboot’ of the Vatican.”

While many will be inspired to join Francis’ cause, some already were anxiously awaiting a leader to pave the way. It is up to the Catholic Church and its members to keep Francis’ momentum going; the revolution was never meant to be Pope Francis’ one-man show. Collegiality is often referred to in this book, signaling Francis’ desire to bring all parties to the table. Like his namesake from Assisi, Pope Francis is forging a new reality for the church, where tamed wolves live in harmony with the rest of the faithful.

ELIZABETH WEBB, a graduate of Saint Peter’s University in Jersey City, N.J., is a senior intelligence analyst at iJET International in Annapolis, Md.





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THE ROAD TO CHRIST

OPENING THE DOOR OF FAITH

Encountering Jesus and His Call to Discipleship

Thomas D. Stegman, S.J.
Paulist Press. 103p \$11.95

THE NONES ARE ALRIGHT A New Generation of Believers, Seekers, and Those in Between

Kaya Oakes
Orbis Books. 198p \$22

James Joyce famously wrote in *Finnegan's Wake* that "Catholic means 'here comes everybody.'" Catholics have repeatedly created new forms of community to respond to the signs of the times and the "joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties" of their particular context. In the postmodern West, where we are increasingly isolated and disconnected from each other—experiencing what Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone* dubbed a serious "loss of social capital"—questions of building and sustaining community take on a new urgency. This is particularly true for millennials like myself: digital natives who increasingly engage with the world through screens and whose relationships are often formed and deepened through online platforms. What does it mean to be faithful in community in this context?

This question is engaged by Kaya Oakes and Thomas Stegman, S.J., who live on opposite coasts of the United States and write from distinct contexts. Oakes, whose writing has appeared in *America*, is a self-described "progres-

sive," "agnostic-leaning believer" and "Catholic revert" (one who was raised Catholic, left and later returned). She teaches at the University of California, Berkeley, "the most secular of secular universities." Stegman is a Midwest native and New Testament professor at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, my alma mater. While many of Oakes's students and conversation partners are secular, or at least not religious practitioners in any traditional sense, Stegman's students are training for professional Catholic ministry. It is not surprising, then, that they make different assumptions and come to diverging conclusions about the life of faith.

Oakes invited young seekers on social media to share their stories of "reinventing what it means to 'be church' outside of church walls." In *The Nones Are Alright*, she paints a sympathetic, thoughtful portrait of this "Generation of Believers, Seekers, and Those in Between" for whom there is "no one way to believe and no one way to belong."

The interviewees she highlights are "nones" or "unaffiliated," a category that describes 31 percent of people between the ages of 18 and 29, according to a Pew Forum study in 2012. For previous generations, faith and practice were assumed. In contrast, Oakes and I and her subjects are part of a postre-

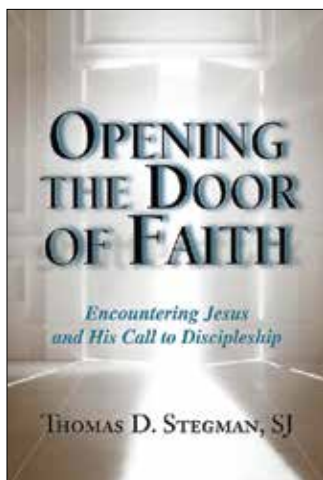
ligious generation, in which adherence to a religious tradition is the exception, not the rule. "Many younger people engage in a kind of spiritual mix and match, blending many traditions and adhering strictly to none," she writes. They are not indifferent to spirituality and in some cases passionately desire to believe and belong, but they cannot reconcile their experience with

the church's teaching on women or sexuality, struggle with doubt or distrust large institutions—a generational trend that is only exacerbated by the mishandling of the crisis produced by sexual abuse by members of the clergy. Yet these "nones," Oakes assures us, are "mature, self-aware, intelligent and well informed." And though they eschew traditional religious practice,

they still seek community, engage in service and social justice efforts and experiment with spiritual practice, albeit in a casual, syncretic, do-it-yourself kind of way.

Stegman's book *Opening the Door of Faith: Encountering Jesus and His Call to Discipleship*—which originated in articles for *The Pastoral Review* on the Year of Faith—is written as a resource for "groups to study, reflect, and pray together" with the "sincere hope" that it will "open the door" into what the New Testament says about faith." To this end, he includes 10 prayer and reflection questions at the end of each chapter that serve to challenge the reader in exploring the theme of faith more deeply.

Stegman explores what five distinct voices in the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke-Acts, John and Paul—say about faith. He succinctly and accessibly summarizes each of these five biblical authors' writing on the topic. He concludes that there are



four primary themes: encounter with Jesus, call to discipleship and mission, prayer and sacrament, and community of faith. While acknowledging current polarization in the church and the abuse scandal, Stegman, as a New Testament scholar, is more focused on the words of the biblical authors than on the social and religious landscape of postmodern America.

Several times Stegman posits that faith describes God's fidelity to God's people; *pistis* ("faith" or "faithfulness") is first a divine attribute, which is then followed by the human response. Our faith is the "second act." This resonates with much of what Pope Francis has stressed in the Year of Mercy: God seeks us out tirelessly and, thus, the church is to be a place of mercy and welcome. This statement stands in counterpoint to the witness of many of Oakes's interviewees, whose experience of church is uncomfortable at best and inhospitable and alienating at worst. Unlike Oakes's "nones" on the religious margins, Stegman assumes belief—while recognizing the challenges of Christian discipleship acknowledged in New Testament texts—and assumes participation in faith community.

Around questions of faith and faithfulness, Stegman and Oakes begin and end in different places. Stegman, citing Luke, states that lived faith is "marked by a bold and holy confidence." For the young seekers Oakes interviewed, faith is a doubt-filled struggle marked with tension and paradox, even contradiction. Stegman appeals to both the authority of biblical authors and the writings of Popes Francis and Benedict XVI, while Oakes's "self-reliant and free-thinking" interviewees look to their own experience instead of to outside authority in their quest for truth. Stegman wants his readers to walk through the "door of faith" and "hold the door open for others to enter," while Oakes is convinced the young seekers she writes about are doing just

fine in the liminality of the doorway. For Stegman, the life of faith is one of "continual conversion...even heroism," while Oakes claims that "faith is a tidal motion, an ebb and a surge, a push and a pull." Stegman cites the biblical authors in emphasizing the primacy of faith community in "following Jesus alongside others" in "flesh and blood" interactions," while Oakes's nones drift in and out of various communities and often find like-minded seekers online.

A rare point of consonance between Oakes and Stegman is a shared emphasis on concern for the poor and struggle for social justice in the life of faith. Beyond this, the Boston Jesuit and the Berkeley writer make different assumptions, ask different questions and come to different conclusions about what it means to live faith in community.

Their books, read in conversation with each other, prompt some fascinating questions. How is faithfulness to be understood in a way that recognizes both the truth of Scripture and

tradition and the 21st-century reality of postreligious United States? How can our universal church of "here comes everybody" cultivate communities of faith in our postmodern and postreligious context? Who defines Catholic identity and gets to decide what it means to be a faithful Catholic, when so many young people are redefining faith in their own image? If Dorothy Day's words that the "answer to the long loneliness is community" are taken to heart—particularly during this Year of Mercy—then how can parish communities that "open the door of faith" be recreated in ways that connect with "the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties" of both Gen-Xers and millennials?

RHONDA MISKA, a former Jesuit volunteer, is a Dubuque-based freelance writer and contributor to *Catholic Women Speak: Bringing Our Gifts to the Table* (Paulist Press, 2015). She teaches in religious studies at Clarke University. Website: www.clippings.me/rhondamiska.

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Christian Freedom

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), JUNE 26, 2016

Readings: 1 Kgs 19:16-21; Ps 16:1-11; Gal 5:1-18; Lk 9:51-62

“For freedom Christ has set us free” (Gal 5:1)

There are different ways to understand freedom. There is childhood freedom, which remains linked to the carefree days of summer, peddling furiously to the playground to join friends in a game of baseball or to go swimming. The summer idyll reflects freedom from responsibility. Others view freedom as the choice to live your life however you choose, unencumbered by religious morality or authority figures. This is freedom as license. There is also the liberty to choose among a series of candidates for office in elections, some of whom might even inspire some hope in you, so that there is a freedom to establish how we are governed. This is the nobility of political freedom.

None of these, though, are what Paul has in mind when he claims that it is “for freedom (*eleutheria*) Christ has set us free.” Ancient Greek thought comes closer to what Paul had in mind since, especially among the Stoics, freedom was not grounded in external circumstances but in how an individual responded to these circumstances. To be *apatheia*, for a Stoic, was not to be swayed by outside events but to retain control over one’s emotions and thus one’s soul. But for Paul, this would ignore the power of sin.

The first-century Jewish philoso-

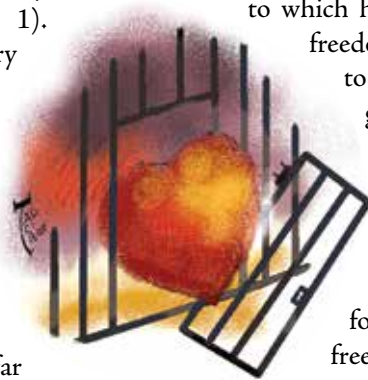
pher Philo of Alexandria approaches Paul’s thought in his treatise *Every Good Man Is Free*. Philo’s positive point of view is expressed in the contrasting statement: “Every bad man is a slave” (No. 1). Philo states that “in very truth he who has God alone for his leader, he alone is free” (No. 20). For Philo, sin enslaves us; it is the soul following the dictates of God’s law that sets us free.

While this is not far from Paul’s view of freedom, what sets Paul apart from Philo is that Paul believes that freedom has been gained through the salvific actions of Jesus Christ, not simply by following the Law of Moses. Paul writes, “You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.” In some sense, Paul’s freedom is freedom from law—not, like Philo, freedom that comes from following the law.

This is the hardest part of Paul’s thought, though, since he also says Christ does not lead us away from the law but to its fulfillment. How is this done? As the Second Vatican Council’s “Declaration on Religious Freedom” (No. 11) states, Christ “bore witness to the truth, but he refused to impose the truth by force on those who spoke against it.” Christ offers us freedom through his example, which draws us to fulfill the law not out of obligation but out of love of neighbor and God.

Paul says that the whole law is fulfilled in love.

Freedom is not “an opportunity for self-indulgence” but an opportunity to “through love become slaves to one another.” In the Greek text, the word (*sarx*) translated “self-indulgence” means literally “flesh,” which intends not just “sins of the flesh” but the behaviors of the whole person turned away from God, which can include greed, gossip and any other weakness to which humanity is prone. Our freedom through Christ is to be an opportunity to go beyond the demands of the law in order to love in the same way Christ loved us. Christ gives us the
The contrast, therefore, is not really between freedom and law, but be-



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Contemplate your own understanding of freedom. What comes to mind when you think of freedom? What sort of freedom means the most to you? What do you think of Paul’s understanding of freedom? What challenges you most and comforts you most about your freedom in Christ?

tween flesh and Spirit. It is the license of the “flesh” that Paul warns against, which can only be combated by the Spirit. Paul says, “If you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law.” Yet when you are led by the Spirit—and this is the conundrum here of true freedom—you do not pursue moral license, or attempt to skirt the limits of the law, or seek even the care-free life of a child, free of responsibility. Instead you attempt to be guided by the Spirit. For when you live in the Spirit, you find freedom in pursuing the good of the neighbor and the truth of God.

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



CATHOLIC INITIATIVES

The New Cross

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), JULY 3, 2016

Readings: Is 66:10-14; Ps 66:1-20; Gal 6:14-18; Lk 10:1-12

“May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal 6:14)

In the Apostle Paul’s letters, especially in Galatians, Paul sees boasting as the core of the spiritual sins that haunt the church. Boasting reflects more than just a problematic personality or character trait. For Paul, boasting in anything other than Christ is a sign of the “old creation,” a refusal to be transformed by Christ into a “new creation.” The cross, though, is the emblem of how the old ways are made new in Christ.

To think of what the cross was in the old creation is to recognize it simply as a tool of capital punishment by the Roman state and its functionaries. There was nothing transformative about the broken bodies of slaves or insurrectionists hung out publicly for all to see. But for Paul, the cross, though outwardly the same instrument of torture and torment as before, has been transformed by Jesus into the means of grace by which humanity is brought into the family of God. As a result, when Paul speaks to the Galatians, he tells them that he would “never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In the same way that the humiliation and cruelty of the cross became through Christ’s sacrifice a source of God’s love, so we, too, are to be transformed by God’s love from those who glory in achievement, ethnicity and expertise to those who boast in the cross. It is no longer about the things that used to define us; in Christ “a new creation is everything.” Boasting apart from Christ is

the epitome of the old ways.

In the Septuagint Bible, the common Greek verb for “to boast,” *kauchaomai*, takes on a religious flavor, which is seen in Paul’s own writing. Ceslas Spicq writes in the *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* that the peculiar contribution of the Jewish scriptures to an understanding of *kauchaomai* “is to give the verb a religious meaning and to pose the contrast between human vainglory and divine honor.” This is what Paul’s contrast is driving at—not an argument against human worthwhileness, but an understanding that all of us are valuable to God simply for who we are as human beings and that God has saved us not because of our achievements or holiness but because God loves us. This is our boast, and it belongs to all who belong to Christ.

What it means to be a “new creation” for Paul is to be transformed by the cross of Christ and in light of our eternal goal and purpose into people who glory in the love of neighbor and of God and not our achievements. Paul did not stop being the apostle who “worked harder than any of them,” nor should people stop using their gifts to be the best ski instructor, or chocolate maker, or teacher. But for Paul “new creation” gives thanks to God, acknowledging that “it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Cor 15:10). “New creation” glories not in oneself but the good gifts that have been graciously showered on each of us for the benefit of all.

For Paul, the heart of his “new creation” was doing it all for the glory of God’s reign. This meant

Paul had to “carry the marks [stigmata] of Jesus branded on my body.” While these are not the stigmata as later understood by the tradition, they are most probably the wounds he received for his apostolic work as a member of Christ’s body, and these he bore happily because it was a boast about the nature of his solidarity with Christ’s sacrifice. Though his body was marked, the marks defined him as one who offered honor to God. They were visible signs

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Pray about the cross of Christ. What does it mean to you to boast of the cross? What sorts of boasting do you need to put aside? What marks you as a “new creation” in Christ?

that the body of Christ took precedence, not Paul’s. They were the marks of “new creation.”

The marks we have gained as members serving the body of Christ might be different. They might not be physical but emotional, spiritual or psychological. The marks might not be visible, but they too are signs of “new creation,” of the times when we have been marked by our love of Christ. They do not mark us as weak or strong, but as members of God’s family, those who seek to be transformed as “new creations” who boast only in the cross.

JOHN W. MARTENS

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