

America

JUNE 11, 2018

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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Revisiting Bobby Kennedy's Poverty Tour

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Remembering Bobby Kennedy

What I think is quite clear is that we can work together in the last analysis and that what has been going on in the United States over the period of the last three years, the division, the violence, the disenchantment with our society, the division whether it's between black and white, between the poor and the more affluent or between age groups or over the war in Vietnam, that we can start to work together. We are a great country, an unselfish country and a compassionate country. And I intend to make that my basis for running over the period of the next few months.

—From the last speech of Robert F. Kennedy
June 5, 1968

I was born in Hyannis, Mass., nearly four years after Bobby Kennedy died. But my belief in the nobler spirit of politics and in the dignity of public service were born on the day I first heard his name. Like thousands of others, I entered public service as a young person because I was inspired by his life and witness.

Yet it was not a myth that spoke to me, but the man himself. His brother, Senator Edward M. Kennedy, once said that Bobby “should be remembered simply as a good and decent man.” That he was. Yet good and decent men are rarely perfect. To which I say: Thank God. For it is in overcoming the imperfections within himself, and those in the world around him, that a man becomes

a hero and, in our memory of that triumph, the hero becomes fully a man.

In November 1963 Bobby Kennedy faced the most formidable imperfection in human existence: the sudden, violent loss of someone he loved. Mourning is the loneliest place in the world. Yet God did not abandon Bobby Kennedy. In the crucible of his grief, “the awful grace of God fell drop by drop” upon his heart, forging a soul in communion with the world’s pain. Thus the night of his sorrow gave way to the light of day, when his mourning became his mission and his wounded heart became the heart of a wounded healer. This was the man who ran for president in the spring of 1968 because, he said, “I want the United States to stand for the reconciliation of men.”

Bobby Kennedy’s pilgrimage from despair to hope, from death to life, was the journey of a brother, a father, a husband, a citizen, a Christian. Yet it is our journey too. For as he did for Bobby Kennedy, God calls every one of us out of darkness and into his light. In the light of his grace, we cannot see what might have been. But we do see what was, and the power and spirit of what was is enough to dream anew of what might yet be. The 50th anniversary of Bobby Kennedy’s assassination, on June 6, is not, then, a moment for mourning but an hour for hope. And the ceremony that will mark the occasion is not only a remembrance of things past but the touchstone of our present and a rite of dedication to our future.

For Bobby Kennedy still lives. He still lives in millions of hearts that beat with a passion for social justice, in millions of minds that “dream things that never were and ask ‘why not?’”

He still lives—in every courageous politician who seeks “a newer world,” in every public servant who has “the courage to enter the moral conflict.”

He still lives—in every “ripple of hope,” in every blow to “the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance,” in every word spoken and deed done against the terrors of racism and poverty.

He still lives—in the sacrifice of the human rights worker, in the prayer-in-action of the peacemaker, in the dignified labor of migrant peoples, in the dreams of every immigrant.

He still lives—in the spirit of the American people, who, though beset by human weakness, as all humans are, are “made strong in will to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.”

Bobby Kennedy still lives.

Yet we mark this truth not only with mere human words or earthly gestures but in our encounter with God in the sacrament that was the source and summit of Bobby Kennedy’s life. He was always the most devout in his famous Catholic family. But in the years after Dallas, he found in his faith a renewed sense of purpose and hope. For in the paschal mystery of God, we find the place where what is hidden in darkness is brought to light, where senseless sorrow is charged with meaning, where human weakness is redeemed and hope reborn.

Above all, then, Bobby Kennedy still lives because the one he encountered in the Eucharist—the one he sought to serve, the one who was crucified and yet rose triumphant—still lives. Thus faith, hope and love will never die.

—
Matt Malone, S.J. *Twitter: @americaditor.*



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Two election officers carry a polling box onto the island of Inishbofin, Ireland, on May 24. A referendum on May 25 repealed the Ireland's Eighth Amendment, which guaranteed the right to life of unborn children.

Cover Image: Photo composite (CNS and AP Images)

Photo: Cledagh Kilcoyne/PA Wire/AP

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What is the greatest threat to democracy in the U.S.?

Ninety-one percent of respondents to our survey told us that living in a democracy was either extremely or very important to them. “Democracy isn’t perfect, but I believe it offers the best framework for government,” explained Diana George of Palmyra, Va. “There are multiple paths to justice and to personal success and, ideally, recognition that all human beings are equally worthy.”

When asked the what is greatest threat to democracy in the United States, a third of respondents told **America** that it was money in politics. Michael Phung of Brighton, Mass., wrote: “The government’s purpose of being for the people has been subverted by money.” Barb Anderson of Blaine, Minn., concurred: “If money weren’t a requirement to run a successful political campaign, a wider variety of candidates—without interests in corporations—would have opportunities to run. Also, money seems to sway candidates and the elected too much.”

After money in politics, 19 percent of respondents pointed to voter apathy as the most significant threat to democracy in this country. “People need to vote and vote informed,” said Ann O’Brien of Framingham, Mass. Oth-

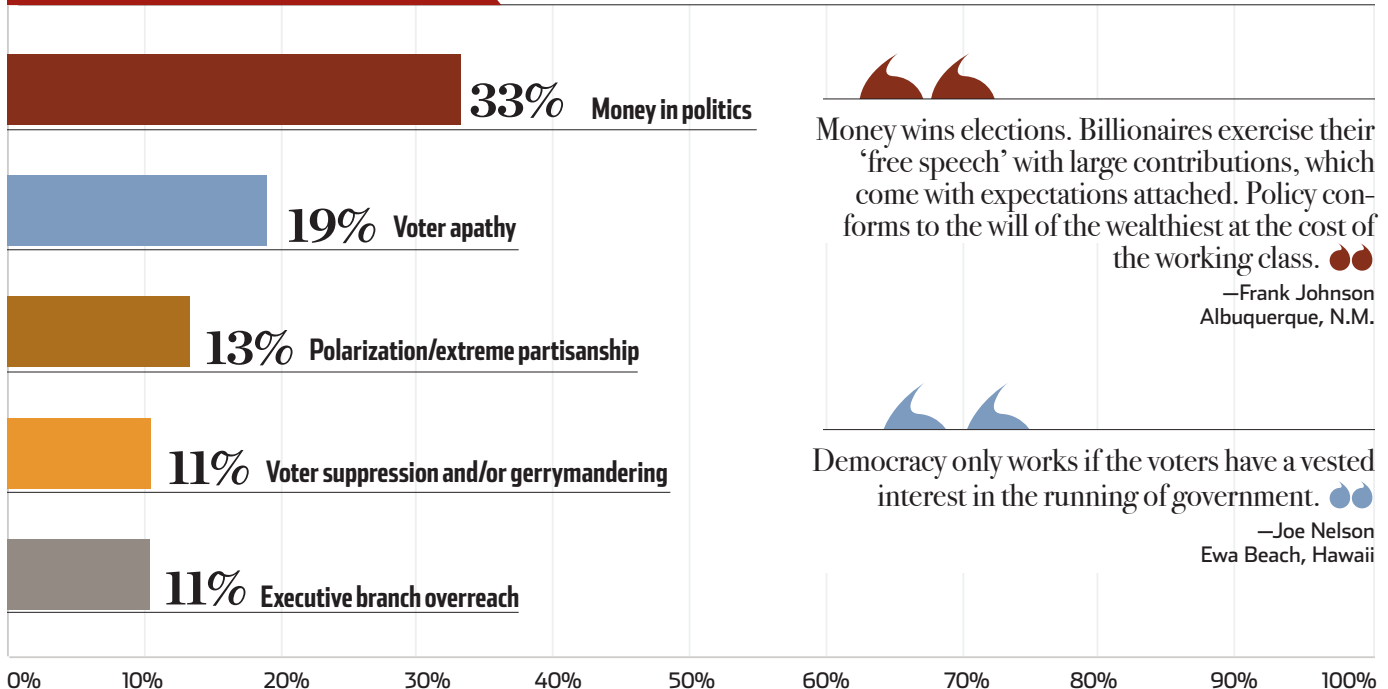
er readers emphasized the civic duty of eligible voters. Cherie Gaiser of Libertyville, Ill., told **America**, “When people do not understand that their freedom is linked to responsibility,” and fail to vote, others gain the power to enact their “own agenda.”

Polarization and extreme partisanship were cited by 13 percent, who felt these are the greatest threat to democracy. Emmett Blake of Texas wrote, “Extreme partisanship is the justification for surrendering democracy using gerrymandering, voter suppression and so on—placing the government in the hands of the parties over the people.”

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT FOR YOU TO LIVE IN A DEMOCRACY?

| | |
|----------------------|-----|
| Extremely important | 75% |
| Very important | 16% |
| Somewhat important | 6% |
| Not so important | 1% |
| Not at all important | 2% |

THE TOP 5 THREATS TO DEMOCRACY IN THE U.S.



These results are based on reader responses to a poll promoted on Facebook, Twitter and in our email newsletter. Respondents were able to choose one of eight options to answer the question, “What is the greatest threat to democracy in the U.S.?” The five most popular answers are illustrated above. The remaining three options (not shown) were: uncivil discourse and/or racial/ethnic tension (7 percent); media bias (4 percent); and judicial branch overreach (2 percent).

Sensitive to Pain

Re “When Parishes Must Close” (Our Take, 5/28): I agree with this editorial. But the priests at the parishes that are to be closed need to be sensitive to the pain being felt. Parishioners need to be involved in final decisions as much as possible.

Priests need to be comfortable with painful, difficult conversations. They should not run away from the people who are hurting. Pastoral training is sadly lacking at this time. When there is autocratic decision-making to avoid hard conversations, we are led back to the clericalism of the past.

Mary Reeves 🗨️

A Pro-life Cause

Re “Prescriptions Are Not to Blame for Today’s Opioid Crisis,” by Sally Satel (5/28): I am the patient Dr. Satel mentions in this article. I feel the opioid crisis is an unrecognized issue for the pro-life movement. I have lost friends to suicide because they no longer had any quality of life. If you believe life begins at conception, use the fetal pain argument to support the fight against abortion, lobby against the death penalty and protest euthanasia, you should support measures that promote quality of life for patients with chronic or intractable pain as well.

Anne Fuqua 🗨️

Thank Korean People of Faith

Re “The Dizzying Pace of Improved Relations Is a Welcome Surprise in South Korea,” by Kevin Clarke (5/28): A lot of the impetus for the summit came from the people of South Korea and particularly from faith-based peace activists, who have been advocating for a peace treaty and improved relations with North Korea for years.

In 2016 a delegation from the South Korean Council of Churches visited the United States to lobby the Obama administration on behalf of a peace treaty. It is hard to know how much President Trump influenced events on the Korean peninsula, but it is clear that in both Pyongyang and Seoul, domestic Korean considerations played an important role.

Nicholas Mele 🗨️

A Terrible Lottery

Re “A Home of One’s Own,” by John W. Miller (5/28): In seeking services for a family member with disabilities, I was told: “He walks and talks and has a living parent. He will never qualify for a group home until his parent dies.” As it turned out, he moved to a different state, where services were available. In the other state, a conversation with a state worker about his being able to move to a group home started with, “Have you ever won the lottery?” It felt like winning the lottery to obtain services for my family member.

Lisa Weber 🗨️

Thank You

Re “We Need a New Pro-Life Movement Built on Social Justice,” by Christina Gebel (5/28): You give me hope for the future in a very grim present.

Sheila Hannon 🗨️

Love and Catholic Teaching

I find more love, and true Catholic teaching, in your elucidation than anything else I have read on the subject.

Stephanie Hampton 🗨️

Spot On

Re “Thank You, Senator,” by Matt Malone, S.J. (Of Many Things, 5/15): Father Malone was spot on with his comments about Mark Zuckerberg’s testimony on Capitol Hill. Having testified (and being grilled in follow-ups) at my state legislature for years over issues as minor as how many times a year a barber shop should be inspected to what level of medical practitioner could safely perform certain procedures, I can say that respect is always noticed and often appreciated by legislators. It is never seen as excessively deferential, and I believe this is good.

Basic respect is sadly lacking in our current culture, and pointing fingers at presidents, senators or anyone else who ignores decorum (or parliamentary procedure) is no license to behave badly. We were all taught two wrongs do not make a right, and being disrespectful is never the proper response when you are shown disrespect. My motto: Always take the high road.

Jill Caldwell

Helena, Mont.

🗨️ Comments drawn from our website, americamagazine.org, and America Media’s social media platforms.

Letters to the editor can be sent to letters@americamedia.org. Please include the article title, author and issue date, as well as your name and where you are writing from.

‘The Ceremony of Innocence Is Drowned’

Two stories separated by 5,000 miles last weekend reminded us all of how crucial it is for citizens of democracies to avoid complacency in the defense of human rights, particularly the rights of those in greatest peril. They also are a reminder that every generation faces challenges to the dignity of life—and those threats are often tragically familiar.

The first was the unexpected landslide vote on May 25 that repealed the Republic of Ireland’s Eighth Amendment, which guaranteed the right to life of unborn children. By a margin of two to one, one of the few societies in Europe that prohibited abortion on demand voted to allow it on almost exactly the same terms as the others.

As the votes were being counted in Ireland, the journalist Chris Hayes was reporting on a case from Brownsville, Tex., in which border patrol officers took an 18-month-old baby from his mother at the border in February because she was seeking asylum from violence in her home country. She says in a lawsuit that she has not seen her child for more than a month. The inhumanity of the episode was reinforced by news reports that of the 7,000 undocumented children the federal government has taken into custody and placed with adult sponsors, the Office of Refugee Resettlement does not know where 1,475 of them are.

In the case of Ireland, most prognosticators saw the liberalization of abortion laws as a likely outcome, given that nation’s legalization of divorce in 1995 and same-sex marriage in 2015, both by similar referendum

processes and against the vehement opposition of the Catholic Church. But the vast size of the vote for repeal—both in terms of turnout and the winning margin—has taken everyone by surprise. On abortion, Ireland seemed to have succeeded where nearly every other modern democracy has failed. Their European neighbors have long allowed abortion early in a pregnancy but also have strong maternal safety nets. Across the Atlantic, the United States has some of the most permissive abortion laws in the world (far more so than those aforementioned European nations) and almost no safety net for young mothers.

But Ireland had gone its own way. (It is worth noting that the Eighth Amendment is not some holdover from colonial rule; it was passed in 1983.) Ireland created a modern state that both prohibited abortion in almost all circumstances and aimed to provide the best care for women before and after childbirth. No more.

Within our own borders, the draconian immigration policies and open race-baiting of the nominally pro-life Trump administration perhaps made public episodes of inhumanity inevitable. But an America where babies are torn from their mothers’ arms because their parents fled violence, where children are separated from their families or lost through blasé indifference, is not a pro-life nation at all. The rhetoric of Emma Lazarus, where the “Mother of Exiles” welcomes “the wretched refuse of your teeming shores,” seems less pertinent than that of theologian William Stringfellow: Is our nation

now “a demonic principality” that “exacts human sacrifices, captures and captivates presidents as well as intimidating and dehumanizing ordinary citizens”? The juxtaposition of these policies with the Trump administration’s efforts to defund Planned Parenthood, a necessary and laudable pro-life goal, reveals a cruel irony. Under this regime, the dignity of human life is subordinated to political ends even when, by happenstance of political alliance, it is being defended.

Our biblical heritage provides another warning—and mandate—in both cases. No doubt the Israelites of Exodus considered Pharaoh’s new law, that their offspring should be marked for death, a singular evil upon the earth. Yet in the time of Christ, another generation was vexed by the same nightmare in the person of Herod, in an edict whose eerie echo we remember in our own liturgical readings to this day. And now, 20 centuries later, that evil slouches forth again. To defend our prosperity, to defend ways of life we reflexively consider blessed, we seem to ignore the true and good impulses of our nature and instead turn again on our children.

The Creeping Normalcy of School Shootings

“We are dying on your watch. What will you do about it?”

That was the question put to Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas by a group of high school students after yet another

school shooting ripped apart 10 more American families. It is a question that should be asked of every adult in the nation who has stood by since Columbine, since Sandy Hook, since Parkland, while the list of school “shooting tragedies” grows longer.

It is exhausting to return to the same arguments about gun control as the bodies pile up, especially as Second Amendment absolutists propose increasingly preposterous responses to school shootings.

Apparently, just about everything contributes to gun mayhem in the United States—video games, peer bullying, A.D.H.D. medicine—but not the 300 million guns themselves.

Some Americans are ready to arm teachers and spend billions on school security systems or Kevlar backpacks that double as last-ditch bullet shields. It is school doorways, not guns, that need to be controlled; excessive government monitoring is welcomed for mental health and social media activity, not so much for gun purchases.

The worst is the creeping normalcy of it all as the nation grows incapable of shock, inured to the suffering inflicted on families and communities.

This publication has called for repeal of the Second Amendment. In the meantime, we insist on the well-regulated militia described in the Constitution. Comprehensive gun registration and commonsense gun sale policies; a ban on bump stocks and military-grade weapons; and mandatory safety instruction, proof of safe storage and liability insurance are good steps to getting there.

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The church in China and lessons from the Cold War

Fresh off the plane, you want to let your family know that you have landed safely in Guangzhou, but first you need to turn on your virtual private network (V.P.N.), a workaround for anyone who wants to use the internet without censorship in China. On state-sanctioned social media platforms, certain words are banned, and criticism of the government can lead to a visit from state authorities and even time in prison.

Control over the citizenry is a first-order concern for the People's Republic of China, and it is in this environment that the Vatican is attempting to create space for Catholics to practice their faith. Today there is an “underground” church as well as the state-sanctioned Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association. Members of the two groups often intermingle, sharing the same worship spaces and priests, but both have suffered persecution by the state.

A potential agreement between Beijing and Rome would bring these two communities together through the consolidation of bishops and would provide a framework for the joint appointment of religious leaders. Any deal will presumably involve the government taking more control over the lives of Catholics in China, and the question must be asked: Is that good for the faithful living here? The Chinese government sees the Roman Catholic Church as a foreign entity and the pope as a foreign sovereign. A fundamental aim of the agreement on Beijing's side will be to limit the potential influence of the Holy See on Chinese citizens and to increase its own control over the Catholic community in China. President

Xi Jinping is suspicious of foreign influences in the country that could undermine the state. These influences include not only Western concepts of freedom and individualism but also religion, because it represents a powerful alternative worldview.

As has been reported in **America**, crosses have been torn off churches and bishops have been arrested in recent months. This repression has happened within both the registered and the unauthorized church communities, and it leads to questions about the value of cooperation by Catholics with the state in the first place.

This is not 1980, and China is not Soviet Russia. But the comparison can help us better understand how the Chinese government views religion, in particular by considering the role religion played in undermining government authority in the Soviet bloc. In Poland, for example, the state tried to maintain a complete monopoly on not only physical property but also intellectual life. The Catholic Church broke both of these monopolies, first by allowing people a place to assemble safely, and second by giving people a counter-worldview with revolutionary potential. The church created the space for people to breathe—physically, intellectually and spiritually.

It is certainly not a coincidence that Solidarity, the independent labor movement, was founded after the first visit of St. John Paul II to Poland. Though the church was not the only catalyst behind the fall of totalitarian government in that country, it played an integral role. Within China, an entire academic field has evolved to

study the history of the Cold War and the fall of Communism in Europe. The example of Eastern Europe has not been lost on them.

Living and working in rural China and traveling across the country to cities large and small, I have been able to talk with Chinese people and learn about their understanding of religion. Many non-Christians see religion as a superstition or, even worse, a poison that inspires poor people to ask God to provide for their needs instead of raising themselves up with their labor.

One woman asked me, during a train ride to Beijing, why Americans believed in God since, she said, superstitions are for poor and ignorant people. And a colleague told me that religion wants people to look outside China—to Mecca or to Rome, or to the sky, or to Buddha. China must be made better, the colleague said, and that cannot happen with people looking outside for help.

Still, if trends continue, China will have the largest Christian community in the world by 2030, an ironic feat in a country ruled by a party that is fundamentally atheist. This prospect shapes discussions in Rome as well as Beijing, and any future agreement between the two sides will shape the opinions that Chinese citizens, religious and otherwise, have toward the church. Any deal that makes the lives of Catholics in China better will be much welcomed, but what is good for Beijing may not align with what is good for the faith community in China.

Michael Ryan is currently living and working in northern China.

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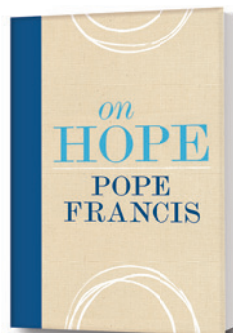
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Is Catholic identity hurting enrollment at Catholic colleges?

By Michael J. O'Loughlin



Colleges and universities across the United States have struggled to meet enrollment goals for the last decade or so, leading to cutbacks in faculty and staff. Catholic schools must market themselves to an increasingly secular applicant pool while trying to catch up to their secular peers in terms of financial resources.

At Loyola University New Orleans, a “campus climate survey” commissioned by administrators last fall found that 64 percent of the faculty have “seriously considered leaving Loyola in the past year.” About seven in 10 in that group cited “institutional instability” as a reason to consider leaving, the report found, with some describing Loyola as a “sinking ship.”

The New Orleans Advocate reports that the survey was conducted in October, after the Jesuit university completed a round of layoffs, its fourth in as many years. The school faces a projected budget shortfall of \$8.7 million, but spokesperson

Laura F. Frerichs said the university has “a plan in place to balance our budget with no further draw on our endowment” and anticipates an operating surplus by July 2019.

Administrators at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minn., are considering laying off up to 50 faculty and staff members to address a budget shortfall caused, in part, by a decline in enrollment of more than 6 percent from 2012, Minnesota Public Radio reported. The Catholic University of America, the only university in the United States with a papal charter, is proposing to reduce the size of its full-time faculty by about 9 percent, according to The Washington Post, through a plan that could, in addition to buyouts and attrition, include layoffs.

Overall enrollment has been on a downward trajectory since 2010, The Chronicle of Higher Education reported, and the plan calls for faculty members to teach more classes so

that the university can cut about 35 positions. A spokesperson for the university reports better news over recent academic terms: Undergraduate enrollment increased last year and is “tracking up for next year.”

According to its consultants, how C.U.A. markets its Catholic identity presents challenges to increasing enrollment and closing budget gaps. Some prospective students, the report found, perceive Catholic University to be more religious than its peer institutions, which may be a stumbling block to reaching enrollment goals.

“Students are open to having their experience enriched by Catholicism, but not necessarily defined by Catholicism,” said Eric Collum, one of the consultants, according to an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. “They want to go to college; they don’t want to go to church, necessarily.”

In recent years, budget shortfalls have led to cuts in faculty and other staff at other Catholic schools, including the College of New Rochelle and the College of St. Rose in New York, Assumption College in Massachusetts, St. Michael’s College in Vermont and Aquinas College in Tennessee. Other schools, like Wheeling Jesuit University in West Virginia and Holy Cross College in Indiana, have sold land in order to invest resources in their curriculum.

Melanie Morey, the director of the Office of Catholic Identity Assessment and Formation in the Archdiocese of San Francisco and the co-author of *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis*, said that some Catholic colleges and universities that relied on religious orders for staffing face special challenges.

Many of those schools relied on a “living endowment” for several generations, Ms. Morey said, in the form of free labor from the Catholic religious orders that founded and staffed them. With many of those orders shrinking or even disappearing, expenses add up. And historically, these schools had not made fundraising a priority, so they do not have large endowments to sustain them through difficult financial times.

Meanwhile, the number of Americans who do not identify with religion has grown rapidly in recent decades, with young people leading the charge. According to the Pew Research Center, 36 percent of those born between 1990 and 1996 say they are religiously unaffiliated. In light of such rapid social changes, Ms. Morey said, religious institutions must consider how best to communicate their mission to prospec-

tive students.

“For the vast majority of students who go to Catholic institutions, the Catholic identity is not necessarily the thing that draws them first and foremost,” she said. “They want an academic setting that is appealing and that will help position them to flourish and do well.”

But Ms. Morey also said that schools should not run from their Catholic heritage. She said Catholic schools have a “value added” in their openness to exploring religious questions, which can be appealing even to students who are uncommitted to a particular faith tradition.

Rebecca Sawyer, a vice president at the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, told *America* that she agrees that the challenges facing Catholic schools warrant action, but she pointed to a general upward trend in enrollment during the past 60 years. It is only recently that there has been a dip in enrollment at Catholic institutions, which appears to coincide with a dip in overall enrollment at colleges and universities. According to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, while the number of Catholic colleges has fallen, from 305 in 1965 to 225 today, total enrollment at Catholic institutions has increased steadily, from about 410,000 students in 1956 to about 765,000 students in 2017. Still, that number is down about 20,000 students from a peak in 2010.

“For every negative story there is out there saying enrollment has gone down, there’s a story on the opposite end saying enrollment has gone up,” Ms. Sawyer said. “It’s part of the normal ebb and flow of higher education.”

According to an analysis published by *The Wall Street Journal* in February, U.S. colleges and universities are being sorted into “winners and losers,” with the top-ranked schools thriving while once-stable but lower-ranked schools face sometimes insurmountable financial challenges.

At a meeting hosted by the A.C.C.U. in Washington earlier this year, a higher-education consultant challenged administrators of small Catholic colleges to consider the future of their institutions. “I actually think there will be fewer institutions in 20 years,” Lucie Lapovsky said. “The smaller colleges need to ask themselves ‘Is our self-preservation really for the students or for the institution?’”

Michael J. O’Loughlin, *national correspondent*.
Twitter: @MikeOLoughlin.

Revisiting R.F.K.'s poverty tour

Robert F. Kennedy's assassination 50 years ago still reverberates in American life. One reason his standing as a political leader endures is the genuineness of his concern for the most disadvantaged Americans. A child of privilege, Bobby Kennedy was a perhaps unexpected champion of the poor and the marginalized. But living out his strong Catholic faith, he was determined to go to the margins of society—and was always empathetic with the people he met there.

Through 1967 and 1968, in the runup and course of his campaign for president, Robert Kennedy traveled to some of the places in the United States hardest hit by poverty and racism. In the midst of the civil rights movement and the war on poverty, the U.S. senator from New York wanted to

see how change was playing out and what still remained to be done.

Over the course of what became known as his “poverty tour,” Kennedy visited the Appalachian region of eastern Kentucky and western Pennsylvania, California's Central Valley, and the Mississippi Delta. Among whites, blacks and Latinos alike, Kennedy found a nation within our nation in need of aid and wrongs that needed righting.

In the infographic below, we highlight the places that so moved Robert Kennedy and sparked his determination to act. Much has changed in 50 years, but extreme poverty and racial inequality are still entrenched in many of the places he visited in the last year of his life.

Antonio De Loera-Brust, Joseph A. O'Hare fellow at **America**.

R.F.K. POVERTY TOUR, THEN AND NOW

CALIFORNIA

Kennedy met with labor leader Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers in Delano in 1966 and again in March 1968. In 1970, his widow, Ethel, visited Chavez in jail in Monterey.

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------------|
| Poverty rate 1970: | 11% |
| Poverty rate 2016: | 14% |
| Supplemental Poverty Measure 2015: | 21%* |

*Highest among the 50 states



Under the old formula for measuring poverty, California is near the national average, but it now places first under the Supplemental Poverty Measure, which takes into account geographic differences in housing and noncash benefits from government programs.

In the city of Salinas, a major agricultural center, 66 percent of farmworkers were “food insecure” in 2015, according to the California Institute for Rural Studies. A U.S. Department of Labor survey of crop workers nationwide in 2013-14 found that 30 percent had family incomes below the poverty line and only 35 percent had health insurance. Seventy-three percent were born outside the United States, and 80 percent were Hispanic.



Sen. Robert F. Kennedy meets a resident of Greenville, Miss., in April 1967.

AP Photo/Jack Thornell

MISSISSIPPI

Kennedy visited the Mississippi Delta in 1967 as part of a Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Labor, and Poverty fact-finding mission to measure the effect of Great Society programs.

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------------|
| Poverty rate 1970: | 35%* |
| Poverty rate 2016: | 21%* |
| Supplemental Poverty Measure 2015: | 17% |

*Highest among the 50 states

In 1967 Mississippi elected its first black state legislator since 1896. It now has more black elected officials than any other state in the nation but has still not elected a black candidate to statewide office. While the state's overall poverty rate has fallen, it remains above 30 percent in most Delta counties, which now also face sustained population loss.



KENTUCKY

Kennedy visited the “coal counties” of eastern Kentucky in February 1968; according to *The Washington Post*, a doctor there “told Kennedy that 18 percent of the population was underweight and 50 percent suffered from intestinal parasites.”

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| Poverty rate 1970: | 23% |
| Poverty rate 2016: | 19% |
| Supplemental Poverty Measure 2015: | 16% |

According to the Appalachian Regional Commission, the number of high-poverty counties in the region, which includes parts of 13 states, declined from 295 in 1960 to 107 in 2008-12. But many residents are now dependent on government programs (which account for one-fourth of all personal income, 41 percent higher than the national average). Health outcomes and mortality rates are also poor here compared with the United States as a whole, in part because of high rates of obesity, diabetes and opioid addiction.



Sources: 1970 U.S. Census (data collected in 1969) and Census Historical Poverty Tables; American Community Survey (2016); Pew Research Center. The Supplemental Poverty Measure, developed in 2010, takes into account geographic differences in housing and noncash benefits from government programs. In 2016, the poverty rate in Puerto Rico was 44 percent.

Cautious hope follows resignation of Chile's bishops



Pope Francis and Chilean bishops meet to discuss the clerical sexual abuse crisis in Chile.

Pope Francis pulled no punches in the letter he gave to Chilean bishops at their first encounter during an emergency meeting in Rome on May 15. In it, he accused them of enacting such “a transformation” of the church in Chile that “its sin became the center of attention,” not Jesus Christ.

He told them, “The painful and shameful fact of the sexual abuse of minors, of the abuses of power, and of the abuses of conscience on the part of ministers of the church, as well as the form in which these situations happened, highlighted this change of center.”

Revelations of the pope’s critique of the bishops followed quickly after a decision that appears to be without precedent in the history of the church: All 34 Chilean bishops, including two cardinals, who participated in the summit with Pope Francis announced on May 17 that they had “handed in their resignations to the Holy Father, in written form, so that he can freely decide for each one of us.”

Victims of sexual abuse by clergy in Chile reacted with praise and hope to the mass resignation.

José Andrés Murillo, a sexual abuse survivor who earlier this month spent hours discussing the scandal with Pope Francis at the Vatican, called the bishops *delinquentes* (“delinquents”).

“For dignity, justice and truth, the bishops should leave,” he tweeted. “They didn’t know how to protect the weakest, they exposed them to abuse and then impeded justice. For this, they only deserve to go.”

In another tweet, Juan Carlos Cruz, the main whistleblower in the scandal, said the resignations were “unprecedented and good” and that this “will change things forever.”

“This is the pope that I met during my conversations in the Vatican,” Mr. Cruz told the Chilean news site Emol on May 17. “I hope all [the bishops] resign and that the church in Chile begins to rebuild with true shepherds and not with these corrupt bishops who commit and cover up crimes, as the document states.”

Marie Collins, who resigned in 2017 from a Vatican

commission charged with helping to protect minors over what she said at the time was a lack of cooperation from senior church leaders, asked if there would be institutional changes to hold bishops accountable.

“Will the Pope now implement the Accountability Tribunal for negligent bishops recommended by the [Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors] and deemed ‘unnecessary’ by the [Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith]? If not why not?” Ms. Collins tweeted.

The U.S. watchdog group Bishop Accountability called the resignation “as stunning as it is necessary” and urged Pope Francis to accept the resignations and to issue a “papal rebuke.”

“The institutional church and Catholics everywhere owe an enormous debt to the steely and gutsy survivors who brought about this unprecedented event,” Anne Barrett Doyle, the group’s co-director, said in a statement.

Whether the pope accepts any or all of the resignations remains an open question, which could prove complicated for the Vatican. Ed Condon, a canon lawyer, wrote in Britain’s Catholic Herald that accepting all the resignations would do little in terms of holding errant bishops accountable, as it “could ensure that no individual person or persons have to answer directly for what they did.”

“They all express remorse, they all accept collective responsibility, they all resign, no individual answers for individual crimes. It is, in effect, an entire national episcopacy trying to take the gentleman’s way out, and Pope Francis should have none of it,” he wrote. While investigations and trials would could take months or years, Mr. Condon wrote, “taking that harder, longer road would be a real demonstration of probity, accountability and rigour in handling the abuse crisis.”

Gerard O’Connell, *Vatican correspondent*. Twitter: @gerryrome.
Michael J. O’Loughlin, *national correspondent*.
Twitter: @MikeOLoughlin.



An elderly Palestinian man falls after being shot by Israeli troops at the Gaza Strip's border with Israel on May 14.

In Gaza, the suffering only continues

Why would anyone try to stare down military snipers at the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip? The Israeli Defense Forces killed scores of protesters and wounded thousands more who did so on May 14.

The willingness to rush the border fence is a testimony to the despair of the people living in Gaza, said John Byrne, who helps lead Envision Gaza 2020, an employment and family assistance project sponsored by Catholic Relief Services. Many in Gaza told him that death at the border was a sacrifice they were willing to make, hoping their suffering might return world attention, distracted by other conflicts in Yemen, Syria and several countries in Africa, to the dismal conditions in Gaza.

“Gazans don’t understand why people don’t care,” Mr. Byrne said—and not just about the violence at the border but the grind that is life in Gaza under Israeli occupation.

Gaza, one of the most densely populated places on earth, has been likened to an open-air prison. Most res-

idents have electric power for only about three hours a day; water purification and sewage systems do not work. “The water is undrinkable, it has to be trucked in,” Mr. Byrne said. Garbage collection has essentially ceased. Unemployment, officially 44 percent, is actually significantly higher, he believes.

The Palestinian refugees’ right of return is certainly an issue that has compelled some to the border demonstrations, he said, “but it is really being able to live like human beings with some dignity and autonomy” that are the prime motivations.

“It’s that simple. People want to be able to move freely, to have a little money in their pockets and to have some hope for a future—if not for themselves, then for their children.”

Kevin Clarke, *chief correspondent*. *Twitter: @ClarkeAtAmerica.*

Texas parish issues IDs for undocumented people



Photo courtesy Dallas Area Interfaith.

Dallas Auxiliary Bishop Gregory Kelly (left) and Bishop Edward J. Burns (right) meet with local law enforcement during a Dallas Area Interfaith meeting last November.

It has been a year since Texas passed S.B. 4, a measure that requires police and county sheriffs to cooperate with federal immigration enforcement. The measure also grants local law enforcement personnel the right to question the immigration status of anyone they arrest.

A federal court blocked the implementation of the measure last August, but a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals reversed that decision in March. All the while, the undocumented community in Texas has been living with increasing fear, according to the Rev. Michael Forge, pastor of Mary Immaculate Church in Farmers Branch.

He told **America** that many people are afraid to go to church. “They are afraid of going to the grocery store or driving their kids to school.”

Father Forge joined leaders of Dallas Area Interfaith and more than 1,000 others who met with law enforcement officials from Dallas and neighboring communities Carrollton and Farmers Branch last November to see what could be done to quell fears. Tensions often arise, according to law enforcement, when individuals pulled over for traffic violations cannot identify themselves.

Police understandably “want to know who they’re talking to,” Father Forge said. “Well, we already issue our volunteers with ID cards, so we jump on that.”

The police officials agreed that their officers could ac-

cept ID cards issued by Dallas Area Interfaith, the Diocese of Dallas and local parishes. The Dallas Interfaith IDs have no legal standing. In each case, it remains up to the officer’s discretion whether to accept the card, which has a photograph of the individual, along with his or her name, address, date of birth and the name of the parish. That allows officers to write a ticket to the individual without arresting them, an act that could lead to their deportation.

“It’s a way for the police officer to know who he’s talking to when he pulls someone over for a minor infraction,” Father Forge said. “It takes a little of the edge [off the anxiety of] the undocumented population. People realize that the police are not out to get them.”

Fear of deportation in the community has led to crimes not being reported to police, a challenge that local law enforcement has been trying to overcome.

“It goes back to building trust between community and police. If we don’t have that collaboration, our communities won’t be as safe as they could be,” said Josephine Lopez Paul, lead organizer with Dallas Area Interfaith. “Law enforcement can’t do its job if immigrants aren’t talking to police,” she said.

The ID program, Father Forge said, is more than just a way for undocumented immigrants to demonstrate their identity to police. It has become a way for parishioners to feel welcomed by the church.

Adriana, an undocumented immigrant who chose not to reveal her last name, is from the Mexican state of Morelos, but has lived in the United States for the last 23 years. Since S.B. 4 passed, she has been waiting for the deportations to begin.

“I thought it was going to be a matter of days,” she said. Adriana, a parishioner at San Juan Diego in Dallas, added, “I have a 7-year-old daughter, and I was afraid of how her life would change. I was crying every single day.”

It is not safe in Mexico, she said, noting the nation’s high rates of kidnappings and incidents of women and girls disappearing. “I’m afraid, but I’m not paralyzed,” she said. “I’m just trying to do the next thing.”

J.D. Long-García, *senior editor*. *Twitter: @jdlonggarcia.*

WHY PRESIDENTS SHOULD MATTER LESS

By Nathan Schneider

Democracy is in decline around the world, and the problem isn't just who we're electing.

Throughout its uncommonly long run as an independent republic—from roughly the late 12th century to the coming of Napoleon—the Italian city-state of Lucca had the same image on its coinage. It was customary then for coins to bear the face of the current, secular ruler in their place of origin. But the crowned head on Lucca's coins was that of the Volto Santo, a wooden, Byzantine-styled, brown-skinned, black-bearded crucified Christ kept in the city's cathedral. It was said to have been carved by Nicodemus and an angel at the time of Christ, then transported miraculously to Lucca by boat and ox-pulled cart in the eighth century. The

earliest historical record of the Volto Santo and its cult, however, coincides with the origins of the republic.

The Volto Santo was, in effect, the king of Lucca, overseeing the republic's varying fortunes and political arrangements, including rule by dukes, oligarchs, a kind of democracy and passing occupiers. Through all that, nobody could claim to be king except by uncrowning Christ, and nobody dared. Lucca therefore remained a republic, resistant to human kings.

Such a cult might be useful again today. Stateless currencies, interconnected markets and self-organizing social movements all point toward a





These are now the images our children see of what leaders look like. They will stick with them as they grow up. 



President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey
Presidential Press Service/Pool via AP

President Vladimir Putin of Russia
Photo via AP

future in which centralized authorities are no longer needed. Yet strongmen are seeking unchecked power and find mounting success in gaining it. Polling in the United States and other developed nations suggests increasing openness to the idea of authoritarian government, especially among younger people. (According to the World Values Survey, almost one-fourth of U.S. citizens ages 16 to 24 said that a democratic system was a “bad” way to run the country in 2011, about twice the percentage as among those over 65.) With nothing like the *Volto Santo* to assume the crown of 21st-century civilization, a new breed of political personalities is vying to dominate our attention.

Perhaps the authoritarian tide is a passing counterreaction to an ascendant democratic, multicultural consensus. The data may be too inconsistent to constitute a trend. But with populist, perpetually viral, personality-driven regimes taking power in country after country, the long-held assumption that liberal democracy is the eventual destination of historical progress can no longer be taken for granted.

Across the United States during the last academic year, political science professors taught coordinated courses on the haunting premise of “democratic erosion”—that is, the widespread decline of democracy in theory and practice. The syllabus template included an article by Nancy Bermeo of the University of Oxford from 2016, which spells out a typology of “backsliding,” with gradual power grabs facilitated by “executive aggrandizement” (such as Obama-era executive orders) and “strategic electoral manipulation” (like Republican Party voter suppression tac-

tics). Students considered examples of such backsliding from Ghana to Venezuela and from Hungary to Thailand. They learned to notice the ascendent formula of liberal economics combined with nationalist, authoritarian government, on display especially in Russia and China.

The familiar bulwarks of democratic consensus no longer seem interested in the job. The U.S. president has ceased to maintain even the fiction of championing democracy and human rights abroad. President Trump has praised the extrajudicial killings of the Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines, reveled in the riches of Saudi royalty, congratulated Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey for eroding checks on his power and maintained his longstanding, ambiguous admiration for Vladimir Putin. When President Xi Jinping of China secured the elimination of term limits earlier this year, Mr. Trump remarked, allegedly in jest, “Maybe we’ll want to give that a shot someday.”

These are now the images our children see of what leaders look like. These images will stick with them as they grow up.

A parallel condition has taken hold in the business world as well, with fascinating super-C.E.O.s like Mark Zuckerberg and Jeff Bezos, who have managed to wrest unprecedented, nearly absolute authority from their boards and shareholders. Meanwhile, as thinkers on the right and left have warned for decades, our collective fixation on market outcomes runs the risk of shrinking the political sphere, leaving no space for discussions of shared means or ends. For Facebook, for China, for Russia, for us—as long as the stock tickers keep going up, do we care any more who



is in charge or what rights we might claim on the basis of being alive?

Democracy depends on a twofold faith: that human beings have the capacity to govern themselves and that we hold the inherent dignity to deserve self-government. If democracy is eroding, has the world given up on itself? Have we given up on ourselves?

Certainly those who are enthusiastic over ascendant right-wing populism would not say so. But the emerging political paradigm seems to depend on a disregard for established procedure and for compromise, in exchange for the comforts of an ever-present media personality. Allegiance to personality takes precedence over ideology or vision. We have no idea where we are going, and that is the point.

The clumsiness of Mr. Trump's presidency, at least, bears a kind of revelation—or rather, our persistence in the face of it does. The United States has thus far survived well over a year with an unrelentingly chaotic president, plus many years more of ineffectual leadership in Congress; and still, for better or worse, life goes on. Economic indicators continue more or less as they were going before, just as coal plants keep closing and we keep repeating the morbid ritual of mass shootings. Chaos fills the headlines, but in the background things remain eerily as they were. A cataclysm may or may not come, but it is not automatic.

In the Bush-Clinton-Bush years, I remember people saying it did not matter who got elected, little would change; now, little changes despite an unending presidential crisis. If the system can survive Mr. Trump, presidents

matter less than we have come to think.

What Is a President For?

Politics is a form of attention. In medieval Lucca, the locus of attention was the Luminaria, when the Lucchese celebrated the eve of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross each Sept. 13 by parading the Volto Santo around their city streets by candlelight. (There is still a candlelight procession today, but the Volto Santo stays in the cathedral.) Participation was an expression of fealty to the city. Dissenters in the nearby Garfagnana hill country faced punishment for failing to pay homage to the wooden king.

Attention is no less a currency of modern politics. A colleague of mine who grew up in a monarchy remembers that the evening news always covered the king, even if reporters rarely explained what he was actually doing—only that it was important. Power demands an ever-growing share of our attention. Whereas the Luminaria offered a climactic event once a year, @realDonaldTrump provokes us several times a day, ensuring that the personality of the president breaches each news cycle, leaving a mark wherever his subjects seek or encounter tidings of the world beyond them.

There has been a reversal over the past few years in how governments manage networked attention. In 2011, when social media platforms seemed to be emboldening dissent and aiding uprisings around the world, the powerful sought to control activity on them. Hosni Mubarak turned off Egypt's internet in an attempt to tame the Tahrir Square uprising. China blocked posts that contained cer-



President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines
RTVM via AP

Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary
AP Photo/Czarek Sokolowski

President Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela
AP Photo/Ariana Cubillos

tain words. And a court in the United States subpoenaed an Occupy Wall Street activist's tweets after he deleted them.

Now the ascendant strategy, incubated by U.S. intelligence and honed in Russia and China and countless client states, is the opposite. Security agencies and foreign agents flood the networks, micro-targeting people's feeds. Under the guise of internet-born phenomena such as trolling and memes, established institutions deploy "free speech" even more aggressively than their challengers, inciting conflict and chaos in order to present their personalities-in-chief as heroes in a never-ending game of thrones. Vladimir Putin concocts political opponents in order to manage and vanquish them. President "No Drama Obama" conducted his expansions of executive power discreetly, but Mr. Trump succeeds in bypassing far more hallowed constraints through the public, relentless bloodsport of scandal.

This circus has seemed to work. It has become a strategy of governing the world over. The strategy is to keep people so constantly on the edge of their seats—what will he tweet next?—that they neglect to imagine any other kind of politics. Whether they love or hate their political protagonist, they have trouble imagining the world without him.

Yet the first governing document of the United States, the Articles of Confederation, did not provide for a president at all. The absence of an executive branch, however, confounded some necessary feats of coordination, such as levying taxes to pay war debt. Seven years after the Articles' ratification—seven years without a president—the country ratified a Constitution that conferred on its chief executive a title so passive and impotent that it was

nearly an insult: the president, the one who merely presides, who sits and calls meetings to order while others get things done. No modern nation had dared call its head of state that before.

In retrospect, the U.S. president seems like a particularly strong executive, compared with other democratic systems established since then, but at the time the prevailing urge was to minimize the office. In the spring of 1789, Congress debated what title should be used to address the first president, George Washington. Legislators considered such familiar options as "His Majesty" and "Highness." The eventual choice, "Mr. President," was again an affront to the norms of the period and to any urge the chief executive might harbor for self-aggrandizement.

A recent cover story in *The Atlantic* by John Dickerson chronicles our slippage. James Polk's wife, Sarah, had to direct the Marine Band to play "Hail to the Chief" when he entered a room so that guests would know who the president was. Presidents as recent as Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy were not expected to rush to the site of every natural disaster for photo-ops with the victims. But all along, presidents from Andrew Jackson to Franklin D. Roosevelt developed techniques for cultivating personal followings through the mass media of their time. The Cold War, and particularly the nuclear codes, rendered the U.S. president the "Leader of the Free World" in the eyes of some; the mandate to fight terrorism means micromanaging an endless war on every front. Meanwhile, the 24-hour cable news industry discovered that obsessive monitoring of the president serves as a cheap, convenient, news-like



If democracy is eroding, has the world given up on itself? Have we given up on ourselves?

substitute for actual reporting.

Mr. Dickerson concludes that the presidency has swelled into a role no mortal person can fill and that no citizenry can hold to account. “We are a president-obsessed nation, so much so that we undermine the very idea of our constitutional democracy,” he writes.

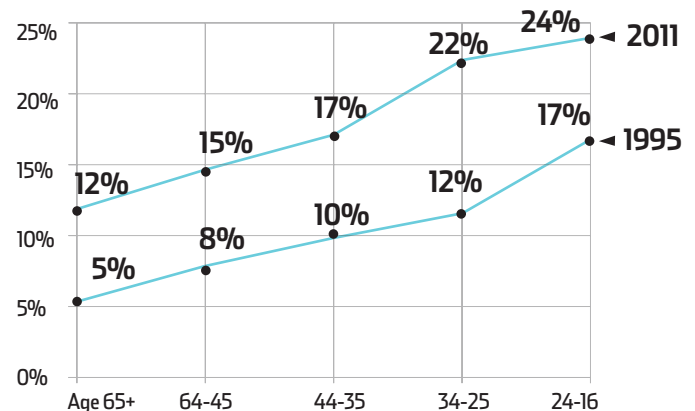
The presidency has become a cult, like that of a medieval patron saint, to whom we are expected to constantly direct our attention. Other forms of civic duty have been supplanted by the responsibility to keep abreast of presidential gossip. This can be a grating, even violent requirement. People who found Barack Obama’s style and policies distasteful complained just as vigorously about the dictatorial style they saw in him as critics of Mr. Trump now cry crisis.

The president is either your bully or your attack dog. Even those who claim to stand for states’ rights or for draining the swamp tend to regard a favorite president as their champion. Each successive president makes a show of vigorously undermining the previous one’s work, although the actual policy shifts may be relatively superficial. Our Luminaria is a ritual of collective whiplash and mutual trauma.

Beyond the Ballot Box

The rise of the political personality comes at a peculiar time, when centralized power seems newly irrelevant. Ever greater swaths of planetary culture and economic activity are created through overlapping networks—social media platforms, open markets, popular international move-

U.S. adults agreeing that a democratic political system is a “bad” way to “run this country”



Source: World Values Surveys, as reported in “The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democratic Disconnect,” Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, *Journal of Democracy*, July 2016.

ments, transnational brands. Especially compared with the days of Mao, China’s recent ascent has come about less by force of personality than by rational bureaucracy and private entrepreneurship. The first year of Mr. Trump’s presidency coincided with the unprecedented mainstream adoption of Bitcoin, a secure digital currency system designed by a pseudonymous inventor to bypass the need for a government to back it. Even the mucky labor of lobbying has increasingly become the work of algorithms. The headless, decentralized democracy that the Articles of Confederation outlined may not have worked in the 1780s, but maybe something like it could suit us now.

The presidency has become a cult, like that of a medieval patron saint, to whom we are expected to constantly direct our attention. 🔴🔴



U.S. Presidents
Donald Trump
AP Photo/Evan Vucci

Among all the strongmen and wannabes taking power around the world, there are contrary developments. The city-state system that served Lucca for centuries is being re-invented in the municipalist movement, which is redirecting focus from nations to cities. Political candidates from Buenos Aires to San Diego are proposing to relinquish their legislative discretion and instead vote in accordance with direct polls of their constituents. Experiments in techniques like liquid democracy (in which voters can delegate their votes to issue-based proxies) and quadratic voting (in which voters can allocate more votes to decisions they care more about) are making such schemes appear less and less crazy. Old democracies may seem to be on the decline, but the prospects for responsive democracy have never been better.

Not every country is backsliding. Taiwan's government has enlisted young protesters who once occupied the parliament to run online platforms for public deliberation. Estonia has become a playground for digital governance tools that cut red tape and invite investment. Spain's upstart political party Podemos crowdsourced its platform online; Iceland and Mexico City used crowdsourcing to develop new constitutions.

These techniques capture signals about our preferences and needs that the old-fashioned ballot box cannot deliver. Well-designed networks can help us hear each other as never before.

All this points toward a kind of politics in which more can be done without deference to the personalities of politicians, with more fine-grained and meaningful input from

citizens. Mounting evidence suggests that voters tailor their views to mimic the parties and politicians they identify with, rather than choosing leaders based on issues they care about. Better forms of participation could help empowered voters to set their own agendas instead.

The private sector has also been undergoing experiments in less-centralized management structures, countervailing the fandoms surrounding certain celebrity C.E.O.s. Firms from auto manufacturers to software developers have reaped efficiencies from lean, agile, open-source practices that transfer decision-making from managers to frontline producers. The technology underlying Bitcoin has made possible entirely new kinds of "decentralized autonomous organizations." Cooperative businesses, owned and governed by their workers or customers, are experiencing a renaissance.

Maybe cults of personality are an inevitable response to this bewildering array of options. But that means taking a very low view of human potential. There has never been a better time to cultivate forms of governance that are pluralistic and diverse and responsive, rather than monopolistic, omnipresent and remote. The old principle of subsidiarity, of governing locally whenever possible, has fresh promise.

This was what the framers of the Articles of Confederation, along with the republicans of Lucca, hoped for: a society with no need for a king. Even under our present Constitution, the president could actually act as a presider, helping rather than hindering the business of compromise. This would free us to pay less of our precious attention to the president and more to layers of governance we can



George W. Bush
CNS photo/Jason Reed, Reuters

Barack Obama
CNS photo/Joshua Roberts, Reuters

meaningfully affect, from credit union boards and national labor union conventions to city councils and global networks of cities.

Many of those angered by Mr. Trump's election called for the abolition of the Electoral College system that put him in office. But perhaps a more decisive blow to his kind of presidency would be to employ the Electoral College even more fully. State legislatures could select electors, as some did in the past. Such an indirect method—in partial defiance of the 14th Amendment, admittedly—would direct more attention and care toward local elections and dampen the high drama of the presidential office. We might also put a strong limit on the duration of campaigns, as many other countries do. By fixating less on the ritual of directly electing a president, we can begin to unravel the orgy of attention that has led the presidency into a crisis.

Without the attention machine of presidential campaigning, we could turn our gaze back to more interesting kinds of politics. Rather than fixating on the hope of squashing the other side with a president of our own, we could all aspire toward outgrowing the need for a presidential figurehead altogether. Could Mr. Trump tolerate being only as famous as the secretary general of the United Nations?

Some may object that humbling the chief executive would inhibit the ability of government to challenge dangerous concentrations of power, like abusive corporations or institutional racism. Yet presidents have been of limited usefulness in these matters. The unraveling of Jim Crow began in the Supreme Court and ended in Congress, thanks

to the legislative (more than executive) expertise of Lyndon Johnson; recent presidents, from Ronald Reagan to Barack Obama, have allowed the scope of antitrust law to narrow considerably from the mandates that Congress once enacted. Lately, in its willingness to confront big tech firms, the European Union has emerged as the world's leading antitrust cop, despite having three presidents, sort of, none of whom most of us can name. At the very least, the job of the U.S. president could very well revert to the constitutional mandate of implementing (and occasionally vetoing) legislation rather than proposing, negotiating and taking credit for it.

At a time when political systems and social contracts appear to be shifting beneath us, we must guard our attention. Resisting democratic erosion requires more than harping on civic truisms and worshipping centuries-old constitutions; it means pushing democracy forward, in truer and more responsive forms. The choice before us is between a politics of personalism—grounded in the dignity and self-determination of human beings—and a politics of superficial, ego-stroking personality armed to the teeth, taking credit for how the rest of us self-organize, from our local communities to our global networks.

What Belongs to Caesar

The folk singer Woody Guthrie left behind a lyric that resembles the spirit of Lucca: "Let's have Christ our President/ Let us have him for our king." The song regards this as a strategy for achieving such policy aims as job and



pension guarantees, together with the age-old ambition of clearing the “crooked politician men”—that is, the “money changers”—out of the “Capital town.” The song contends that to secure justice, ultimate power must be elevated out of human reach. “It’s Jesus Christ our President,” Guthrie imagines a crowd chanting, and “God above our king.”

Religions the world over have habitually vacillated between endorsing worldly authority and standing above it to hold it accountable. Does the high priest crown the king, or does the king draft the high priest? Religion can also stand as a sign of contradiction to the very premise of kingship, ridiculing both those who claim to be king and those who long for one. Thus the *Volto Santo*—the image of a king portrayed at the very moment of his execution for being king of the Jews.

Long before Christ, the Jews got a king only after begging for one in hopes of being more like neighboring peoples. Before they had kings, they had judges—a diverse and transient set of leaders. “This was obviously a flexible system,” observed the sociologist Jacques Ellul. God regarded the demand for kings as a personal betrayal but then relented. The kings the people wound up with were of a sort that has recently evoked comparisons with Donald Trump’s sex life; the story the Bible tells of kings is mainly a chronicle of scoundrels.

Then came Jesus. Compared with the usual pronouncements of political fealty in the ancient world, “Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar” was a hair’s breadth from open revolt. It was also a teaching about attention, about not granting the rulers of this world any more concern than they deserve. Pay your taxes, but save your love for God and neighbor. Jesus and the early Christians practiced this ethic of dissenting obedience unto death—executed by the remote and hostile empire of their day, an empire their community would eventually conquer and dismember.

Christians attempting to reclaim the roots of their religion have repeatedly disowned central authorities, from the rotating leadership in Anabaptist sects and the Puritan congregational system to the distributed governance in many Catholic religious orders. Despite centuries of centralization, as the Holy See sought to check the power of emperors and modern states, Pope Francis has reminded the church that the pope is one bishop among others. He invited fellow bishops to steer the meetings of the Bishops’ Synod on the family, rather than dictating doctrine to them. Yet in both airborne press conferences and gestures of humility, he has been at home in the age of rule-by-per-



The crowned head on Lucca’s coins was not that of a human king but the *Volto Santo*, or the crucified Christ.

Saiko / Creative Commons

sonality as well. As with the best-intentioned recent U.S. presidents, media omnipresence has made him an inadvertent polarizer.

We need not adopt a Lucca-like theocracy to diminish the ills of politics today. But we do need better options than simply continuing to replace one domineering personality with another. A yes or no vote to a Trump or an Obama or a Xi or an Erdogan is not enough. Democracy is no longer a given. The project of self-determination, of human dignity, will survive only if it advances into more radically accountable forms. Doing this begins with the imagination, with sharpening the spiritual discipline of attention.

Writing from exile in 1943, as war was swallowing Europe and herself, Simone Weil warned about the kind of politics that had inclined democracies to slide into fascism. “Instead of thinking, one merely takes sides: for or against,” she wrote. “This is an intellectual leprosy; it originated in the political world and then spread through the land, contaminating all forms of thinking.”

We the people are more connected than ever before, more capable of managing our own economies and collaborating across the globe, and yet we stand at the mercy of petty men with nuclear weapons, flinging insults across oceans. We are better than this. Perhaps we are finally ready for a politics in which the president matters less.

Nathan Schneider, a contributing writer for *America*, is a reporter and professor of media studies at the University of Colorado, Boulder. His next book, *Everything for Everyone: The Radical Tradition That Is Shaping the Next Economy*, will be published in September.



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WHO WILL GUIDE THE GUARDS?

The missing Christian ministry to corrections officers

By Eve Tushnet

The patron saint of corrections officers, St. Adrian of Nicomedia, is said to have been a Roman officer astonished by the faith and courage of the Christians whose torture he was supervising. Legend has it that he declared himself a Christian and ordered his own name to be added to the list of those facing the death penalty, although he had not even been baptized.

In Acts 16, Sts. Paul and Silas converted their warden after being miraculously freed from their chains; they prevented him from killing himself in shame over their escape.

At the crucifixion, the two people who confessed Jesus as Lord were a fellow prisoner and the centurion assigned to guard them. From the very beginning, Christ came to deliver not only captives but their guards.

And yet today, startlingly few Christian ministries exist to serve those who work in jails and prisons. Chaplains and

other Christian volunteers come to visit inmates—following Jesus’ call in Matthew 25:36—but corrections officers are mostly left to handle their spiritual lives on their own. Trained to mistrust others, doing work that is poorly understood and only noticed when it is done wrong, working overtime in an environment of fear, stress and split-second moral decisions, officers show all the signs of people in crisis: high divorce rates, high rates of post-traumatic stress and depression, high rates of substance abuse; several studies have found that their suicide rate is among the highest of any job in the United States.

I spoke with several people who looked back on their corrections work as a time when they were able to make a positive difference. But most people I heard from echoed the assessment of Jeffrey Rude, a chaplain and trainer of corrections officers: “Our staff are hurting, and our staff are desperate.”

Hidden within our contemporary debates about the nature, expanse and injustices of incarceration in the United States are hundreds of thousands of people who took a job. They took the job because they needed work or because they wanted to protect their communities. They came out of the military or out of neighborhoods much like those of the inmates. Some had loved ones behind bars. Others came out of sheltered environments utterly foreign to what they were about to experience.

Officers noted that their job was to watch over people who might be trying to kill them or threatening them or their family members with assault. They work in unpredictable environments, where even elderly or ill people may become violent. They have seen religion used to manipulate, shanks hidden in Bibles. They are often explicitly trained to view inmates with suspicion and even contempt, and yet some put themselves at risk to save inmates’ lives. Officers work grueling hours, sometimes in facilities without adequate heating in the winter or cooling in the summer—an issue of prisoners’ rights but also workers’ rights.

People used words like “thankless,” “unappreciated” or “guilty until proven innocent” to describe their role. Al-

most all of the officers and former officers I spoke with told stories, unprompted, of fellow officers who had committed suicide.

Many people knew corrections officers who had been raised Christian but no longer went to church. Long, inconvenient hours made churchgoing hard; some former officers said they were anxious in crowds or they’d had painful experiences worshipping alongside inmates’ families. This can be considered fraternization, a security risk and therefore a risk to their jobs. Every single person I talked to mentioned that C.O.s learn to close themselves off from others.

What kind of ministry could offer people in these jobs hope, guidance and the transformation to be found in Christ?

WHERE ARE THE CHAPLAINS?

Chaplains might seem like the obvious front line of Christian ministry in jails and prisons. But this is only true if you are an inmate. Richard Dolan is a retired fire chief who has worked in areas of the Florida prison system ranging from death row to the hospital wing. Looking back on 11 years working in prisons, he says, “I remember [chaplains] coming in and talking to all the inmates, and nobody ever came up to us to minister to us.”

Dale Recinella is trying to change that. Mr. Recinella, the author of *When We Visit Jesus in Prison: A Resource Book for Catholic Prison Ministry*, is a lay minister and chaplain to inmates on Florida’s death row and in solitary confinement. In 1998 he moved from Rome to a part of the country where “there are no registered Catholics except the inmates,” he says. You have got to have a sense of humor when you are answering questions ranging from, “Explain what Catholics believe about the death penalty,” to, “Is it true that the ashes on Ash Wednesday come from human sacrifices?”

Mr. Recinella notes: “The officers have this very difficult line that they have to walk, and this also applies to the staff. They are subject to what are called non-fraternization rules. It is not just appearing too friendly with the



Pope Francis shakes hands with officers at the Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility in Philadelphia on Sept. 27, 2015.

inmates. Appearing too friendly with the volunteers is also something that can get them fired. Because every person that walks into that prison who is not a state employee is considered a security risk.”

One of the best things volunteers can do, Mr. Recinella suggests, is to get out of the way. Do not make officers’ jobs harder than they already are. He says: “I’ve seen people yelling at officers for things they had nothing to do [with]; it was decided by the legislature. They’re getting chewed out by people who are in there as guests about things they have no control over, like why is there no air conditioning? Why do we have to sign in and out of the wing?... Nobody inside the fence wants to hear your opinion of the state’s rules.” Leave that to the state’s Catholic Conference, he says, with a huge laugh.

Pat Douglas, S.J., is the regional vocations director for the Midwest Province of the Society of Jesus. He worked in juvenile corrections before becoming a Jesuit brother and working as a chaplain at the juvenile facility on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota. He is self-deprecating and quick to laugh, with a slight Nebraska accent.

“On the reservation, that was probably the most positive and most professional, most caring corrections staff I had ever seen,” he says. He says he loved seeing “how much the kids thrived in that environment. It was not uncommon for a kid to go up two grade levels in five or six months.”

And yet even in that environment, traumas pile up.

Shortly after he started his chaplaincy on the reservation, an officer committed suicide, and Brother Douglas was called in to minister to the man’s co-workers, alongside Lakota elders. Officers would ask him to pray for them or for sick family members. “They wouldn’t do it in front of other guards,” he says. “They would do it with me privately.”

ON THE FRONT LINES

LeAnn Skeen, an English teacher at an alternative school in Oklahoma, describes the prison where she worked: “I understand that hell is unimaginable. But if hell could be imagined, it was like that.”

Corrections work might have seemed like a good fit for Ms. Skeen, initially. Her father worked as a police officer for most of her childhood and worked briefly in corrections.

“He didn’t like inmates,” Ms. Skeen notes quietly. “That sounds strange, to say it that way. He didn’t think that they had any value as human beings.”

When she entered corrections, she found “there were some good people who worked there.... The people on the bottom, who just go in there as C.O.s, most of them go in there with good intentions. But they’re disillusioned pretty quickly.” She believes the training they received shaped the prison’s atmosphere. “They were teaching us submission techniques,” she says, “and they would say things like, ‘Now if you accidentally break an arm or accidentally kill somebody, don’t worry about it. Because inmates are replaceable.’”



Chaplains might seem like the obvious front line of Christian ministry in jails and prisons. But this is only true if you are an inmate. 🕯️

While Ms. Skeen was working in a prison, her husband was serving time in one after drinking in violation of his probation. She saw the manipulation inmates could apply to C.O.s and the attempts to humiliate her: “They were all exhibitionists. They loved to expose their penises.” But she could never forget their humanity, and she began an ongoing spiritual journey. “I have changed a lot,” she says. “And working in the prison and seeing the inhumanity—that was a huge catalyst for this change that’s taken place since then.”

She says she was raised in a church where prisoners were souls to be saved but in a way that objectified them—a “self-righteous” approach. She does not attend church now, and she is wrestling with what it means to be a Christian. When I asked what her ideal ministry for corrections officers might look like, she thought of the place she stayed when she first moved to Oklahoma City: St. James Gospel of Life Dwelling, which describes itself as “a Catholic ecclesial family of consecrated and laypersons.” The house mostly serves the elderly but occasionally takes in GOLD people struggling with substance abuse—or people like Ms. Skeen, who simply needed a place to stay. At the house, she saw lives structured and sustained by prayer. The religious sisters there provided a refuge and served residents without judgment. She wonders if there could be a place like Gospel of Life Dwelling for officers.

For now, Ms. Skeen hopes to return to prison—as a teacher.

Cary Johnson is the 2017 Michigan Corrections Orga-

nization Officer of the Year and a trustee with M.C.O., the state’s corrections union. She has worked in a men’s prison for 23 years. Ms. Johnson spoke to me on speakerphone with the union’s communications director, Anita Lloyd, there in the room. She offered a stark example of what officers face: “We had a prisoner suicide. He cut his wrists, and then he hung himself. The officers that performed C.P.R. for an hour on the prisoner were left to finish their shift. The prisoners that were in the area were offered mental health services—and [the officers were] never [offered that] once. They can’t cry. They can’t express any type of guilt that the prisoner didn’t survive.”

Ms. Johnson, who was raised Catholic, says good ministry should probably happen outside the facility, where officers would find it slightly easier to open up. Ms. Johnson notes, “With religion comes weakness, right?” She knew she would not be comfortable discussing spirituality and becoming “teary-eyed” at work. But she has few opportunities to open up elsewhere.

“I do not talk to my spouse about what happens at work, and I don’t think he really wants to know because some things are just crude,” she says. “As far as confession, I haven’t been in a very long time. We are programmed to think that some of these things are part of the job we signed up for, and we should just accept them and leave work at work, home at home.”

“What would it look like if we had a chaplain who was focused completely on employees?” Ms. Johnson asked. “An institutional chaplain that’s completely directed toward the employees—hey, can you fix that [up]? Because I would love that.”

SEEKING FELLOWSHIP

Ms. Johnson does receive a daily prayer email from Corrections Staff Fellowship. This is a national group whose chapters hold regular meetings to support and encourage Christian officers. There are several of these fellowships, some national and some region specific, run by and for officers. I spoke with Paul Lee, executive director of the



SERVING CORRECTIONS OFFICERS

Fellowship of Christian Peace Officers, which ministers to the law enforcement community. The F.C.P.O. offers Bible studies, support groups and activities for officers and their families.

Mr. Lee, a captain retired from the Chattanooga Police Department, is a genial man whose accent reflects 61 years spent in his Tennessee hometown. At times, he described law enforcement in near-apocalyptic terms: “A lot of cops and corrections officers [are] dealing with evil. And especially those guys in the prisons, in the jails. They’re in there crammed with some of the most evil this world’s got to offer.”

Yet Mr. Lee’s faith also offers him a more complex view of his former job: “The world will tell you that this group or that group is not important; they’re thugs, they’re bad guys, they’re unsalvageable, they’re less. But God’s word says they’re precious. God’s word tells me how to treat the poor, the indigent.”

Before he became a Christian, he says, he felt “dirty,” as if he wasn’t good enough to love God. Now he knows, he says, that “God can work anywhere. And nobody has access to more people than corrections or law enforcement. There’s nobody that has access to the lost like we do.”

But what happens when officers are themselves among the lost?

PLACES OF HEALING

Caterina Spinaris, who grew up in the Greek community of Alexandria, Egypt, finds those people. She founded Desert Waters Correctional Outreach in Florence, Colo., which offers training, books and workshops on “corrections fatigue” and resilience. The program is not tied to a faith tradition, though spiritual matters like forgiveness and gratitude are addressed.

Ms. Spinaris has no corrections experience, but she clearly feels for officers. “There are staff who keep it together and help their co-workers,” she says. “They are a light in a dark place.” In her description, corrections officers can become like the people in Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale “The Snow Queen,” who get a shard of glass from an

1. Know what you are talking about. Almost everyone I spoke with emphasized how much easier it is to open up with people who have law enforcement or corrections experience or who have, at least, spent a long time listening to people in those jobs. Constantly explaining the rules, jargon and emotional dynamics is alienating and exhausting.

2. Know what you do not know. I spoke with two women who worked at the same time in the same prison. One of them looks back on the prison as nightmarish, a place where people were trained to become angry and callous. The other remembers the prison fondly, as a place where she gave people respect and consistency when they needed it most. You do not have to judge one woman as more accurate than the other to know they will likely have different spiritual needs.

3. Offer practical help. Churches can do immense good by offering practical aid: child care for single moms working night shifts or double shifts at the local prison, for example. Dale Recinella says he connects officers with Catholic assistance programs: “Sometimes there’s a need for marital counseling, sometimes help with a kid who’s going the wrong way, sometimes it’s as basic as food and clothes and utilities.”

4. Corrections officers are not the system. Some of the people I interviewed for this article believe the prison system is, at its root, oppressive and unjust. Some believe prisons are a necessary defense against horrific violence. You may believe officers need an escape from an inhuman system or deserve support and honor for good and necessary work—but officers are not avatars of your beliefs.

5. Listen first. I was struck by how many people used language like “unheard” when describing officers. Most of these previous points will come naturally—if you listen.



The pope told inmates in Philadelphia that Jesus “asks us to create new opportunities: for inmates, for their families, for correctional authorities and for society as a whole.”

confession, repentance, maybe restitution to try to make it right. And grieving. Seeking and receiving forgiveness. And in some cases extending forgiveness.”

Jeffrey Rude is a trainer with Desert Waters and a case manager for the Washington State Department of Corrections. He has been training corrections staff for the state for 19 of the 22 years he has spent in service with the department.

For the past two years he has had a new role: chaplain. He is serving officers—but almost underground. Mr. Rude, who is a member of an evangelical free church, says: “The State of Washington does not recognize us, so we are ‘word of mouth’ only.” The department, he says, is worried about conflicts of interest. But Mr. Rude sees a need.

“Staff are desperate for wellness,” he says. “For help. Most of them—I’d say 75 to 80 percent of them—don’t recognize it. They don’t recognize the damage that’s been done to them just by living in the [prison] environment as long as they have.”

The inspiration for Desert Waters came when Ms. Spinaris moved from Denver to an area with several prisons. Although she had not looked for these clients, she began seeing corrections officers, former officers and officers’ children at her psychotherapy practice.

Ms. Spinaris did not think she was the right person to serve these clients. “I have no law enforcement experience,” she says. “I have no corrections experience. I’m a foreigner; I’m female.” But then she had a dream in which Jesus told her point blank: “If you don’t get into this, I’ll give it to someone else, and who knows what they’ll do with it. And you will have missed out on your life’s calling.”

Ms. Spinaris gave in. But she still asked, “Why is the Lord sending us to this sliver of the population?”

Her husband answered simply, “He heard their cries.”

Eve Tushnet is a contributing writer for America. She is the author of Gay and Catholic: Accepting My Sexuality, Finding Community, Living My Faith and Amends: A Novel.

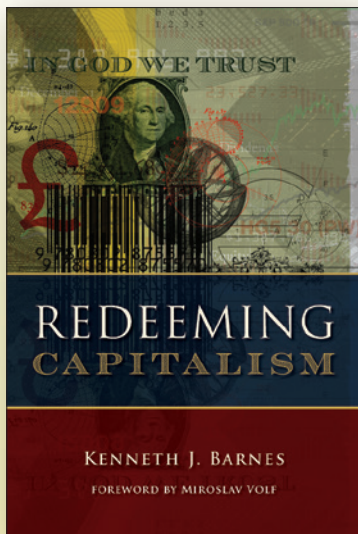
evil mirror stuck in their eyes and can no longer see the joy and beauty in life. If their work performance suffers, superiors will likely blame a bad work ethic; if their family life suffers, family members might not realize how much of the problem is work-related stress.

According to Ms. Spinaris, officers often suffer from “moral injury.” “Moral injury is a term that the military came up with,” she explains, “where you either see or do something that bothers your conscience, and you don’t do anything about it, and you try to hide it, stuff it, forget it, drink it away, whatever. It eats at them.”

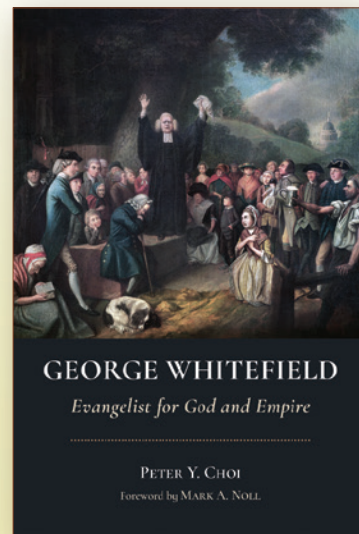
She notes that when Desert Waters did a study to estimate the prevalence of post-traumatic stress symptoms in corrections staff, the emotions most strongly correlated with meeting P.T.S.D. criteria were not fear or anger but guilt and shame. One man in her program started telling his story with gallows humor: “I can talk about it now—because the statute of limitations has expired.” But he went on to express deep shame and regret. “For every story told, there are several in the room who are quiet,” Ms. Spinaris says. “But they know. They [may] have been in those shoes.”

“The solution ultimately is the spiritual solution of talking about it with somebody” who understands, Ms. Spinaris says. “In the Christian tradition [this involves]

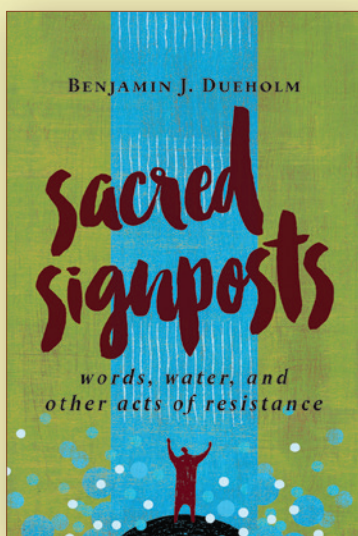
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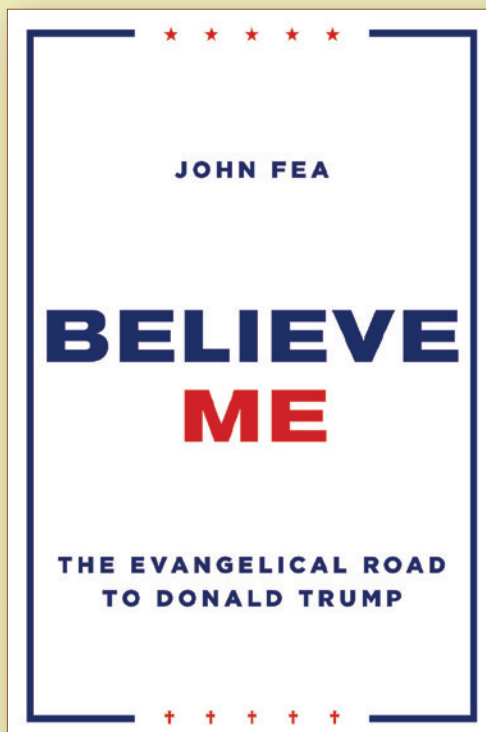
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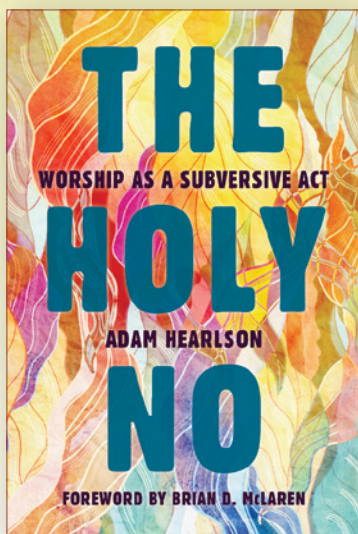
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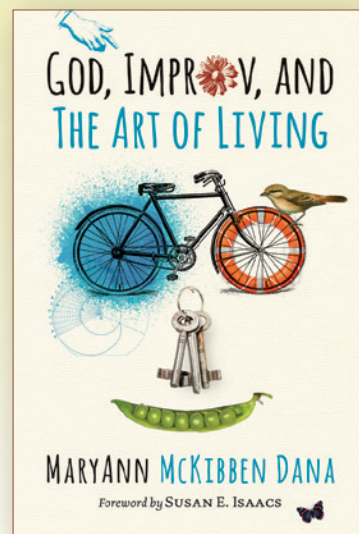
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Bridging the Racial Divide

By Edward K. Braxton



We are living in a unique moment in our national history: a moment when, sadly, the racial divide in our country is becoming more acute. The events of the past year concerning freedom of speech, public Confederate monuments, white supremacists, neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan are particularly challenging and complex for Christians seeking to obey the law of love. Daily headlines, the evening news and all forms of social media have placed the racial divide in the United States right in front of us in ways we would not have expected 50 years after the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968. Was his precious blood spilled in vain? Do black lives really matter?

If we are to move ahead in a positive way from this divide, we must learn from the past by studying the choices, decisions, beliefs and experiences that have brought us to this moment. As Catholics, we must open our hearts to the purifying power of the Holy Spirit and the healing grace of Christ. We Catholics sometimes have only a superficial

cultural commitment to our faith. But a deep existential commitment to follow Jesus as the way, the truth and the life impels us to truly live our Catholic faith in all of the complex and difficult situations of our lives, including those that require us to oppose anyone and anything that serves to maintain the current racial divide in the United States. Every individual, organization, institution and structure in the church must do something to counter this intensification of the racial divide. Discerning what we can and should do may not be easy. But if we are following the path of true Christian, ecclesial, intellectual and moral conversion, we should be able to scrutinize with care the horizons of possibilities before us and prayerfully make the best choices in matters great and small.

Here are some concrete steps Catholics and the church can take.

Fight the conspiracy of silence. If family members, co-workers or representatives of the Catholic Church do or say things that reinforce the racial divide, find a re-



Photo courtesy of The University of Notre Dame

Left to right: Rev. Edgar Chandler, Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh with Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., and Msgr. Robert J. Hagarty of Chicago at the Illinois Rally for Civil Rights in Chicago's Soldier Field on June 21, 1964.


spectful but effective way to communicate that you think what they are doing is wrong. This will not be easy. Gain strength and confidence by prayerfully reading the Gospels regularly. In a dialogue of the soul, be attentive to the specific and very clear directives from Jesus, especially his law of love: Love God with your whole being, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Study the past and present racial divide in the United States and in the church. It is a broad, deep and complex reality that is woven into U.S. culture. We must be careful not to presume to know what is in the hearts of others. While extreme racial prejudice has been a tragic flaw in the past and present history of the United States and the Catholic Church, we should be careful not to generically brand historical figures and contemporaries, whose horizons and experiences may be unknown to us, as “racists” or as guilty of “racism.” It is unwise, imprudent and probably incorrect for a speaker to address a large crowd of people and say, “Most Americans are ‘racists’ and guilty of

‘racism.’” This judgmental and confrontational approach closes the door on possible meaningful dialogue and authentic conversion before they can even begin.

Examine history books used in Catholic schools. Are they truthful, fair and balanced? Are these texts silent on the moral blindness of individuals like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Robert E. Lee and Catholic Chief Justice Roger Taney on the evil of enslaving free human beings for the sole purpose of enriching their so-called owners? Do these texts routinely speak of enslaved free human beings as “slaves” without acknowledging the Christian truth that no human being can “own” another? Similarly, is church history presented in these texts from a completely Eurocentric perspective, giving little or no attention to the flourishing churches in sub-Saharan Africa and to African-American Catholic history?

If this is the case, we should replace them with more accurate textbooks or supplement parish school textbooks with a more complete and accurate history to



The greater concern of African-American Catholics is not for the church to say more or write more, but to do more and be more. ●●

correct false, incomplete and misleading accounts. This is essential for the proper formation of the religious consciousness of young people. They must build the bridges to ultimately cross the racial divide.

Attract and retain African-American college students and faculty members. This continues to be a challenge in most Catholic institutions of higher education. An atmosphere of true welcome and inclusion that does not tolerate a culture of racial prejudice, white privilege or expressions of white supremacist attitudes must be consciously maintained.

Those Catholic universities that have known connections to human slavery and institutionalized racial prejudice would do well to follow the example of Georgetown University under the leadership of President John DeGioia. The university's Working Group on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation faced with honesty a painful history and offered a heartfelt apology. The university contacted and assisted the descendants of free human beings once "owned" and "sold" by the university, renamed halls that once honored Jesuits who were involved in the sale of human beings and honored the first enslaved man listed on the 1838 sale document and a free black woman who established a school for African-American girls at the university in 1820.

Be vigilant at seminaries. Make sure that men who harbor racial prejudice are not advanced for ordination and that faculty members understand clearly that no actions or attitudes of racial bias will be tolerated. Seminaries should encourage educational presentations on the racial divide.

Be attentive to sacred art. Parishes building new churches and dioceses erecting new cathedrals should ponder this question: Why are the images of God the Father, Jesus Christ, Mary, Joseph, the apostles, the saints and even the angels presented almost exclusively with Western European features? We do not know what most of them

actually looked like. Michelangelo's majestic frescoes in the Sistine Chapel notwithstanding, everyone knows that God the Father is not, in fact, an elderly European man with a flowing white beard. Why is God exclusively pictured that way?

The horizons of possibilities of African-American Catholics are certainly limited by church art that suggests quite definitively that no one in the kingdom of heaven looks like them. The church could take a giant step across the racial divide by regularly incorporating racially diverse images of the divine and the saints in sacred art. This would announce to everyone who enters that "all are welcome!"

Daily news stories announce that our country and our church are at a crossroads. If we do nothing, I fear that in the years ahead, the small but vital African-American Catholic population of 2.8 million will shrink rather than grow. The church does well to form committees, issue pastoral statements and publish timely articles. But the greater concern of African-American Catholics is not for the church to say more or write more but to do more and be more.

As Catholics, we must continue to enter into silent dialogue with the Holy Spirit and pray for the expansion and enrichment of our personal horizons of possibilities so that, as members of the one body of Christ, we can help to heal old wounds and to bridge the racial divide. Listen. Learn. Think. Pray. Act.

Most Rev. Edward K. Braxton is the bishop of Belleville, Ill. This article is based on the concluding section of the address "The Horizon of Possibilities: 'The Catholic Church and the Racial Divide in the United States: Old Wounds Reopened,'" which he gave at The Catholic University of America on Sept. 21, 2017. It is available on the website of the Diocese of Belleville at www.diobelle.org.

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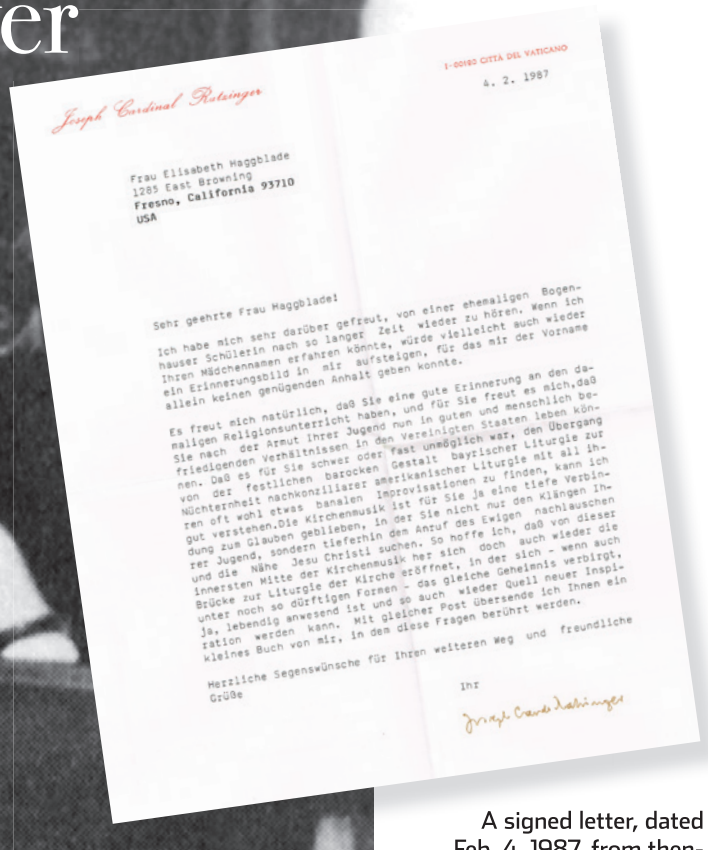
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Pope Benedict, my teacher, never failed to write me back

By Elisabeth Haggblade

CNS photo from Catholic Press Photo



A signed letter, dated Feb. 4, 1987, from then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to Elisabeth Haggblade
(Photo provided by author)

My acquaintance with J.R. dates back to when I was a fourth-grade student in Bogenhausen, a suburb of Munich, in the early 1950s.

Elementary schools in Germany at the time were still segregated according to gender. In our school, staffed by women teachers, the only male we saw up close was the chaplain who taught our catechism class. Herr Kaplan, as we called him using his title instead of his name, was short and stocky, with dark hair and fingers stained yellow from

smoking. His quiet, low-key demeanor seemed to complement his simple black suit and stiff white collar. We thought he was all right.

One day, Herr Kaplan told us that a new priest would be joining the school staff to prepare us for our first Communion, an important milestone in our lives. We were anxious and excited. What would the new priest be like? Would he be nice to us? Would he like us?

When the classroom door opened one morning, two

Joseph Ratzinger, who became Pope Benedict XVI on April 19, 2005, is seen as a young scholar in this undated file photo.

black-clad gentlemen walked in: The first one we knew. The second one was young and slender, his suit too skimpy to fit his tall frame. He was our new teacher, introduced to us as Herr Ratzinger. His full name was Joseph Ratzinger; we called him J.R. He had just completed his seminary training in Freising, a town about 20 miles north of Munich.

From that day on, we fervently looked forward to our catechism class. We cheered our new teacher as he entered our gray, postwar school days. J.R.'s knowledge of the church seemed bottomless, his patience with us infinite. We duly intoned: "Ecce Agnus Dei, Ecce qui tollit peccata mundi." We translated all the Latin phrases of the Mass, but did we really understand what we were memorizing? I am not sure any of us could have repeated J.R.'s explanations of canon law; but instead of scolding us when we fell short, he gently reworded the questions to meet our way of reasoning. But what mattered most to us was his bright face and enthusiasm.

It was not to last. After only a short time, we learned that J.R. had suddenly and quietly left to pursue further studies at the university. We were inconsolable.

We must write to him, we said in a chorus. We debated endlessly. I was given the task of secretary to take down notes from class members and to transpose everyone's thoughts into words of disappointment and hope that he would return to us soon. I wrote the letter, accordingly, in the name of our class.

Did we really expect to hear from J.R.?

One day I received a reply: a carefully drafted letter, an entire page, in his fine handwriting that almost resembled Arabic with its small, even, round letters, fluidly connected. Forever the teacher, he wrote about the proper path to follow in growing up, illustrating it with an analogy: "If one buttons one's coat the wrong way, one would have to undo all of it and start over again to make it right," he wrote. "So it is with life." He admonished us, therefore, to choose the right path from the beginning. He signed it simply, Joseph Ratzinger.

I no longer have that letter that I see so clearly in front of me. I must have lost it during my many moves. I continued my life with and without the church, with and without

family, with and without my homeland. And periodically, from a distance, I was able to follow his trajectory in the church.

After more than 30 years, I decided to write to him, reminiscing about the early days in Bogenhausen. By then he was at the Vatican, serving as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. I did not expect to hear back from him, but he graciously responded in February 1987, sending me two small books he had written (*The Feast of Faith* and *Liturgy and Sacred Music*) with a full-page type-written and signed letter.

In my letter to him, I had mentioned that upon arriving in the United States and attending Sunday church services, I missed the music that had always accompanied Mass when I was growing up. I missed the Bach organ music; I missed the choir and full orchestra performing Masses by Haydn and Mozart, music I had taken for granted as a child. I felt that I had lost my bond to the church.

In his letter, he explained to me the deep connection between music and belief. He encouraged me to seek that bridge in whatever music I had access to, to find that path again from music to liturgy.

I wrote to him once again at Christmastime in 2012. By then he had become Pope Benedict XVI. He graciously sent his good wishes on a beautiful card depicting the manger. He never left a note I sent unanswered.

This time, I will be sure not to lose them.

Elisabeth Haggblade has a doctorate in English philology from the Free University Berlin. She taught English and linguistics part-time at California State University, Fresno, at California State Polytechnic University in San Luis Obispo and at the Free University Berlin.

Photo: Wikimedia



A WRITER AND A REFUGEE

James Chapman

America, in partnership with Jesuit Refugee Service/USA, the Jesuit Schools Network and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, is pleased to publish the winner of the 2018 Anne Frank Essay Competition. The prizewinning essay is in the form of a letter written to the imaginary friend, Kitty, to whom Anne Frank addressed the famous diary she wrote, beginning in 1942.

Dearest Kitty,

Nearly 74 years ago, you received what I'm sure you never expected to be your last letter from Anne. At the time that letter was written, Anne, along with seven other people, had been hiding in a secret annex between two buildings on a canal street in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam for over two years.

As Anne's closest confidant throughout her time there, you must remember all the food shortages, the constant quarrels and the many near-discoveries that characterized daily life in the annex. However, as your perspective of the annex was shaped solely by Anne's, you must recall with even greater clarity those times when Anne was burst-

ing with joy, hope and benevolence and especially the immeasurable goodness and love with which a small group of non-Jewish friends sustained Anne and her comrades.

You were a much-needed ear when no one else could spare a moment to listen in the chaos of war, and you were an endless source of comfort when Anne needed it most.

I sincerely can't begin to imagine the horror in which Anne and millions of other people lived during this war. Looking back on the war from a distance, it's far too easy to desensitize oneself to the suffering, violence and inhumanity that rocked the world and left it shaken and recovering for decades. It's an abrupt reawakening to consider—truly consider—what life was like for the millions of refugees and orphans of the war.

These men, women and children came from all walks of life and were of all nationalities and religions. Yet they were bound together in a whirl of unending uncertainty, distrust and lies, of famine and epidemic and death, closing in, as immense and inescapable as night. The facet of wartime life I personally find most difficult to imagine, Kitty, is the simple reality of not knowing what the future holds. For



One need only look at Anne to see the plight of the refugee: unwanted and unloved. ●●

people like Anne, the darkness must have seemed nearly complete. With the sweeping and lightning-fast victory of the Nazis in places like the Netherlands, the German Wehrmacht must have appeared unstoppable, and as Jews and other “undesirables” disappeared in staggering numbers, the terrible fate of many, especially refugees, must have seemed immutable.

Faced with a multitude of evils, Anne took a rather Ignatian outlook, thinking of all the beauty left around her and trying to remain content. In addition, she wished to become an author after the war; in particular, she desired to publish her correspondence with you, in the hope of providing a firsthand account of the barbaric persecution of the Jewish people under the Nazi regime. And I guess, Kitty, this wish has been fulfilled, though in a tragic way.

However, the publication of Anne’s letters to you gave us so much more than a mere account of the war. It gave us a candid and completely innocent view of a young girl growing up as a refugee, complete with all of her thoughts, emotions and desires, and a distinctive and often humorous voice. Very impressive, don’t you think, Kitty, for a teenage Jewish girl in hiding during Nazi occupation?

Even after her death, Anne’s memory lives on. She is, in effect, the face of refugees everywhere. She and her family were, in the blink of an eye, forced from their home in Frankfurt for their beliefs and carried away to Amsterdam. Refugees around the world today face the same problems. As conflict rages like a festering disease in many regions across the world, millions upon millions of people are unceremoniously uprooted from their homes.

Recalling the story of Anne, it is impossible to forget the many helpers who daily risked everything—their lives, jobs and families—to support and conceal the whereabouts of their charges. However, in looking at the stories of today’s refugees, the positions once filled by Miep Gies and Bep Voskuil, who did so much to help Anne and her family, have yet to be taken. On the contrary, there is an alarming, growing anti-refugee sentiment. Numerous leaders around the world with strong views on this matter are finding an increasingly large collection of listeners, and aid efforts are

grossly underfunded. Thus, many refugees are forced to flee, not to the safer and more prosperous West but to the nearest moderately stable country.

These nations, unequipped to manage such increases in immigration, are taxed to the breaking point. And still, be it out of fear, out of prejudice or out of simple self-interest, many with the resources to aid these helpless people turn their backs on them.

Too often, we refuse to see these people as people. Instead, we choose to see them as problems that need to be dealt with quickly and efficiently. Too often, the way we deal with these “problems” is simply by passing them on, by handing them off to others. But all people must cry out against this! One need only look at Anne to see the plight of the refugee: unwanted and unloved from so many sides. With this image of need in mind, how could we possibly refuse our aid to any man or woman without a place to call home?

We must be like Miep and Bep and all those other good souls who welcomed Jews at their own peril, and welcome the Anne Franks of the world into our lives today! When confronted with people in need, we are obliged to find the beauty underneath the surface and to appreciate our many differences because, in spite of everything, these differences draw us together more than they pull us apart.

As I’m sure you’ll remember, Anne frequently mused that paper is more patient than people. Paper is, after all, always willing to listen quietly and not to judge. Would it not be wonderful if people tried, just once, to be like this too? Acceptance of anybody, from our closest neighbors to refugees fleeing distant conflicts, begins with an open mind, just as the great tales of the great writers were born from empty parchment. I wonder, Kitty, would it not be world-changing? Yes or no, I’m sure we both know what Anne would say.

Yours,
J.C.

James Chapman is a student at Creighton Preparatory School in Omaha, Neb.



What the World Cup Can Teach Us About Everything

By Antonio De Loera-Brust

► The World Cup is a black hole, a force that draws everything toward it and from which nothing can escape.

It is upon us again. Four long years have passed, and now the 21st World Cup, hosted in Russia, will soon be broadcast around the world in dozens of languages. Beginning June 14, we will have a month of football matches almost every day to settle once again which nation is the best footballing nation in the world. The entire planet will be gripped in a sudden and near-religious fervor. Even Pope Francis will get in on it, lending a legitimacy to my quasi-spiritual ardor, and providing perhaps even more divine aid for Argentina, as if Lionel Messi were not enough.

The French existentialist Albert Camus once wrote, “Everything I know about morality and the obligations of men, I owe to football.” This is the quote I fall back upon when I want to appear intellectual in my justification for how madly infatuated I am with football (please note: I shall refer to the sport played with one’s feet as football for the duration of this article—because it makes sense). I often feel the need to explain myself to those who wonder why the one goal produced in an otherwise uneventful 90 minutes can have me celebrating, laughing, in tears on the top of a table, arms raised, yelling: “Goooooooooooooooooooooool!”

If you already understand why the world goes insane for the World Cup, then no words of mine are necessary. You know that no words could explain it all anyway, its magnitude, its all-encompassing importance. But if you don’t understand, this essay is for you. This is my humble attempt to welcome newcomers into the warm embrace of the global epidemic of football. This is an attempt

to explain the stakes, the history, the drama of the World Cup. The World Cup is a black hole, an eternal and incomprehensible force that draws everything toward it, that bends time itself and from which nothing can escape. If I succeed in infecting you, then perhaps you too will be found once every four years, jumping for joy, weeping in ecstasy or crushed by defeat. Join me in the madness.

THE WORLD CUP AS RITUAL

It is hard to overstate just how much football means to people around the world. The sport has triggered violent riots and even an all-out war between Honduras and Guatemala in 1969. Many an old-world hatred has found new life through the sport, complete with corporate sponsorship. Real Madrid and FC Barcelona’s famous rivalry gives voice to longstanding regional and separatist tensions in Spain. The “Old Firm Derby” between Celtic and Rangers, both based in Glasgow, is a proxy battle for the Northern Irish Troubles, pitting the Irish, Republican and Catholic FC Celtic against the British, Unionist and Protestant FC Rangers. In Buenos Aires the “Superclasico” pits the Boca Juniors, historically associated with Argentina’s Italian working-class immigrants, against River Plate, known as the team of the affluent, their fans “the millionaires.” Rome’s “Derby della Capitale,” infamous for spectator violence, sees AS Roma face off against SS Lazio, the latter team being notorious for its fascist-leaning supporter base. Football

abroad is simply weighed down by history. There are no comparably politicized rivalries in American sports, not even the Yankees versus the Red Sox.

International football simply raises the stakes of football’s identity politics to the national level. For example, the “Hand of God” goal scored by Argentine legend Diego Maradona against England in the 1986 World Cup match cannot be discussed, nor its enormous impact in both England and Argentina understood, without the context of the Falklands war. Argentines, and many others, forgave the blatant handball as an act of anticolonial defiance. And for all their greater military strength, in the end the English could only watch as Maradona scored again (with what was widely considered the best World Cup goal of the century). Argentina went on to win the game and eventually the World Cup, striking a symbolic blow against Margaret Thatcher. Is it madness that two goals in 1986 should resonate politically for decades? Yes, but that is the whole point.

What else can one expect from the only sport that is truly shared across the whole world? How could a competition pitting the avatars of nations against one another not be seen as a font of symbolism and greater meaning? The World Cup is a ritual World War, a cathartic ceremony of the old nationalisms made obsolete by our new globalized world. Our teams carry all our hopes, hatreds and history with them. Whether it exorcises or feeds those demons is up



for intense academic debate. But what is clear is that only in our globalized world is such a ritual possible. This is tribalism brought to you by Coca Cola and Adidas.

When else will the streets of Cairo and Montevideo, Mexico City and Berlin, be silent at the exact same moment, regardless of the time zone, suffering the same anxiety, living the same thrills?

AMERICA'S UNFULFILLED POTENTIAL

This is the high drama that football creates. The ritual clash illuminates society's tensions. What must be recognized is that, unlike warfare, economics, diplomacy or even creative industries, it is a relatively egalitarian way for nations and tribes to compete with one another.

You need not go to Russia in the summer of 2018 to witness this. I think of the local migrant farmworker camps near my hometown in the agricultural heart of California's Central Valley, which have their own little football league. The boys of the camps meet in ferocious and hard-fought clashes on

fields yellowed by the harsh summer sun and Gov. Jerry Brown's water conservation rules. Every free moment of the summer is spent outside, kicking the ball around. There are no trophies for participation here; even the pick-up games after school are played to win. And when the same 100 degree heat in which their parents pick crops finally tires the boys out, they sit in the shade and trade stories of Messi, Ronaldo and Chicharito.

Mexican-Americans breathe football in a way most other Americans, even those who play the sport, do not. I once saw the farmworker camp team play a private club team full of predominantly white, affluent, college-bound kids; the children of vegetable-buyers, not vegetable-pickers. It was donated and hand-me down cleats versus brand new ones. Nevertheless, the migrant kids overwhelmed their more affluent peers. Final score: 8-0.

There is a clue in that anecdote for why the United States, for all its status as a superpower, remains a weak presence in global football. Despite enormous pools of untapped, largely Latino

immigrant football talent and passion, youth football in the United States (sorry, soccer) remains, at the competitive level, the exclusive domain of wealthy suburbanites. The U.S. youth soccer system is pay-to-play, with the best college teams recruiting from expensive club teams. Children from less affluent families get priced out and overlooked by scouts. The irony of all this is that in the United States, the world's most diverse country, the world's most popular sport has become an enclave of white affluence.

At the same time, Major League Soccer, which is based in the United States, is increasingly a league worth watching, though it creates new problems for American soccer. Top-level international players like Sweden's Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Spain's David Villa and Germany's Bastian Schweinsteiger are "retiring" to M.L.S. as they age out of more competitive European leagues and are lured by American cash. While this gives American fans like me the chance to watch legends in the flesh, it comes at the cost of American youth development. American de-



Tweeting about football, Pope Francis wrote, “May sport always promote the culture of encounter.”

CNS photo/Stefano Rellandini, Reuters

mand for world-class football diverts considerable financial resources away from the development of local talent. It is no accident that the most promising contemporary American players, like Christian Pulisic, were trained in Germany.

Given all these deep-seated issues around youth development and diversity, it should not have been a surprise when the United States failed to qualify for the 2018 World Cup. Nevertheless it was a monumental setback for a country that spent more on the sport than ever before. The U.S. national team players will have to watch from home as nations like first-timers Senegal and Panama have their shot at glory. As recently as 2014, Americans dreamed of holding their own against such titans as Brazil, Germany and Spain. It turns out the United States, despite all the money spent, could not triumph even over Trinidad and Tobago. But that is also what is fantastic about football. A nation like Trinidad and Tobago could beat a nation like the United States! In how many other competitions can that be said?

America’s football losing streak won’t be forever. My Dad has a saying: “Once the Americans get an idea into their heads, they can do anything. They can land on the moon.” The United States needs to harness the fundamental egalitarian nature of soccer. The nation of immigrants from around the world should be uniquely suited to conquer the world’s sport. But until the United States learns to find its champions among the kids of California farmworker camps as much as the kids of professionals in the suburbs, its glory days will have to wait.

PUTIN’S WORLD CUP


The largest shadow over this year’s World Cup will be cast by Vladimir Putin. Given that FIFA may be the most laughably corrupt organization in the world, the Russian Federation is certainly a good fit as the 2018 host. And while I do not believe the games are rigged (there might be a worldwide riot if it were ever proven they were), it does seem awfully convenient for the hosts that Russia’s opening home game is against Saudi Arabia, one of the few teams in the tournament ranked lower than Russia. By all accounts, Vladimir Putin’s dream is to restore Russia to its former imperial glory. What better way to assert Russian influence on the world stage than by becoming the stage for the world’s most watched event?

Putin is hardly the first authoritarian leader to benefit from the World Cup. The second-ever World Cup was used by Mussolini as an advertisement for fascism all the way back in 1934. In the aftermath of an attempted assassination of a Russian defector in the United Kingdom, many European

heads of state have announced they will not be attending the games. Some have called for a boycott of the World Cup in the spirit of the U.S. boycott of the 1984 Moscow Olympic Games. Still, despite being fully aware of the symbolic lift the tournament will give the Putin regime, I won’t boycott the games. I’ll watch every second of every game I can. And to be honest, I’m not sure there is anything that could change that.

At the conclusion of the 2014 World Cup, Pope Francis perfectly encapsulated all the positives of the sport, tweeting: “The World Cup allowed people from different countries and religions to come together. May sport always promote the culture of encounter.” But football brings us together and divides at the same time. The “culture of encounter” in football is not always what Pope Francis would hope for. Encounters between football fans are often marred by violence and hatred. Mass casualties have occurred in riots and stampedes in stadiums across the world, with over 70 killed in a Egyptian Football riot in 2012. The football scene in Pope Francis’ own Argentina is notoriously violent. Serious resources around the world have gone into policing the football world and attempting to make it safer and more family friendly. In Russia, normally home to a racist and homophobic hooligan scene, the formidable state security services are utilizing the full might of the Russian state to ensure no violence disrupts Putin’s showcase.

In the face of so much violence and corruption, many have blamed football itself. Yet I would argue that anything that has ever meant this



One day, I will teach my children football as a means of knowing themselves. ●●

much has always been accompanied by violence. The true source of this violence is the simple fact that it holds a meaning equivalent to any ideology for millions of fans around the world. Football's power is such that appeals from the national team of Ivory Coast even helped end a vicious civil war. Perhaps the fact that a sport has been given so much meaning reflects more than anything our modern and increasingly secular world's desperation for a sense of purpose and belonging.

FOOTBALL AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

For me, the World Cup provides exactly that sense of purpose and belonging. For Mexican-Americans, it is often a form of cultural survival. We feel the Mexican national team represents us; already Mexico plays more of its "home" games in the United States than in Mexico. It makes economic sense: Mexican-Americans have larger disposable incomes than Mexicans; that is why so many of us came here in the first place. More money means more tickets sold, more jerseys sold and at higher prices. The national team means more to us here than in Mexico. In Mexico you care about your local team, Club America or Chivas or Tijuana or whoever, but on this side of the border, it is your way of expressing your Mexican pride, your Mexican roots in a country that wishes to build walls against us. Mexico's chief rivalry is against the United

States, a battle that for many of us represents our own divided cultural identity. No wonder advocates of closed borders like Ann Coulter have been so alarmed by the spread of football in the United States.

These are the stakes of football; it is our nations, it is ourselves. This is why there is so much violence in football: because football contains everything worth dying for, which is another way of saying everything worth living for. One day, I will teach my children football as a means of knowing themselves. I will teach my children football as a means of knowing others. Football is a team sport; and teamwork is the best practice for building a society.

This is not to say one must be a cog in a collectivist machine; the sport offers plenty for the individual too. Unsurpassed glory awaits those who compete at the highest level of football. Think of Pele, Beckham, Ronaldo. But on a team, the tension between the individual and the collective is transformed into the best efforts of the individual serving the needs of the team. This is the best way to teach the responsibilities of citizenship: that privileges and rights come from responsibilities.

In this technocratic world of routine, here, once every four years is duty, conflict, glory and belonging in all its ancient forms, delivered to the world through modern communica-

tion. Sure, it is commercialized and corrupt and all a big show. But like religion, it offers comforts and answers questions. It inspires violence but can pass on the most important of values and lessons. At the risk of sounding ridiculous: I do not know if it is possible for me to care about something more than I care for football.

This summer it will happen again. For months, speculation has been rampant and anticipation has built. Some say it is time for Brazil or Spain to return to former glory, others that Germany will be the first since the '60s to win back to back to titles, and still others that it must be Argentina as this is Messi's last chance to win it all. No one can be sure.

All we know is the world will once come together to witness it. Pope Francis and Vladimir Putin. The heads of FIFA and migrant farmworkers from California. The world's greatest athletes and little old me, all of us, together, hanging on the outcome. We will gather in the stadiums, we will watch on our phones, we will listen on the radio, we will celebrate in bars. All of us, groaning and cheering, at every pass, every foul, yelling at the ref, praying to God in every language on earth, from the Alps and the Sahara, from Seattle to Tokyo, from Copenhagen to Lima, from presidential palaces and refugee camps, all of us, unable to breathe, unable to watch, unable to look away, oh god it's going to be a penalty kick isn't it, *no puede ser! No fue penal, no fue penal, no fue penal, no fue penal!!*

Antonio De Loera-Brust, Joseph A. O'Hare fellow, Twitter: @AntonioDeLoeraB.

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A wise and lovely metaphor

By Joe Hoover

Nearly 1,000 poems poured in this year for **America's** annual Foley Poetry Contest from writers of all ages. Entries were postmarked from all over the world: Tunisia, India, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Germany, Botswana, Cameroon, New Zealand, Israel, Iraq, Thailand and, of course, the United States.

Several of the poems, whether they made the final cut or not, contained wonderful lines or phrases that were poignant, funny or simply rang true.

God is the net under the Golden Gate Bridge.

I remember the first time you bested me in a match. I was scared that you would win, and equally scared that you wouldn't.

Each year I mean to see when Winter hands the earth back to Spring.

Keep praying, and go to church. I'm always beside you, but also, you're on your own.

where's the rehab in a broken mind left alone feasting on itself?

Some poems dealt, as they do every year, with current events, such as school shootings, refugees, opioid addiction, violence against black men and U.S. prison culture.

The most discouraging poem we received was "Ruinination." It began: "I swim in the black river/ and wash my sins in the oil/ of death. I bathe in the melted poles/ and sing among the gmos." It continued in that vein.

Once in a while a poem's cover letter had the makings of a strong poem in itself. This is because, I think, the letters are often more freely written, unconcerned with being good or worthy.

"I was a 20-year league bowler who scored a 259 clean game/630 series."

"[the poet] hopes to eventually write something as beautiful as the song 'Africa' by Toto."

"My great-grandmother had a floor to ceiling glass display case in the far corner of her 200-year-old tobacco farmhouse. This is where she kept a collection of painted porcelain dolls and figurines. They absolutely terrified me. Patterned lace circled the necks around pink inflated cheeks that would make me sick if I stared for too long."

"The following words were said to me after I gave some of my poetry to my mother to read: 'This is sick! You belong in an insane asylum!' It took me 32

years to finally put pen to paper again."

"I spent my whole day on this, so pretty please, pick me as the winner."

That one came from a 12-year-old girl. It was not a winner. A poem also came in from a member of the Little Sisters of the Poor. It did not make the cut either. I had to reject a 12-year-old's poem and a poem from a Little Sister of the Poor. Just sit with that for a moment.

Dealing with the winning poem, "Whales," by Richard Lewis, was not so distressing. Chosen from the final 25 with the help of the poets Shannon Camlin Ward and Emma Winters, the poem managed to draw out a wise and lovely metaphor all the way, 26 lines, without apology or strain.

The runners-up, to be published in subsequent issues, are "I'm Never Told of Family Funerals," by George Rappleye; "Only Grain and Goats," by George Longenecker; and "e.g. sublimation," by Jasmine Throckmorton.

As long as **America** keeps running this contest, I imagine we will keep getting a bundle of poems sent in every year. And thank God. Sometimes poems tell the truth about the world better than anything else can.

Joe Hoover, S.J., poetry editor of **America**.

(Jeremy Bishop/Unsplash)

The editors of **America** are pleased to present the winner of the 2018 Foley Poetry Award, given in honor of William T. Foley, M.D.

Whales

By Richard Lewis

I know not to tell you that one day you'll be better, so instead I tell you this: We are blue whales, we lie solitary on the ocean floor, looking up at a surface where life is nothing but silhouettes. I tell you I feed on white tablets of krill, committing to the analogy, take them each morning with yesterday's water. They keep me anchored, low to the ground. Without them I'd be battered by storms which rip metal from ships. Without them I'd be a husk; a carcass in the currents. I tell you it's nothing like this at all. But close enough. Nights down here will twist you until you snap; days will cut you off under the ice; every few seconds a sudden drop into remembering, so that you can never truly relax. I know this doesn't make you feel any better, that you think you belong down here, alone, and maybe you do. I know you think that it will never change, and maybe it won't. I know how easy it is to wrap yourself in the water and the silence and forget. And so I tell you, instead, about the importance of perspective. That you only appreciate the magnitude of blue whales when you're up close, when you can run your fingers over the old scars of their thick hide. Or when they venture out of the depths to pass ships. Finally, I tell you that I'm kept going by those moments: When a certain song, smile or break of sunlight calls me to the surface, and just for the briefest of moments, taking a deep breath, the cold air stinging my lungs, the world says "welcome back."

Richard Lewis, of Swansea, Wales, was the second-prize winner of the 2015 Terry Hetherington award. His work has appeared in *Bare Fiction* magazine, *London Grip New Poetry*, *Ink Sweat & Tears* and *Cheval*. He is currently working on his debut poetry collection.

The Foley Poetry Award is underwritten by a grant from the William T. Foley Foundation.

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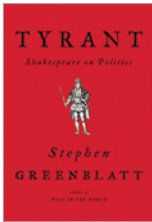
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Tyrant is a supple page-turner about some of Shakespeare's most dastardly characters.

Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown

By Thomas Jacobs



Tyrant
Shakespeare on Politics
By Stephen Greenblatt
W. W. Norton
224p \$21.95

In my senior year of high school, I did a fellowship at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C., spending a couple of afternoons a week attending seminars, lectures, performances and conversations about the Folger Theatre's slate of Shakespeare plays. I recall one afternoon in particular. We were speaking with the cast of "Hamlet," in which the title character was rendered by four separate actors onstage at the same time. My friend Jim, then in the larval stage of what has become a career as a professor of performance studies, posed a complicated interpretive question to the director. I don't recall the question, but I recall the director's reaction, which went from polite interest to complete bafflement. When Jim finished up his soliloquy with "Is that what you were going for?", the director grinned ec-

statically and said, "Sure!"

Part of Shakespeare's genius is that his plays are large enough, world-filling enough, to fit any number of interpretations. All we have, after all, are the "words, words, words," and we can do with them what we will. Still, some interpretations are better than others, and when those interpretations are coming from Stephen Greenblatt, you can be sure they are worth close attention. Greenblatt, the John Cogan University Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University, is also general editor of *The Norton Shakespeare* and a literary historian; in short, he is an incredibly well-read and authoritative thinker on the Bard's work.

With *Tyrant*, he has given us a slim yet supple page-turner about some of Shakespeare's most dastardly characters. I read the book in two sittings, the literary equivalent of binge-watching a crossover between *Game of Thrones*, *House of Cards* and *The Tudors*.

The setup for the book is simple. At the time Shakespeare was writing, Elizabeth I had been queen of England for 30 years. No longer young, she

nevertheless refused to name a successor, setting up rival court factions for a potentially violent throne-grab. Worries about the kind of ruler who might succeed her would have been on everyone's mind, and Shakespeare was no exception. He was, Greenblatt says, preoccupied with the central question of tyranny: How does a figure like Richard III or Macbeth ascend to the throne? There is also its corollary: How can a society—and for Shakespeare, it is all of us who bear responsibility—prevent his rise?

Tyrant is Greenblatt's attempt to draw answers from the plays that tackle these questions most directly. Shakespeare "seems to have grasped that he thought more clearly about the issues that preoccupied his world when he confronted them not directly but from an oblique angle." (It probably helped that the punishment for writing about it directly was death by dismemberment.) He did this by locating his plays in the historical and mythic past.

The book is organized into a series of themes or aspects of the tyrant's

rule, which more or less follow a “prototypical” rise to power, from ginning up support through false populism to violently seizing the throne with the help of powerful enablers.

Greenblatt turns to the plays to flesh out this trajectory, honing in on a single tyrant to illustrate each “phase.” This focus gives the analysis an immersive quality, and it is clear from the big picture that there is something of the ur-tyrant in each of them. The first half of the book is a little more coherent on this front, focusing its attention on tyrants both royal (most kings and aspirants) and non-royal (the rebel Jack Cade) in the historical plays, beginning with Richard II, diving deep into the Henry VI trilogy and finishing with the tyrant par excellence, Richard III.

The second half of the book moves into the ancient past, with the Romans (Caesar, Coriolanus) and the mythic tyrants (Lear, Macbeth, Leontes).

Tyrant’s best chapters are about the worst villains: Richard III and Macbeth—different men, to be sure, but both emblematic of the almost incoherent narcissism that thrusts them bloodily onto their thrones and drags them mercilessly down from them.

If this were all the book were, I would go into more detail about what a deft and masterly hand Greenblatt has used in lucidly and grippingly unpacking Shakespeare’s powerful and compelling vision of the tyrant. But that is not all there is. As the reader has no doubt anticipated, Greenblatt has emulated the Shakespearean endeavor: The book is a rumination on the current president, without once mentioning the man by name.

Much has been made of Trump’s dictatorial tendencies, and there are

aspects of Trump-the-politician that certainly seem to comport with Shakespeare’s understanding of the tyrant. Trump’s presidential campaign mirrors that of the rebel leader Jack Cade, who “begins by talking vaguely about ‘reformation,’ but his actual appeal is wholesale destruction.” His rhetoric mirrors that of Coriolanus, “the plutocrat, born into every privilege and inwardly contemptuous of those beneath him, who mouths the rhetoric of populism during the electoral campaign, abandoning it as soon as it has served his purposes.”

Like the Duke of York, Trump installs unqualified family members in high positions of power, for who “can the perennially insecure tyrant trust more than the members of his own family?” Even his “governing style” echoes the likes of Macbeth, for whom “[c]onsiderations of morality, political tactics, or basic intelligence have all disappeared, and in their place is a mere calculation of the effort involved.” Indeed, I found that the book helped to make sense of the mind-bending, complicated relationship Trump has—indicted, alleged and everything in between—with Russia. The Shakespearean tyrant courts foreign assistance, even while engaging in war with the enemy, betraying his own country only to bind himself up in the mantle of the state.

Still, the fact remains that *something* (our institutions? The deep state? His profound laziness and disinterest in the job?) has prevented Trump from either claiming or exercising tyrannical power as Shakespeare understood it. If I am left with any single sense from this book of what a tyrant is, it would be, tautologically, someone who does tyranny.

Trump, in a cowardly way, fires people over Twitter; Richard III and Macbeth dispatch their predecessors by *doing the stabbing themselves*. Greenblatt has nothing to say on this front.

This is of a piece with one of my small frustrations with the book—namely, Greenblatt’s use of the more or less agreed-upon language about Trump from his critics in politics and culture to explicate his analysis of Shakespeare. There are references to “draining the swamp” and “a well-coiffed politician’s donning of a hard hat at a rally,” “fake news,” and a winking reference to a hypothetical president offering his services to Russia. Richard III and Trump may share some of the more off-putting tyrannical predilections (there is a compelling psychosexual parallel between Trump’s fraught language about his own daughter and Richard’s desire to marry his niece), but I prefer my analysis of Richard to take place on Richard’s terms, not Trump’s. If the point is to make the case for Trump the Tyrant, it should rely less on innuendo than argument.

The book ends on a hopeful note, recounting the story of Coriolanus’s failed attempt to ascend to the Roman consulship. He is effectively thwarted, in Greenblatt’s analysis, by the very thing that he most loathes: the self-serving political machinations of the plebeians’ elected representatives. Coriolanus, even with his wealth, power and success in war, remains ultimately a failed tyrant. May we be so lucky.

Thomas Jacobs is a novelist and a graduate of St. John’s College in Annapolis, Md.

A gentle and generous man

The details of Robert F. Kennedy's life are familiar to anyone who has read or followed the biographies of the Kennedys, as individuals or as a group. Written by Chris Matthews, the host of MSNBC's "Hardball," *Bobby Kennedy: A Raging Spirit* gives us a different take on Kennedy and his times. The subtitle, "A Raging Spirit," gives a clue as to how the author seeks to cover his subject.

Given the toxic political environment we are currently enduring, Mr. Matthews seeks to re-examine the life of a man who sought to inspire people rather than attack his enemies. Robert F. Kennedy mesmerized people (whether they were political or not) by the force of his personality, by his mere presence. It is ironic that his personality was so compelling, given that he

started out as the shy one, the diffident one, the cautious one—an anomaly, really, in such a rambunctious family. His great desire was to be accepted, within and outside the family—a project that was to be the work of his life.

Robert Kennedy worked hard at whatever he did, including mastering his shyness. It was never completely erased, but it was essential to the formation of his character. This shyness helped him develop those traits for which he would later become famous: empathy, loyalty and determination. In combination with his reticence, these traits created a forceful personality. A level of gentleness was always there, however, even when it was cloaked by the adult toughness, the famed ruthlessness. Matthews tells a revealing anecdote about how young Robert was perceived, even by his own father, the domineering Joseph

P. Kennedy. He recounts that when Lem Billings (family friend and J.F.K. schoolmate) remarked that Bobby was "the most generous little boy" and that even for a child, he had an extraordinarily kind and generous nature, the patriarch commented, "I don't know where he got that."

Matthews shows how R.F.K. steeled himself for life's challenges—and there were many. He was always there whenever he was needed, whatever the emotional and physical cost. Like an emergency first responder, he ran toward danger, ready to assist those in need. The leader that Matthews presents is the kind sorely needed today, one who is committed and dedicated to the betterment of all—not just the few.

Joseph McAuley, *assistant editor.*

Meet the new boss

Among the many revolutions taking place all around us in our hyperconnected world, argue authors Jeremy Heimans and Henry Timms in *New Power*, is one involving a perennial issue in every society and culture: the nature and use of power.

"Old power," argue the authors, is like a currency: held and directed by a leadership class that controls it jealously. "New power," however, is more like a current of water or electricity: open, participatory and most potent when it surges. A smart leader doesn't seek to hoard new power like currency but to channel it like a current. This new power is made possible by connectivity—facilitated by peer-to-peer communication and

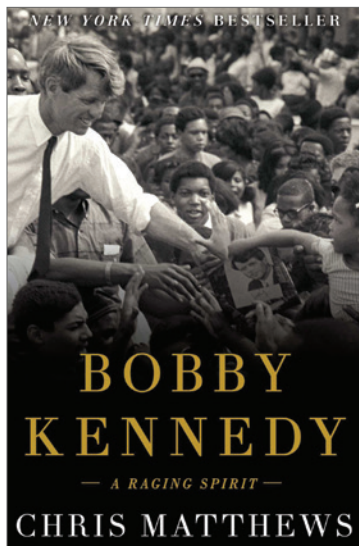
leadership approaches, crowdsourcing and online engagement with audiences. The authors use examples ranging from the edifying, like fundraising for a cure for A.L.S. through the "ice bucket challenge," to the horrifying, as in the rise of white nationalist movements, to show where and how new power erupts and interrupts.

Part of our reconfiguration of **America** as a media apostolate over the past five years has involved grappling with many of the concepts that Heimans and Timms identify, including online engagement with audiences and more horizontal approaches to decision-making. I read with interest their analysis of the modern workplace, including their assertion that the best contempo-

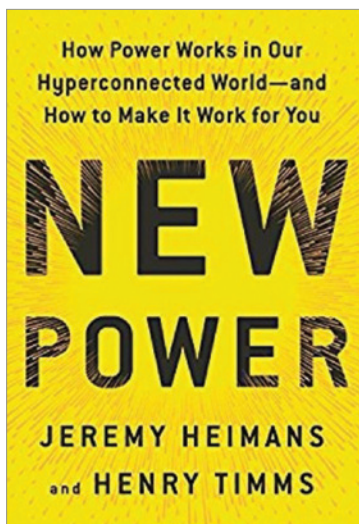
rary organizations are often those where everyone sees him or herself as a "founder," with all the responsibilities and joys that entails.

The authors' embrace of new power's potential has its limits, of course. (Tell the parents of a newborn that their relationship with their child should be crowdsourced.) As long as hierarchical structures exist culturally, politically and economically, "old power" will still have a significant role to play. Nevertheless, no observer of our contemporary society can miss the obvious signs that the authors of *New Power* are onto something significant.

Matt Malone, *S.J., editor in chief.*
Twitter: @americaeditor.



Bobby Kennedy
A Raging Spirit
 By Chris Matthews
 Simon & Schuster. 416p \$28.99



New Power
How Power Works in Our Hyperconnected World—and How to Make It Work for You
 By Jeremy Heimans and Henry Timms
 Doubleday. 336p \$27.95

Connecting liturgy to life

Remembering a day serving meals to the homeless, David Haas writes:

That evening as I was driving home, the relentless mantra in my mind and heart was ‘Blessed are you! Holy are you!’ This is how Christ sees the broken and poor.... This is how I, from that point forward, was called to see, honor, and embrace the poor, in an ongoing invitation.... When I got home... ‘Blest Are They’ came pouring out of me.

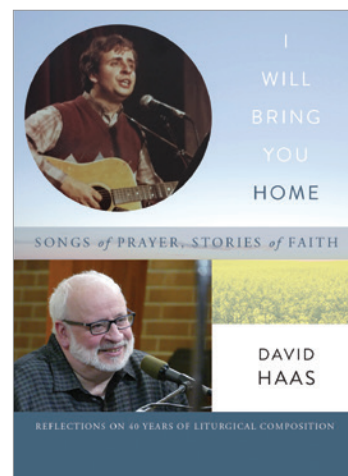
In *I Will Bring You Home*, Haas gathers 132 songs from among his most widely known pieces, like “Blest Are They,” “We Are Called,” “Now We Remain” and “You Are Mine,” and others not as familiar. He gives a brief reflection on each song and on the Scriptures and people who have inspired and accompanied him along his 40-year journey composing music for Catholic liturgy.

Yet this book is more than just an autobiography of one of the most prolific and significant liturgical composers of the post-Vatican II English-speaking church. It is a manual for anyone who wants to learn how to connect the liturgy to life’s daily joys and sorrows. It is a guidebook for aspiring liturgical composers to learn that, more often than not, “liturgical composition is more craft than inspiration” and a reminder to liturgical ministers that “God’s cause is not to be found in the feeding of [one’s] ego, but in the feeding of the hungry.” A prayerful reading of the lyrics provided for each song makes this a kind of breviary,

complementing our daily prayer with rich texts grounded in Scripture and, like the psalms, reflecting every human emotion. These texts are enriched by Haas’s collaborations with several remarkable Protestant text writers, including Mary Louise Bringle, Adam Tice, Shirley Erena Murray and Timothy Dudley-Smith.

Most striking, however, is that on nearly every page, we meet yet another of Haas’s family members or his myriad friends, colleagues or communities who have encouraged his vocation. His love for them is clear. In pulling back the curtain on his own life of faith, on the composing process and on the relationships that permeate the music he writes, Haas invites us deeper into a community of faith that, in Christ, truly has something to sing about.

Diana Macalintal is the cofounder of *TeamRCIA.com* and an author and speaker on liturgy, music and the catechumenate.



I Will Bring You Home
Songs of Prayer, Stories of Faith
 By David Haas
 GIA Publications. 470p \$29.95

Harry Potter is on Broadway now and maybe forever

By Rob Weinert-Kendt

Has Broadway, once home to some of the world's great drama, been turned into a theme park for tourists? It's a frequent charge, and those who make it have a gleaming new exhibit to enter into evidence: "Harry Potter and the Cursed Child," a two-part extravaganza that has landed at the Lyric Theatre for what might as well be a permanent residency, with ticket prices comparable to the cost of an all-inclusive family vacation.

But with its sprawling narrative and jaw-dropping special effects, this live "Harry Potter" sees the theme-park charge and raises it: What theme park, let alone stage play, delivers this much entertainment value? Most don't even think to try. The crowds pouring in for this sensational spectacle don't have to strap on virtual-reality goggles or 3-D glasses, and the ride isn't over in minutes; it runs close to six hours, including intermissions. It is an honest-to-goodness piece of marathon theater, in other words; and for all its state-of-the-art technology, it achieves most of its effects by theatrical means as old as Shakespeare's: costume and makeup, light and shadow, some ex-

perimentally employed trap doors.

The hand-wringing may be overwrought, then, but it cannot be dismissed so easily. After all, what does it say about the state of American drama that this flashy, populist confection—a British import, no less—is likely to win this year's Tony Award for Best Play and become Broadway's longest-running non-musical? Put another way: Is a great spectacle the same thing as a great play?

This Broadway season offers a convenient study in contrast. "Angels in America" is also a two-part marathon, crawling with incident and dotted with stage magic, but its stature as one of the last century's great pieces of stage literature lies more in its perceptive depths than its dazzling surfaces. Profound or not, though, "Harry Potter" is inarguably gripping theater, in part because the material's antiquated trappings—wands, owls, capes, staircases, spell books—make an ideal fit for the old-fangled storytelling traditions of the stage.

With a script by Jack Thorne (based on a story he concocted with Potter's creator, J. K. Rowling, and the show's director, John Tiffany), "Harry

Potter and the Cursed Child" is both a sequel to Rowling's iconic seven-book series about the precocious boy wizard and a canny rehash of many of its tropes. Like the new "Star Wars" films, it rewards but does not require intimate foreknowledge of the canon, as it spends considerable time revisiting key moments of its own legend—in this case, literally. The vehicle of teen rebellion chosen by Harry Potter's pouty son, Albus, is to travel back in time to right a wrong from his dad's past. This allows the show to rifle back and forth through the chronology of Harry's Hogwarts adventures. There are some new faces—Albus's bestie is Scorpius, the son of Harry's old rival, Draco Malfoy, and a Goth girl named Delphi—as well as a gallery of familiars: Harry's old pals Ron and Hermione, and Dumbledore, McGonagall, Snape, Voldemort.

Those among us for whom that list of names is talismanic make up the show's obvious target audience. But as that is a not insignificant portion of the population, the show's generous "fan service" hardly feels like a geeks-only niche effort. And any who aren't Potterheads going in are likely

What theme park, let alone stage play, delivers this much entertainment value?



to be converted, at least for most of the show's running time.

Thorne's script, like Rowling's books, strives beyond fantasy and fable to plumb its characters' humanity, with mixed results. Best is the show's portrait of the joys and trials of friendship, in large part due to Anthony Boyle's show-stealing performance as Scorpius. Less successful are efforts to mine the childhood trauma of orphan Harry (played gamely by Jamie Parker) in a few too many scenes rife with unearned earnestness. And in its last quarter the script strains the edges of credulity, even for its fantastical genre, and the final showdown has some of the ritual exhaustion of most action films.

Ultimately this "Harry Potter" may be a bit too much of a good thing, but at these prices, that is hard to begrudge. If every show were this fully realized, Broadway—plays, musicals, theme park rides and all—would be better for it.

Rob Weinert-Kendt, an arts journalist and editor of *American Theatre* magazine, has written for *The New York Times* and *Time Out New York*.

The rise of black women in television

In April, ABC aired the final episode of "Scandal," starring Kerry Washington as Olivia Pope. The series, created by Shonda Rhimes in 2012, became a cultural phenomenon, prompting various popular hashtags and peaking in the ratings at No. 8 among all prime-time broadcast series in the 2014-15 season. The casting of Washington was also the first time in 40 years that a network drama starred a black actress.

Thanks to Rhimes, "Scandal" has paved the way for other shows featuring black women, both on and off the screen.

Lena Waithe, an actress, writer and producer, first came to prominence for her acting and writing on the Netflix series "Master of None." Along with Aziz Ansari, Waithe co-wrote one of the show's most successful episodes, "Thanksgiving," for which the 33-year-old won an Emmy for Outstanding Writing for a Comedy Series—the first time a black woman has won in this category. This past January, "The Chi," a coming-of-age drama set in South Side Chicago created and executive-produced by Waithe, premiered on Showtime. Waithe, who was born

in Chicago, told *Vanity Fair*: "I wanted to tell a story about the world that was from a person who lived there, and I think that's the problem. I think people critique the city too much, and I really wanted to show the people who lived there."

Then there is the ABC hit "black-ish," a comedy about African-American parents raising their children in a white neighborhood, starring Tracee Ellis Ross. Last year, she won a Golden Globe award for leading actress in a comedy series, the first time a black woman won in that category since 1983.

The characters created by Shonda Rhimes, Lena Waithe and many others have allowed audiences to further understand what it means to be a black woman in the United States. Jasmyn Lawson, a black social coordinator in Los Angeles, is hopeful. "I love seeing black women who are so, 'that's so me' and black women characters who are like others that I know," Ms. Lawson tells **America**. "This moment in TV feels personal, and I hope it continues."

Joi Childs is a brand marketer and film critic. Twitter: @jumpedforjoi.



Kerry Washington, Lena Waithe and Issa Rae
(Images: ABC/Mitch Haaseh, Netflix, Anne Marie Fox/HBO; iStock, Composite: America)

God Gives the Increase

Readings: Ez 17:22-24, Ps 92, 2 Cor 5:6-10, Mk 4:26-34

An invasive vine called kudzu thrives throughout the southern United States. The Department of Agriculture brought it to the United States from Japan in the early 20th century to stabilize eroding hillsides. The vines grow exceptionally fast and produce dense vegetation that protects loose soil from water and wind but also blocks sunlight from anything that tries to grow below it. Lacking any predators or natural competition, kudzu will rapidly smother shrubs, trees, rocks and even houses and cars. In the course of only a few years, Kudzu's range expanded throughout the Southeast. Only the drier climate farther west and the colder winters farther north halted its expanse. It is, as one author described it, the "vine that ate the South."

Jesus has a plant like this in mind in his parable of the mustard seed. From the tiniest of seeds comes a plant that can grow anywhere from six feet to eight feet in height and is strong enough to accommodate the nests of birds. More important, mustard plants were, according to Pliny's *Natural History*, extraordinarily hardy and difficult to control. Pliny warned that mustard left unattended would quickly take over an entire garden. The symbol Jesus proposes, then, does not just describe a kingdom that grows to great size in spite of a small start, but one that is also resilient and ever-expanding. Destroy it, and it will sprout up again quickly. Very soon, all evidence of the disruption vanishes under ever-greater waves of new growth.

Jesus referred to seeds in a number of his parables. Although he was not a farmer and his first disciples were mostly fishermen, he found important metaphors in the mysteries of planting and growth. Many scholars agree that in the parable of the mustard seed Jesus consciously drew on Ezekiel 17, a portion of which appears as this Sunday's first reading, but he replaced Ezekiel's imposing cedar tree with something that grew much more quickly. Ezekiel's cedar may have symbolized a majestic and ancient Israel, but it was also a plant that grew slowly and was all too easily toppled. The kingdom that Jesus revealed grew fast, recovered quickly from damage and flourished anywhere it sprouted.

'He would sleep and rise night and day and the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how' (Mk 4:27)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

What mustard seeds transformed your life?

How do you distinguish God's action from your own?

When did you trust God's mysterious action? What happened?

Jesus also called attention to the mysterious way seeds sprout and grow. That something so tiny could give rise to something so much larger than itself suggested divine activity. After sowing, a farmer had little more to do until harvest. "Through it all the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how." The disciples of both Jesus' day and Mark's needed a reminder that the success of their mission was in God's hands, not their own. Their cooperation was important for planting and harvest, but the growth came from divine power.

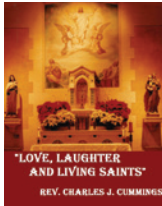
Jesus' disciples today also need to trust in the promise of small beginnings and in the power of grace. The kingdom contains as much mystery as a tiny seed, and its growth is as inexorable as kudzu. Many of us dream great dreams for the church and the human community, but the kingdom is ultimately God's dream, not ours. Our role is to till and sow and then look on in wonder as God brings it to fruition.

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

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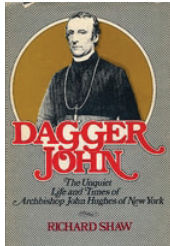
LOVE, LAUGHTER & LIVING SAINTS

Short Stories of Catholic School Days & 50 Years of Parish Happenings, by the Rev. Charles J. Cummings, retired priest, Diocese of Scranton, Pa. Book and preview available: Amazon paperback, \$12.95; Nook or Kindle e-book device \$4.99.



DAGGER JOHN:

The Unquiet Life and Times of Archbishop John Hughes of New York, by Richard Shaw. Paulist Press. Available on Amazon.



“Everyone should read ‘Dagger John’... by Fr. Richard Shaw.... It’s a treasure... reminding us of what it was like to be Catholic, and even worse, Irish Catholic a century and a half ago in New York.”
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God Has Compassion

Readings: Is 49:1-6, Ps 139, Acts 13:22-26, Luke 1:57-80

“Each saint is a mission,” Pope Francis writes in “Rejoice and Be Glad,” “planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel.” This is true for every disciple of Christ. We are not *on* mission, we *are* a mission from God, sent to make the world holy.

The mission of Israel was to imitate God’s holiness: “Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell them: Be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy” (Lv 19:2). Ezekiel believed this imitation revealed God’s holiness to the world. “Through you I will manifest my holiness in the sight of the nations” (Ez 20:41). This mission started before birth, as this week’s responsorial psalm proclaims: “You knit me in my mother’s womb.” The reading from Isaiah expands on this, teaching that a person’s name reveals the mission God has planned.

“John is his name.” *Yehohanan* means “The LORD is gracious; the LORD has compassion.” Gabriel’s announcement reveals that God had planned John’s mission even before the child was conceived. Describing John’s mission

(Lk 3:1-20), Luke specifically recounts John’s command that the newly baptized are to reflect divine compassion in their own lives, “Whoever has two tunics should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise” (Lk 3:11). John’s preaching rings of Leviticus, “Be compassionate, for I am compassionate, says the LORD!”

John’s life offers two lessons. First, awareness comes in stages. When Jesus appeared in a violent and miserly world, not many people would have found him without help. John was the help God offered. John’s preaching inspired *metanoia*, a word that means both “repentance” and “transformation of the mind.” This transformation centered on the belief that compassion was stronger than hate. The nation of Israel may have vexed God with their sins, but God was ready to overlook them and move on. Similarly, sins by neighbor against neighbor might have hardened people’s hearts to one another; but just as God was ready to ignore Israel’s sins, so the time had come for the Israelites to do the same. John successfully inspired this transformation, and in so doing, prepared Israel for Jesus’ more radical instruction to love one’s enemy. In discipleship today, we must never forget the value of such “in between” stages that lead toward Gospel holiness.

Second, John reveals the role of the desert. “He was in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel.” John found God’s grace in the desert, as all Israel had done before him. God’s grace appeared there in stark relief, as John learned the ways that the desert provided clothing, food and shelter. John found an empty land and made it a place in which the multitudes encountered divine grace. Just so, we must pay attention to the grace active in our own deserts. Those places in our lives and our world that might seem to hold no promise may in fact contain the grace that can turn the hearts of many to Christ. Like John, we must reside there until God speaks the word of compassion that God formed our lives to embody.

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

“He was in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel.” (Lk 1:80)



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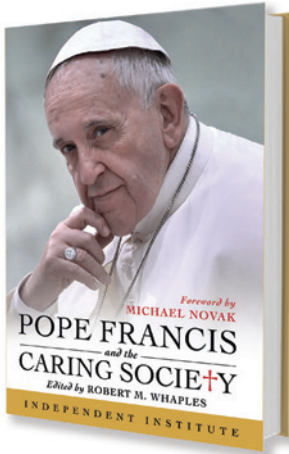
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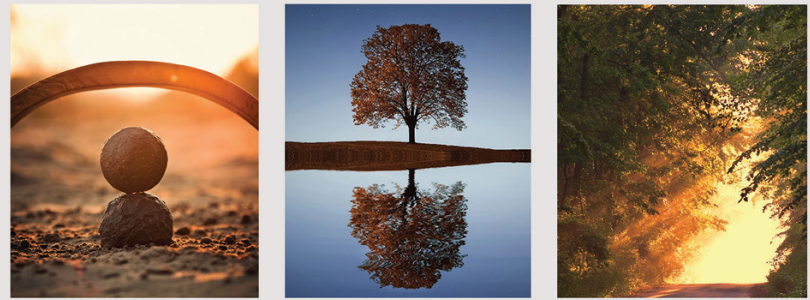
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A Haven for Healing

Fighting modern slavery in the Philippines

By Cecilia Flores-Oebanda



In the 1970s, I was a young catechist in the city of Bacolod in the Philippines. During this time, when the country was under the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, my family and I were kept in captivity for four years. Under President Marcos's rule, the military cracked down on church workers who devoted their time to protesting and organizing for social justice issues.

During my years in captivity, I lived with women and girls who had been sexually abused, trafficked and exploited. I learned that slavery was not dead. It was present in the faces of all the abused girls and women I met who had been used for cybersex, trafficked and forced into abusive domestic work and prostitution.

I wondered: How can I say that I love God, when I fall short in doing good for others, especially for the least and the lost? How can I prove my belief if I cannot even offer myself as an instrument of God's love and justice?

In response I founded the Visayan Forum Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to helping marginalized communities in the Philippines. Through V.F.F., I established the Center of Hope. The building, which is located in Antipolo, is a safe haven for abused girls and women. At the center, victims are empowered with a holistic set of psychosocial restorative programs. They have access

to age-appropriate alternative educational opportunities, including home study programs, vocational training and life-skills seminars. Since its creation, the Center of Hope has also provided victims with the legal assistance to fight known sex traffickers.

Through many years of working with abused girls at the Center of Hope, I have learned that transforming them into survivors is a difficult job. I had to dig deeper into my faith and force it to grow to effectively help heal their broken souls. It is only with the grace of the Holy Spirit, who reveals the true gift of life through forgiveness, repentance and grace, that I inspire the girls to believe too.

I also realized that while we empower these young girls to seek justice against their perpetrators, we also teach them about inner healing and reconciliation. True healing results from coming to terms with mistakes in the past and overcoming anger, betrayal and self-blame. Facing these everyday challenges, I also felt weary and fragile. As a mother, I easily absorb the anger, frustration and confusion felt by the children.

Sometimes I am angry that these girls have been forsaken. But I cope by knowing that I can help them to find their life purpose. We are told in Scripture that "faith without works is dead" (Jas 2:26). I believe

the opposite is true as well: Our deeds must be done in the spirit of faith. And so, every day, I keep the faith so the girls might discover God in me and reflect his love through my life. I tell them that we are all God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do the good works that God prepared for us.

There are many success stories to celebrate at the Center of Hope. As they pursue their legal cases, many of the girls return to school. Others graduate from the home schooling and alternative learning systems provided at the center. Armed with new life skills, young women are able to find work at large companies. And today, survivors have returned home to their families with a new brand of hope and optimism for the future.

And for these lessons and struggles, I am grateful for having strengthened my faith in God—a faith enriched with action and action sustained by faith.

Cecilia Flores-Oebanda is the founder of the Visayan Forum Foundation Inc. and a human rights activist.

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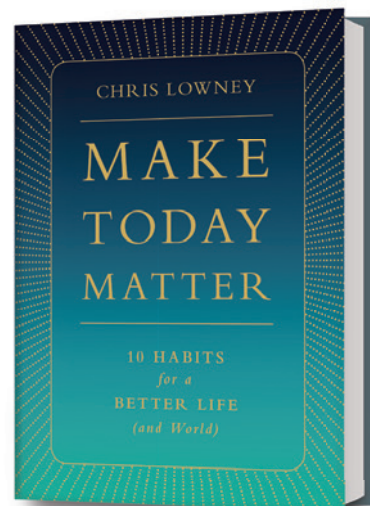
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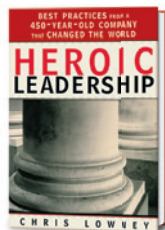
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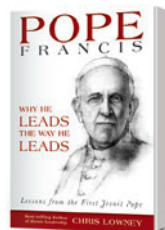


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