

# America

JANUARY 20, 2020

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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## Protecting the Least Among Us

The March for Life, the annual gathering of pro-life activists, clergy and civic leaders, will take place in Washington, D.C., on Friday, Jan. 24. In our pro-life commitment, **America** is allied with the sentiments expressed in the statements by the Society of Jesus of the United States, “Standing for the Unborn,” which was published in **America** on May 26, 2003, and “Protecting the Least Among Us,” published on Jan. 18, 2018. As is our annual custom, we republish excerpts from these texts here as an expression of our solidarity with the women and men who will march this month in the nation’s capital.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Matt Malone, S.J.  
 Twitter: @americaeitor.

As we Jesuits survey our culture, we cannot help but see abortion as part of the massive injustices in our society.... Since the January 22, 1973, Supreme Court decisions in *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*, more than 55 million American lives have been ended by abortion. Among all the justice issues we as a society should view with grave concern, abortion is a key social evil. We approach this topic as pastors, scholars, social activists, and educators. There is no part of our ministry that is untouched by the devastating consequences of abortion and there is, therefore, no environment in which we find ourselves that does not have some role to play in addressing this complex issue.

Pope Francis writes, “No one must say they cannot be close to

the poor because their own life-style demands more attention to other areas.... None of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and social justice” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 201). In the same way, the Society of Jesus today asks its members and collaborators to find ever new and creative ways to bring the protection of the unborn and solidarity with mothers in difficult situations into whatever mission they serve.

As we continue to engage on the topic of abortion, we wish to proceed in a way that rests on the following insights:

First, the foundation of the Catholic moral tradition is the dignity of the human person. The second key insight of Catholic moral life is that we are social beings and that solidarity matters. The social acceptance of abortion is a profound moral failure on both counts. It undermines the claim that every life is infused with God-given dignity, and it often pretends such decisions can be relegated to individual choice without having negative consequences on society as a whole. Sacred Scripture, the witness of early Christianity, Catholic social teaching, and the magisterium consistently teach that we cannot in good conscience ignore this tragedy.

Second, Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit history offer unique lenses through which to view the topic of abortion that should deepen our resolve to work in this area. The Spiritual Exercises

of St. Ignatius of Loyola are motivated from beginning to end by the laboring presence of God in creation and redemption. We are invited to co-labor, not because we are perfect, but because we are loved, and in recognizing God’s love for us we cannot but act on it. Jesuits throughout history have lived out this insight to transform the world, and we are asked to do the same today.

Third, beyond the actual content of “what” we say in making a case against abortion, it is critical to pay attention to “how” our defense of the unborn takes place. As St. Paul reminds us, we must “speak the truth with love” (Ephesians 4:15). Success will not come through force of will; it will only come by changing hearts. Therefore, we must always keep watch over our own hearts and ensure they are filled with the love and hope needed for this holy work.

Our Jesuit brother and our Holy Father, Pope Francis, highlights our concern: “Among the vulnerable for whom the Church wishes to care with particular love and concern are unborn children, the most defenseless and innocent among us. Nowadays efforts are made to deny them their human dignity and to do with them whatever one pleases, taking their lives and passing laws preventing anyone from standing in the way of this” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 213). May we always listen to the lives of the most vulnerable in our society and use our voice on their behalf.



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Pakistani Shiite Muslims demonstrate over the U.S. airstrike in Iraq that killed Iranian Revolutionary Guard General Qassem Soleimani, near the U.S. Consulate in Lahore, Pakistan, Jan. 3.

Cover: iStock

AP Photo/Mukhtar Khan

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## How Do You Build a Culture of Life in Your Community?

In conjunction with the annual March for Life and the lead editorial in this issue, we asked **America's** readers for examples of promoting a culture of life in individuals or groups, either by themselves or with their neighbors.

I've recently moved to Detroit as a Jesuit volunteer, and I've been amazed by the beauty, strength and community I've seen in the city. One small example of this is a weekly vigil held in Clark Park, in southwest Detroit, called the "We Stand With Our Neighbors Weekly Vigil." (They have a Facebook page.) This is a group of teachers, counselors and anyone in the community who feels called to stand in support of the immigrants living in the community.

This started shortly after the 2016 election when teachers heard from their immigrant students that they felt unsafe in the school and community. The teachers then decided that this public witness each and every Friday afternoon would be a good way to show support and love for immigrants. It is a perfect time, right when school is getting out. It is a high traffic area and many people walking by show their support with smiles and waves. This has shown me that people in my community care about the wholeness of life. They saw a need in their students, and they responded to it.

**William Myers**  
Detroit, Mich.

[We have] participated in 40 Days for Life in Portland, Me., and the annual Pro-Life Walk in Sanford, Me, sponsored by the local Knights of Columbus and we have written pro-life letters to the editor at the Portland Press-Herald.

**Daniel and Gloria Rooney**  
Sanford, Me.

We brought medical and dental care to an urban area that had neither. Additionally, we built in ways to address some social determinants of health like nutrition, health literacy, social isolation and transportation.

**Carolyn Capuano, H.M.**  
Canton, Ohio

I am a fat-acceptance activist. I have existed in my fat body and been very vocal about it, challenging the idea that the point of our bodies is to be perfect. It's not. And that is a very real part of a culture of life. Whether it's a child found to be "imperfect" in the womb or a person at the end of life, the culture of life says that it's not the state, size, ability

or health of our bodies that make us important—it's the fact that our bodies enable us to have relationships—with God, with others and with ourselves. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, we are obliged to regard our body as good (No. 364), and I bear witness to that in my large body. I take up the space I need to and invite others to do the same.

**Amanda Martinez Beck**  
Longview, Tex.

As a retired pediatric nurse practitioner, I always wished I did more. The simple thing I did do was congratulate young girls who came in pregnant. Those who gave birth to their babies were grateful for the positive support, as the most common response to a teenage pregnancy is negative.

**Janet Nagy Hanley**  
Milton, Mass.

We have helped build a culture of life in our community by seeing immigrants and refugees as our sisters and brothers, hosting them and inviting others to do so. We have hosted educational programs advocating gun safety. We have done analysis of poverty and promoted advocacy in light of our findings.

**Sister Martha Ann Kirk**  
San Antonio, Tex.

My daughter with Down syndrome is a eucharistic minister once a month.

**Jean Roma**  
Cotuit, Mass.

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## Creating Family-Friendly Workplaces

On Jan. 2, over 200 members of Congress called on the Supreme Court to reconsider and, “if appropriate,” to overrule *Roe v. Wade* when the justices decide this spring the fate of a Louisiana law that requires abortion providers to have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals. The call to reverse the landmark decision that legalized abortion nationwide will be echoed later this month by the thousands of students, religious leaders and activists attending the 47th annual March for Life in Washington, D.C. With the appointment of two pro-life justices to the Supreme Court by President Trump, members of the pro-life movement are hopeful that the long-awaited reversal or a significant weakening of *Roe* is close at hand. We share that hope.

But as the editors of this review wrote one year ago, “the pro-life movement’s work becomes more complicated, not less so, as the prospect of meaningful legal protections for unborn children dawns.” Because abortion will likely remain legal in many if not most states regardless of where the court comes down on *Roe*, building a culture that helps mothers and fathers to welcome children remains imperative. Support for working parents is an essential part of that culture, and Catholic organizations and business leaders should be at the forefront of efforts to create more family-friendly workplaces.

The Archdiocese of Chicago has been a leader in this regard. In 2016, it became the first U.S. diocese to offer 12 weeks of paid parental leave to its employees. In March 2019, the Diocese of Burlington, Vt., also began providing 12 weeks of paid leave to employees after a birth or adoption.

Bishop Christopher Coyne described his decision to offer parental leave as “one way we can help to build a culture of life.” But these dioceses are outliers—and not just in the Catholic Church. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 16 percent of workers in the private sector have access to paid leave.

There are steps short of fully funded family leave—which may be out of reach for many cash-strapped dioceses and nonprofits—that employers can take to ensure that parents do not have to choose between supporting their families financially and spending time with infants and young children. All workplaces can provide nursing mothers with paid breaks for breastfeeding or lactation rooms. Granting more flexible schedules or the option to work remotely allows parents to spend more time with children during the essential years of early development and can cut down on child care costs.

Executives and managers should also create a workplace culture that does not penalize or stigmatize those who choose to take advantage of the benefits available to parents. This is especially important for men—76 percent of whom return to work after one week or less following a birth or adoption, according to a 2014 study.

If *Roe v. Wade* is reversed, it will remain only a partial victory as long as people feel they have to choose between keeping their baby and supporting their family. But mothers and fathers should be able to feel secure in their decision to bring a child into the world without having to depend on the rulings of justices or the votes of politicians. Pro-life employers, in

both the church and the private sector, do not need to wait for a government mandate to begin building pro-family workplaces.

## King and Prophet

As we celebrate the life and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. this month, it is worth remembering that despite the intensely political nature of his ministry and activism, Dr. King was himself not a politician so much as a prophet. A minister and a preacher, his activism for civil rights was grounded in a profound understanding of biblical notions of justice and the irrevocable promise made by God to the people of the Exodus. But, as happened already during his life as well as in the half-century after his death, we seem forever to be trying to attach a convenient political label to him.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation under J. Edgar Hoover tried mightily throughout the 1950s and 1960s to identify King as a “Marxist/Leninist” and to link him to Communist political figures: Documents from 1968 released by the F.B.I. in 2017 described King as “a whole-hearted Marxist who has studied it [Marxism], believes in it and agrees with it, but because of his being a minister of religion, does not dare to espouse it publicly.” (Hoover also once publicly called King “the most notorious liar in the country.”)

On the other hand, King also faced criticism from figures like Malcolm X for not being combative enough in the struggle for civil rights for African-Americans, preaching methods of nonviolence when Malcolm X and others wanted a more assertive and



militant posture. “We want freedom now, but we’re not going to get it saying, ‘We Shall Overcome,’” Malcolm X once noted. “We’ve got to fight to overcome.” In recent years, some have claimed that King was actually a Republican. (In fact, King was not registered with either major political party.) Figures from all over the political spectrum, in other words, have long tried to turn Martin Luther King Jr. into something he was not.

These debates about King’s legacy miss the most important point: He was not a Marxist revolutionary, nor a political moderate, but a radical Christian. His commitment to the cause of civil rights (and his ultimate sacrifice for that cause) was evangelical: He believed that every human being, no matter the color of his or her skin, was born in the image of God—something that the great monotheistic religions have taught for 4,000 years. Nor was his commitment to non-violence simply a tactical move to achieve political aims. It was a deeply held belief born of those same religious convictions. We honor his memory and sacrifice best when we see the great man for the prophetic soul he was—not someone to co-opt to our own political aims.

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## With gas terminal, Ireland may fracture the common good

As an island nation, Ireland gives special significance to water. No town is more than three hours from the sea with its “timeless waves, bright, sifting, broken glass,” to quote the poet Seamus Heaney. Water is often the preamble to conversations among both friends and strangers, as the frequency of rain is lamented or inquiries are made of the next forecasted shower.

Given our respect for water resources, it came as something of a surprise when the Irish government added a liquefied natural gas (L.N.G.) terminal to the European Union’s list of Projects of Common Interest. The terminal is to be built on an estuary of the island’s longest river, the Shannon, a Special Area of Conservation, but the project is on hold awaiting the outcome of a court case over planning and environmental concerns. The project’s U.S. backers, New Fortress Energy, report the terminal will have the capacity to import from the United States more than six million gallons of “fracked” L.N.G. each day, which is equivalent to the amount of gas currently imported annually.

Climate activist groups and anti-fracking campaigners, including Mark Ruffalo and Cher, have pleaded for the Irish government to reconsider including this project on the P.C.I. list. Many have accused the Irish government of hypocrisy on the subject of fracked gas, a process it outlawed domestically in 2017. The process of fracturing rock to capture gas can lead to the escape of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, and contamination of the atmosphere, groundwater and soil. One scientist who opposes the Shannon River facility says that the carbon footprint of imported L.N.G. is

44 percent higher than that of coal.

The opposition to the Shannon L.N.G. facility is grounded in a realization that local actions have global implications. Fossil fuel emissions do not respect national borders. And the fracking for the L.N.G. imported by Ireland will primarily take place in Pennsylvania, increasing the risk of poisoning aquifers and water tables for low-income communities in that state.

How do we make sense of a country that protects its water supply by banning fracking within its own borders but is willing to contaminate waters in another country? Perhaps considering water as a common good provides a path to enlightenment.

Descriptions of water bookend the Bible. In the Creation story (Gn 2:13), “a river flows out of Eden to water the garden.” In his final description of a holy city within a new heaven and a new earth (Rv 22:1), John tells of “the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God.” Water is central to life-sustaining acts of God, like parting the Red Sea in Exodus 14, providing water to drink from the rock at Massah and Meribah (Ex 17:1-7) and serving as the medium for baptism (Rom 6:1-14).

Water, which is necessary to sustain life, must be understood as fundamental to any concept of the common good. In 2003, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace declared that “water is a good that must serve for the development of the whole person and of every person.” Central to this is the idea of a good being available to every person. For the Irish government to continue with the L.N.G. terminal on the basis of energy security for Irish people is to disregard the harm caused to people in Pennsylvania.

Defending his position during a parliamentary debate, the minister for climate action, Richard Bruton, argued that “we cannot, as a country, pick and choose which products we take based on their environmental profile.” But in the encyclical “*Pax in Terris*,” Pope John XXIII, describing mutual collaboration between states, differentiates between the common good of the nation-state and the common good of the entire human family:

We must bear in mind that of its very nature civil authority exists, not to confine men within the frontiers of their own nations, but primarily to protect the common good of the state, which certainly cannot be divorced from the common good of the entire human family (No. 98).

This is the crux of the issue. The Irish government’s insistence on importing fracked gas reveals the dark heart of neoliberalism, where democratically elected politicians are unable to refuse the provision of new markets for goods that have deleterious effects on the communities where the goods are extracted. But decisions made locally make a difference globally. The Catholic Church, in its insistence that water is a common good, is invoking a universal moral principle of profound political significance that hints at how we can engage this global issue from our local perspectives.

---

*Ciara Murphy is the environmental policy advocate in the Jesuit Center for Faith and Justice in Dublin, Ireland.*

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# After Boris gets Brexit done, what's next for Britain?

By Austen Ivereigh

Combining an appetite for power with ideological vagueness and counterintuitive alliances, the world's most successful election-winning machine has done it again. Just as the Tory squires in the 19th century made common cause with angry workers against the rising middle class and their new-fangled ideas, Boris Johnson's Conservative Party in December gained a thumping majority of seats in Parliament by winning over lifelong working-class Labour voters.

The Boris Johnson earthquake shattered the “red wall” of Labour strongholds across north Wales and in England's northwest, Midlands and northeast. “When someone walks into a polling booth, they're answering a question,” Isaac Levido, the 36-year-old Australian coordinator of Mr. Johnson's election campaign, later told journalists. “The successful campaign frames the questions that voters are asking. What was the question that Labour was asking?”

The Tories' question was clear: How can Britain best get Brexit “done”?

They knew Workington Man, as commentators described the Brexit- and now Johnson-voting working-class voter, because Mr. Johnson and his team had themselves mobilized Workington Man during the pro-Brexit campaign in 2016. They understood that lower-middle-class folk in small-town Britain had a very different perception of the state of the world than affluent and middle-class metropolitan voters.

Workington Man had many concrete aspirations and grievances—about the state of health care and schools, the cost of living and property, the state of the roads, the number of newcomers—that made their way into the Conservative manifesto “not just topic by topic, but almost word for word,” recalled one of its authors. So, too, did Workington Man's one overriding conviction: that only when the politicians got past Brexit could these problems be addressed.

Mr. Johnson's gnomish Anglo-Saxon mantra, “Let's get Brexit done,” was perfectly pitched. So too was his un-Tory-like spending list, promising dozens of hospitals and thousands of nurses, roads and railways in left-behind areas and pledging to raise up the lowly through tax cuts for the working poor and a higher living wage. He did it all with panache and a sense of fun, convincing Britons who wanted to believe it that far from being a horrendous self-inflicted wound, Brexit has opened the door to a wonderful new future.

Jeremy Corbyn, who led Labour to its worst rout since 1935, seemed more concerned with Palestinians and Venezuelans than with working-class “Leavers,” and his confused stance on Brexit seemed to them a betrayal.

After the election the new prime minister said it was vital for the Conservative Party to understand “the way in which we have changed the political map of this country” and to “answer the challenge that the British people have given us.” Mr. Johnson said he knew that many pencils had



AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth, Pool

“hovered” over the ballot paper, and he promised to repay the trust he had been shown by traditional Labour voters.

British politics over the next decade will be determined by the success or failure to fulfill that pledge.

After years of political stalemate and polarization, the three-week election campaign promised to be full of lies, bitterness and conflict. It did not disappoint. The campaigning “intensified and deepened the kind of obstructive and destructive tone of the politics of the past two years,” Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the archbishop of Westminster, said. But responsibility for the destructiveness fell not just

on the politicians. The cardinal blamed the print media, in particular, for feeding conflict and high emotion.

A big difficulty for U.K. Catholic voters concerned by the rise of nationalism was the shrinking of the space on the left for Christian conscience. While all the parties promised to boost support for pregnant mothers, Labour and the Liberal Democrats broke with the tradition that abortion be treated as a nonpartisan issue, pledging to decriminalize abortion up to birth if elected.

One of those caught off-guard by this change was Robert Ffello, a Catholic convert who was Labour M.P. for Stoke-on-Trent South from 2005 to 2017 but who, appalled by his party’s lurch to the left under Mr. Corbyn, had since joined the Lib-Dems. Selected as the Lib-Dem candidate in his old seat, Mr. Ffello—a prominent member of a bipartisan parliamentary pro-life group—was suddenly deselected days later after party grandees discovered his tweets opposing abortion and same-sex marriage. Mr. Ffello is now bringing a discrimination claim against the party, arguing that his views are mainstream religious convictions that are protected under the Equality Act 2010.

He wants an apology and reparation, but more broadly, he wants to defend what he sees as a fast-shrinking space for religious conviction in U.K. politics. “We should be encouraging people of faith to stand for election rather than giving them the message that they are not welcome,”

he told me, adding that “mainstream Christians” were increasingly treated as extremists.

Cardinal Nichols said that Mr. Ffello standing for the Lib-Dems “was almost a self-evident mismatch,” given the party’s views not just on abortion but in favor of giving recognition to what it called non-binary gender identities. And the cardinal agrees that his deselection illustrates the shrinking space for candidates with clear Catholic values.

Yet now that the Conservatives are looking to Workington Man, “who doesn’t think the same way” as the caucus of the Labour and Lib-Dem parties, the cardinal sees the chance of change: “That’s what’s new about this moment.” The party of the London metropolitan elite is now Labour, he points out, while “the Conservatives have moved to being much closer to the majority of the population, which would not share those high-level, liberal values that caused Robert Ffello to be pushed out.”

Mr. Ffello agreed, pointing to polling by the leading U.K. anti-abortion charity Right to Life that shows, he said, that “mainstream Catholic teaching is shared by very large proportions of the population who don’t think there should be abortion up to birth or on any grounds, and don’t like the Liberals and Labour pushing euthanasia.” Mr. Ffello’s own positions—socially conservative, center-left on social and economic matters—sat well with his working-class, Leave-voting Staffordshire constituency until he lost his seat to the Conservatives in 2017. Stoke-on-Trent Man went for the Tories, going blue as Labour went woke.

“Where the Conservatives under Boris Johnson appear to be, is where the vast majority of the population is,” said Mr. Ffello.

Conservatives now have 365 out of 650 seats, more than the other parties (Labour has 203; the Scottish National Party 48; Lib-Dems 11) combined. So expect swift passage of legislation through a suborned Parliament and getting Brexit “done”—at least Stage One—by Jan. 31. Expect, too, Parliament approving spending on what have become known as “red wall projects,” such as infrastructure investments in left-behind areas. But will Mr. Johnson’s broader ambition of resurrecting One-Nation Toryism succeed?

Britons are divided these days into many new tribes—and nations. The ongoing rise of pro-European Union Scottish nationalism, for example, threatens to split the union. Where Parliament’s dithering over Brexit was interpreted as dismissive of Workington Man, Mr. Johnson’s determination to Get Brexit Done is seen as dismissive of Scottish concerns—hence the S.N.P. taking 48 of the 59 seats north

of the border, which it will now use to press hard for a second independence referendum in order to remain in the European Union.

Consider, too, the split between the older, whiter and less-educated sectors of the population who voted Tory and the younger, educated and more mobile populations who stuck with Labour, especially in London. The latter are repelled by tough rhetoric on crime, hostility to migrants and the jingoism that has accompanied Brexit. As Mr. Johnson negotiates a new relationship with Europe—what Cardinal Nichols calls moving from Getting Brexit Done to Making Brexit Work—many believe that these tribal divisions can only sharpen.

But Cardinal Nichols is hopeful. Britain has, for now, the most stable government in Europe, which means it can move on from the stalemate and focus on pragmatic talks with Brussels, “looking at those factors in life,” the cardinal said, “which contribute to the common good, such as trade and security... research exchange with universities, all those things that make for a more rounded relationship with your neighbors.” He said the bishops will continue to press on issues such as the treatment of prisoners and the fate of refugees from outside the European Union, always asking if the intent and impact of policies prioritize the dignity of the person.

“What is there, potentially, is a refashioning of British politics, but so far it’s only a potential,” Cardinal Nichols said. Yet there is a chance to heal the fractures. “Now we have to learn to look each other in the eye and see the good,” he said.

The pain of the post-industrial areas has been heard. The Brexit revolt has succeeded. The prime minister’s promise to rebalance public spending and political focus from south to north, from rich to poor, from city to town—and thus attend to the sense of loss at social and economic change, to the existential displacement so many feel—is surely overdue. Much now depends on Mr. Johnson, not least his ability to keep open European markets for British goods. If he is sincere, “good on him,” said Mr. Ffello.

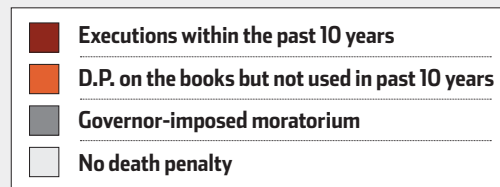
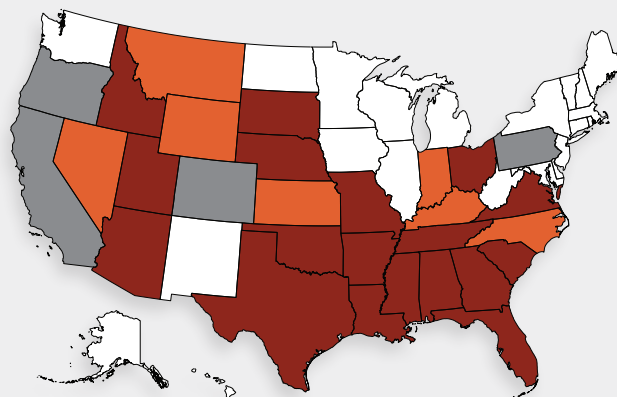
So I couldn’t resist a cheeky question. If Mr. Johnson protects life, spends on health care, raises the living wage and creates infrastructure and jobs for the north, does that mean the Catholic former Labour M.P. for Stoke-on-Trent South might find a home in Boris’s new national Conservatives?

Too soon to say, said Mr. Ffello. Like Stoke-on-Trent Man, he will be watching and waiting.

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Austen Ivereigh’s latest book is *Wounded Shepherd: Pope Francis’s Struggle to Convert the Catholic Church*, published by Henry Holt.  
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## New report shows decreased use of death penalty in U.S.



Use of the death penalty in the United States continues to decrease, according to a report released on Dec. 17 by the Death Penalty Information Center. The report said last year’s 22 executions were down from the previous year’s 25. The report also noted that death sentences have declined by more than 85 percent and executions by more than 75 percent from their peaks in the 1990s.

Last June, the U.S. bishops voted to revise the death penalty section of the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, reflecting a change made by Pope Francis and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2018 to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which now states that the “death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person.”

The report said that 32 states have now either abolished the death penalty or not carried out an execution in more than a decade, a strong contrast with the federal government’s recent announcement that it would resume executions after a 16-year hiatus. Seven states carried out executions last year: Texas, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Dakota and Missouri.

The report also highlighted this year’s Gallup poll results about the death penalty that showed most Americans support life imprisonment over the death penalty, revealing a shift in the majority opinion on this issue for the first time in 34 years.

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Carol Zimmermann, Catholic News Service

# Threats to seal of confession intensify as Australian mandatory reporting laws go into effect

Archbishop Mark Coleridge of Brisbane, center, and other Australian bishops depart from the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome on June 25, 2019, after concelebrating Mass during their “ad limina” visit to the Vatican.

The question of whether Catholic priests should be made to report child abuse revealed during confession continues to cause controversy in Australia as nationwide mandatory reporting laws move closer to reality. Mandatory reporting laws are the individual responsibility of each state and territory government. They require people in certain professions, such as teachers, to report suspected child abuse to government authorities.

The Royal Commission Into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, in its final report in 2017, recommended that Catholic priests be added to the list of mandatory reporters. Canon law, of course, forbids priests to disclose what a penitent says during confession and warns that a priest “who directly violates the sacramental seal incurs a *latae sententiae* [automatic] excommunication reserved to the Apostolic See.”

In October 2018, the state of South Australia became the first jurisdiction to remove exemptions for priests from mandatory reporting when information about child abuse is revealed during confession. In September 2019, several more Australian states and territories altered their mandatory reporting legislation in a similar way.

Australia’s Council of Attorneys-General met in November last year to harmonize the approach to mandatory reporting for ministers of religion. According to a communique released after the meeting, all states and territories have now agreed on a set of principles for their laws that would require priests to break the confessional seal.

“Confessional privilege cannot be relied upon to avoid a child protection or criminal obligation to report beliefs, suspicions or knowledge of child abuse,” the council said.

In response to the changing laws, Archbishop Mark Coleridge, president of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, reiterated the conference’s support for na-

tionally consistent child protection reporting regimes but argued that the removal of legal protection for the seal of confession “would be ineffective, counterproductive and unjust: ineffective because abusers do not seek out confession and certainly would not seek it out if they knew that their offenses would be reported.”

Indeed, one legal academic suggested that it would be “wishful thinking to believe child molesters would disclose their offending in confession if priests were legally obliged to break confidentiality.”

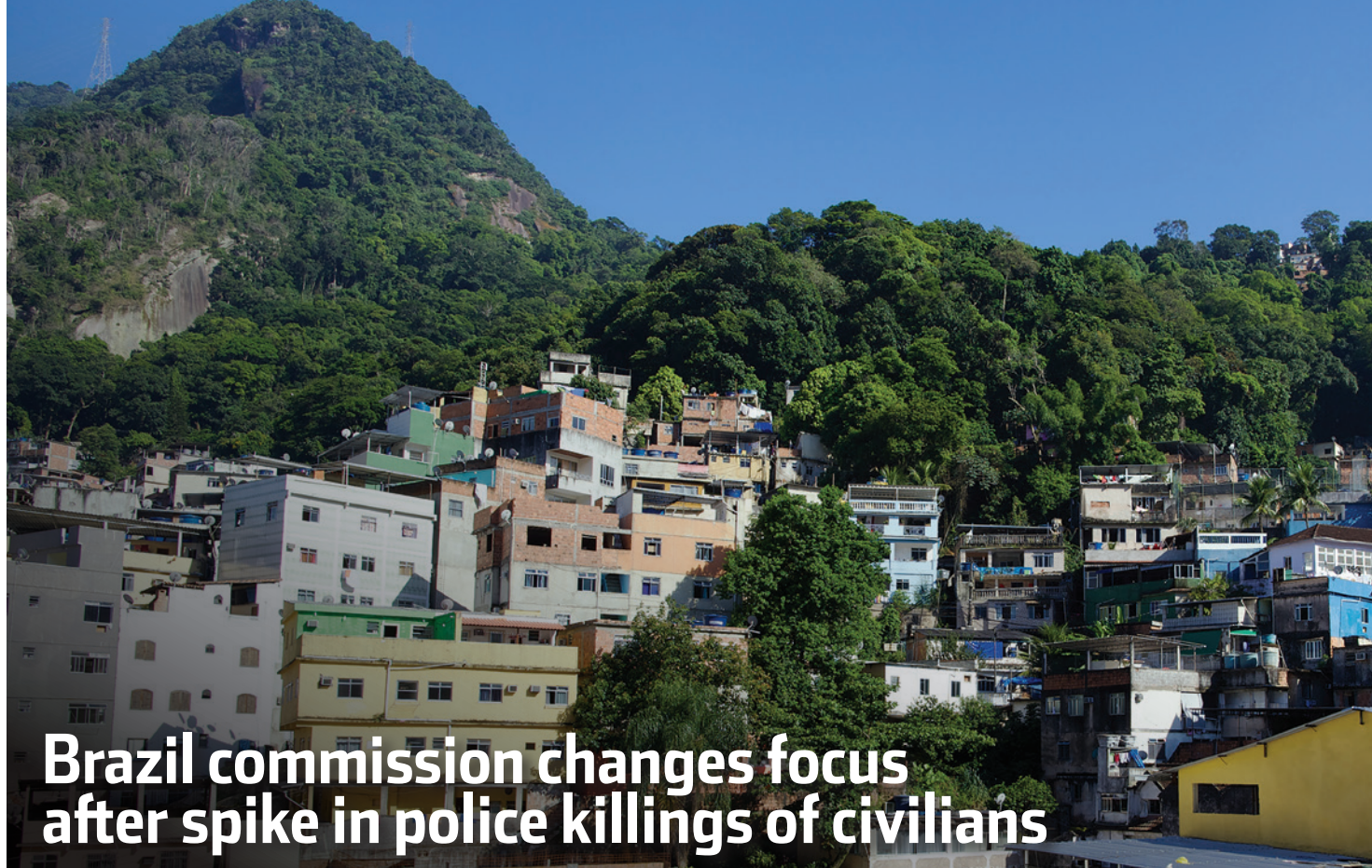
“Arguably, maintaining the seal might prevent molesters from committing further acts of sexual abuse. During the confession, a priest can encourage the abuser to seek psychiatric help or come forward to the police,” said Hadeel Al-Alosi, a lecturer in law at Western Sydney University.

The Australian bishops’ conference has recently received some concessions from the federal government in the form of proposed religious freedom laws. Among other provisions, these laws would allow hospitals, providers of care for the aged and other services run by the church to employ people based on their faith in order to preserve the “religious mission and organizational ethos” of organizations.

But many in the church see demands to lift the confessional seal as an attack on religious freedom. Earlier this year, the Vatican argued that “any political action or legislative initiative aimed at breaching the inviolability of the sacramental seal would constitute an unacceptable offense against the liberty of the church.”

How far Australian priests will go in defying the new laws and whether the church will take the fight to the courts remains to be seen.

Ben Wilkie contributes from Victoria, Australia.  
Twitter: @benwilkie.



## Brazil commission changes focus after spike in police killings of civilians

Between January and October, 1,546 people were killed by police in the State of Rio de Janeiro, most of them during enforcement operations in favelas—the poor neighborhoods, often on hillsides, of precarious houses and shacks that are home to at least 1.4 million Rio residents. The increasing number of fatal acts by police are among the emerging concerns addressed by the archdiocesan commission created 42 years ago to respond to the needs of Rio’s slum dwellers.

“Our main focus has always been housing, but violence and death are capable of putting an end to any idea of [human] dignity that we may be [defending],” said Msgr. Luiz Antônio Pereira Lopes, who coordinates the pastoral commission, called the Pastoral of Favelas. “Many relatives of police victims have come to us in the past months, hoping that we can help their voices to be heard by the authorities.”

Unfortunately, according to the Monsignor, that is not the case any more. Since the state’s new governor, Wilson Witzel, assumed office last January, dialogue between human rights organizations like the pastoral commission and the government has been completely cut off. Mr. Witzel was elected in 2018 on a platform promoting zero tolerance of crime in Rio, promising not to punish police officers who “shoot down” suspects carrying rifles, a regular presence in

many of the favelas that are controlled by criminal gangs.

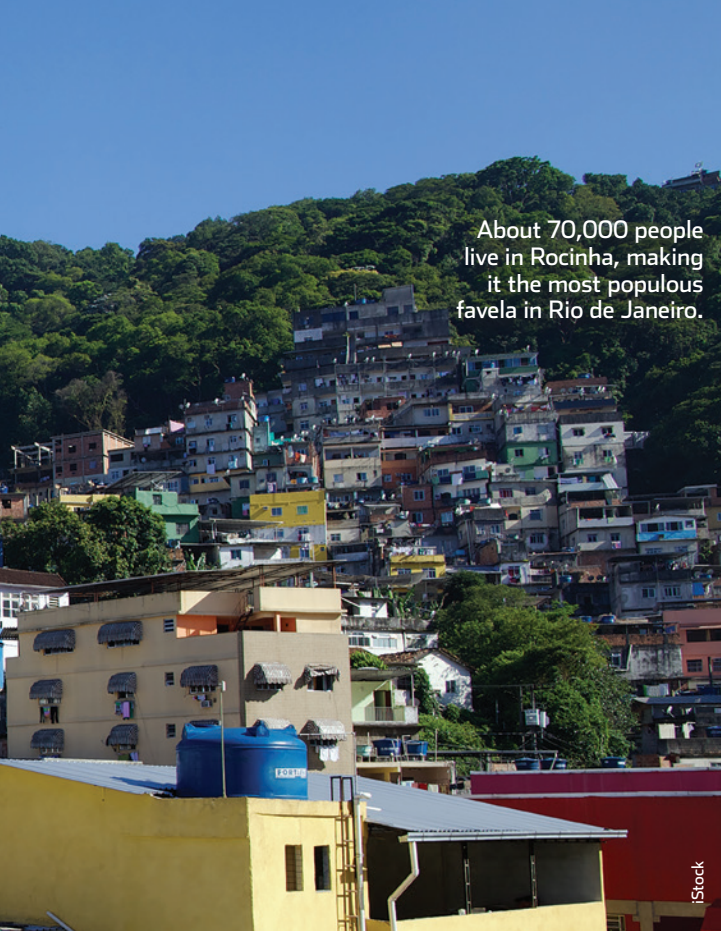
At the beginning of 2019, police intensified interdiction operations against drug traffickers in the favelas, and a record number of deaths soon followed. In July 2019 alone, 194 people were killed by police, the highest number for a single month since the government started monitoring police killings in 1998.

At the end of August, Mr. Witzel’s Civil Police secretary, Marcus Braga, in an interview with TV Globo, acknowledged the trend of an increasing number of civilian deaths caused by the police. “It’s a high number; it’s not the number we desire,” he said.

According to Mr. Braga, measures such as better coordination of the Civil Police with the Military Police and increasing attention to intelligence gathering should reduce police killings in the future. But in September, Mr. Witzel affirmed again that criminals would be “hunted” in the favelas, and he terminated a bonus system that had been in use to reward police officers who took precautionary measures to reduce the number of civilian deaths during confrontations.

According to the historian Mario Brum, who has studied the role of Pastoral of Favelas in Rio life, the commission’s power “is much limited” when it comes to concrete action concerning police violence. “It’s up to the church as





About 70,000 people live in Rocinha, making it the most populous favela in Rio de Janeiro.



Ted van der Zalm, founder of Wells of Hope.

CNS photo/Spirit Juice, courtesy Knights of Columbus

## GOODNEWS: Bringing clean water and more to Guatemala

The only water available to the people of Santa María in Jalapa, Guatemala, was infested with bacteria, and women and girls would spend as much as eight hours each day walking to the water and hauling it home for their families.

Enter Ted and Miriam van der Zalm, who founded Wells of Hope in 2004 to bring clean water, education and basic health care to villages like Santa Maria. Ted is a member of the Knights of Columbus Council 1394, in St. Catharines, Ontario.

The couple had a decade of experience drilling water in Africa and brought their knowledge to Guatemala. At the time, they had four young children.

“We said, ‘Look, God has blessed us with a beautiful home. Maybe the home was not meant just for us. Let’s go to the bank with our home, get a loan against our home; we’ll buy a drilling rig,’” Mr. van der Zalm remembered.

The van der Zalm family drove their rig from Ontario to Guatemala and started drilling. The well they created now produces more than 100 gallons of water a minute, with a tap at every household’s front door. Mr. Van der Zalm said the result is life-changing.

“The women will never have to walk for water again; they will never have to feel the pain in their backs again. They will have water at the front door—fresh, pure drinking water 24/7.”

Because of Wells of Hope, today more than 50,000 residents in Santa María, Jalapa and Jutiapa have 14 new wells, 19 newly constructed schools and dental care. The Knights of Columbus in Canada and the United States have helped raise more than \$1 million to purchase new drilling equipment for Wells of Hope.

Andrew Butler, *Catholic News Service*.

a whole to have a stronger institutional stance on this,” Mr. Brum said.

According to Monsignor Lopes, violent police operations—many times snipers shoot from an armored helicopter that flies over the favelas—have been accompanied by a similarly rough treatment of slum residents by the housing agents of the city government.

The vast majority of Rio’s favelas began as informal occupations of municipal land, usually along hillsides that are not desirable property for formal development, and their residents lack deeds and construction permits. “Many residents have been complaining that city government officials want to expel them from the favelas, claiming that they were built in areas with risk of landslide,” said Monsignor Lopes.

“But residents don’t want to leave. They have a feeling of belonging to those places. What they want is the regularization and urbanization of the favelas,” said Luiz Severino da Silva, a pastoral worker in the slums. Some residents have lived in their favelas since the 1960s, he said.

Eduardo Campos Lima contributes from São Paulo, Brazil.

# SAVE SOFTGRACE

## Glimpses of the kingdom in California

By Jim McDermott

California is nowhere near as homogenous politically as it is usually represented. Yes, they have elected Jerry Brown as governor four times. But in the last 50 years, Californians have also elected Ronald Reagan and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Of the roughly 20 million registered voters in California as of earlier this year, only 43 percent are registered Democrats. Up and down the coast, once you get away from the Pacific Ocean, our state votes a pretty solid block of red.

It is also not a state free of significant problems: the concentration of wealth, the lack of affordable housing, the gentrification of poor and diverse neighborhoods, the recent passage of laws allowing euthanasia, the overcrowding of prisons, the traffic.

But when it comes to both the state government and that of the city of Los Angeles, in which I live, one finds in general a concern for groups and issues for which other states and our nation's current administration seem to have little time. Environmental regulations are common sense here. So are protections for the undocumented, for minorities and for transgender youth.

My work for **America** has taken me all over the state, from its northern border to its southern and from the Pacific coast to the state's eastern borders. And again and again I have watched Californians find a way beyond the categories they are supposed to occupy, the divisions they are told lie between them.

Forward movement can be halting or it can completely stall. But in a world that keeps insisting we all

have to hunker down and hold our own close because we are all so polarized, California has continued to offer glimpses of the kingdom that Jesus imagined, a feast of friendship where all have a seat at the table.

### **Where Everybody Knows Your Name**

The first time I met Ron Pacheco in the basement of Most Holy Redeemer Church in San Francisco, he was in a simple blue sweater and gray sweatpants. His brown eyes had a wry, seen-it-all quality. Whether that was from a lifetime of work in human resources or almost two decades spent running the parish's Wednesday night suppers for people living on the streets, it seemed like there was little that might surprise him.

A graduate of the University of San Francisco, Mr. Pacheco had been away from the Catholic Church for 40 years when the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, happened. Two weeks later, without really understanding why, he started going back to Mass.

The Wednesday night supper was in its infancy at that point. The parish had had a tradition of prayer and a simple meal on the Wednesdays of Lent. On the way to one such event a parishioner found himself almost walking over some people who were clearly living on the street. So he invited them along. And a new parish tradition began.

Mr. Pacheco recalled there was initially a fair bit of controversy about the suppers. "This is a great parish, except for the Wednesday radicals," he remembered



istock

someone telling him. “We don’t want them messing up our church”—a beautiful space with lots of wood, cream-colored walls and a simple altar surrounded by pews.

The parish sits in the heart of the city’s Castro District, which in the 1960s and ’70s was the most famous gay neighborhood in the world. At the time, most parishioners wanted nothing to do with their L.G.B.T.Q. neighbors; the hostility could be palpable, even violent. Then the dual factors of the aging of the parish and the AIDS crisis together shook loose the possibility of something new. What emerged was a community of welcome and friendship that Father Anthony McGuire would come to call “the gays and the grays.” Today the parish commemorates this history with a scroll listing all the parishioners who have died of AIDS.

The idea of the Wednesday suppers followed a similar path from animosity to embrace. “We used to talk about ‘those’ homeless,” Mr. Pacheco recalls. “Now they’re ‘our’ homeless.”

The suppers have received widespread recognition, including praise from Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and The National Catholic Reporter, and have been lauded for the way the structure of the meal continues to inspire that same sense of community and acceptance of people on the margins that the parish built in the ’70s and ’80s. Each of the event’s 100 diners sits with the same group of people every week. They learn one another’s habits and encounter one another with the familiarity of friends. At one table when one of


their party shows up, the others give a happy cheer.

Likewise, rather than the standard single-file serving line, which tends to put those in line in the position of beggars asking for food, the format for the Wednesday suppers is a four-course sit-down meal. Each course goes out to all the tables at the same time, so that no table feels of lesser value. The volunteer servers are laser-focused on helping the diners feel welcome and at home. One night the volunteer Bill Jordan, a middle-aged man with the kind of easy graciousness that makes everyone feel important, described for me my table’s food preferences and what issues I should be aware of among those seated there. “We wanted it to feel like they’re going to grandma’s for dinner,” Mr. Pacheco explained. And it does.

I went in thinking I would spend my time mostly talking to the diners, but that proved intrusive. The whole point of the evening is to give the diners some space of their own. So I stayed with the volunteers, who between courses sit facing the room, eating together while they scan their tables for needs.

Many of these people have been working at the supper for years; they are lawyers and chief executive officers, grandmothers and nuns, former priests and deacons in training. And it is clear that being a part of this is important for them, too. “Doing this keeps me sober,” one young man confided to me. Another, a tall figure with a gray beard who told me jokes about the likelihood of Jesuits getting into heaven, explained to me what this is all really about.

“[Catholicism] is about how you live. This,” he said,



# Again and again I have watched Californians find a way beyond the categories they are supposed to occupy. ●●

gesturing to the diverse crowd in front of us, giving and receiving grace, “this is how we live.”

At various times throughout the night people at the table I was serving called for me by name. Everyone here, servers and served, wears a nametag; it is another way of creating that sense of community.

It stayed with me for days, that experience of a stranger at a table calling me by my name. He said it with such familiarity, like we were friends. And somehow in this parish to which I had never been before, whose roots have been fed over and over both by pain and welcome, conflict and liberation, it felt like we were. I felt as if I, too, was known.

## **Blessings of the Past**

Like many things in Northern California, the origins of Big Basin Redwoods State Park find their foundation in the California Gold Rush. Just one year after gold was discovered in 1848, San Francisco had exploded in population from roughly 1,000 residents to 25,000. The city that emerged was built from the area’s forests, where two men on platforms six feet above the base would saw for days at individual *Sequoia sempervirens* trees, more commonly known as redwoods. Some of these trees were 50 feet across and as tall as the Statue of Liberty. The men would then section each tree into pieces so that they could be drawn by oxen to wagons, which took the wood to boats waiting below.

It is hard to imagine such an arduous process posing any real threat to the tens of thousands of acres of redwoods in the mountains of Northern California. And yet within 40 years the area had 28 sawmills processing between 11 million and 17 million redwoods yearly to accommodate the city’s now 230,000-plus people.

Many of the California redwood trees range from 1,000 to 2,500 years old, making them among the oldest life forms on our planet. And the stillness of a redwood forest is unique, profound. Walking through Big Basin, you occasionally hear the crack of something happening in a tree,

the whicker of a bird taking flight. A breeze plays among the leaves high above, while tiny russet-colored chipmunks, blending in with the shade-dappled paths, dash past occasionally. But the presence of the trees absorbs it all into silence.

The loggers did not see any of that. For them and others the focus was growth, prosperity and opportunity. In just 50 years they cut down 75 percent of the old-growth redwoods.

Then in 1899 a photographer from San Jose, Andrew P. Hill, got an assignment to cover the site of a recent forest fire. One of the redwoods he photographed was on the property of an obnoxious dairy farmer who told Mr. Hill he planned to raze his forest for wooden railroad ties. Mr. Hill later wrote, “[t]he thought flashed through my mind that these trees, because of their size and antiquity, were among the natural wonders of the world, and should be saved for posterity.”

When he returned to San Jose, Mr. Hill gathered prominent citizens, including scientists, lawyers, the president of Stanford University and members of the San Jose Women’s Club. A group of them traveled into what is now the national park to survey the situation. While there they formed the *Sempervirens Club*, a reference to the redwood’s scientific classification, the “ever-living” *Sequoia*.

Passing the hat among themselves, the group generated \$32; it would become the state’s first land trust. And in 1901, the state legislature approved what is today California’s oldest state park.

Many times when I have come north for work I have taken a day to visit Big Basin. When you live in a place as barren of leafy trees and shade as Los Angeles, just standing in an actual forest is akin to stumbling upon a lake in the desert. You cannot quite believe it is real, or how desperately thirsty for it you have been. I can feel it in my skin somehow when I am there, every pore soaking up the quiet and life of this place while the leaves above soak up the light.

There is also something deeply reassuring about being in the presence of life that is so ancient. To be around these trees is like sitting in prayer with a group of old monks; no matter how serious the cares you bring, in their presence it all falls away. You follow their gaze into the simplicity of eternity.

“The redwoods, once seen, leave a mark or create a vision that stays with you always,” wrote John Steinbeck in *Travels With Charley: In Search of America*. “They are not like any trees we know, they are ambassadors from another time.” They have a kind of consciousness of their own, one



Most Holy Redeemer Church in San Francisco has a history of welcoming those on the margins, whether those suffering from AIDS or those experiencing homelessness. A scroll in the church lists all parishioners who have died of AIDS.

Redwoods often occur in a ring, new trees sprouting from the roots of a fallen one in a circular, almost familial pattern. It is a potent image for the community these trees have inspired. About his campaign, Mr. Hill later said he had believed “there was a latent force, which, when awakened to a noble cause, would immediately respond, and perhaps arouse the press of the whole country.” Those forces, once roused, continued to ripple out. U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt visited the redwoods a year later. He was so taken with them that he threw out most of the content of his two addresses simply to talk about the trees.

“We should see to it that no man for speculative purposes or for mere temporary use exploits the groves of great trees,” he said in Santa Cruz. “Where the individuals and associations of individuals cannot preserve them, the state, and, if necessary, the nation, should step in and see to their preservation.” Roosevelt, a Republican, would go on to establish 230 million acres of public lands during the course of his presidency, including 150 million for national forests.

“We should keep the trees as we should keep great stretches of the wildernesses,” he said, “as a heritage for our children and our children’s children. Our aim should be to preserve them for use, to preserve them for beauty, for the sake of the nation hereafter.”

### Small Stories Writ Large

In the very back of the massive exhibition hall of the San Diego Convention Center, which during the week of Comic-Con International each year is overwhelmed by both vendors and attendees, some wearing costumes that take up much of the space in the paths leading up and down the floor, there is a young woman with her head down at a

that contemplates the world in units of centuries. We rise and vanish before them like mayflies.

And yet in 1901, this forest’s survival was in doubt to the very last minute. The day before the final vote in the state capital of Sacramento, which reports were suggesting was doomed to fail, Robert E. Kenna, S.J., president of Santa Clara College and a future commissioner of the park, asked his nephew, Mayor James D. Phelan of San Francisco, to meet with Mr. Hill. That night Mr. Phelan agreed to guarantee \$50,000 to the lumber owners if the state legislature agreed to spend \$250,000 for the purchase of the land.

At midnight, Mr. Hill walked three miles from the meeting at Santa Clara to the San Jose newspaper offices, where the editor in chief agreed to print immediately a special edition of the paper headlining the guarantee. Mr. Hill then took the 4:30 a.m. train to Sacramento and had copies of that edition placed on each legislator’s desk. It made all the difference; the bill passed unanimously. Had it failed, the old-growth redwoods of the Big Basin State Park would have been wiped out within six months.

Photo courtesy Michael O’Loughlin

The first Comic-Con had 300 people. In 50 years the crowd has grown to more than 130,000 people gathered to celebrate their shared love of stories.

little table drawing tiny cartoon figures in watercolors and ink for anyone who wants one. The only thing that might make you notice her as you dodge around slow walkers and people with strollers and/or swords is the fact that such a long line of people queues for hours just behind her booth, waiting for their chance to ask her to draw their favorite pop culture character.

Katie Cook is well known in the comic book world for her webcomics and her work for the “My Little Pony” and “Star Wars” franchises. Her paintings at Comic-Con are sometimes child versions of adult characters. Princess Leia has a Chewbacca doll; Hulk has a boy’s grin and a speech balloon that is just a heart. But even when drawing adults, Ms. Cook’s art exudes the humor and wide-eyed innocence of a child. It clearly speaks to people.

It also captures much of what is going on here. When you hear people talk about Comic-Con, usually it is about what big shiny new Hollywood thing was revealed and what everybody was wearing. Television reports tend to fixate on the crazy cosplay (costume play) and the lines of thousands waiting hours (or days) to get into a room to hear the cast and creators of “Game of Thrones” or “Doctor Who” talk for an hour. It’s a pop culture version of Willy Wonka’s chocolate factory, complete with a lottery to buy tickets months beforehand that by some estimates rewards a badge of entrance to fewer than one in 10.

When the event began 50 years ago in the musty basement of a San Diego hotel, it seemed like a completely different phenomenon. “The very first one we had 300 people,” the comic book and television writer Mark Evanier told me. He has been to every Comic-Con and run panels at most of them. “We thought, ‘Oh my God, 300 people together who all love comics, that’s incredible and that’s impossible.’”

And yet through the decades Mr. Evanier has seen a unifying thread. “We are all there because we share common interests,” he said. “[To be] in a room filled with people with some common love, that’s very comforting.”

As I walk around the convention center, I see on so many faces exactly that kind of wonder and delight that comes from suddenly being with so many others like yourself, people who love not just the same tentpole franchises but the same niché stories that spoke to you as a child or that speak to you now.

In some ways Comic-Con is always an act of reclamation, a moment where attendees discover or acknowledge anew the debt they owe to certain stories and creators, the



ways a show or character freed them to think about life in a new way, even showed them there was a place for them in this crazy world. I attend the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress in Anaheim most years, and, though the stories that have spoken to people are different, the sense of gratitude is very much the same.

And despite the great size of the convention, when you have been here a few times the real magic and beauty are found not so much in the big splashy panels but in the small ones.

Mr. Evanier recalled a recent convention at which he got to host a panel for Joy Murchison Kelly, who ghostwrote Wonder Woman comics in the 1940s and was never credited for them. “The people who got into comics in the 1940s and ’50s never thought they’d become famous or wealthy. It was just a job they thought they’d enjoy,” he told me.

“Then to find out there are generations of artists or writers that said [to them], ‘You inspired me to become an artist.’ ...I’ve seen people reduced to tears, happy tears,” he said.

“The nice thing about Comic-Con for me is, there is all these little human stories around.”

As I was packing up to leave at the end of another convention weekend this July, it hit me that the following week these 130,000 people will all be back at home. At some point soon thereafter news stories will cross their screens having to do with politics, religion (or even pop culture), and many times they will be on opposite sides from one another, perhaps vehemently so.

And yet for those few days each year in July we all have that same happy experience, where we discover our divisions meant nothing at all.

### Upon This Western Shore

One of my favorite sessions at Comic-Con is a panel run



Photo courtesy Luke Henkel

by a cartoonist named Terry Moore. Mr. Moore has been writing comic books for decades, and he is well known in the industry for the complexity and variety of his female protagonists. They are veterans, office workers, mechanics, photographers and assassins—and endlessly layered.

The other unique quality about Mr. Moore is that his stories so clearly walk in worlds that cut across blue state/red state lines. He loves a good small town setting, and features both characters who love their firearms and have never left the communities they were born in, and some who can talk for hours about artisanal food trucks and which farm in Honduras has the most ethically harvested coffee beans.

I wrote Mr. Moore to ask him how he keeps alive that spirit of welcome and curiosity to all walks of life, especially in these difficult times.

In response he wrote: “You have to be interested in life beyond your own. The people you meet any given day, the people you read about halfway around the world, the ones you can relate to in a foreign land, the ones you can’t.... It’s all so fascinating and the stories are endless.

“If I told you a boy lost his school lunch to bullies yesterday, you might complain about bullies. If I told you the boy’s mom is dying of cancer and used her waning energy to make his lunches with little notes of love and encouragement and yesterday’s lunch was the last one, you very well may ask to know more about the mother and her son. That’s not me being a good storyteller, that’s you being a good human being. The more you know about someone, the more you care. It’s the writer’s job to give you that opportunity.”

Recently a Jesuit friend who just started his theology studies was telling me he had to write a paper answering the question “What is faith?” As we talked I found myself realizing I wasn’t sure where I would start to answer that

At its weekly Wednesday night suppers, the members of Most Holy Redeemer Church in San Francisco serve a sit-down dinner to 100 people in need.

question myself. “So what do you say?” I asked him.

“Faith,” he told me, “is a response to an experience of God’s revelation. And that response inevitably involves action that builds community.”

A few years after she helped Mr. Hill and others to create the Big Basin park, the local poet Carrie Stevens Walker published a poem titled “California.” In it she imagined different parts of the state looking out at one another with admiration and sharing common experiences or the fruit of their labors. San Diego benefits from the Sierras’ gold, and the ocean breezes kiss both northern pine and southern palm.

“The rose entwines the orange-tree,” Ms. Walker wrote, “the sea-winds rock the pines,/ And wheat-sheaves lift their golden heads amid the grapes’ green vines;/ the latest glow of sunset still enfolds it ever-more,/ While Strength and Beauty stand hand-clasped upon this Western shore.”

Some of the people that I have met during my travels through California have been religious; others have not. Yet it is clear to me they have all experienced something at some point that turned their heads and caused them to clasp hands in solidarity.

Maybe it was just a glimpse of grace out of a corner of their eye. But to paraphrase Mr. Moore: Life in California has given them an opportunity. And they have responded.

Jim McDermott, S.J., is a contributing writer for *America*.

# THE PSALMIST'S LAMENT

*What does it mean to be 'home' in a world without roots and relationships?*

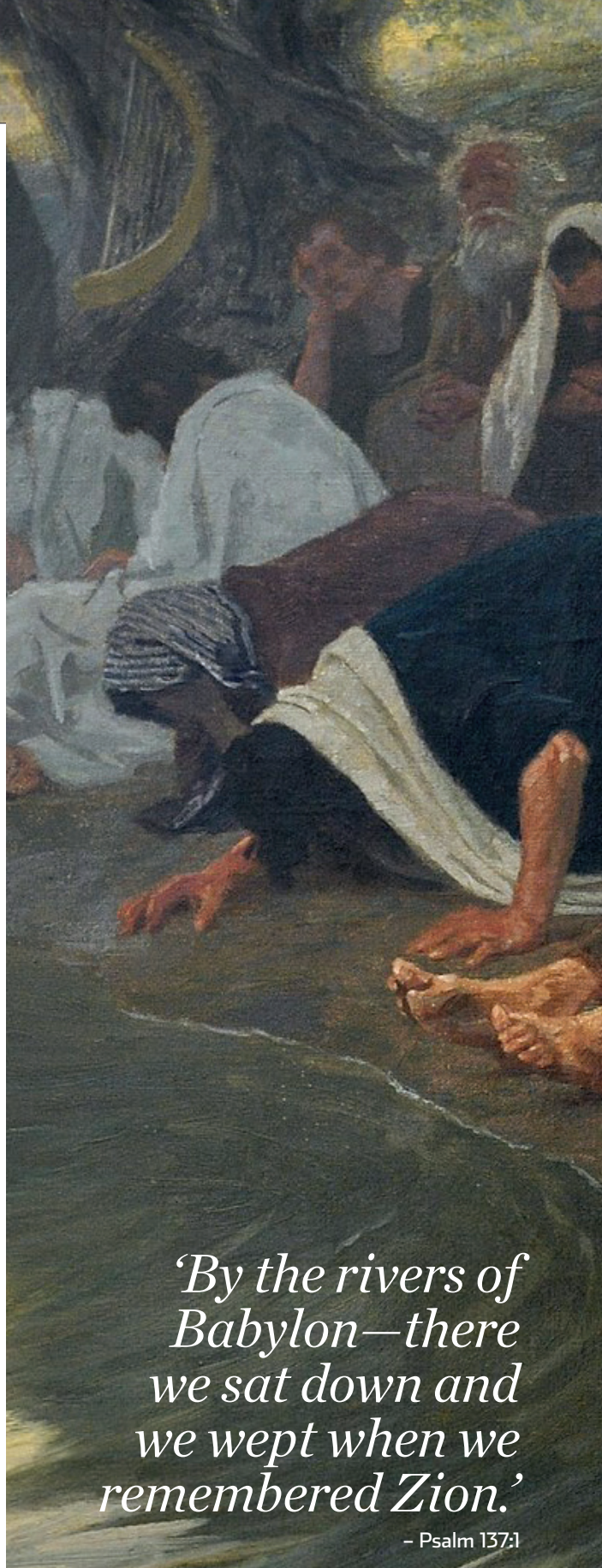
By Nichole M. Flores

In August 2007, I hitched my Dodge Neon packed with my belongings to the back of my dad's pickup truck. After leaving my hometown of Denver, we would drive across 10 states until we arrived in New Haven, Conn., where I was to pursue a master's degree at Yale Divinity School. I sobbed as we drove eastward across the plains in the dark, not knowing if or when I would return to live in my hometown again. Arriving in New Haven, my dad and my sister unloaded my belongings from the car and helped me set up my new apartment. A couple of days later, they embarked on their journey back to Colorado. As we wept in each other's arms, I promised that I would never forget where I came from. My sister kissed my cheek and my dad made the sign of the cross on my forehead. Then they headed westward toward home.

This was not the first time I had lived far from home. I spent my undergraduate years at Smith College in western Massachusetts, thousands of miles from any family members and in a culture that often felt alien to me. During my first year, some of my housemates ridiculed me for going to a "ghetto" high school and not being able to buy anything but a candy bar during a trip to the mall. If the thousands of miles between my family and me had not already made me feel far from home, the experiences of social rejection certainly did.

I found a refuge in the Catholic student group that met in the basement of the college chapel. Each of us, in some way or another, was far from the home we had known in our youth. Yet, we shared a common striving to anchor our distinctive identities in Christ. This group became my family during these years; our shared faith was the framework through which we found meaning in the world. We made a home with and for each other.

The decision to move back East for my graduate studies was a difficult one. I missed home as much as I had during my undergraduate years, if not more so, because this move had a feel



*'By the rivers of  
Babylon—there  
we sat down and  
we wept when we  
remembered Zion.'*


— Psalm 137:1





"By the Rivers of Babylon," by Gebhard Fugel, c. 1920

Wikimedia Commons



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# My work led me to a deeper relationship with the Catholic Church of my upbringing, where I found a diverse community of friends striving to anchor our distinctive identities in Christ. ●●

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of permanence that the previous one did not. During the spring semester of my first year, I wrote an exegesis essay for my Hebrew Bible class on Psalm 137, a bitter lament composed in the context of exile:

How could we sing the Lord's song  
in a foreign land?  
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,  
let my right hand wither!  
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,  
if I do not remember you,  
if I do not set Jerusalem  
above my highest joy.

This bitterness gives way to anger and cursing, calling for revenge against the author's captors: "O daughter of Babylon, you devastator! / Happy shall they be who pay you back / what you have done to us! / Happy shall they be who take your little ones / and dash them against the rock!" This cry for vengeance is one of the most difficult texts in the entire body of Scripture, a behavior that is unjustifiable in the morality of mercy that, as the theologian James Keenan, S.J., argues, is the very heart of the Catholic faith. Even so, this exilic lament conveys the penetrating, mournful anger of a community that believes that their captors have taken everything from them. It is the wailing of someone who has lost their home.

## Exiles From Home

I read Psalm 137 that semester alongside the works of theologians Miguel A. De La Torre and Ada María Isasi-Díaz, both of whom lamented their own exile from their Cuban homeland. While liberation theologians have turned to Exodus as a source of hope in the midst of oppression, Mr. De La Torre argues that Psalm 137 resonates more profoundly with the political and cultural dimensions of Cuban exilic experience. "Like the psalmist," he writes, "Exilics sat by the rivers of their host country, singing about their inability

to sing God's song in a foreign land."

Ms. Isasi-Díaz once described her experience of being asked to sing the songs of her Cuban homeland in the United States: "Those around me could not figure out why I, who love to sing, always seemed reticent about singing 'Guantanamera,' the song that uses for its verses poems from the father of my country, José Martí.... So I kept saying to myself, 'How can we sing Yahweh's song in a foreign land?'" She feared that singing this precious song in the United States, where it is easily commodified and risks being treated as cheap entertainment, would be to disrespect her homeland.

The danger of commodification is exacerbated by a sense of one's own inauthenticity in relation to the homeland after years of living in exile. As Mr. De La Torre explains, it is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to remember a homeland that one left when he was very young: "Those who arrived in the United States from Cuba as infants or small children struggle with the realization that they do not belong to the mythical *Cuba de ayer* of their parents." Both Mr. De La Torre and Ms. Isasi-Díaz are wary of the way the treasures of their culture would be treated outside of their homeland, especially in the context of the dominant U.S. culture where they have experienced mockery and hatred directed toward them as Latino people. Nonetheless, both theologians yearn to return to their homeland, even if their own memories of the place are imperfect. They yearn for a connection to their home.

The Cuban-American theologian Roberto Goizueta calls community "the birthplace of the self." The loss of our community—along with the places and spaces in which we come to know that community—can shake our identity and sense of self to its core. Reading these reflections on the relationship to homeland in exile allowed me to hear Psalm 137 speaking to the spiritual dimensions of the loss of home and community in a new way. While it illuminates the spiritual dimensions of our political relationship with place, it also shows how our sense of self is shaped by attachments we have that give us a sense of home. Losing these attachments means losing our self-understanding, but also our sense of belonging both to the community and to God.

## Memory and Loss

I missed my homeland during those early days in New Haven. I missed the weather, the people, the food. I often thought of the beauty of the Rocky Mountains open-



Downtown Charlottesville, Va., the city where the author currently works, lives and makes a home with her family.

ing their arms wide to my home city of Denver. I recalled mornings riding the light rail to my job at the center of the city, the eastern face of the Front Range shining in the light of the bright morning sun. My mother would send me mixed CDs with music from my favorite local radio station, acoustic tracks recorded live at the station that evoked images of cold winter mornings covered with powdery snow. And while I yearned to return, I did not feel the same anger expressed in the psalm. After all, I had only been away from home for a little while. While it might be difficult to find a job there, no political entity or law explicitly prevented me from returning there on my own accord. And I always hoped that I would return in due time.

The second year of graduate school, I fell in love with a member of my systematic theology class. We married the year after graduation in a ceremony held in my hometown to make sure that as many members of my large, Mexican-American family could attend as possible. On our wedding day, my father told us that home would now always be with each other. His benediction seemed to be realized as we embarked on our lives together. The week after our wedding, we moved to Massachusetts for our doctoral studies. Three years later, we moved to New Hampshire when I was offered a job teaching in Manchester. Then we moved to Virginia when I was offered a position in Charlottesville. Each move took us farther from our extended families and

our homes, if only existentially. But my father's blessing continued to resonate with us as we built a home together in Christ.

It has been more than a decade since I lived in my hometown. Some days, Psalm 137 reflects my longing to return home, even as I am aware that I have idealized it in my earnest efforts to not forget it. At the same time, I feel anchored in my faith and growing family, a home that I can call my own no matter where I live.

### **A Crisis of Hope and Home**

It was not until we had our first child that that feeling of home began to seem insufficient. A perfectly mundane pregnancy and labor gave way to unexpected difficulties with the delivery. It took only moments for sheer joy to become unimaginable terror as our first and only child was wheeled out of the delivery room in a plastic bassinet for emergency treatment in the neonatal intensive care unit. The attachment between my son and me, one that had been fully embodied for the better part of a year, ended abruptly. I was unable to cradle him in my arms for the first four days of his life. I spent those days surrounded by family, friends, doctors and hospital staff. But I had never felt more alone in my life. Thankfully, his treatment was successful, and we were able to take him home just six days later. But the rupture engendered a sense of the fragility of life and of our

The Colorado State Capitol building and the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in the author's hometown of Denver. The foothills of the Rocky Mountains and Mount Evans can be seen in the distance.

attachments that would become the central spiritual challenge of my earliest days of parenthood.

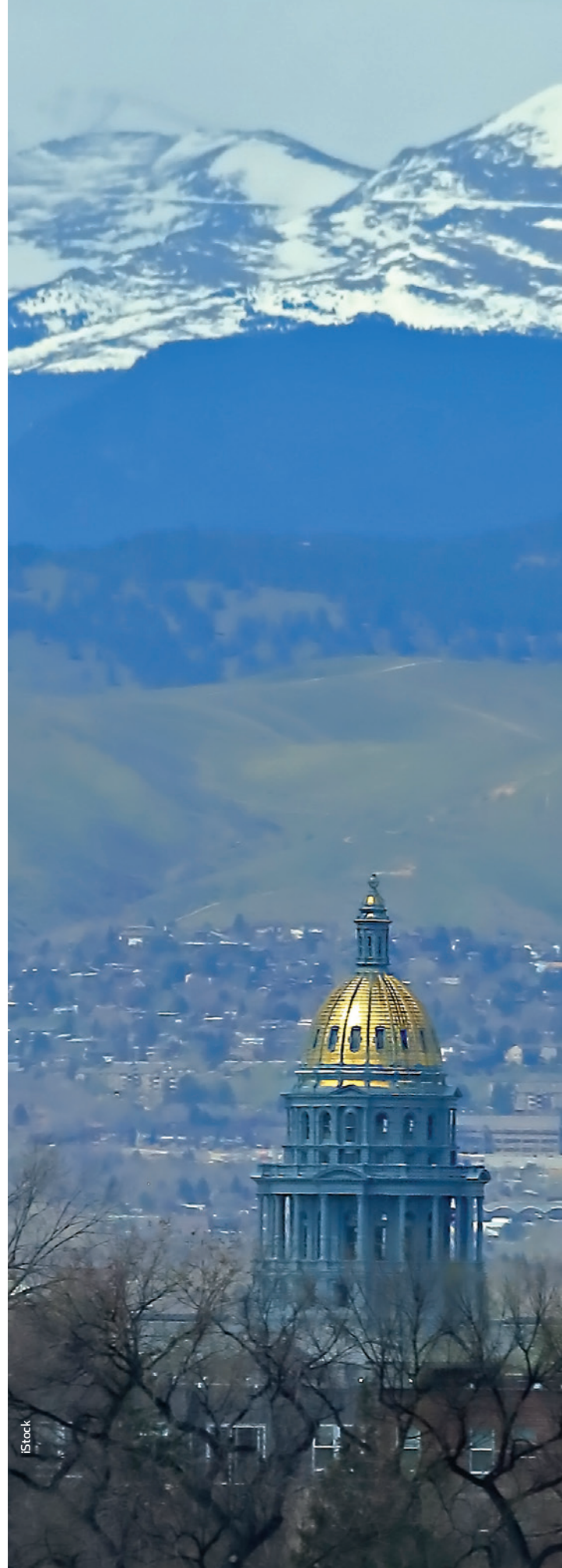
My family spent the first weeks of my son's life helping us change diapers and wash bottles. Once they departed, we began to feel the full weight of responsibility for the life of a child while living thousands of miles from both of our hometowns. We have many friends in our city, but we had not really cultivated the kind of relationships where we would feel comfortable imposing upon someone to come hold the baby while we napped or cleaned the house. The pressures of parenthood without a social cushion began to mount. Like many new mothers, I felt the aches of loneliness as I arose multiple times each night to nurse my son. I would cry in a sleep-deprived haze, wishing I had my family nearby to help me with the loads of laundry, the dishes and the tears.

My experience of loneliness was complicated by the trauma I experienced during my son's delivery and the first week of his life. Why had this horrible thing happened to my son? As the days, weeks and months of sleep deprivation wore on, I began to wonder if God was angry at me. I began to ask for the first time in my life whether God really loved me. While this kind of spiritual upheaval is commonly referred to as a crisis of faith, it seemed more accurate at the time to call it a crisis of hope. While I did not doubt that God existed, I lost hope that I had a home with God. I lost hope that God would rescue me. I felt the abiding sense of home beginning to unravel. I felt angry. For the first time in my life, I felt truly adrift.

### **Adrift at Sea**

The current state of our society's relationship with home has been fraught with neuralgia because on a global and national scale, debates rage on about the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Unimaginable violence in Syria and the ensuing refugee crisis have led millions of vulnerable humans to seek asylum, only to be turned away by neighboring nations that are their only hope for safe harbor. Unbearable images of suffering migrants have been cast across social media, searing our consciences with the image of 3-year-old Alan Kurdi's lifeless body washed ashore on a Turkish beach, or Omran Daqneesh's visage covered with blood and ash. These images are a reminder that the loss of home usually causes irreparable harm, especially for the most vulnerable among us.

According to a recent report by The New York Times, the weight of the great recession has crushed economic prospects for younger generations, making it statistically more likely for



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us to remain near our hometowns than previous generations. This is the case despite dwindling economic opportunities in small-town and rural areas in the United States. At the same time, rising costs of living in cities disincentivize movement to major metropolitan areas in an attempt to improve one's economic opportunities.


These reports are in tension with the experiences of long-time residents of major cities, especially economically strained communities of color, who are seeing their neighborhoods transform through rapid gentrification (the displacement of less wealthy residents of a community by more wealthy newcomers). This displacement has led to the dismantling of neighborhood institutions that grounded these communities: churches, businesses, social clubs and even public art that have both consoled and empowered these communities in the midst of social and economic turmoil.

These dynamics concerning our collective relationship to home make it difficult to detect a clear signal about the status of our society's relationship with notions of homeland. Beneath the aggregate of any demographic profile exists the mosaic of our stories in which home, as well as its loss, bears particular significance for each of us. But what is clear is that members of these generations often struggle to feel truly at home, regardless of our proximity to homeland.

### **'To Whom Do You Belong?'**

Natalia Marandiu, who immigrated to the United States from Romania to pursue her studies, is an assistant professor of Christian Theology at the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University, where she researches the theological meaning of home and belonging. "When I would visit my grandmother in her village in Romania as a little girl, the moment I stepped off the bus, villagers would ask me, *'Tu a cui esti?'*" which means "Whose are you?" or "To whom do you belong?" According to Ms. Marandiu, the question of "to whom do you belong" is becoming an increasingly difficult one for our society to answer. Although physical distance from home is the cause of some of this difficulty for many, she argues that there is an even deeper sense of loss of attachments, ones that keep us anchored in the midst of indeterminate circumstances.

Our social attachments have come under pressure in our contemporary society. Once viewed as the bonds of affection necessary for living in a society together, our relationships with others are increasingly seen as expendable. But, as Ms. Marandiu argues, such attachments are necessary for a sense of authenticity: "Authenticity of the self in fact requires attachments," she says.



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# Once viewed as the bonds of affection necessary for living in a society together, our relationships with others are increasingly seen as expendable. ●●

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To understand the role our attachments have in shaping the self, argues Ms. Marandiuc, it is important to understand how they are formed within a framework of meaning. But she argues that such frameworks of meaning are not necessarily given in the context of modernity and post-modernity. “As if in a cafeteria, contemporary people can and do pick and choose, from different paradigms of meaning, the bits and pieces that suit them,” she explains, “and they pick and choose according to criteria that they themselves have chosen subjectively.” Despite this inherent subjectivity of our contemporary orientation to frameworks of meaning, however, Ms. Marandiuc argues that the loss of a framework is a profoundly disorienting experience that raises questions about the foundations of meaning. Drawing on the writing of Charles Taylor, Ms. Marandiuc says: “To lose such a framework is tantamount to being adrift ‘at sea, as it were,’ to lose one’s sense of orientation with respect to who one is.”

Ms. Marandiuc describes experiencing this kind of loss when she moved to the United States. “It was hard for me to come to the United States in ways that I did not expect,” she says. She was so lonely, in fact, she was not sure the word “lonely” truly conveyed how she felt: “I had no experience in my home culture that would translate in any way.” The experience of loneliness, almost too profound to express, accompanies the loss of a framework of meaning.

I know what she means: It was this same feeling of loss more profound than loneliness that I experienced as I felt my attachments eroding as I tried to raise my son without the support of nearby family and in the context of trauma. My framework of meaning is my Catholic faith; to feel a rupture in that framework was to feel as though I was losing everything.

This experience of something even more profound than loneliness motivated Ms. Marandiuc to study questions about the theological significance of home. She was deeply moved by the plight of migrants, especially those without the protections of documentation or the privileg-

es of whiteness or wealth. But as she delved into questions of migration, she became interested in questions about the loss of home and homeland. What makes home good? In her 2018 book, *The Goodness of Home: Human Love and Divine Love and the Making of the Self*, she points to our attachments of love as that which gives us a sense of belonging.

Similarly, contemporary life in an atomized, deeply individualistic society such as the United States can be antithetical to the formation of such attachments of love. The theologian William Lynch, S.J., wrote of the “problem of freedom” in this regard, noting that the “problem of freedom is not about the goal of freedom, but the far more difficult question of how, in our actual lives and in the life of the city, we move to attain real freedom—how, in other words, we understand the relation of freedom to the contrary reality of limitation.” When humans seek complete autonomy from concrete commitments, the result can be a loathing for oneself, for one’s background, and even for one’s country.

Our attachments, in other words, are central to our shaping of the self. They allow us to give and to express love, and thus give us a sense of belonging, and help us to “be at home” in ourselves and in our actual homes.

Attending to research in neuroscience, Ms. Marandiuc articulates the role of attachments in human cognitive development. Such attachments are crucial to emotional well-being. “The only way human beings become fully formed is through attachments.” While her argument is theological in nature, the developmental significance of attachments informs a bioethical argument of the centrality of home, family and belonging for the integral development of the human person.

This position has implications far beyond the walls of our homes. For example, the current crisis of migrant detention at the Mexico-U.S. border, including morally evil policies of family separation, have concrete implications for the cognitive development of children separated from their caregivers. For young children, the attachment to parents is essential not only for development, but for survival. According to Nim Tottenham, associate professor of psychology at Columbia University, parents and children “can be thought of as a single organism.” Separating them from each other causes a rupture in attachments that has lasting negative implications for their cognitive and emotional development. One need only remember the stories about certain orphanages where children were deprived of

any emotional nurturing, and the traumatic effects on their intellectual and emotional development.

Our attachments—to people, to places and even to institutions and ideas—are fundamental to human experience and identity. Respecting and nurturing those attachments, as well as acknowledging the serious implications of both the loss of those attachments and the maintenance of harmful attachments, is thus essential to attending to human physical, emotional, intellectual and moral formation in the 21st-century global context.

### **Faith, Love and Hope**

Before I gave birth to our son, a deacon at my husband's church wisely suggested that we establish a meal signup. Friends from my parish, my husband's church and our office quickly began relaying fresh, warm food to our door, often offering to hold our son for a few minutes while we ate a quick bite before returning to our parenting duties. And while I am not sure that they were aware of it at the time, these friends anchored us during some of the most tumultuous times of our lives.

The presence of our people during these stressful times witnessed to God's unyielding love for us. It helped us see that others claimed us as their family. It helped us remember that God's family was our home. It was this community that guided me back home when I felt that all was lost.

I asked Ms. Marandiuc how Christian faith helps us to recover a sense of self resulting from ruptures in our frameworks of meaning. But she suggested that I shift the question from the theological virtue of faith to the theological virtue of love. "What helps us to recover the goodness of home is love more than faith," she said. While we rightly conceive of the church as a means of communicating the overwhelming sense of God's love, she argues that love helps us to form attachments with others. These attachments take the shape of institutions such as the church, she says, but they are also conveyed in other manifestations of community and relationship. "Thinking in relational terms," she said, "we need to think above and beyond the church."

I concur with her about the significance of love for forming these kinds of attachments. But it is also essential to highlight hope. It is these attachments that allow us to experience hope in an abiding sense. This hope is not a simplistic one, but one that grounds us. Pope Francis has returned to this theme time and again in his homilies, especially to young people.

Alejandro García-Rivera, yet another Cuban-American theologian, once wrote of a beauty that draws a community together: "Subversive, yet gracious, ever hoping and fresh, Beauty crossed barriers and created community. Beauty's call made possible the impossible and made visible the invisible." This is the kind of beauty that holds together communities across time and place and space. This is the kind of beauty that reveals the attachments we have to each other and to God. This is the kind of beauty that engenders hope when we feel far from home.

I experienced this hopeful beauty as I watched my son look at our Christmas tree. I watched him marvel at the lights and tug on the ornaments adorning each branch, even as I tried to keep him from toppling the tree. He pointed at each ornament, his face lighting up at the sight of each glittering bulb. He asked me to lift him up so he can take a closer look at the branches out of his reach.

As we inspected the tree, I told him the story of each ornament. Here is one that your grandma Nancy gave us the winter before she went home to Jesus. Here is one from when mommy and daddy lived in New Hampshire. Here is the ornament from your very first Christmas here in Virginia. Each ornament represents a person, a place, a memory, a hope. And in this way, our tree represents a diachronic array of people, places, spaces and institutions. It remembers our web of attachments that define who we are, even those attachments that feel lost or far away. It helps us teach our son about the attachments that form us even as he begins to form his own, ones that will be related-but-distinct from our own. But, significantly, the tree remembers the birth of our savior Jesus Christ, the root of all of our relationships and attachments. And it reminds us of the home he gives us, even as he lay in the cold without a home of his own.

When we finished examining the ornaments, we sat at the base of the tree singing Advent hymns and Christmas carols. In singing songs together, we keep our promise to remember where we came from. In our singing, we make a home together even though we are still far from home.

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# ENDING SEX ABUSE AND PURIFYING THE CHURCH

*Tolerating abuse stands in total contradiction to the Gospel message*

By Blaise J. Cupich

One day, a man in his mid-50s came to my office and shared the painful story of being sexually abused by his pastor. He started serving Mass when he was 9 years old, and the pastor always asked him to stay afterward to tidy up the sacristy. One day the priest took him to the basement and sexually abused him. He did this every Sunday over four years. After abusing him, the priest would walk the boy home and have dinner with the boy's family. Adding another demonic layer of pain to the sexual abuse itself, each Saturday the priest would drive the boy to another town and force him to confess his supposed sins to another priest. Finally, the boy had the courage to tell his father, and the abuse

stopped. Seeing the suffering in this victim-survivor's eyes, witnessing his courage in sharing this horrible experience with me, I knew I had to act.

He wanted to meet his abuser, so I arranged a meeting, which I also attended. The priest did not deny the allegations. I also notified local law enforcement, removed his faculties for ministry and reported it to the Holy See, which eventually resulted in his removal from the clerical state. I also traveled with the victim that next weekend to the parish where the abuse took place and told the congregation about the abuse. After Mass, I invited the congregation to join me in the church vestibule, and we removed the photo of their former pastor.





CNS photo/Clodagh Kilcoyne, Reuters

Children's shoes and toys are strewn on a sidewalk in Dublin Aug. 25 as part of a demonstration against clerical sex abuse in Ireland. Pope Francis met privately for an hour and a half with eight Irish survivors of clerical, religious and institutional abuse.

defensively or at best dispassionately, as an inconvenience to be endured.

Months after the sex abuse scandals in Boston came to light in 2002, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops gathered in Dallas, knowing we first had to listen. We heard from victim-survivors, a historian and a psychologist. The last speaker was the journalist Margaret O'Brien Steinfels, who was at the time the editor in chief of *Commonweal*, a lay-edited Catholic magazine. Among other things, she called on the insights of the great French theologian Henri de Lubac in his book *The Splendor of the Church*:

We are all human, and none of us is unaware of our own wretchedness and incapacity; for after all, we keep on having our noses rubbed in our own limitations. We have all, at some time or other, caught ourselves red-handed...trying to serve a holy cause by dubious means.

De Lubac goes on to say that when self-deception comes in the form of a “criticism that is always directed outward, it may be nothing more than a search for an alibi designed to enable us to dodge the examination of our consciences.” The only antidote to such self-deception, he concludes, is “a humble acceptance of Catholic solidarity that will perhaps be more profitable to us by shaking us out of some of our illusions.”

The road to ecclesial purification begins at the level of solidarity with victims, embracing our connection with them at the profound level of our common vulnerability. This means, Ms. Steinfels told the bishops, recognizing that “these are the church’s victims, our victims, and the church’s victimizers, our victimizers. Solidarity has seldom been so painful or so difficult to sustain or so humbling or, in the end, so important.”

It was for this reason that Pope Francis, in preparation for the February meeting on child protection, asked participants to meet with victims in their own countries. He understood that purification begins with solidarity.

### Synodality

But the purification that begins in solidarity must deepen through synodality. Traveling with the victim to his

Everything I want to say about ecclesial purification is in this story of my encounter with this victim. It puts into focus many elements of the purification I have tried to pursue since visiting with this victim.

### Solidarity

The first element is solidarity. As I listened to this victim, I realized that I was listening to a 9-year-old boy, speaking to me with all of the vulnerability that belongs to that tender age. It is at this level of profound vulnerability that we must connect with those who have been harmed. If we do not, then we will be tempted to relate to victims at worst

This is the front page of the Nov. 4, 2018, issue of The Philadelphia Inquirer. The Inquirer and The Boston Globe teamed up for an article that examined ways it said the U.S. bishops have failed to police themselves even since their 2002 gathering in Dallas about clergy sex abuse, when they "promised that the church's days of concealment and inaction were over."

childhood parish where the abuse took place and asking the community to process with me after Mass into the church lobby has become for me a symbol of the approach Pope Francis has called us to in addressing this scandal. The entire church must walk together toward healing for victim-survivors, protection of the vulnerable and accountability for those who harmed and failed them.

Just as solidarity allows us to connect with those who have been harmed at a profound human level, so too, it inspires us to stay close to them and journey with them. There should never be any suggestion that victims should "get over it" or that it is time to move on and leave everything in the past. What has happened is part of our history. Yes, we must walk ahead into the future, but we must do so arm in arm with those who have been wounded. Is that not the invitation of the risen Lord, who appeared to the disciples not in a glorified perfect state but with his deep wounds fully exposed?

Only when Thomas accepted his Lord and touched his wounds could he and the other disciples understand what it means to follow the risen Lord. It means walking with the wounded in our midst. Victim-survivors are a manifestation of the risen Lord, reminding us what it means to be his disciple. The pope has provided a powerful example to all bishops by regularly meeting with victims and keeping in contact with them. He reminds us that the first demand for an apostle is to witness to the risen and wounded Lord.

### Repentance and Conversion

Just as synodality gives sustainability to the purification needed, conversion keeps it authentic. In 2002, our episcopal conference and each diocese established procedures to deal with priests who have abused. Yet, as is now clear, we failed to hold ourselves accountable as bishops. That has exposed the flaw in our approach to purifying the church of this scourge. We lost sight of the truth in our tradition that purification comes through a conversion that costs us something and makes demands—not just in one area but in all aspects of our lives.

The late German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote about two kinds of grace, cheap and costly. "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ,

living and incarnate," he wrote.

So too, there are two kinds of purification, cheap and costly. Cheap purification gives priority to saving face, thinking that procedures alone are enough. Cheap purification fails to correct the distorted view that protecting the church from scandal means protecting the people of God from the truth. Cheap purification turns a blind eye to a culture that believes bishops are beyond accountability or that being a member of the clergy provides privileges to lord over the weak. This kind of purification costs nothing and makes no demands on the church or on me as a bishop.

Again, let us turn to Bonhoeffer to understand the meaning of costly purification as he writes about costly grace: "Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. It is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light.'"

We naturally hesitate to pay the price of this conversion and prefer to make easy compromises. Remember the words of de Lubac: "We have all, at some time or other, caught ourselves red-handed...trying to serve a holy cause by dubious means."

Was this not the cheap purification of cover-up? Was this not looking the other way when warning signs demanded attention? Was this not failing to hold one another accountable as bishops? Was this not the moral laziness of believing that policies on a piece of paper alone would be enough?

A costly purification does not content itself with strong policies in a way that hardens into proceduralism. This way of thinking leads to complacency. Urgency in our conversion is the hallmark of true purification.

This is not to say that dioceses and all institutions that care for children should not maintain strict procedures to keep young people safe, to reach out to victim-survivors and to hold leaders accountable. Across all sectors of society, this is foundational. In the church, it means barring





# The Philadelphia Inquirer

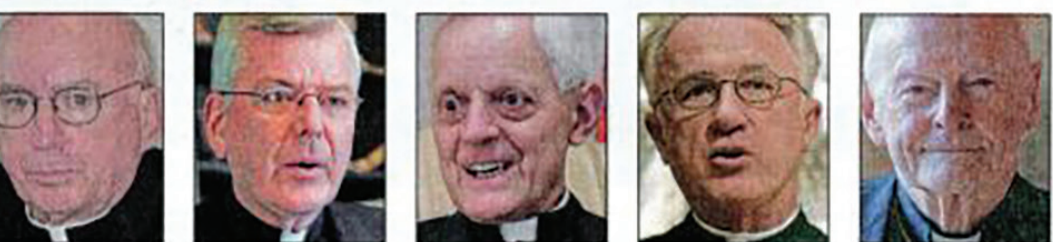
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## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CRISIS

A PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER | BOSTON GLOBE SPECIAL REPORT



# FAILURE AT THE TOP

### ELECTION 2018

# Divide is deep as decision day nears

With control of Congress at stake and 2016 still echoing, anxious voters head to polls.

By Jonathan Tamari  
WASHINGTON BUREAU

from ministry anyone who is a danger to children and holding accountable those who fail in their sacred duty to protect the vulnerable.

But this is just where the conversation begins. The deeper need is for us to accept and pay the price of our personal call to *conversion*.

Finally, as I reflect on that first encounter I had with a victim-survivor, it occurs to me that a sign of the authentic purification we are called to is *transparency*. Transparency opens new possibilities for healing for those wounded by abuse and the entire church. Is this not the way in which Jesus presents purification? He approaches it as an opening to the new creation made possible by God's mercy.

Being open, honest and transparent with people whenever abuse happens and as we discover past failures has a liberating effect. By being open with our people we treat them with respect, and at the same time admit our limitations and our need for their help. This is also true in the cas-

es when we discover the cover-ups of the past. We no longer have to pretend that church leaders were not capable of making bad decisions. When we confront the past with clarity, we discover the profound sense of atonement and the humility that recognizes that sin has invaded the core of our ecclesial life. Transparency gives us the freedom we need for authentic purification.

Blindness to institutional sin always prevents us from recognizing the presence of evil in our midst. Nowhere is that more obvious than in the case of the sexual abuse of minors, when demons of the human heart and soul crippled our ability to respond as we should have and to truly reform our lives in Christ. Much is at stake for us if we fail to seek this kind of purification in our ministry. Not only will we continue to damage our credibility, but as the journalist Steinfelds warned the bishops in 2002, we risk our ministry before the Lord.

Affirming our Christian belief that the gates of hell will

# The purification to which we are called as a church constitutes a strong source of hope, not despondency.

not prevail, Ms. Steinfels said that we have to acknowledge the ways in which the gates of hell have made advances in subtle ways. “The gates of hell,” she said, “could also be more modest, undramatic, everyday passages, through which we as easily slip by a furtive act of accommodation, cowardice, silence or sloth, as by some bold act of rebellion.” Steinfels then urged the bishops to guard against self-deception at this moment and to choose another pathway forward, the pathway of purification that comes in transparency.

## Authentic Purity

I want to close with two images that bring together these reflections on the authentic purification needed now. The first comes in a short story titled “Revelation,” by the American novelist Flannery O’Connor. The story ends with a scene in which a supposedly righteous Christian is shocked by a vision of the afterlife in which all the people she thought unworthy were marching to heaven ahead of her. She recognizes that the purity she cultivated was not the purity God wanted for his people. In a profound way, she came to see that the people she had reviled were the ones God favored. The difference was that she pursued a kind of purity on her own terms. The others took up the journey together. So too, we must pursue a path forward in solidarity with those harmed, knowing that we do so in answer to the purifying call of the Holy Spirit.

The second image comes to mind as I reflect on the word “sincere,” and its derivation from the Latin words *sine* (“without”) and *cera* (“wax”). Some have said that this is a reference to the way wax was used to cover flaws or shine marble sculptures. This allowed the sculptor to make his work less demanding and less costly. Some etymologists dispute this claim, but the idea holds power in this context. Just as sunlight melts the wax and exposes the flaws beneath, so does this moment of the abuse of God’s little ones reveal our need to acknowledge own

our failures. It is a reminder that authentic purity costs something. But it also reminds us that just as the sun rises each day, the truth will always come out. We are foolish to think we can play the game of hiding the flaws in our midst.

The purification to which we are called as a church constitutes a strong source of hope, not despondency. We should be fearless in making clear that tolerating clergy sexual abuse stands in total contradiction to the core of the Gospel message. By recognizing that truth, we begin to answer the call to move forward on the path of ecclesial purification with solidarity, synodality, conversion and transparency. In this way, we become ever more strongly the sacrament of Jesus Christ that the church embodies.

And so it is up to us to answer this call. Let us be bold in doing so.

*Cardinal Blase J. Cupich is the archbishop of Chicago. This article is based on a talk delivered at the Latin American Congress on the Prevention of Child Abuse in the Catholic Church, held at the Pontifical University of Mexico in Mexico City on Nov. 8.*

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# SCIENCE AND THE ATONEMENT

By M. T. Bennett

A medical experiment raises the question:  
How much can we really change?

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

– 2 Cor 5:17

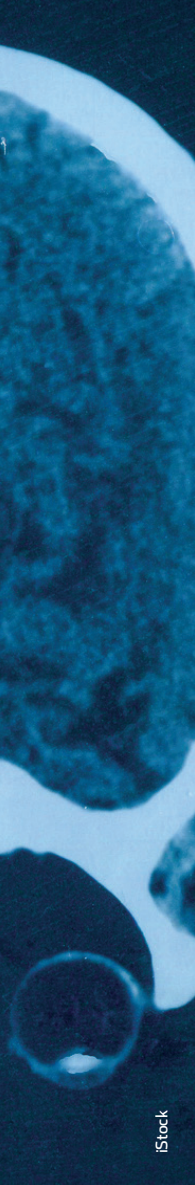
Back in the 1960s, the maverick days of medical research, two scientists, David Hubel and Torsten Wiesel, experimented on newborn kittens by sewing their eyes shut. When I first read this study as an undergraduate psychology student, I was shocked. It sounded like something a mad scientist or psychopath would do in their spare time. Yet Hubel and Wiesel were serious researchers who eventually earned a Nobel Prize for their work. What drove them to such cruel actions?

During the mid-20th century, optical surgery improved enough to allow adults born with cataracts to have them successfully removed. But something unexpected occurred. Even though the cloudy lens was removed from their eyes, these patients continued to suffer from visual deficits. In contrast, patients who developed cataracts late in life and

then had them removed made a full recovery. Hubel and Wiesel wondered why this was the case. They developed the hypothesis that there is a critical period of time, early in development, during which the neurons dedicated to vision will fail to develop or will rewire if they do not receive stimulation. This prompted their research on kittens.

At birth, the ill-fated kittens had their right eye sewn shut, blocking its input to the visual cortex. After three months, the sutures were removed. Their results proved the hypothesis correct. The left eye worked, but the right eye was basically blind. There was nothing wrong with the eye itself; the lens was clear, and the optical nerve was intact and properly formed. The problem was in the brain. Due to a lack of input, the brain did not develop a section dedicated to right-eye vision, essentially making the otherwise fully functional eye blind. It was like my undergraduate mentor always said: “Neurons that fire together, wire together.”

This admittedly disturbing research study raised profound questions for me, both as a medical professional



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and a man of faith, about what it means to grow and to heal. What does it take for us to change—physically, emotionally, spiritually? At some crucial point, do we lose our ability to change at all?

The Greek word for repentance is *metanoia*, which means “to change one’s mind or purpose.” All of us need to change because, as Rom 3:23 teaches, all of us have “fallen short of the glory of God.” It is through Christ’s atonement that we are able to repent or change. But change is hard, some might even say impossible.

Everyone has tried to change something about themselves. Many have made a New Year’s resolution to work out more and eat less. Yet studies show that the majority of people will return to poor habits and regain all the lost weight. I have often resolved to be a more patient parent, only to grow frustrated and upset when my son makes a mess. Every night I tell myself I will wake up earlier, yet a few short hours later I am once again hitting the snooze button. Why do we find it so difficult to become the people we want to be?

When we are born, our brains undergo an incredible amount of growth. Neurons make millions of connections. As we grow, our brain begins to cull those pathways. Depending on our genetics, actions, thoughts and experiences, we will get rid of obsolete neural connections and

keep ones we frequently use. The brain finishes growing in our early 20s with the frontal lobe. New neurons are thought to be impossible to create. Therefore, neural pathways are set and cannot change. One who is blind from birth will always be blind. That is what my medical training teaches me.

My faith, however, gives me hope for a different outcome. In the ninth chapter of the Gospel of John, we read about a man who was “blind from birth,” just like our kittens. Perhaps the initial problem was an eye malformation or poorly formed optic nerves. Whatever the reason, this malady was with him since birth, so the evidence tells us that his brain was not wired for sight. Medicine tells us he would never see. Even if he were given new functional eyes or surgery repaired his optic nerve, he would not see because his brain was not built for visual stimuli.

But with a little bit of spittle and clay, the Lord gives this man sight. In light of Hubel and Wiesel’s research, this miracle takes on new depths. Christ did not just fix the man’s eyes. He reached past them and rewired the man’s

very brain, giving it the neural connections it needed to see.

What does this mean for the rest of us? What about those of us who suffer addictions or mental illness? What about those of us who have ingrained poor habits and neural networks based on our life choices and experiences? Can we change?

Medicine would tell us no, people can act differently, but we cannot really change. The program Alcoholics Anonymous does wonderful things to help people overcome their addiction. It has helped thousands achieve sobriety, live healthy, productive lives and repair broken relationships. But whenever a member introduces themselves, they say they *are* an alcoholic or a *recovering* alcoholic. It does not matter if they took a drink this morning or 50 years ago. They are never a recovered alcoholic; they are always in recovery. There is no cure for alcoholism. A.A.’s *The Big Book* describes it as “an illness which only a spiritual experience will conquer.”

But as Christians, we can in fact hope for complete change. We can become a “new creature.” This is an amazing thought. Christ has the power, if he wills, to reach into our minds and wire us into the people he hopes we will become. True change is possible. Through the atonement, miracles beyond the current knowledge of modern medicine can be manifested. Christ can heal our spiritual blindness, remove our addictions and excise our weaknesses.

For some of us who are lucky, this change will occur in this life. For many of us, we must wait for the life hereafter, the resurrection. Even Paul lamented some “thorn” that was not taken away from him. Our mortal journey is an individualized experience given to us from a perfect Father who is helping us grow. The weaknesses that we suffer provide us with lessons we need to progress and to lean on the Lord for his help. Thankfully, these weaknesses will not be our eternal companions. There is hope for a complete change.

So next time you lose your temper and say, “My parents were this way, our family have always been hotheads, this is just who I am,” stop and remember that just because one is a certain way, this does not mean one has to remain that way. We are to learn from and overcome the lesser parts of ourselves. We do not have to be defined by our weaknesses. Another phrase from my undergraduate mentor was, “Biology isn’t destiny.” We can change through Christ’s atonement, and we should seek that change through daily repentance.

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M. T. Bennett is a medical student with a degree in psychology. He is the author of *Dark and Bright: Poetry and Prose* and the founder of the charity *Longboard for Love*.



# *The Buenos Aires Bergoglio Called Home*

By John Anderson

The boulevards of Buenos Aires have a breadth and sweep to rival Haussmann's Paris; the football stadiums rock; the landscape rolls. While it is a city bursting with life, even the dead provide a tourist destination—at the mausoleum city of the Recoleta Cemetery, people still

leave flowers at the crypt of Eva Peron.

But it was the thriving, immediate cultural life of Buenos Aires I was there to sample, as a juror at the Buenos Aires International Festival of Independent Cinema, which by itself is worth a visit to the Argentine capital. Unlike many similar events around

the world, real people—not just critics—go to the festival. But as I kept telling my colleagues, as soon as we got a break in jury duty, I was going on “the pope tour.”

Even in Buenos Aires, this required a bit of explanation—though halfway through the explanation I





Jorge Mario Bergoglio, S.J., was based at the Metropolitan Cathedral while he was archbishop of Buenos Aires.

blessing in disguise: When I arrived at the tour office, I was the only one there other than staff, and when my guide arrived he informed me that the group he would be taking on tour consisted of...me.

There was a brief negotiation with a taxi driver outside, and then Juan (last name Kavarkian “like the doctor,” he smiled, as if he had heard it before) told me to hop in. We had the cab for the entirety of our trip, and it would be part of the package. We tooted off from the office of Tangol San Telmo (in the Monserrat neighborhood) for the drive of 20 minutes or so to the Flores neighborhood.

Not surprisingly, Juan was a student, working part time for the local tour company (I booked online through Viator), a student not just of Buenos Aires history but the pope’s. Before we reached any of the landmarks of Francis’ life, Juan provided a running history—of the area, Buenos Aires and how Francis’ father, Mario Bergoglio, emigrated from the Piedmont region of Italy in the 1920s to what his son would later call the “end of the world.” There was a shortage of labor in Argentina at that time, thanks to increased international business investment from countries like Britain, and the government actively encouraged and promoted immigration from countries like Italy. Mussolini was on the rise, and a Bergoglio relative had emigrated earlier and started a successful paving company some 500 kilometers outside Buenos Aires. This

would get nods of recognition: Jorge Mario Bergoglio, I would say, was the archbishop of your city; his base was the Metropolitan Cathedral; he grew up in the working-class barrio of Flores. Ah, yes, they would say, and in 2013 he became Pope Francis.

Right, and going on a guided fol-

lowing of his footsteps here was not something I wanted to miss.

The opportunity that presented itself began inauspiciously. It was a Friday morning, the cab crawled through rush-hour traffic and it was raining. Oy, as they would say back in New York. But this turned out to be a



Jorge Bergoglio grew up in the working-class barrio of Flores, where a plaque commemorates his election to the papacy.

Photo courtesy John Anderson

was where Mario Bergoglio would eventually go to work.

But the Bergoglio family travel plans did not go quite according to schedule, something Juan attributed to a “divine message.” The family members coming with Mario “couldn’t get tickets out on the boat they had intended to take,” he said. “The news arrived 30 days later that the ship was wrecked, killing every person on board.” The Bergoglios took a later boat.

As we traveled the streets of greater Buenos Aires, Juan pointed out the still-visible physical legacy of Piedmontese immigration on his city—the surviving Italianate architecture, the hand-wrought ironwork that remains on the facades of buildings that, then and now, provided homes for people uprooted and striving. Several thoughts occurred to this traveler. One was of the universal-

ity of experience—the stock market crash of 1929, which Americans think of as an American event, also ruined the Bergoglio paving company and forced Mario by 1932 back to Buenos Aires, where he would marry Regina Silvio and father five children, the eldest being Jorge Mario. Theirs was a classic immigrant story, in many ways, a story that is part of a history to which the people walking the streets of Flores—or their fellows in New York, Paris or Rome—become, by necessity, numb on a day-to-day basis. But we are always surrounded by history; and as Juan took me to the various neighborhoods and the school and churches that had played an essential part in Pope Francis’ life, that sense of immersion in the muted past became more and more pronounced.

In a few cases, it was also blackly comic. There is a plaque on the

building where Jorge Mario Bergoglio grew up, commemorating the pope’s childhood there. But as Juan pointed out, Pope Francis was actually born across the street, where on this particular day a dumpster and rather dilapidated Japanese compact car stood guard; graffiti besmirched the walls of the house. When we toured the schools young Jorge had attended—as well as one he didn’t but where the San Lorenzo soccer team was founded (San Lorenzo being, famously, the pope’s favorite team)—life was proceeding as usual. Children could be heard singing. Pedestrians made their way around the strange pair of men studying the *fútbol* mural on the side of the school. Lunchtime office workers strolled through the park across the street from San José de Flores church—the one containing the confessional in which Jorge

Bergoglio had his epiphany about joining the Jesuits (a moment now memorialized in “The Two Popes”). The sun peeked out.

A highlight of the tour was our visit to the temple, as Juan called it, of St. Charles Borromeo and Mary Help of Christians, a fantastical place of rococo design where not only the pope’s parents were married but the baby Jorge was baptized—in, it should be noted, what looked like one of the more ostentatiously decorated fonts in the history of the sacraments. It seemed appropriate.

As we made our way back toward the more central part of Buenos Aires, Juan gave a rough outline of Pope Francis’ life—the influence of his grandmother, for whom young Jorge cared during her paralysis and who encouraged his love of reading; his study of literature and his teaching of it, first in “a very humble school in Santa Fe” and later at the Colegio del Salvador in the neighborhood of Almagro, which we visited; how the military junta forced him into semi-exile in Cordoba and how the Jesuit-turned-bishop-turned-archbishop served his city from the base of the Metropolitan Cathedral, the next stop on our tour. We left our cab nearby and arrived on foot.

It is a magnificent neoclassical structure with a large nave and five aisles and, like many of the churches in Buenos Aires, enormous—and enormously crowded. On a Friday at noon (the tour had been about two and a half hours) Mass was overflowing. Was this typical for a weekday midday Mass? Juan said it was. It’s a *turismo* hotspot; a Babel-esque chorus of sotto voce conversations could be heard in the chapels off the cen-



Photo courtesy John Anderson

The confessional in St. Joseph Basilica in Flores where Francis had a spiritual awakening as a young man. The moment is dramatized in the new film “The Two Popes.”

tral pews, though most of the attendees were taking part in the Mass.

The church’s renown as Francis’ former headquarters probably accounts for some of its popularity; Francis’ popularity might account for some of the attendance, too. It is the place where I would part from Juan and make my wandering way back to my hotel, thinking about history and where exactly I was.

But a few notes on the cathedral: It is the home of the Pope Francis Museum, for one thing. It is also where one can find an image of the “Christ of Footballers.” In 1979, Héctor Scotta and Daniel Bertoni, two ex-players for Argentina’s renowned national

team, donated the image of the “Cristo de Buen Amor”—the Christ of Good Love, which is also called the soccer player’s Jesus. You can find him in the left aisle, next to the crypt. And why is it in such a prominent location? Because the Metropolitan Cathedral was home to the world’s most famous soccer fan.

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John Anderson is a television critic for *The Wall Street Journal* and a contributor to *The New York Times*.

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## The View From a Cafe in Ethiopia

By Daniel Luttrull

Hailemichael, newly blind,  
Heads down the street without his cane.  
His youngest daughter jogs behind  
And tugs him back from the roadside drain.  
They turn, as though to look at you,  
When a shouting merchant passes through.  
He carries posters and blocks our view  
With Guido Reni’s Michael.

The angel in this old icon  
Trods Satan with a careless stare.  
His victory is quickly won,  
He has an easy, dapper air.  
It’s not for me. My Michael’s hair  
Would wear stipples of blood. His bare  
Legs shaking in the dying glare  
Of the devil’s deathly gaze.

The merchant wanders off. We see  
The sightless walker once again.  
His face is turned toward you and me.  
His daughter takes him by the hand.  
And a new icon appears in this  
Old man named Power of Michael:  
The angel ranged against hubris  
Not in triumph nor in struggle,  
But in dependence on the grace  
Of a daughter in a shadowed space.

---

Daniel Luttrull is a doctoral student at Case Western Reserve University in Ohio, where he lives with his wife and children. He has written essays for *Christianity and Literature* and *Front Porch Republic* and poetry for *First Things*.



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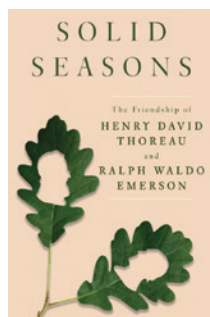
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## A sweet friendship refreshes the soul

By Cynthia-Marie Marmo O'Brien

Wikipedia/Stock/America



**Solid Seasons**  
The Friendship of  
Henry David  
Thoreau and Ralph  
Waldo Emerson  
By Jeffrey S. Cramer  
Counterpoint Press  
368p \$26

Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were both preoccupied with the topic of friendship. In many cases, it is hard to differentiate between the two men's ideas. Yet while Emerson writes explicitly of Thoreau, Thoreau mostly alludes to Emerson only through abstract expressions about friendship; direct references are rare. In *Solid Seasons*, Jeffrey S. Cramer explores the deep friendship between the two literary titans.

Biographers of 19th-century personalities have a rich storehouse of commonplace material that modern-day biographers may lack, in the form of letters and paper journals.

In fact, "Thoreau's journal contains around two million words; Emerson's over three million." Indeed, Emerson's question to Thoreau if he kept a journal prompted Thoreau to begin keeping one. This is just one example of the profound influence that Emerson had not only on Thoreau's writing but also on his everyday habits.

For Emerson, friendship could be "entireness, a total magnanimity and trust." To Thoreau, it encapsulated the "unspeakable joy and blessing that results to two or more individuals who from constitution sympathize." For us as readers, it helps to remember that friendship is, ultimately, a Christian concept. "A sweet friendship refreshes the soul," says the Book of Proverbs (27:9). And much of the Gospels consists of Jesus modeling how we should relate to others, with the lovingkindness that is the hallmark of a cherished friendship. Before the disciples were anything else to each other, they were friends, united by their following of the same itinerant preacher, who, in

turn, became their friend, too. It is in sharing beliefs that many people come to be friends, and this was true for the disciples as they evolved into apostles.

Those of us who have been blessed with mentors may know that marvelous feeling when the relationship evolves into friendship, and this seems to have been the case with Emerson and Thoreau. The much older Emerson advocated on behalf of Thoreau in the early days of their relationship and then came to admire Thoreau as a greater talent than himself, a possibility that could only have come to be if he first thought of Thoreau as an equal.

At one point, Thoreau begins to doubt the friendship, and writes often of these questions in his journal. "During this period," writes Cramer, "Thoreau was constantly writing of his personal turmoil about their friendship, while Emerson was, in comparison, relatively silent about it. He continued to recognize that "Thoreau 'gives me, in flesh and blood and

Ralph Waldo Emerson, right, had a profound influence on both Henry David Thoreau's writing and his everyday habits.

pertinacious Saxon belief, my own ethics. He is far more real, and daily practically obeying them, than I; and fortifies my memory at all times with an affirmative experience which refuses to be set aside.”

“Friendship is evanescent in every man's experience, and remembered like heat lightning in past summers. Fair and flitting like a summer cloud,—there is always some vapor in the air, no matter how long the drought, there are even April showers.” Thoreau wrote. “Surely from time to time, for its vestiges never depart, it floats through our atmosphere. It takes place, like vegetation in so many materials, because there is such a law, but always without permanent form, though ancient and familiar as the sun and moon, and as sure to come again.”

Cramer speculates that “perhaps Emerson avoided the despair that Thoreau felt because each of Emerson's acquaintances contributed only one part of the whole that made up his family of friends.” Thoreau seems to concur about the way that friendships can expand our world, even if his was smaller than Emerson's: “Nothing makes the earth so spacious as to have friends at a distance; they make the latitudes and longitudes.” Thinking of the friends I have met around the world does indeed make the world not only spacious, but closer, knowing I have kindred spirits from Latin America to Eastern Europe.

In any crisis, the first thing I long for is a friend to share it with. Having lived through many crises, I know how hard it can be to find a friend who is able to accompany us in our darkest hours. According to some theologians,

we should think of Christ as our most steadfast friend, the one who will always see the best in us and want the best for us—and who will never leave us, come what may. Emerson and Thoreau's friendship illuminates this model, in which each party is a well-spring of good will toward the other.

Their shared love of nature largely brought them together in Concord, Mass., where they walked frequently, in addition to dining with one another. As Emerson wrote:

So much only of life I know by experience, so much of the wilderness have I vanquished and planted, or so far have I extended my being, my dominion. I do not see how any man can afford...to spare any action in which he can partake.

Thoreau, writing again on friendship, wrote of a necessary quality that usually existed between himself and Emerson: “Perhaps it is only essential to friendship that some vital trust should have been reposed by the one in the other.” Emerson, too, felt a strain in their relationship, but perhaps not so deep as the rift that Thoreau imagined. Where Thoreau saw crisis, Emerson perceived only annoyances: “his disposition to ‘maximize the minimum’ which Emerson scorned by saying ‘that will take [Thoreau] some days.’” Although he admired Thoreau as “a person of extraordinary health and vigor, of unerring perception, and equal expression,” he also complained that “he is impracticable

and does not flow through his pen or (in any of our legitimate aqueducts) through his tongue.”

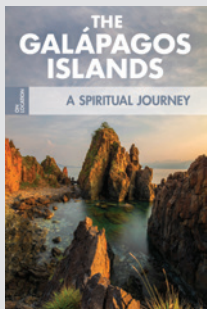
Still, the two remained friends for most of their lives, through such tragedies as Emerson's loss of a child and until Thoreau's early death. Thoreau's admiration for Emerson shines through as he writes: “Emerson has special talents unequalled. His personal influence upon young persons is greater than any man's. In his world, every man would be a poet, Love would reign, Beauty would take place, Man and Nature would harmonize.” Perhaps this was reflective of his own experiences with Emerson.

The first third of this book chronicles their friendship, largely through quotations from their writings, and then provides readers a section of each man's writings on friendship. This is a rich cornucopia for Emerson and Thoreau enthusiasts, who will feel the pulse of each man's heart beat through the words as they come alive on the page.

In the end, theirs was a reciprocal friendship, one built on experiences as much as on ideas, nurtured by geographical closeness.

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Cynthia-Marie Marmo O'Brien, a writer and editor, has reviewed for *America*, *Booklist*, *Kirkus*, *The Literary Review*, *Publishers Weekly* and *Words Without Borders*, among others.



**The Galápagos Islands**  
A Spiritual Journey  
By Brian McLaren  
Fortress Press  
282p \$16.99

### Sacramental proclivities

This book, like Charles Darwin's life, can be divided into a few distinct phases.

Darwin (1809-82) spent years actively collecting specimens in England and then jaunting around the world on the H.M.S. Beagle (1831-36) before settling into a country home, family life and decades-long analysis of his collections, which ultimately resulted in the publication of *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and other books on sexual selection, moral instincts and earthworms, among other topics.

Similarly, the first half of Brian McLaren's *The Galápagos Islands* is a travelogue and the second part a wide-ranging and associative analysis that builds its argument in stages.

The first eight chapters are interesting as a day-by-day account of how an eco-conscious traveler might experience the Galápagos. Their merit is in their meandering naturalistic thoroughness, in slowing the pace of the reader's expectation of what is being delivered and perhaps in providing a fair introduction to the kinds of second-order reflections—about technology, aging, destructive capitalism and Christianity—toward which McLaren is inclined.

It is in the latter part of this book that the magic happens: the as-

sociations and conversations among the animal worlds of the Galápagos as well as McLaren's own icons and practices of spirituality.

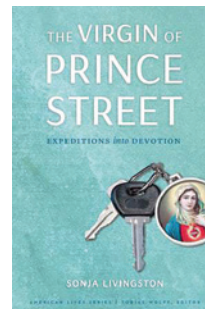
In Chapters 9 through 14, McLaren's observations are honed into compelling, synthetic and provocative essays. Chapter 9, "Monster," is a useful introduction to Darwin, of whom McLaren accurately writes that "where competing loyalties were in tension"—to family, culture, tradition and to his meticulously gathered and systematically queried data—"he was loyal to the tension itself. He lived with it, felt it, and refused to resolve it." Most provocatively (and again, I think, rightly) McLaren suggests that there are some important similarities between Jesus and Darwin: "They both dared to say aloud the simple but revolutionary truth that what is has not always been, and what is will not always be. And they were both seen as monsters for doing so."

Chapter 11, "Evotheology," is noteworthy as well. Here McLaren re-imagines God while navigating questions of one's own personal and cultural evolution. What kind of God do various forms of Christianity presume? What threat has evolution seemed to pose, especially to biblical literalists? What does that threat reveal not just about God but about those who try to interpret signs of God in text, in tradition and in the natural world?

This is a book that is about much more than one voyage, whether Darwin's or McLaren's own.

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Christiana Zenner is an *associate professor of theology, science and ethics at Fordham University in New York.*



**The Virgin of Prince Street**  
Expeditions Into Devotion  
By Sonja Livingston  
University of Nebraska Press  
184p \$17.95

### Stalking the grain of ancient tables

In her fourth book, *The Virgin of Prince Street: Expeditions Into Devotion*, Sonja Livingston introduces herself as a "pilgrimage" returning to her childhood church in Rochester, N.Y., after not regularly attending Mass for 20 years. The realization that a beloved statue of the Blessed Mother, "Our Lady of Grace," is missing sends her on the "radical proposition" of exploring devotion, especially, she writes, "when the norm is walking away," given the declining numbers of practicing Roman Catholics in the United States. Livingston might be a familiar name to readers because three essays from her latest book first appeared in **America**.

Her search for the statue takes her from Rochester to most of the churches in Buffalo and eventually Pittsburgh. The other pilgrimages she goes on include trips to Ireland (Galway, Ballinspittle and a well dedicated to St. Brigid at Liscannor); Santa Fe; Nags Head, N.C.; and southern Louisiana.

In the book's subtitle, the italicized preposition "into" emphasizes Livingston's quest to examine devotion. While many passages pay homage to saints and martyrs, and cherished nuns and priests, this is not a book of devotion. It is a nar-



rative rendered by a skilled creative nonfiction writer who understands that to explore means to linger in the complexity of one's subject. Upon returning to church, Livingston finds that "the dynamic brand of Catholicism that once provided such nourishment is gasping for breath."

This is not a book exclusively for doubters or the devout, but for readers who want an openminded fellow traveler venturing into sacred origins. Sitting in the church of her youth, she remembers her "grumbling stomach" when growing up in the poorest family "in whatever enclave of poor families we lived." And yet "here I was," she writes, "stalking the grain of ancient tables while carting around a hungry ghost."

Travel stories are only lasting when the main character's external movement coincides with an internal one. As Livingston moves through the pews of her memory and her present, the authenticity of her pursuits captivates: "What my heart wanted was to go back, to look at things straight on, to take it all in—the beauty and the flaws—and see what it would be like not to leave."

Livingston has created a distinctive contribution to spiritual literary nonfiction. Her ruminations dwell in the sanctity of desire, where she "attempts to build bridges with words to the mysterious expanse where language cannot join us."

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James M. Chesbro is the author of *A Lion in the Snow: Essays on a Father's Journey Home*. His work has appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The Writer's Chronicle*, *HuffPost* and *The Millions*, among other publications.



### The Sacrament

By Olaf Olafsson

Ecco

304p \$26.99

#### A nun uncovers searing truths

Sister Pauline Reyer's life at a French convent appears peaceful. She tends a remarkable rose garden that draws remarkable tourists and their donations; and she cares for a stray dog, George Harrison, named after her favorite Beatle. She enjoys the respect of her sisters, particularly because of her decades-long acquaintanceship with a powerful Vatican cardinal who summons her on occasion for special assignments.

But as Olaf Olafsson explores in his searing novel *The Sacrament*, surfaces deceive, and the contortions against truth necessary to retain outward placidity cannot be maintained forever.

Olafsson's elegantly constructed novel begins with an arresting scene. A boy locked in a closet for punishment at a Catholic school in Iceland witnesses the parish priest falling to his death from the bell tower. To illustrate the dark forces that led to this moment, Olafsson skips back and forth through time. Most of *The Sacrament* is set during Pauline's second and third visits to the country of 10,000 Catholics roughly two decades apart. During her second visit, the priest from the opening chapter dies.

In Sister Pauline's youth, she discovers she is attracted to women but never acts on her inclinations. She

studies theology at the Sorbonne as a way to wrestle with her beliefs but secretly falls in love with her Icelandic roommate Halla. Although Pauline never expresses her feelings, a young, ambitious priest named Raffin, who will become a cardinal, notices her struggle and uses this as leverage over her. Shortly after Pauline is consecrated as a nun, Raffin asks her to investigate an allegation of a priest's abuse of a student in Iceland because she knows the language, thanks to Halla.

Olafsson's understated prose and the novel's chilly Icelandic setting belie the burning tension under the surface. *The Sacrament* is a novel about secrets, lies and power.

The horrors of abuse remain off-stage, barely spoken of, yet the entire book is haunted by them. It is sometimes difficult to ascertain when the Iceland chapters are set, but Olafsson's design suggests the cyclical, ongoing nature of abuse and how its effects ripple out in time and warp everything they touch.

Sister Pauline is an endearing, wise character who fashions an abundant life despite unfulfilled wishes, yet Olafsson suggests not all desires can be squelched. In Pauline's case, while she resisted "desires of the flesh," she can never extinguish her yearning for justice. In the devastating conclusion to *The Sacrament*, as the powerful conspire to conceal truth, readers just might find themselves rooting for a vigilante to step in.

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Jenny Shank's first novel, *The Ringer*, won the *High Plains Book Award*; and her work has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post* and *Image*.



## Stephen Adly Guirgis on God, Broadway and writing for women of color

By Rob Weinert-Kendt

“Look, man, I want to believe in God, and I often do,” the playwright Stephen Adly Guirgis tells me, sitting at a desk in the cluttered, Upper West Side Manhattan apartment he has lived in more or less his whole life, and from which since the mid-1990s he has written a spate of brilliant, profane, deeply human stage plays, including the Pulitzer winner “Between Riverside and Crazy.”


This revealing, self-deprecating quote about his occasionally aspirational religious faith—which comes up as we discuss the thorny question of euthanasia raised by a scene in his newest play, “Halfway Bitches Go Straight to Heaven,” at the Atlantic Theater—could be a line of dialogue from one of his plays, or even serve as a mission statement for the not-quite-lapsed-Catholic dramatist. That’s

because all of his characters, from the junkies of “The \_\_\_\_\_ With the Hat” to the convicts of “Jesus Hopped the ‘A’ Train” to the damaged women of “Halfway Bitches,” are driven, or dogged, by a sense of a larger purpose from which they inevitably fall short. Whether that larger purpose takes the form of familial loyalty, scheming self-interest or an overarching call to eternal justice, Guirgis’s characters have motivations and beliefs beyond their own immediate, often craven needs. The messy collisions among these characters and their clashing worldviews are the grist of his drama.

This is certainly true of the New Testament characters Guirgis reimagined for his 2005 play “The Last Days of Judas Iscariot,” his most overtly religious work, which took the form of a trial of Jesus’ friend and betrayer

(and which inspired the book *A Jesuit Off-Broadway*, by James Martin, S.J., editor at large of **America**, who has become a sort of chaplain to Guirgis and the troupe he started with a group of actors, LAByrnth Theater Company). That play was inspired by another thorny question: Was Judas really beyond redemption, not for his betrayal but for his suicide? “The guy felt so bad, he hung himself,” as Guirgis puts it. “And that was the big crime, not the betrayal—it was the despair.”

If Guirgis has been tempted to despair, he has had his share of reasons. His close friend and LAByrnth co-founder, Philip Seymour Hoffman, died of a drug overdose five years ago after years of struggling with addiction. Guirgis admits he still harbors anger toward those who drank and partied with Hoffman in his last years,



A scene from “Halfway Bitches Go Straight to Heaven.” Stephen Adly Guirgis’ characters are driven by a sense of a larger purpose from which they inevitably fall short.

but he is philosophical about assigning blame.

“There was a close friend of mine who had been doing drugs with him nightly, and when Phil died and people learned about this friend, they really came down on him,” Guirgis says. “In my mind, even though obviously it wasn’t a good thing, it was like: Whoa, but that’s what junkies do.”

That is why, for instance, in “Halfway Bitches,” a transgender hustler named Venus is portrayed both sympathetically—for the abuse she suffers, and the care she doles out to other marginalized folks in the halfway house of the play’s title—and harshly, for continuing to use drugs in a place where many need encouragement to stay sober, not temptation to stray. “I try to have sympathy for, or empathy for even the worst type of characters,” says Guirgis. “Maybe that’s a way of looking for empathy or forgiveness for myself.”

The new play boasts his largest cast—18 characters, plus a live goat—and arguably his most ambitious social canvas. It is populated mostly with poor women of color, hashing through tough, intersectional dilemmas of race, class and sex, but it is running at an Off-Broadway theater where most tickets are \$81.50—a steal compared to Broadway prices, but steep for the class of people depicted in the play itself. I have to ask him: What is his connection to the world of this play? And what makes it more than poverty

porn, or what he calls “a poor people parade so rich people can feel better”?

He cites his background as an H.I.V. educator and conflict resolution specialist, work that took him to homeless shelters, prisons, schools and hospitals, and adds that “what put me into this world now is, there’s a shelter around the corner from here and I walk my dog by it every day.” He often sees its residents sitting on nearby park benches, and has noted sourly how “people in the neighborhood dealt with them, which was by making them invisible.”

The play he began to write about that shelter started off as a small downtown workshop, but soon ballooned into a major Off-Broadway production, in part as a means to revivify the LAByrinth company, which has faltered and fractured since Hoffman’s death.

“I was asked to write a play, and it wasn’t a good time for me to write a play,” Guirgis says almost plaintively, still looking equal parts shell-shocked and grateful for having written it anyway. He looks up at two cork boards with index cards bearing names of scenes from the play, some of them long since cut. “I don’t usually use things like this—this is more like what I might do for film and TV,” he says, confessing that while he usually is “guided by something that’s going on inside of me,” he wasn’t as sure in this case. “Instead of knowing why I was writing, I had to trust that it would be revealed, and to keep going.”

If that writing process sounds like a leap of faith, that is not far off the mark. In fact, he says, prayer may be his most valuable writing hack.

“When I attempt to explain prayer, I usually say that I have great difficulty writing, and the last thing I do that works—it doesn’t work right away, but if I repeat, repeat, repeat—is prayer. In essence the act of prayer is a sublimation of the ego, an acknowledgement of powerlessness. Like, I can’t do this alone. I need help.”

Did he ever find his personal reason for writing “Halfway Bitches”? As usual, now that it’s done, he sees himself in many of its characters. But it’s more than that. “There’s a young woman in the cast who says, ‘I think I know what this play’s about—it’s about how people don’t care about black bodies,’” Guirgis says. To him, though, the point is more universal: “It’s that often people just don’t care about other people at all.”

This finally may be the curse that haunts both Guirgis and his restless characters: For all their faults, they can’t help but *care*. While he has no illusions that a single play can change minds or lives, he says, “If someone sees this play and it’s a little more difficult for them to pass a homeless person on the street, then that’s a little contribution.”

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Rob Weinert-Kendt, an arts journalist and editor of *American Theatre* magazine, has written for *The New York Times* and *Time Out New York*. He writes a blog called *The Wicked Stage*.

# An Imperfect World

Readings: Is 8:23-9:3; Ps 27; 1 Cor 1:10-13, 17; Mt 4:12-23

Today's readings describe moments of destruction, uncertainty and discord. They invite us to reflect on the imperfections of the world, learn from them and grow in our relationship with God and one another.

The readings from Isaiah and Matthew both refer to the land of Galilee, specifically to territory associated with the Israelite tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. Both books connect the land with a negative experience but then describe a positive outcome.

The Book of Isaiah is often analyzed as a composite work written over the course of several hundred years in Israel's history. Today's reading comes from the portion of the book sometimes called First Isaiah, the earliest prophetic layer of the text found in Chapters 1 through 39. During First Isaiah's time, the northern kingdom of Israel—including the area of Galilee, the land of Zebulun and Naphtali—was destroyed by the Assyrians, and the people were conquered and exiled (2 Kgs 15:29). Despite Assyrian oppression (darkness), the author describes relief provided by God (light). Although initially a place of contempt, the region becomes a place of joy.

Over 700 years later, Matthew's Gospel quotes a version of First Isaiah (Mt 4:14-16), connecting Jesus to the Israelite prophecy. He depicts Jesus fleeing to the same region after hearing of John the Baptist's arrest. During this troubling period, Jesus proclaims a message of repentance closely associated with John's ministry (Mt 3:1-9). Both Isaiah and Matthew reframe negative events as moments for progress. Fittingly, Jesus calls his first disciples at the Sea of Galilee. Although the impetus for Jesus' journey was negative, Matthew presents it as the fulfillment of what was promised in Isaiah: Jesus begins his proclamation of the kingdom and calls followers to join his emerging ministry. Jesus' disciples would gradually develop into a larger movement that included Jews and Gentiles. The second reading from 1 Corinthians reveals some of the challenges within those Christian communities.

After Jesus' death, an early Christian community would

*People who have walked in darkness have seen a great light. (Is 9:1)*



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How do you address differing viewpoints?

How can you overcome negative events in your life?

Do you look to God for comfort and guidance during moments of uncertainty?

develop at Corinth, a large urban center that was religiously, ethnically and culturally diverse. The reading from 1 Corinthians shows Paul responding to reports that have reached him about rivalries in the community. Paul insists that the Corinthians be in agreement with one another and be unified in their shared baptism in Christ. He condemns their divisions and quarrels and encourages harmony to build a unified church. Paul's assertions are meant to unify people and end hostility. Yet, Paul's call for unity should not be misinterpreted as imposing uniformity on Christian communities. Diversity can strengthen and enrich communities by honoring the perspectives of members.

Hearing and affirming different voices can increase understanding and build meaningful relationships. When conflicts emerge, they can be addressed with thoughtful dialogue, which is far richer than simple agreement with one another. We do not all need to think and live the same way in order to have a mutually respectful and open society. Paul's calls for harmony and unity should be nuanced. Paul might inspire us to seek harmony in our communities; nevertheless, we can achieve that harmony while promoting thoughtful discourse that honors diverse perspectives.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



CATHOLIC  
INITIATIVES

# The Importance of Community

Readings: Mal 3:1-4; Ps 24; Heb 2:14-18; Lk 2:22-40

Today we celebrate Jesus' presentation at the temple. This event is recorded only in the Gospel of Luke and is rooted in the Jewish practices of purification of a mother after childbirth and the offering of the firstborn son. While the event centers on Mary, Joseph and Jesus, two community members support the Holy Family during this celebration.

The tradition described in Luke has its roots in Leviticus 12, which prescribes rules of purification and presentation. In ancient Judaism, after childbirth women were required to be purified before interacting with people and sacred objects. Giving birth to Jesus made Mary ceremonially unclean for 40 days (Lv 12:2-4). For the first seven days, she would avoid contact with people. For an additional 33 days, she would avoid contact with holy objects and the sanctuary. Though this may sound peculiar, it is important to remember that although childbirth was considered a divine blessing, purity regulations like these developed out of concerns and taboos regarding bodily fluids and their relation to religious activities.

At the end of the purification period, Mary and Joseph

offered a sacrifice of two pigeons, which was expected from people who could not afford to offer a sheep (Lv 12:8). The parents also present Jesus at the temple, as was customary for all firstborn male children (Ex 13:2). The first and second readings complement this event, as Malachi prophesies about a messenger of the covenant at the temple, and the Letter to the Hebrews recognizes Jesus' participation in Jewish rituals.

When Mary and Joseph present Jesus, they encounter two prophetic figures, Simeon and Anna, both of whom recognize the significance of Jesus. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Simeon had received a divine message that he would see the Messiah before his death. Recognizing the Messiah, Simeon takes Jesus into his arms and affirms that he can die having seen the Christ. Simeon asserts that Jesus is "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory for your people Israel" (Lk 2:32). Jesus is the Messiah for both Gentiles and Jews. Mary and Joseph are surprised that this relative stranger recognizes who Jesus is. Simeon blesses the parents and offers a message specifically to Mary that despite his importance, Jesus would be rejected by many.

We also hear about a woman prophet, Anna. Anna's piety is highlighted, as she regularly worships, prays and fasts at the temple. Although there is no quoted speech from Anna, we are told that at the presentation she offers praise and thanksgiving to God and speaks about Jesus to all who were looking for redemption (Lk 2:38).

Although the Holy Family is central to this feast of the Presentation, Simeon and Anna play vital roles. Simeon publicly confirms Jesus' identity and future ministry, and Anna shares Jesus with the world, proclaiming him to the Gentiles and Jews mentioned in Simeon's prophecy. These community members affirm the significance of Jesus to the world.

*Jaime L. Waters teaches Scripture at DePaul University in Chicago. She is an associate professor of Catholic studies.*

*There was also a prophetess, Anna.... She gave thanks to God and spoke about the child. (Lk 2:36, 38)*

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How can I be a prophet in today's society?

Do I recognize God in my life?

Do I invite people to praise and worship God?

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



CATHOLIC  
INITIATIVES

# A Delicate Balance

*The complex relationship between Catholicism and alcohol*

By Stephanie Slade



America readers will be familiar with “the Catholic both/and”—the idea, as the Jesuit writer Felix Just put it, that “both the one side *and* its opposite not only can, but *must* be held together in tension, even if they seem to be contradictory, in order to understand the whole truth, the whole of the complex reality.”

Jesus was God *and* man. Humans have a body *and* a soul. We are saved through faith *and* works. These “vibrant paradoxes,” in Bishop Robert Barron’s phrase, are a hallmark of Catholic thought. On the table before me one evening was an emblem of another, if less theologically lofty both/and: the relationship of Catholicism to alcohol.

I smiled as I took my seat in the monastery where I was making a short retreat. Beside each plate was a bottle of Chimay Gold, one of four kinds of beer produced on the premises. Like many Trappist communities, Scourmont Abbey in Belgium is funded out of the proceeds from its brewery. For the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, whose charisms include hospitality, it is only natural to share this work of human hands with guests.

Alcohol is, quite literally, at the center of the Catholic experience. The Eucharist begins with bread and wine. At the same time, the dangers associated with intoxicating substances are well documented. In the early 20th

century, Americans so feared the consequences of alcohol that we banned its production and sale from 1920 until 1933. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that 88,000 people die from alcohol-related causes in the United States each year. “Binge drinking” or “heavy drinking” is listed as the cause of death for one in 10 Americans between the ages of 20 and 64. And because drinking to excess diminishes our reason—the very faculty that separates us from the lower creatures—its seriousness is not to be minimized. In his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas wrote that drunkenness is not just a sin but a mortal sin, so severe that the early Apostolic Canons decreed that one “who is given to drunkenness or gambling...must either give them up or be excommunicated.”

Yet it seems to be no accident that Jesus’ first recorded miracle was, at the prompting of Our Lady, to turn water into wine. Today, the “Catholic Stuff You Should Know” podcast features four Colorado-based priests discussing historical, liturgical and doctrinal topics—nearly always over glasses of Maker’s Mark bourbon. Dioceses around the country offer lectures on religious subject matters aimed at young people, hosted at bars, under the banner “Theology on Tap.”

Chartreuse was perfected in the 18th century by the Carthusians, widely considered the most austere

of the Catholic religious orders. It was intended as a medicinal elixir, but people quickly took to consuming it recreationally. The monks leaned in and began marketing the (slightly) lower-proof green and yellow versions now found in high-end cocktails.

“I think the monks understand that alcohol is an intrinsically good thing,” says Michael Foley, an associate professor of patristics at Baylor University and the author of *Drinking With the Saints: The Sinner’s Guide to a Holy Happy Hour*. “That doesn’t mean it’s a good that can’t be abused. It certainly can be abused. But when you drink alcohol responsibly, particularly within the Catholic moral framework, you are encouraging a lot of virtues, such as fellowship and enjoyment of a meal.”

Both good *and* able to be abused: The bothersome formulation rides again. To focus on the first half and ignore the second is to expose ourselves to mortal danger. But anyone who has stayed up late, savoring the company of friends and a nice tittle, understands that those moments can be as close to paradise as we get in this life. Not for nothing have generations looked forward to the coming “heavenly feast.”

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Stephanie Slade is the managing editor at *Reason* magazine and a 2016-17 Robert Novak Journalism Fellow.

## Human and Divine



*La Ascención, c. 2019*

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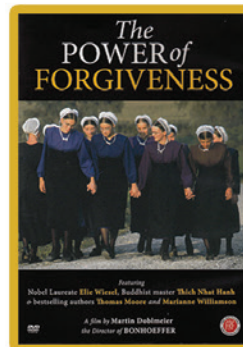
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