

America

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THE JOURNAL OF AMERICAN AND CULTURE



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Do Read the Comments

The last time Father Malone left this column in my care (4/3/17), I made an argument for reading the long form of the Gospel when the Lectionary gives us that option. Today I'm going to make an even more shocking reading recommendation: You should read the comments.

At least, you should read **America's** online comments, which we improved and relaunched at the beginning of November last year. I am not so foolish as to suggest reading all comments, everywhere, indiscriminately. There's a reason "Don't read the comments" has become perhaps the most often given—and maybe also the most frequently ignored—advice on the internet.

Yet there is something to learn there, both about why we give that advice to one another and also about why so many of us (myself most certainly included) are tempted to brush it off. "Don't read the comments" reflects an understandable despair at the usual level of discourse found in comments sections, even at publications with otherwise admirable editorial standards and well-informed, well-intentioned readers. It is all too easy to find examples of people talking past each other or getting pulled into pointless arguments by trolls whose goals are merely to score points for their side or to provoke a reaction and derail a discussion independent of any ideological aim.

That we are pulled in to the comments anyway, despite these problems, testifies to how much we desire conversation. We are deeply, sometimes almost obsessively, curious about what other people think and how they think and why. And sometimes a viewpoint we disagree with is even more fascinating

than one that echoes our own thinking. At its best, such curiosity about someone who thinks differently is a kind of broad-minded charity, but it can become self-serving and narcissistic, leading to the sort of trolling that has made many comments sections dismal.

Around a year ago, I was almost ready to abandon our comments section. On my list of responsibilities for **America's** digital platforms, moderating the comments was the one that most reliably inspired frustration. The task was guaranteed to be thankless and also frequently felt pointless, as I cleaned up the worst aftermath of threads where people had been yelling at each other without really engaging in any conversation. The thing that stopped me from joining colleagues at other publications, including some in the Catholic media, that have given up comments, beside my own habitual temptation to read them, was **America's** commitment to "lead the conversation." How could we lead a conversation we weren't willing to have?

We applied for and received a grant from the Lenfest Foundation that supported a shift to using Coral, an open-source software project, as our commenting platform. During one of the first conversations I had with the team at Coral, they introduced me to an analogy that helped me understand my own frustration. Imagine trying to collect food donations by leaving cardboard boxes out on every street corner, hoping that people will put in cans of food. Imagine how quickly those boxes would be filled with trash.

Now imagine how much better this would work with a smaller number of boxes, with real people standing

nearby, asking people to donate food, thanking them when they do and immediately throwing out any trash that might make it in. Comments boxes are not predestined to be filled with garbage—but largely anonymous, infrequently monitored comments boxes where the only feedback is the eventual silent deletion of bad comments are headed that way.

Our comments relaunch last November consisted of two big changes. First, the new software from Coral made it much easier for us to moderate comments close to the time they're posted. It also allows commenters to receive notifications about replies, making it easier to keep a good conversation going. Second, we stopped having comments open by default on every page. We open comments on the most important stories we publish each day (stories without comments open have a form for feedback that comes to us another way, by email), but we have stopped putting out more cardboard boxes than we are capable of standing near.

I have seen a marked improvement in the light to heat ratio in our comments over the last few months. You can read some examples in this issue's Your Take (Page 6). Our comments are still contentious sometimes, but they are far more likely now to be contentious in the direction of a conversation. Instead of dreading moderation, I have begun looking forward to seeing what our readers are most interested in and engaged with.

So please, do read the comments. And write some, too.

Sam Sawyer, S.J., executive editor.
Twitter: @SSawyerSJ.



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AP Photo/Aaron Favila

Leila de Castro carries a statue of the baby Jesus as she walks on a road covered with volcanic ash in Boso-Boso, Batangas Province, southern Philippines, Jan. 14.

Cover: Donald Glover, who goes by the stage name Childish Gambino, and Rhiannon Giddens

Charles Sykes/Invision/AP
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Story: A (Complicated) Prayer for Kobe

Yes we are all complicated. What a tragedy...and losing his 13-year-old daughter, there are no words. If he hadn't been a sports figure, his death would likely be unknown. I lost my son (10 years older than Kobe) in November after a nine-month battle with pancreatic cancer. He was a loving husband, father of 8-year-old twins and received his I.B.E.W. Local 126 30-year pin the day before he died. There was no fanfare or news—just caring thoughts and condolences from family, friends and coworkers. He was special to all of us. It doesn't matter if you are a sports celebrity or just a private citizen. We ache and grieve the same. And we all are not perfect.

Jill Gavioli

I appreciate the courage and honesty to acknowledge in prayer the many things that people might feel during a time like this. I teach high school, and this is a great prayer to help with the conversation and discernment around all the information my students are inundated with this week.

Jennifer Greene

Story: How St. John Henry Newman Can Help Us Understand Why Catholics Are Leaving the Church

I appreciate Father Paternostro's review of Newman's *Grammar of Assent* and his attempt to explain that there is a complexity of motives held by people who leave the Catholic Church. I differ with him if he is using the *Grammar* to show how people leave the church. Newman is clear throughout the text that people assent to truth. One assents to a true statement through processes of thought and deliberation, extensive as they may be. Newman would not consider a person leaving the church, with that person's complexity of motives, as making an assent. It is making a decision—of course—but not assenting to a truth.

This is why evangelization is such a challenge today. To assent to a truth is vastly different from choosing a preference.

William Hayward

To David Paternostro—if you are interested in a different kind of “knowing” to compare with Newman's you might try Lonergan's ideas about both rational and spiritual knowing. I have surveyed his ideas in The Los Angeles

Review of Books in my review of a book written by one of Lonergan's students, titled *Brain, Consciousness and God*.

Arthur McCaffrey

Thanks very much for the recommendation! You're right that Newman and Lonergan are very much intellectual fellow travelers, with their emphasis on accounting for the knowing subject as much as the known object when we talk of knowledge, and Newman can rightly be seen as a forerunner of Lonergan. I must confess I've always found Lonergan to be difficult reading, but perhaps this book you recommend will change that. I'll definitely be picking it up soon!

David Paternostro, S.J.

Story: War Crime Pardons Dishonor the Christian Roots of the Modern Military

Just what are the Christian roots of the military? I don't believe that there are any. What is a just war? I can't think of a single one. Certainly not Vietnam, which I fought in, and most certainly not Iraq or Afghanistan. I remember struggling in Marine Corps boot camp and combat training with the extreme command to “Kill kill kill!” Deep in my soul, I clearly knew how wrong that was. No one has the right to take another life, and the greatest act of peace is forgiveness, not revenge.

Michael Svensen

Michael, I respect and share your general sentiment. Yet, as the daughter of a Vietnam vet who was a 39-year-old U.S. Air Force pilot/advisor on the ground with ground soldiers during the time of the Bat-21 incident, I understand what the author means by the “Christian ideal” of the warrior. My father was an officer who dropped bombs in an unjust war. Until he died, he lived in a state of pain about what it meant to be a moral soldier, a moral man, a moral Catholic—who played a part in that unjust war that consumed so many lives.

J. Jones

These comments were excerpted from our website, where new commenting technology was recently installed. For more about this, see Of Many Things (Page 3).



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Congress's Duty to Act on Behalf of Immigrants

In a 5-to-4 decision on Jan. 23, the U.S. Supreme Court cleared the way for the Trump administration's plans to deny green cards or visas to immigrants it deems likely to become a public charge—that is, a person who is at least partly dependent on government assistance.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has maintained its position against the rule change, most recently stating that the decision “will have devastating consequences for immigrant communities, as those impacted are cast into the shadows because they fear deportation and family separation for seeking critical support.”

Congress cannot continue to sit idly by while the executive branch continues to demolish our already broken immigration system. This body has been negligent for far too long in its duty to pass fair and humane immigration reform.

Since 1990, the little Congress has done has restricted immigration, strengthened border security and cracked down on employers who hire undocumented immigrants. Those measures include the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, the 2001 Patriot Act, the 2005 Real ID Act and the 2006 Secure Fence Act.

Throughout this time, the Catholic Church in the United States and immigrant rights advocates have lobbied Congress for comprehensive reform. Those efforts have included “Strangers No Longer,” a 2003 pastoral letter from the bishops of Mexico and the United States, which articulated a nuanced path forward on immigration reform. The bishops' vision recognized the nation's right to sovereignty while upholding the human dig-

nity of migrants. But while efforts like the Justice for Immigrants campaign continue, a divided Congress has yet to enact comprehensive reform.

This partisan congressional paralysis has left immigration measures in the hands of the executive branch. In 2012, President Obama issued an executive order to establish the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, known as DACA, which protected from deportation undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children.

The Trump administration announced plans to end DACA in 2018, but court rulings have temporarily blocked the termination of the program. Last November, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments on DACA and is expected to rule on the measure in June. The recent ruling on public charge could be a harbinger of that decision.

But Congress does not have to wait for the Supreme Court or the president to act. Last June, the House passed the American Dream and Promise Act of 2019, which would create a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers and recipients of Temporary Protected Status. It is time for majority leader Mitch McConnell to allow a vote on the American Dream Act in the Senate and for President Trump to sign it into law. Polls have indicated that more than 75 percent of Americans support legislation that allows Dreamers to stay in the country. Mr. Trump has said he has a “great heart” for Dreamers.

Beyond addressing this imminent threat to Dreamers, members of Congress must stop using immigrants to score political points with their base and finally fix the policies that treat foreign

arrivals as problems and keep millions in legal uncertainty. The nation is ill served by a Congress that neither addresses the estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants who have made the United States their home nor provides a realistic process for managing the flow of immigrants across the southern border. The greatness of America has always been built on the strength of its immigrants. It is time for Congress to ensure that this legacy continues.

Almsgiving: Lent's Overlooked Discipline

Is there any question that almsgiving is the under-practiced, under-encouraged Lenten discipline when compared with prayer and fasting? (In this magazine's 110-year-old archives, a search for the terms *prayer* and *fasting* in the titles of published articles brought up thousands of examples. A similar query for *almsgiving* yielded a meager two results.) Resources and encouragement abound for new and creative ways to immerse ourselves more deeply in prayer during this season of penance. And while it may be true that fasting requirements have been relaxed in both church law and daily practice in recent decades, one can still find pockets of resurgence of the ascetic practice (even amid a more secular world that is discovering the health and productivity benefits of intermittent fasting and Dry January).

Perhaps Catholics in the United States might redouble their efforts to give alms this Lent and to reflect in greater depth on the spiritual benefits the practice can bring.

Scripture is replete with instructions to give to the poor: “Almsgiving delivers from death and keeps one

from entering into Darkness,” Tobit tells us. Sirach commands: “Do not grieve the hungry, nor anger the needy. Do not aggravate a heart already angry, nor delay giving to the needy. A beggar’s request do not reject; do not turn your face away from the poor.” “Give alms,” Jesus tells us, and we will build up “inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach nor moth destroy.”

Charity and almsgiving should be part of regular Christian practice. But during Lent we are called to do more. Many are willing to increase their charitable giving in December, presumably for tax benefits. Should not our annual call to conversion inspire at least as much of an increase?

All the better if the alms that we give come from money saved by giving up forms of amusement or self-gratification. Catholics might ask themselves: Is there a streaming service that I could do without for these 40 days? If meat is common in my diet, could I opt instead for less-expensive vegetable substitutes? Is there a concert, a movie or a sporting event that I could forgo?

In truth, many people in this country already go without these luxuries in order to provide for basic necessities. A healthy stock market is little comfort to the 40 percent of Americans who do not have savings to cover a \$400 emergency expense. Lent is a time for Catholics not only to pray for those in need but also to give alms and help alleviate the suffering of the poor.

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Ten steps toward a parish bulletin that people will actually read

Most parish bulletins are ugly. I combed through dozens of parish bulletins from around the country and noticed a similar set of design problems. But most just need to be simplified. These rules can help create a bulletin people will actually read.

1. *Keep things organized.* Reading a parish bulletin can feel like opening someone's junk drawer. You have to sift through the pastor's letter, the announcement about the clothing drive and even the odd quotation from St. Augustine before finding the times for Mass. Think of visual organization as a way of sorting items into boxes based on their function. Mass and confession times should be together, and recurring features like the parish directory should be found in the same place every week. But resist the temptation to use actual boxes with hard borders in your design. Even worse are "fun" borders, like musical notes for a concert announcement. This kind of embellishment is tacky and unprofessional.

2. *Be consistent.* Designers at professional publications know that readers come to expect certain elements, like National Geographic's signature yellow border. The same can be said of parish bulletins. If it seems as if you are designing from scratch every week, readers will sense it. Save time and keep elements like font and color scheme consistent.

3. *Strive for simplicity.* So many bulletins are overcrowded. Not only is there too much information on any given page, but unnecessary elements make the bulletin harder to read. No one needs a clip-art photo of a loaf of bread to know about next month's bake sale. The project of decluttering should affect every aspect of the bulletin

design. It starts with getting rid of "https://www" before every website address. And do not cram the pastor's letter and weekend Mass times on the cover along with a large illustration for that week's Gospel reading.

4. *Establish a hierarchy.* Hierarchy in design is about clearly communicating what a reader should see first, second, third, etc. Readers are drawn to bigger items first and tend to read from left to right. Be aware of this when putting together each page.

5. *Less is more in typography.* Many bulletins make readers dizzy by casually switching between centered and left-aligned text, or using new fonts for each text box. Keep most text left-aligned; centered text is harder to read and should be used only for high-priority information like the parish name. And do not use fonts like Comic Sans or Papyrus, even when you want to make things "kid-friendly" or "exotic." These have a reputation for being overused and unprofessional.

6. *Use images sparingly.* Images pull readers' attention quickly and thus get bumped up in the hierarchy. Even if that photo from the parish picnic is tucked into a text box at the bottom of the page, it will likely be the first thing that someone sees. So if you are going to use that photo, do it to your advantage. Make sure it is high-quality, and use it to lead your readers into the story that is the most important feature on its page.

7. *Let your pages breathe.* Overuse of images is associated with another mistake in most bulletins: the lack of white, or "negative," space. Good negative space allows the reader to move comfortably through the information without visual fatigue. So establish page margins, usually a half-inch to an

inch all around. And resist the temptation to fill blank spaces with unnecessary elements.

8. *Fix the advertisement section.* One of the most poorly designed parts of any parish bulletin is the ad section. It breaks all the rules about simplicity and negative space. And it can be off-putting to have advertisements for funeral homes take up the most space, giving the impression of a dying church. A simpler list of sponsoring businesses could help readers navigate through needed services.

9. *Get feedback.* After a redesign, ask a few trusted people: "Is this clear? Can you read this easily?"

10. *Treat bulletin design as a ministry.* Parishes still use the bulletin as a tool to help the community think, pray and act together. But much of that good intention is counteracted by bad design. The bulletin should be an extension of the parish's ministry; it may be the way a potential new Catholic finds out about the local parish. It cannot just be an afterthought.

If you can, hire a local design firm to create a new bulletin template. If not, consider reaching out to someone in the parish with design experience, perhaps a person in art school. You do not have to employ cutting-edge design, but remembering these 10 principles can help your ministry be more effective.

Angelo Jesus Canta is a graduate student at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry and former O'Hare fellow at America. His work can be found at angeloxcanta.com.

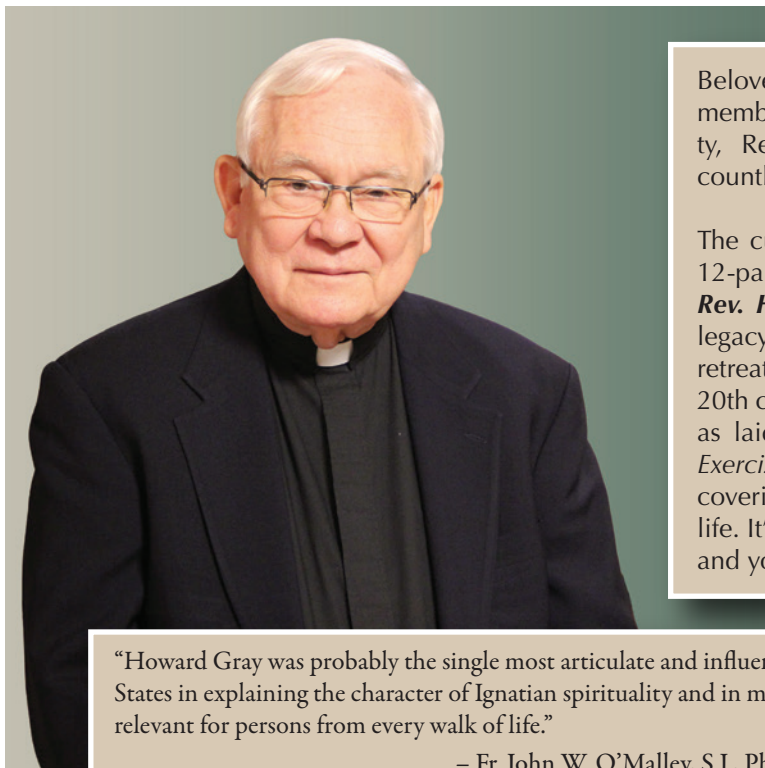
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Lessons learned?

As tensions rise with Iran, Afghanistan becomes the longest war in U.S. history

By Kevin Clarke

How close were the United States and Iran to another Middle East war in January? The prospect of a new conflict, and its cost in blood and treasure, was surely on the minds of many Americans—75 percent of whom say that the United States’ disagreements with Iran are not serious enough to warrant another war—especially those who read a sobering report from *The Washington Post* published just a few weeks before the United States and Iran traded air strikes over Iraq. “The Afghanistan Papers: A Secret History of the War” described in detail the results of an internal review of the failures and miscalculations of this previous—and ongoing—military misadventure in the region.

“These papers basically confirm the concerns that many just war ethicists back in 2001 raised,” said Tobias Winright, a theological ethicist at Saint Louis University in Missouri. He remembers many who challenged the idea that a large-scale military intervention was the most appropriate moral and practical response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Many urged instead a measured “police, SWAT-like response,” he recalled.

Now “here we are, all these years later”—still in Afghanistan. “One of the core criteria I and others have argued for from the just war tradition is right intent: If you are going to use the military, is it really to establish a just peace...a positive peace?” Not only has the U.S. intervention failed to achieve that objective, he pointed out; it has not even been

able to achieve “a negative peace”—that is, the mere absence of violence.

Trying to make sense of that outcome, more than 400 military and civilian officials were interviewed by the Office of the Special Inspector for Afghanistan Reconstruction as part of its Lessons Learned program. Meant to diagnose policy failures in Afghanistan, the program was hidden from public view until *The Post* won the release of its findings after a three-year court battle.

The Afghanistan papers offer a litany of intelligence errors, strategic blunders and expressions of sustained, widespread uncertainty regarding the U.S. mission in Afghanistan. According to *The Post*, those documents reveal “there was no consensus on the war’s objectives, let alone how to end the conflict.”

The same day *The Post* released its grim exposé, *The New York Times* published a summary of a report from Brown University’s Cost of War project. According to those researchers, the United States has spent \$2.15 trillion so far in efforts to contain the Taliban, Al Qaeda and now ISIS militants and to stabilize Afghanistan’s government and civil society.

During that time, the war has cost the lives of 2,351 American military personnel and an estimated 43,000 Afghan civilians. Yet more than 18 years after U.S. and NATO troops first arrived to begin the longest war in U.S. history,



Photo courtesy Department of Defense/1st Lt. Vernicia Ford

the stable, democratic Afghanistan the United States struggled to establish remains acutely vulnerable to collapse, and an emboldened and patient Taliban appears content to simply wait out the Americans.

Karen J. Greenberg, director of the Center on National Security at Fordham University School of Law, said that there were many unknowns when the United States first went to war in Afghanistan. “Among them was how exactly this tribal country functions, what role the warlords and others were playing vis-a-vis the United States and other countries. In other words, who to trust, what their actual

goals were, how they viewed the Americans.”

The unhappy revelations turned up by the Afghanistan papers did not come as much of a surprise to Maryann Cusimano Love, a professor of International Relations at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. She has attended enough briefings and read enough situation reports emerging from the conflict over the years to have long ago concluded it has been a debacle. “It was not a pretty picture ever,” she said, describing Afghanistan as a “horror story of lost money, lost tax dollars, lost lives and not a whole lot to show for it in return.”

If there is a lasting lesson to emerge from the experience of the United States in Afghanistan, it could be one shared by Ms. Cusimano Love: “It’s much easier to start a war than it is to finish it,” she said. “It’s much easier to get in than it is to achieve objectives by force.”

She remembered that in the first week after the 9/11 attacks, Colin Powell, then secretary of state, laid out the reasons why resorting to war in Afghanistan was probably not the best option, “and he laid out all the nonmilitary means to try to fight terror.” In confronting terrorism, she said, “before entering Afghanistan, we had a lot of data about what works and what doesn’t,” an understanding of the difficulty of defeating rural insurgencies, and a palette of nonmilitary options to achieve diplomatic and political aims.

But all the hard-earned wisdom and expertise within

the U.S. military could not overcome the political momentum for war in the aftermath of the terror strikes at home. Under the Constitution, civilian decision-makers have the final say about how the military is used, no matter what lessons military planners have taken to heart. The military can advise and counsel, but the politicians “set the tone.”

“So we kind of learn these lessons over and over again,” Ms. Cusimano Love said, “that military force is limited in what it can achieve and that sometimes the other tools in the toolbox,” like peace building, “are more effective—but they oftentimes are less [politically] attractive.

“They also don’t have big price tags associated with them,” she said. “You don’t need big equipment or aircraft carriers and nuclear missiles to do peace-building, so you don’t have defense contractors lobbying for those particular avenues of policy.

“It’s a structural problem. It’s not just on particular personalities, that sometimes the more effective things to do are harder to get through the political gauntlet.”

Reading through the Afghanistan papers, David Cortright, director of policy studies at the University of Notre Dame’s Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, drew some overriding lessons. “One is that the top senior people in the military knew that the war was unwinnable. There was no way that we were going to defeat the Taliban, and they’ve known that for years.”

Yet U.S. military soldiered on in Afghanistan, proposing troop surges, promising successes. “They deceived the public,” Mr. Cortright said.

“And politicians, who received enough accurate information to know better, continued the war out of what I would consider political cowardice,” he said. No one wanted to be the leader who told the U.S. public the truth about Afghanistan, that the war against the Taliban was unwinnable “and probably unjust and that we should have never gone in.”

“It reminds me so much of Vietnam, where you had [Secretary of Defense Robert] McNamara and others who knew in 1967, ’68, certainly after Tet in 1968, that there was no way we were going to win this war, but they kept on, increased the bombing.”

And in that unwillingness to accept the truth and share the bad news lies another lesson, he said. In Afghanistan, as in Vietnam, when all else fails, U.S. strategists seem to fall back on escalating aerial campaigns under the mistaken belief that “even if we can’t win with the troops on the ground, we can bomb them sufficiently to force the other

side to cave in or capitulate to our demands.”

Mr. Cortright believes that Iran likewise will not be brought to accept America’s will through the force of drones or missiles or a bombing campaign. The Islamic Republic of Iran has already demonstrated its mettle, enduring nearly a decade of war with Iraq, he pointed out, suggesting that the U.S. public, with the Afghanistan deceptions in mind, should be skeptical of the aggressive rhetoric against Iran emanating from the current occupants of the White House.

“The reality is that there’s no way we can achieve any policy goals with Iran through these military means,” Mr. Cortright said, noting in frustration “just an unwillingness to even consider the fact that maybe we can negotiate [with Iran], maybe we can work out a better deal and to accept that we had a pretty good deal with the Iran nuclear agreement.”

Afghanistan “has been a quagmire, and that’s a lesson learned,” Mr. Winright said. “In the future we need to take

seriously [just war] considerations.” He worries that President Trump does not know about just war standards or “care about them” if he does.

“Iran could be much worse, if it escalates, than either Afghanistan or Iraq,” Mr. Winright said. “This kind of impulsive recklessness is very dangerous. I’m very concerned.”

“I think [the Afghanistan experience] shows that just war tells you how to limit war. It doesn’t tell you what’s necessary to build peace,” said Ms. Cusimano Love. “So even if you could have made a just war argument for the invasion of Afghanistan, it still wouldn’t lead up to how to build a positive peace.”

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

With reporting from Ryan Di Corpo, Joseph A. O’Hare fellow.

AFGHANISTAN WAR TRADE-OFFS

COST OF U.S. OPERATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN (2001-19)

\$1.5 trillion	War effort
\$10 billion	Counternarcotics operations
\$87 billion	Afghan police and military training
\$24 billion	Afghanistan economic development
\$30 billion	Reconstruction programs
\$500 billion	Interest on federal borrowing
TOTAL	APPROX. \$2.15 TRILLION



1.2 BILLION METRIC TONS OF GREENHOUSE GASES: U.S. MILITARY EMISSIONS SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR ON TERROR IN 2001.

PROJECTED FY 2020 DEFENSE BUDGET

\$718 BILLION (CBO)

HOW WE MIGHT HAVE SPENT THE MONEY

MORE THAN 76 YEARS OF FAMILY, MEDICAL AND PARENTAL LEAVE (at an annual cost of \$28 billion, according to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research)

8.75 MONTHS OF HEALTH CARE SPENDING under Sanders-proposed Medicare for All, at \$2.93 trillion a year (estimated annual cost from Economic Analysis of Medicare for All, Political Economy Research Institute, 2018)

27 YEARS’ WORTH OF TUITION-FREE PUBLIC COLLEGE, at \$79 billion per year (current annual tuition from the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education)

CUT CHILDHOOD POVERTY IN HALF IN 10 YEARS: \$910 billion (annual cost from “A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty,” The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2019)

REDUCE U.S. FOSSIL FUEL EMISSIONS BY 40 PERCENT IN 15 YEARS: \$200 billion a year (Political Economy Research Institute, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2014)

FIX U.S. INFRASTRUCTURE: \$2 trillion (cost of Afghanistan war thus far) (2017 Infrastructure Report Card, published every four years by the American Society of Civil Engineers)

Sources: Costs of War Project, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University; “What Did the U.S. Get for \$2 Trillion in Afghanistan?,” The New York Times, Dec. 9, 2019; “Long-Term Implications of the 2020 Future Years Defense Program,” Congressional Budget Office.

Secondary school students get to work in September at the Matteo Ricci School in Brussels.



Photo courtesy of Matteo Ricci School.

GOODNEWS: Jesuit school opens in Muslim-majority neighborhood in Brussels

At the 8 a.m. bell, French-language rap music blasts through the loudspeakers above the playground of a new Jesuit school in Brussels. Its students, age 12 and up, pick up their bags, shuffle themselves together and head toward their classrooms. It is the start of a new school day.

The Matteo Ricci School opened its doors in September 2019 in the heart of one of the most densely populated and impoverished neighborhoods of Brussels, home to families who have migrated to the European capital from all over the world. Most of the school's students come from Arab backgrounds, while others are of sub-Saharan African and European origin and descent.

In Europe, where Jesuit schools have traditionally catered to pupils from middle- to high-income families, the Matteo Ricci School, located between a homeless shelter and broad avenues leading to a busy train station, is setting a precedent. For Alain Deneef, who launched the project and later became one of the school's board members, Matteo Ricci represents a pilot project that could be emulated elsewhere in Europe.

"Apart from a couple of schools in Spain, I do not think there are many others like us, but there will be more, and that is why everyone is watching what we are doing," he told **America**.

Jesuits in Belgium wanted to launch a new school that would reach less-affluent communities, but they were also keenly interested in connecting with "people from different cultural and religious backgrounds," Mr. Deneef said. The majority of pupils at Matteo Ricci are Muslim.

"If I have to boil it down, we want to educate the future elites of the Muslim communities in Brussels," he said, noting that the city and nation will need their leadership and contributions in the future.

The neighborhoods of Brussels where halal meat

shops, Western Union remittance offices and the Arab language are prevalent were overrun by media in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015. It was from within these marginalized communities that elements of the terror network that launched those attacks emerged.

Some schools in these neighborhoods in northwestern Brussels—often dubbed the "poor crescent" corridor of Brussels—have been derogatively called trash schools because of their high levels of violence, dropout rates and overwhelmed teachers. Mr. Deneef acknowledges that "the good schools are not in these neighborhoods," but he wants to change all that.

Last September, students from 42 different schools switched to Matteo Ricci. Redouane Nadja, one of Matteo Ricci's two administrators, enjoys watching how some youth begin to trust the staff after having previously endured "educational systems that have broken them." Prejudices based on the child's neighborhood, religion or country of origin play a big role in demotivating students, he said.

"We need to break the image that if you come from an immigrant family, you must be up to no good," Mr. Nadja said. With his strong knowledge of the local urban slang and the latest from the Instagram accounts of pop artists, Mr. Nadja is an authority figure to whom the Brussels-bred youth at Matteo Ricci can relate. "I tell the young folk I meet to be proud of where they come from and to work hard."

Anne L'Olivier, the director of the school, said that the Catholic nature of the school was actually a draw for Muslim parents. "A lot of Muslim parents have come here saying, 'I know that this is quality education and that here we can talk about God,'" Ms. L'Olivier said.

Melissa Vida, *Brussels correspondent*.
Twitter: @MelissaVidaa.



In Guatemala, a church shelter threatened for aiding Central American migrants

A boy no more than 6 years old had just arrived in Guatemala after appealing for asylum in the United States with his mother. He bowed his head and prayed, hands joined over a bowl of rice and frankfurters, his first hot meal after weeks in U.S. detention. “Thank you for our daily bread. Amen.”

He was one of more than 200 Honduran and Salvadoran asylum seekers sent to Guatemala since the United States started implementing the Asylum Cooperation Agreement (also known as the Safe Third Country Agreement).

The mother and child sat among 16 other women and children and one man silently eating dinner inside Casa del Migrante, a shelter in Guatemala City run by the Scalabrini Mission of St. Charles, part of a network of four “migrant homes” in Guatemala along the most traveled routes to the north.

In mid-January more than 2,000 Central Americans, part of the latest migrant caravan attempting to reach the United States, passed by Casa del Migrante as they fled political and criminal violence, poverty and state corruption in their home nations. Hundreds of caravan travelers forded the Suchiate River, which separates Mexico and Guatemala, only to be driven back by members of Mexico’s National Guard.

Some of these migrants found temporary respite and a

hot meal at the center, but not everyone is grateful for the small mercies it provides. On Jan. 20, Mauro Verzeletti, C.S., the director of the shelter, began receiving threatening phone calls.

“Using foul language, saying that they were going to put an end to the work we are doing in the migrant house, to all the staff, and to me, too,” the Brazilian priest said, describing the caller during a press conference outside the public prosecutor’s office in Guatemala City, where he had filed an official complaint.

Honduran asylum seekers sent to Guatemala from the United States told **America** they had no idea where they were being sent until they arrived in Guatemala. In many cases, asylum seekers returned to a neighboring country face the same imminent dangers they originally fled when they left their home country.

After filing his complaint with Guatemalan authorities, Father Verzeletti was noticeably shaken, but by the time a group of returned asylum seekers, mostly women and children, made it to Casa del Migrante later that evening, he was able to shake hands and greet the people coming to the door. Frontline staff, who had already put in a 15-hour day, explained the rules of the house and answered medical and legal questions before handing out small kit bags with soap and toothpaste to the new arrivals.



AP Photo/Marco Ugarte

Mexican National Guard block Central American migrants near Tapachula, Mexico, on Jan. 23.

Most of the people sitting around the table on this night had been awake for 24 hours since they started their deportation journeys from Texas and Florida. Among them was Henry, a successful businessman until he was forced to flee San Pedro Sula, Honduras. He described himself as a threat to the Juan Orlando Hernández government because he was independent, a well-off man who did not agree with its policies.

“You can’t live in peace anymore,” he said. “You can’t work. From the moment [you leave home], you’re afraid they’re going to kill you. It’s not good,” he said. Henry and his family joined the recent caravan but turned around when they got to Tapachula, Mexico. He was worried that his wife and daughter could become victims of human traffickers operating at the border, so they returned to Guatemala City.

Too afraid to head north again or to return home, Henry and his family are considering staying in Guatemala, a place where they may try to start over again.

Jackie McVicar contributes from Guatemala.
Twitter: @pajarolindo.



CNS photo/Michael Stulman, CRS

Safe from Boko Haram at a camp in Kindjani, Niger, in 2016

Pastor executed as Boko Haram resurfaces in Nigeria

A resurgent Boko Haram executed a local Christian leader on Jan. 20, 18 days after kidnapping him during a raid on his community in Michika, a town in Adamawa State in northeast Nigeria. The murder of the Rev. Lawan Andimi, a Church of the Brethren pastor and chair of the Christian Association of Nigeria, is only the latest in a surge of militant attacks in recent months. On Jan. 19, insurgents ambushed Nigerian army patrols, killing 17. On Christmas Day, 11 men were executed by the militants, and two days later Boko Haram ambushed and executed a bridal party on its way to a family celebration.

Boko Haram has waged a religious ideological war in the region since 2009. Some 27,000 people have been killed since the start of the insurgency, and nearly two million people remain displaced by the violence.

Terror strikes by Boko Haram had diminished under Nigeria’s President Muhammadu Buhari, elected in 2015 on the strength of promises to improve security. But attacks have crept up steadily over the past year.

“Many people, especially Christians in northern Nigeria, are living in fear,” said the Rev. John Hayab, an official with the Christian Association of Nigeria’s northern arm. Many villagers are too frightened to attend regular church programs, he said. In the hot zones where the militant groups operate frequently, churches have been forced to shut down to avoid attacks or kidnappings. Mr. Hayab says members of the clergy are repeatedly targeted.

The Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze, president of the Nigerian bishops’ conference, called for the government to do more to end the violence. “We reiterate that without adequate security of lives and property, there can be no stability and enabling environment for meaningful development.”

Shola Lawal, the recipient of the 2019 Elizabeth Neuffer Fellowship from the International Women’s Media Foundation, writes about West Africa.
Twitter: @Shollytupe.



FOR GOD SO LOW THE SWO

How should we cope in an age of climate apocalypticism?

By Anna Keating

[I]t was reassuring to know that far away, whales swim untroubled in Baltic waters, and monks in arcane time zones chanted ceaselessly for the salvation of the world.

– Donna Tartt, *The Goldfinch*

It is a snowy Friday evening and I am in a tiny, 100-year-old cabin off a dirt road in Manitou Springs, Colo., watching 20-something Colorado College grads in sweaters and boots prepare food for a Shabbat pot-



ED ORLD

luck, or “Shabbat-luck,” which they host every week to welcome in the Sabbath, even though only three of the 20 or so people in attendance are Jewish.

Everyone is giving hugs as people stream in with homemade squash pies, zucchini chocolate cakes and chiles rellenos to share. Ruthie Markwardt, 27, my host, picked the chilis she is cooking. Ms. Markwardt shares this modest home with her boyfriend, Barack Ben-Amots, as well as three other roommates. Through their eco-conscious living, food donation, teaching and mu-

iStock

Brenna Cussen Anglada, far right, is the founder of the Catholic Worker Movement's St. Isidore Catholic Worker Farm in southwestern Wisconsin and a member of the activist group Four Necessity Valve Turners.

These days, we frequently read headlines and wonder if it is already too late.

sic, they are young people committed to trying to repair a distressed world. The windowsill in the kitchen is covered with succulents and candles, gourds and dried flowers, an Our Lady of Guadalupe and a piece of honeycomb. It feels a little like a home altar, and the hospitality I have received is radical and good. Ms. Markwardt and Mr. Ben-Amots, who teaches middle school, are turning this land into a community garden and educational farm.

Even though this is my first Shabbat, the ritual feels immediately familiar and profoundly human: lighting candles, singing songs, blessing and sharing bread, blessing and drinking wine. As we eat, after prayers, Ms. Markwardt, who has long blond hair, bright blue eyes and a nose ring, starts telling me about when she “first fell in love with seeds.” She spends some of her days picking vegetables at Hobbes Farm, others working for a community nonprofit called Concrete Couch, a group committed to community gardens and public art made from salvaged material. Ms. Markwardt teaches people skills that their great-grandparents once knew, like how to can peaches and tomatoes so they can eat locally all year round, or how to use tools so they can build and mend things. It is about rejecting what Pope Francis calls the “throwaway culture.”

It's a beautiful instantiation of living the Gospel, although Ms. Markwardt and the other environmentalists in attendance are not Catholic. They are predominantly “nones,” people who claim no particular religious affiliation. Yet they are clearly living the call of Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical “Laudato Si’,” right down to the pope's desire that we rediscover the Sabbath (No. 237).

What Has Changed

I have come here because it can be difficult to find this sort of ecologically minded conversation among Catholics in

my social circles. My sister Mia Alvarado taught a class on “Laudato Si’” at our Colorado parish in 2018, but it was sparsely attended. My impression is that, even now, many Catholics in the United States do not have a sense of urgency around this issue, nor have they heard about it from their pastors. Catholics also are sharply divided along political lines when it comes to the issue of climate: Eighty percent of Catholic Democrats say that humans are a cause of global warming, while 78 percent of Catholic Republicans say humans are not to blame.

But the impacts of climate change are already being felt, and the extreme weather that accompanies it is devastating communities' lives. Last summer the temperature reached 108.6 degrees Fahrenheit in France, 108.7 in Germany. Hundreds died. My cousin in Houston was rescued from her flooded home during Hurricane Harvey in 2017 by canoe. These days, we frequently read headlines and wonder if it is already too late. Headlines like the BBC's “Climate Change: 12 Years to Save the Planet. Make That 18 Months” urge us to act, but they do not erase feelings of helplessness nor quell fears of the futility of our small actions. Few thought climate change would arrive so quickly. More and more friends tell me, “I've given up hope. It's liberating.” Or, “We're doomed.”

Even among those who understand the urgency and consequences of climate change, resistance, to many, seems pointless. We are accustomed to religious fundamentalists saying that we live in the end times, but now we also see articles about a “climate apocalypse” in *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*. The authors of pieces like these, who often do not have children, seem almost proud of their acceptance that the end is near. As if the end of human life on earth will be a relief. (No more striving for that next promotion.) Many of us, especially those of us with children, cannot accept this. How could we, when it will be our children and grandchildren who will face the long-term effects of our actions?

In the more than four years since “Laudato Si’” appeared, there have been worthy local efforts to respond to its call. The California bishops have laid out a climate action plan; many parishes have formed reading groups and invited speakers on climate change, switched to LED lights and installed solar panels. On a larger scale, the Global Catholic Climate Movement was founded as a network to connect hundreds of member organizations around the world. It also has a youth arm, called Laudato Si' Generation. These initiatives offer some hope, but it is hard to say wheth-



er the people in the pews are getting the message. I have been a Mass-goer my entire life and I do not recall a single homily about caring for creation, nor has my parish made even small symbolic changes like reusable coffee mugs after Mass or changing to a more eco-friendly thermostat. A priest I work with this year told me, “I haven’t read ‘Laudato Si’.” Should I? I don’t believe in climate change.”

A student I know told me, “China doesn’t care if you compost or use a clothesline or fly less or work for political change.” In other words, your little good deeds are as straw before flame. And perhaps he is right. The world is warming much faster than almost anyone predicted, and the combination of political, economic and lifestyle changes needed to reverse course seems unlikely to occur. Still, as Willa Cather wrote in her 1925 novel *The Professor’s House*, “We were better off when even the prosaic matter of taking nourishment could have the magnificence of a sin. I don’t think you help people by making their conduct of no importance—you impoverish them.”

The Church Has Spoken

The church is not without a viewpoint here. Both Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have picked up on this issue as one of the most urgent of our time. And the church has long been calling us to be mindful of threats to our common home. When Pope Francis was elected in 2013, he chose St. Francis of Assisi as his patron, immediately indicating to the world that he would continue the work of calling the faithful to an “ecological conversion.”

In “Laudato Si’,” Pope Francis wrote, “living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to the life of virtue; it is not an optional or secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (No. 217). In this encyclical Pope Francis connects care of creation to all of Catholic social teaching, from “Rerum Novarum” to “Humane Vitae,” from the church fathers to the Hebrew Scriptures, and calls on the world’s biggest polluters to embrace simpler lifestyles and advocate for social change. “We need to take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that ‘less is more’” (No. 22). Following “Laudato Si’,” in 2016, Francis also called caring for creation one of the works of mercy.

On these matters Francis is in good company. His writings on ecology and creation are consistent with those of Pope Benedict XVI, who was sometimes called The Green Pope because he made the Vatican the world’s first solar-powered state and sought to make it fully carbon-neutral. During his eight-year tenure, he was critical of world leaders and corporations for failing to take action to halt the spread of climate change and condemned a “selfish and individualistic mindset which also finds expression in an unregulated financial capitalism.”

Echoing his predecessor, Pope John Paul II, who frequently spoke about ecological issues, Benedict XVI wanted the world’s one billion Catholics to cultivate global solidarity. He encouraged us to recognize that because climate change disproportionately affects the poor, caring for creation and caring for the poor are the same. He urged us to

see that the earth herself is poor and that when our brothers and sisters do not have clean air to breathe or clean water to drink, it is obviously our concern.

Pope Benedict XVI declared pollution a “social sin,” requiring confession and repentance. He also encouraged “particular attention to climate change,” which he described as a matter of “grave concern for the whole human family.” Benedict loved nature and animals and spoke out against factory farms. He argued that ecology was key to teaching young people about morality and natural law, as there is nothing morally relative about clear-cutting a forest and leaving the land a desert. He said in 2007, “Everyone today can see that man could destroy the foundation of his existence—his earth—and, therefore, we can no longer simply use this earth, this reality entrusted to us, to do what we want or what appears useful and promising at the moment, but we must respect the inherent laws of creation.” He urged people to “learn these laws and obey these laws if we want to survive.” More recently, Pope Francis has said he plans to include a definition of ecological sins in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

How to Cope?

Despite this urging from several pontiffs, our two-party political system and polarized cultural climate has turned being good stewards of God’s good earth, a common-sense position, into a partisan one, which often makes the topic off limits in polite conversation. But this is not a time to be polite.

What scares me most is our collective silence. So many of us do not even talk about the ecological news with our friends and fellow parents at soccer practice. Floods. Droughts. Wildfires. Melting ice caps. The sixth mass extinction. It is enough to make anyone tune out the problem and quietly hope that someone else solves it. But how can we make sense of these strange times without each other? How can we live Pope Francis’ injunction to “sing as we go,” never letting “our struggles and our concern for this planet take away the joy of our hope” (“Laudato Si’,” No. 244)?

Some good news is that caring for creation may be a place where religious and nonreligious people can come together. First, we must learn from the Ruthie Markwardts of the world and at least acknowledge the existence of the crisis. This can happen regardless of whether a person understands the science, is politically conservative or liberal, is religious or not. Taking better care of our natural resources is a simple matter of manners that in turn lead to morals. Most of us can agree that the earth is a gift, so we should not pollute it or destroy it.



Second, we must take action and do something at a personal cost, irrespective of whether our actions will ultimately be successful in terms of “saving humanity” or “saving the earth.” Whose individual actions have ever been successful on that kind of scale? As an oft-quoted prayer by Bishop Kenneth Untener reads:

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord’s grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

I first met Catholics who lived voluntary simplicity and did good works that others considered crazy in the Catholic Worker Movement. For example, Sheila McCarthy has





Climate change has brought extreme weather patterns to many places. In 2018, Central Texas experienced historic flooding. Homes in the Graveyard Point neighborhood, in the flood plain of Lake Travis, near Austin, Tex., were nearly submerged under water.

brown hair and rosy, makeup-free cheeks, and often wears T-shirts and long skirts. Now 40, she has spent her entire adult life in the movement founded by Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day. She says, “Everything I’ve done in my life: living in community, eating food that would otherwise be thrown away, has been a way of saying, ‘We have too much.’”

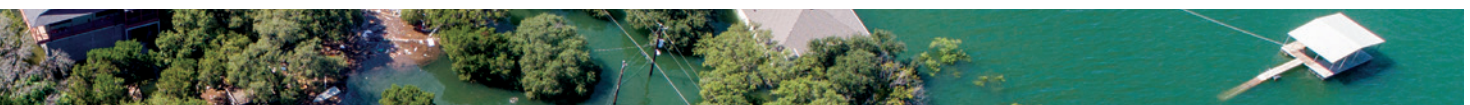
Ms. McCarthy has taken Jesus’ teachings to heart, opening her home to people who were homeless, organizing against war and torture, and living simply. She has a Ph.D. in theology from the University of Notre Dame, and she lives in South Bend, Ind., where she teaches at the women’s prison and works at the St. Julian of Norwich organic farm. She grows vegetables but also flowers and pollinators for bees, and these flowers “grace the tables” of her friends. Ms. McCarthy says, “Interesting things can happen at the fringes. Impossible things. Shifts can occur. I mean, Francis is our pope.”


The Catholic Worker taught me that we do not feed the poor thinking that poverty will be eliminated by our actions or, worse, that we have come to save the poor. We feed them because Jesus told us to and because feeding people is inherently good work. We feed the poor as a spiritual practice, praying that we might be made worthy to feed

them. “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner.” Isn’t this same attitude required for planting trees or rewilding lands or any good work? One day at a time, “Thy will be done.”


Imagine all the saints who could have said, “What difference will my life make? What’s the point? The Nazis/Communists/slave owners/Romans are going to kill me, or others, anyway.” But we are called to be like Jesus, who “so loved the world” and who loved it to the point of death—Jesus who died, seemingly, a failure.

In my searching, I have found points of light like Catholic Energies, a nonprofit group that helps churches switch to solar power, or Jen Betz, a member of Catholic Worker and a graduate of the University of Notre Dame. Ms. Betz became aware that her hometown of South Bend, Ind., was going to sell the Elbel Park golf course and the surrounding Mud Lake wetlands, fully one quarter of the city’s parkland. She and others formed Elbel for Everyone and fought to save the land by keeping it wild. In so doing, they acknowledged an ecological issue in their own backyard and then took action. In a democracy, without mass movements of people demanding change, nothing will change. Each of us is called to do good works in different ways, depending on





Pope Benedict XVI declared pollution a 'social sin,' requiring confession and repentance.



our vocation and state in life. Most of us will never be arrested for civil disobedience, but some of us will feel called to that kind of radical action.

Brenna Cussen Anglada, for example, is someone who has responded to that call. The founder of the Catholic Worker Movement's St. Isidore Catholic Worker Farm in southwestern Wisconsin, she is a member of the activist group Four Necessity Valve Turners. The four were arrested in February 2019 for turning off the flow of tar sands oil in their area, 20,000 barrels of which leaked into the Kalamazoo River in 2010. If convicted, they face up to five years in prison. Ms. Anglada says, "I don't think our action or the way we are living is singlehandedly saving anybody. But there's hope in the world when lots of people are working to protect our relationship with the earth and to try to live in right relationship with creation."

Indeed, we need to cultivate the virtue of hope. Hope is what gives us the courage to live differently and to be brave and joyful in impossible times. As C. S. Lewis wrote in his 1948 essay "On Living in an Atomic Age" about the very real threat of nuclear holocaust in his lifetime:

[T]he first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs.

Therapists tell their news-addled patients to focus on what they can control. Make commonsense preparations for a survivable disaster like a hurricane. Do something good for

the earth. Call your lawmaker. And make time for joy and rest and friendship and laughter. If you feel you are working in an immoral industry, try to change it; or else leave it and do something that leaves the world a better place. There is some measure of peace that cannot be purchased in feeling like you are doing something you believe in.

When I first met the Catholic Worker Movement's Sheila McCarthy, I was a prospective Notre Dame student, and what drew me to her was not her ideas, which at the time I knew nothing about; it was her freedom. I remember thinking, "Who is the beautiful woman with unshaved armpits inviting me to a L'Arche dance?" (The L'Arche movement benefits people with intellectual disabilities.) I did not know that this version of being an American woman was an option. I did not know you could actually wear the world like a loose garment. I wanted some of that freedom. I still do.

It is consoling to think of people living radically good lives and making the world more beautiful regardless of social approval. I do not think the end of the world will come any time soon, but if it does, I hope it would find us, like Ruthie Markwardt, lighting the Sabbath candles and eating a meal with our friends. Or like Sheila McCarthy, visiting the imprisoned and putting up solar panels. Or like Brenna Cussen Anglada, giving shelter to the homeless and milking a cow. Or like my sister Mia Alvarado, raising babies, writing books and composting her table scraps. This is sensible and human work, regardless of whether or not it fixes everything, regardless if it looks to all the world like folly.

As St. Augustine has written, "Bad times, hard times, that is what people keep saying; but let us live well, and the times shall be good. We are the times: Such as we are, such are the times."

Anna Keating is the co-author of *The Catholic Catalogue: A Field Guide to the Daily Acts That Make Up a Catholic Life*. She is the Catholic chaplain at Colorado College in Colorado Springs.



Called & Co-Responsible

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

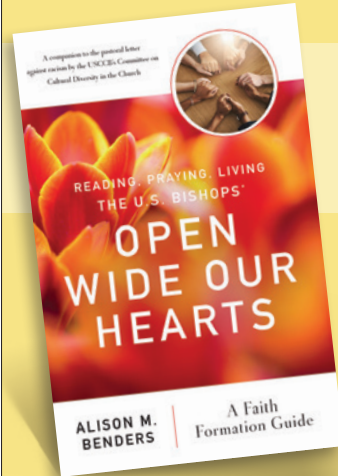
WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT LAY PEOPLE ARE NOT TO BE REGARDED ESSENTIALLY AS "COLLABORATORS" WITH THE CLERGY, BUT THAT ALL THE BAPTIZED ARE "CO-RESPONSIBLE" TOGETHER FOR THE CHURCH'S MISSION?

MARCH 4-6, 2020
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This conference will glimpse the full potential of the idea of co-responsibility and its fruitfulness for the life of the Church going forward.

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A call to form our consciences and convert our hearts

Reading, Praying, Living The US Bishops' Open Wide Our Hearts
A Faith Formation Guide
Alison Mearns Benders

Available March 2020

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PASTRY AS A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

On the surprising transcendence of Paczki Day

By Sonja Livingston

The line to the New Martha Washington Bakery flows around the corner from Joseph Campau Street onto Caniff Street. It is 8 degrees Fahrenheit in Hamtramck, Mich., but with the cutting wind this morning, it feels more like 8 below zero. The 20 degree temperature forecast for the day seems far away and downright tropical. People burrow into coats and hats emblazoned with GM and Ford logos. A television crew is set up near the bakery door. Across the street, a group of women pass by in burqas topped with ski caps and puffy coats. Their black robes skim their boots and lend a certain elegance to a sidewalk crusted with salt and old snow. There is the sense that we have landed in another world—and, in fact, my niece and I have landed in another world. We have taken many road trips together, but this is our first time in this city, which is so small, it seems like a section of Detroit.

“Are you warm enough?” I ask my niece. Nicole is hidden under layers of down and a fur-trimmed hood.

“These boots are made for the Arctic,” she says.

I stopped feeling my toes after leaving the car and shuffling past blocks of struggling businesses and empty storefronts and a mural of Krakow put up to honor Pope John Paul II when he visited Hamtramck in 1987. Now I rock back and forth to keep my feet from becoming blocks of ice while calculating how much longer it will take us to reach the door. An hour, I think. Maybe more. Every few minutes, the door opens and someone steps out of the building, white baker’s boxes stacked in their arms. The line cheers. “Where’s the party?” Someone shouts and the person responds, “You’re almost there.” This is a lie, of course. But it is the kind of lie I appreciate as we inch ever-so-slowly toward the bakery.

Something catches my eye at the front of the line. Slips of paper flutter as a stack is passed from one gloved hand to the next. Order forms. A hopeful sign. The blind woman in





A certain friendliness accompanied the paczki events, we had already noticed—a loosening of the walls and guardrails that often divide us.

front of us tells her friend which flavors to circle. “Cherry,” she says without hesitation. “Chocolate cream.” Because we have no pen, Nicole and I chant our order to commit it to memory—*raspberry, rosehip, apricot, Bavarian cream*—our breath making clouded streamers in the air. Friends deliver coffee, then shiver their way back to their cars. Those who remain become a band of perseverance, alternating between feelings of hardiness and despair. People begin to swap stories of other years and the many hours of waiting.

“You sure you’re O.K.?” I ask again. Nicole is grown, but, at about 100 pounds, is the smallest person in line. “I’m fine,” she repeats; and I wonder why, unlike my sensible niece, I have never invested in a decent parka and a pair of mukluks.

Later we will go to Motown and the Detroit Institute of Arts. Yesterday we had stopped at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, and I looked out at Lake Erie while Nicole checked out exhibits on David Bowie and the roots of rock and roll. But these are merely side trips. Standing in line at this bakery is the actual reason for our visit and represents the pinnacle of our paczki trip.

Pre-Lenten Tradition

When it comes to paczki, the first order of business is pronunciation. “Punch-key,” people say in Buffalo, but the sounds of the vowels rearrange themselves the further west we travel. Had we continued on to Milwaukee or Chicago, we would have heard “pownch-key” more often than the “poonch-key” encountered in Cleveland and Detroit. But no matter how you pronounce the name, paczki amount to deep-fried circles of dough filled with jam, custard or cream. Topped with powdered sugar or glaze, flavors range from old-world classics such as rose petal and *povidla* (prune) to newfangled varieties like marshmallow and birthday cake.

In Poland, paczki are eaten on the Thursday before Lent, but they are a Fat Tuesday tradition in Polish communities across the United States. Like other Fat Tuesday traditions, indulging in paczki is about feasting and the abandonment of

restraint, a massive and last hurrah before the austerity of Lent. On a practical level, for hundreds of years the baking of paczki allowed Polish households to use up stores of sugar and lard before the long days of fasting began.

Poles brought their paczki recipes with them as they arrived in waves to Chicago, Buffalo and Detroit in the late 19th century. The jobs they found (often in automobile or meatpacking plants, factories, farms and mines) were rough. Discrimination was high and, like other groups, Polish immigrants banded together, with their Catholic faith and traditions cementing their sense of identity. When a Dodge plant opened in Hamtramck in 1914, it attracted Polish workers. By 1970, Hamtramck was about 90 percent Polish. Fifty years later, the Polish-American population hovers at around 10 percent.

But while the physical face of Polish America has changed over the years, traditional Polish enclaves still serve as cultural hubs. Let the Gulf Coast have its parades and king cakes, the North Coast has the Polka Hall of Fame and Paczki Day.

And while paczki connoisseurs in Cheektowaga or Chicago might roll their eyes, I say with no disrespect that paczki are basically doughnuts. With options like pistachio and poppy seed, they are more distinctively flavored. Their





AP Photo/Detroit News/T. Coates

Milana Ognanovich serves customers at the New Martha Washington Bakery in Hamtramck, Mich., on Tuesday, March 4, 2014. Hundreds of people filled bakeries in Hamtramck for Paczki Day. The line outside the New Palace Bakery formed at 2 a.m. for the 3 a.m. opening.

eggier dough renders them more stalwart than fluffy. Paczki are a sort of pastry grenade, imparting more texture than the easy melt of a Krispy Kreme. I have sampled a few in my life, the sort that are sold alongside king cakes in grocery stores in the week leading up to Lent. I had been curious about the strangely named pastries for years and decided to learn more. Nicole is always up for a road trip. A road trip featuring doughnuts—well, who could pass that up?

Buffalo

Two days earlier, we had arrived at Holy Mother of the Rosary Cathedral in Lancaster, N.Y. (Polish National Catholic Church) just as the polka music began. Billed as Western New York's largest paczki celebration, the event is in its 22nd year. After paying our entry fee, we passed a vendor selling Buffalo Bills hats and leggings. Girls in folk costumes flitted about, red and floral ribbons trailing behind them.

We pushed into the large hall and scored a spot among the throng of people. Most wore red and were seated at long tables watching as the band played under the bingo sign and

people waltzed around the dance floor. Sisters and friends circled past. Grandmothers danced with granddaughters. A toddler held hands with an older sister wearing an enormous bow in her hair. A man trotted past with his partner, straight-backed and head held high. Even the priest made his way around the dance floor as the band played waltzes and polkas, the thump of drum and pull of accordion helping everyone keep time. Those not dancing ate cabbage rolls and kielbasa, pierogi and pickles, sandwiches made of sausage and good bread. I had already been enchanted by the music and the dancers, but when a woman in the kitchen surprised me with an extra pierogi, I officially fell in love with Paczki Day.

The Polish Heritage Dancers of Western New York took the stage next. Women in bright kerchiefs moved from slow waltzes into spirited obereks, their colorful skirts flaring as they twirled, each moving so quickly she became a spinning top. Next came the younger dancers, teenagers in pairs, followed by girls in floral wreaths and boys in red *krakuska* caps ornamented with ribbons and peacock feathers.

We left as the paczki Queen and King were crowned. It



In 2018, SOMOS released the State of Latino Health report, which was a direct response to the dire health care disparities burdening Latino New Yorkers. The study underscores some of the biggest and unique healthcare challenges facing the Medicaid/Medicare population and outlines the solutions needed to fix them. From access to culturally competent care, to interpretation services, to connecting families with critical social services - SOMOS specializes in bringing high quality neighborhood health care to the neediest New Yorkers and their families. However, this has not been an easy feat since for decades minority groups in New York City have been marginalized and left behind in health care discussions.

In fact, the State of Latino Health (SOLH) study reported that 62 percent of Latinos think cost is a barrier to access for themselves, and 84 percent of providers think cost is a barrier to access for Latinos. In addition, health problems are going untreated in the Latino community. Smoking, asthma, obesity, diabetes, and hypertension are prevalent problems, but, health education has not kept up and health education materials are often not translated to languages such as Spanish.


One of the many goals of SOMOS is to provide a seamless network of support and resources for patients by facilitating and working with community doctors and specialists. These support structures are critical to restoring a broken system that has seldom worked in favor of the poor, undocumented or immigrant populations. Since New York State invested more than six billion dollars in the Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment program

A black and white photograph of a person sitting down, their head bowed and hands covering their face, suggesting a state of distress or mental anguish. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of their body against a dark background.

FAMILY FIRST

A Story Of Mental Health Struggle

SOMOS provides culturally competent care to a family dealing with mental health issues.

A dark, moody photograph showing a person's arm and shoulder, possibly a doctor or patient, in a clinical setting. The lighting is low, highlighting the contours of the skin and fabric.

(DSRIP), SOMOS, which is the only multi-cultural physician-led group participating in DSRIP, has been in the forefront of reforming health care into a value-based system.

Family is key to countless immigrant and first-generation American families, which is why Yolanda Sanchez* sought help when her 16-year-old son Jose* began to show signs of depression. He became aloof, reclusive and his grades took a downturn. Yolanda was referred to Centro Medico Dominicano, a staple in the Washington Heights community and beacon of hope for tens and thousands of Latinos for nearly 40 years.

After months of psychiatric treatment involving therapeutic conversations with a child psychologist from Centro Medico, Jose was feeling better. "It wasn't easy, but his doctor was patient and kind with him and now he is a happier child and his grades are improving," said Yolanda. "I would never have been able to get through this difficult time if I didn't feel comfortable with the doctors at Centro Medico. Being able to discuss my son's ongoing rehabilitation in Spanish was a relief," she added.

During this time, Yolanda was able to make health improvements of her own as well. Centro Medico reached out to her about participating in a nutrition program to help her control her diabetes and hypertension. The program included a guide to preparing healthier meals that incorporates plant-based food that are low in sodium, sugar and calories. Yolanda was able to lose weight and adopt a healthier lifestyle.

The Sanchez family's story is one of many examples that proves why neighborhood primary care works. The SOMOS network brings high quality primary and specialty care that is culturally competent and whose doctors often speak the native tongue of their patients. SOMOS doctors are leaders in their field and community, incredibly committed to delivering the best care possible to the families they serve.

Although Yolanda sought help for her son's mental health issues, many Latino and African American families do not. Mental health and substance abuse challenges remain taboo. As a result, mental health illnesses among communities of color are undertreated or even untreated. In fact, the SOLH report found that 32 percent of health care providers think that Latino mental health is unhealthy compared to the general population.

SOMOS is a non-profit, physician-led network of over 2,500 health care providers serving over 700,000 Medicaid beneficiaries in New York City. Launched in 2015 by its Chairman Dr. Ramon Tallaj, SOMOS is the largest and only physician-led performance provider system participating in the New York State Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment Program (DSRIP). The SOMOS network includes providers delivering culturally competent care to patients in some of New York City's most vulnerable populations, particularly Latino, Asian, African-American and immigrant communities throughout the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens.

**Name changed to preserve the patient's privacy.*



was hard to tear ourselves from the warmth of the church hall and the beautiful dances but we wanted to make Cleveland by nightfall. We ran to the car and blasted the heat, laughing and replaying our favorite parts. “The bonus pierogi!” I said to Nicole. “The raspberry paczki,” Nicole said back. We pulled away from Holy Rosary and pointed the car west. Our paczki pilgrimage had begun.

Cleveland

As we drove into Parma along Cleveland’s southern edge the next morning, we noticed shop windows in featuring red paczki signs. We admired the golden domes of St. Josaphat’s Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral; and though Seven Roses Polish Deli and Rudy’s Strudel & Bakery were both highly rated and close by, both were closed on Mondays. Thankfully, Colozza’s was open. Clearly an Italian bakery, they say that everyone is Polish during paczki season, and Colozza’s glass cases brimmed with paczki dusted with powdered sugar and topped with dabs of cream. We swooned over flavors like pistachio and cannoli, but there was no time to dawdle because a line was forming, with people buying dozens at a time. We settled on two each; and as we stepped from the bakery, a woman approached with a smile, saying, “I hope you saved some for me!”

A certain friendliness accompanied the paczki events, we had already noticed—a loosening of the walls and guardrails that often divide us. “You should become a dancer,” a stranger had encouraged Nicole back in Buffalo. Nicole is of mixed race and was the only person of color in the hall. Like most of my nieces and nephews whose parents stopped attending church in adulthood, she was not raised with Catholic traditions, and neither of us have Polish blood. We were each outsiders in our own way. But Nicole said she felt comfortable. So did I. The gentle camaraderie of the holiday helped to explain why.

Once inside the car with our open bakery box, I tried to explain Fat Tuesday. Lent, I said, is a time of giving something up or of changing a problematic behavior. “The idea isn’t sacrifice so much,” I said, but corrected myself. “Or it is about sacrifice, but not simply for its own sake.” I used my own relationship with sugar as an example. I have never met a doughnut I did not like. I can recall in perfect detail a red velvet doughnut from Gibson’s in Memphis and the transcendent sweetness of a glazed ring from Donuts Delite in Rochester, N.Y.

“Sugar is my Kryptonite,” I told Nicole. It is true. All too often, I turn to fig cookies instead of what I most need, such as a long hike or prayer to recalibrate my connection with God. “Lent helps to clear the decks and wipe away

whatever stands in the way of being the best version of yourself,” I said to my nonreligious niece. Of course, the fact that we were scarfing down paczki as I explained all this rendered my Lenten pep talk largely theoretical.

We stopped at the Krakow Deli on our way out of town, looking at shelves of sugar lambs and Polish chocolates and left with frozen packages of cheddar and sauerkraut pierogi.

With more time we would have kept going to Chicago. But Paczki Day is a Tuesday, and unless we flew, we could only make it so far. We settled on Hamtramck, a two-square-mile city only five minutes from Detroit’s center. Hamtramck made national news when a local mosque won the right to broadcast the call to prayer in 2004 and when it became the first Muslim-majority city council in the United States in 2015. Once a Polish stronghold, it is now Michigan’s most internationally diverse city, whose residents speak 26 different languages. In a rapidly changing religious and cultural landscape, Hamtramck struck me as potentially emblematic. While it is still an immigrant city, change has not always been easy as the Polish-Catholic community gave way to immigrants from Bosnia, Yemen and Bangladesh.

Nonetheless, on Fat Tuesday, Hamtramck is all about the paczki. There are paczki hot dogs and paczki burgers—even paczki ale. The Polish League of American Veterans hosts an annual paczki-eating contest. Bars sell paczki “bombs” filled with vodka, while bands with names like the Polish Muslims and the Kielbasa Kings belt out polka-infused tunes. Despite all this, the simple pastry and the traditional bakeries that churn them out take center stage. Which is why, like thousands of others in cities along the Great Lakes, Nicole and I withstand polar temperatures and the slowest line I have ever stood in to claim a dozen paczki of our own.


Hamtramck

Located in a neighborhood dotted with kabob shops and Polish diners, the New Martha Washington Bakery opened in 1925. Sunca Bakic’s family took over the bakery in 1973. Known as Sandy to her many customers, Sunca grew up on paczki. Beginning on Fat Thursday (the Thursday before Fat Tuesday), she says, they work 15 to 18 hour days until Sunday, when they come in at 6 a.m. and do not leave until 10 p.m. on Tuesday, relying on two-hour catnaps and adrenalin to power them through the rush.


And it is a rush for those behind the counter, while, for everyone else, it is about patience. After an hour or so, the moment Nicole and I have been waiting for finally arrives. We had imagined getting inside the bakery would be the



The Polish Heritage Dancers of Western New York at the 22nd annual paczki celebration at Holy Mother of the Rosary Cathedral in Lancaster, N.Y.



While Paczki connoisseurs in Cheektowaga or Chicago might roll their eyes, I say with no disrespect that paczki are basically doughnuts.



end game, but we discover as we peer through the door that the small space in front of the counter snakes into three lines, with about 50 people crammed into a tight S line. Still, we celebrate as we walk through the door. The air is warm with the scent of sugar and flour.

Every few moments, someone squeezes through the door as another leaves. If the door stays open too long or someone tries to wedge himself in before there is adequate space, the line rebels: “Close the door,” people shout in unison. “The paczki need to rise!”

A bearded man enters. People are already swapping bits of their lives, but the new man is all enthusiasm as he chats up the line and poses a series of questions. “Which flavor is best?” and “How do these paczki compare with those at the New Palace Bakery?” Then he asks, “Who all is giving up anything for Lent?” A few of us raise our hands. Clearly, Paczki Day has moved beyond its pre-Lenten origins. This is not surprising. We are generally more comfortable with Mardi Gras than with Ash Wednesday as a culture. I think of the paczki we have eaten over the past two days and the warm pockets of dough we will eat very soon and wonder whether you can have a good Fat Tuesday if it is not followed by Ash Wednesday. Even as I inch closer to the counter and consider adding a few blueberry items to my order, it seems to me they are inexorably linked, the opening up and feasting and the restraint and letting go.

The bearded man infuses some music into the scene through speakers in his coat pockets. The Steve Miller Band is followed by “The House of the Rising Sun,” but our bakery D.J. does not hit his stride until “Baby, I Need Your Loving.” This is Detroit, after all, and The Four Tops are a local treasure. A lady tying boxes with twine nods her

head. The woman in front of us hums along. It is a diverse line, in terms of race and class and religion, but, as much as they can, each of these lines fades away as black and white people laugh and sway to the song. Something about withstanding the long wait and the brutal cold makes it so nothing is as real to us now as the glory of being inside, the scent of the paczki and the good old song. And as lovely as the pastry and the tradition are, the paczki suddenly seem to me to simply offer an excuse for us to indulge in the increasingly rare treat of coming together without strife.

Though no one here is likely to join me for Mass and ashes at St. Josaphat’s tomorrow, half the population in Hamtramck lives in poverty, and nearly half are immigrants. Even those who have come in from other neighborhoods have survived the massive struggles of this city. The people waiting at the New Martha Washington Bakery clearly understand hard times and sacrifice.

This is what our paczki tour taught me: that life is not simply about feasting or fasting but the necessity of both; that, like Hamtramck, Mich., our country is a place of new and old, black and white, Muslim and Christian, sacrifice and celebration—of great difficulty and even greater possibility; that sometimes an unassuming bakery in Detroit can feel like church.

Sandy, at the New Martha Washington Bakery, believes that Paczki Day is the best holiday—better even than Christmas, which can leave many feeling sad or isolated. I think of the Four Tops and the heads bobbing and the smiling faces, not one among them looking dejected or tired, even after hours of waiting and the bitter cold—all of us moved by a sweetness greater than sugar or froth.

“If everybody had a Paczki Day around the world,” Sandy says, “the world would be a better place.”

Sonja Livingston is an associate professor of English at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Va.

AMERICA'S GUIDE TO RETREATS

Many of our readers are curious about retreats. What does one do on a retreat? Where does one go? What are some good retreat houses? Simply put, a retreat is an extended period of prayer, usually done in silence, and usually at a retreat house, where a team of spiritual directors helps you find God in your prayer. There are also different kinds of retreats. On a directed retreat a person meets daily with a spiritual director to discuss what is happening in prayer. A guided retreat focuses more on one topic (say, women's spirituality) and offers presentations as well as opportunities to meet with a director a few times. Preached retreats consist in listening to presentations and praying on your own, but with less opportunity for direction.



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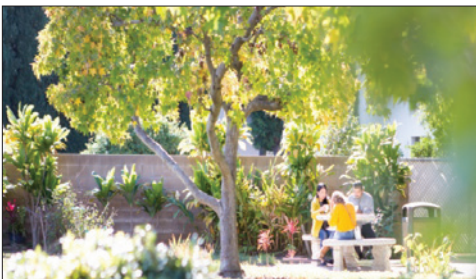
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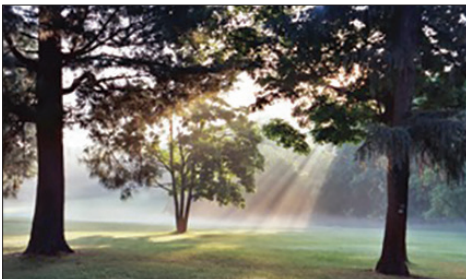
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Good Intentions Closed My Church

By Charles Williams

A black Catholic's painful memories of integration



Photo courtesy of the Diocese of Richmond

In January 1879, Bishop John J. Keane of Richmond began holding special services for African-Americans in the basement of St. Peter's Catholic Church, which served as the cathedral of the diocese until 1906. He later wrote about what he called an "experiment" to spread the Catholic faith among the city's black community: "They behaved in a most respectful manner and seemed greatly pleased with the singing, prayers, and instructions. I intend to devote my own exertions to it whenever I am in Richmond. May God grant fruit to our labors."

Six years later, Bishop Keane's experiment did indeed bear fruit when he established St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Richmond, dedicated on Nov. 22, 1885. It was the first church built to serve the city's black Catholic community. Seven decades later, my journey as a black Catholic would begin at this very church.

St. Joseph's and the adjoining Van de Vyver Catholic School were located in my neighborhood. Although my family was not Catholic and I was not baptized, I started kindergarten there in 1955. At the time, momentum was gaining for "Massive Resistance"—the state government's effort to block the desegregation of public schools mandated by the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* the previous year.

In 1959, Prince Edward County closed its entire public school system rather than integrate. In those early years after that seminal court decision, the black community in Richmond feared the city would follow suit. Richmond was the former capital of the Confederacy and once the largest slave market in the upper South. In the 1950s segregation was still legal there.

African-American families in the "separate but equal" public schools who could afford to take refuge in private schools began to do so in ever-growing numbers.

Families with children enrolled at Van de Vyver worried that enrollment would swell beyond capacity and that students would be expelled and turned away. If the public school system were to shut down, many in the African-American community would be left with no other option for a good education.

In order to secure a spot in Van de Vyver, my mother felt it best to "make it official" and have my brother and me baptized as Catholics. She was not alone. In 1961, when I was 10 years old, my brother and I and at least 10 other black children were baptized on the same day at St. Joseph's. Once baptized, we started attending Mass at St. Joseph's every Sunday.

Exterior of St. Joseph's Church in Richmond, Va.

St. Joseph's, Van de Vyer and my family's home were all located in the heart of an African-American neighborhood known as Jackson Ward. In its heyday, Jackson Ward was known as the Harlem of the South. It was an insular and self-sufficient middle- and working-class community. There were retail stores, a bank, a movie theater, restaurants, barber and beauty shops, a farmers' market and a Y.M.C.A.

For much of the 20th century, it was an anomaly for a black neighborhood to thrive. This is the community where I lived, worshipped, went to school and played. St. Joseph's Church was the center of my social life, the site of all my activities and where I met all my friends.

At St. Joseph's I became a Boy Scout, learned to play basketball and, most important, learned about God. But my most vivid memories are of being an altar server. Being an acolyte meant you were viewed by the school as a good student. And if you were asked to serve a wedding or a funeral, you were considered the best of the best. But it was ringing the bells during the consecration that meant the world to me. The sound alone seemed to draw me into the miracle occurring: Jesus himself was now fully present on the altar.

St. Joseph's was more than a place to worship. For me, the congregation felt like family. In those days, we always dressed up for church in our best clothes, our "church clothes."

After Mass, we would wait in the churchyard until several families gathered, and we would all walk around the corner to Slaughter's Hotel to have lunch together. The conversation at the table was always about the goings-on at church.

Fast forward to June 1969. I was about to graduate from Benedictine High School, leave my family and my church family and go off to college. After Mass on the last Sunday in June, we were told that St. Joseph's Catholic Church and Van de Vyer Elementary School would be permanently closed by the Diocese of Richmond.

Upon learning the news, I was stunned, hurt and then felt outrage. How could they close my church? How could they take away the most important thing in my life? Why did they want to hurt my family? What would I have to come home to?

The answer to my questions was integration. Many Southern bishops at that time believed that closing black

parishes would send us to white parishes, thereby achieving integration. We were, in fact, encouraged to attend the white parishes in nearby neighborhoods.

As a 17-year-old, I did not accept this theory of integration. None of the local white parishes were closed in order to send white people to black parishes. At the time, I believed it to be the most racist act I had ever experienced. I decided I did not need the church or the God who had allowed this to happen. I set my mind to never attend church again.

My decision to leave the church was solidified that summer when I saw my mother attempt to do the right thing by attending the local white parish. She came home Sunday after Sunday in tears because she did not feel welcome. After a while, she gave up and never went back to a Catholic church again.

I stayed angry for 25 years.

Then, in 1994, a childhood friend invited me to his son's first Communion. That day God's grace washed over me in torrents. My long-ignored faith was reignited by forgotten childhood memories of church and community. In that hour, my anger was overcome by my "holy longing." On the very next Sunday, I came back to the church I loved as a kid and the church I love today. Over time, I came to believe that the church had good intentions, albeit poorly executed and culturally insensitive plans for integration.

Not only did I come back to the church, but I have immersed myself in it as a permanent deacon and as the interim director of the Richmond Diocese's Office for Black Catholics. I still feel the pain of what occurred more than 50 years ago, but the church—our church—has asked for forgiveness. I will give it another chance. I pray that all African-Americans who have been hurt by what the church did and failed to do will also, in their own time, grant that forgiveness.

In their 2018 pastoral letter on racism, "Open Wide Our Hearts," the U.S. bishops wrote:





Photo courtesy of the Diocese of Richmond

Therefore we, the Catholic bishops in the United States, acknowledge the many times when the Church has failed to live as Christ taught—to love our brothers and sisters. Acts of racism have been committed by leaders and members of the Catholic Church—by bishops, clergy, religious, and laity—and her institutions.... We ask for forgiveness from all who have been harmed by these sins committed in the past or in the present.

Brothers and sisters, prayerfully consider the bishops' request. Open your hearts to the Spirit, come back to our church where you are needed, where you will be welcomed and loved, where you will be an integral mem-

ber of the body of Christ.

In all these years, my journey has taught me that my church is a pilgrim church and is slow to change. The good news is that it has changed and will continue to change. I offer myself as hope for those who still feel unwanted or angry at the church.

Charles Williams is a permanent deacon in the Diocese of Richmond, where he is the interim director of the Office for Black Catholics.



The New Age of Social Protest Music

By John W. Miller

After the 2016 election, Heather Ehart Hinkel, a college administrator in Frederick, Md., struggled with people fighting about politics on her Facebook page. A registered Republican opposed to President Trump, she counted friends in both parties.

So on Inauguration Day 2017, instead of commenting, she posted a feminist anthem: “Sisters Are Doin’ It

for Themselves,” by the Eurythmics and Aretha Franklin.

“Music seemed to be a palatable way to keep my political views accessible in a way that wouldn’t cut my friends off from me,” she told me.

Friends of all political persuasions loved it, and sent requests. Hinkel posted more, by everybody from Tracy Chapman and Patti Smith to Tom Waits and Bruce Springsteen.

A diverse community rallied around suggesting songs. And people stopped unfriending each other, she said.

In a divided country on an overheated planet, we need tunes to overcome.

Political music peaked in the United States in the 1960s. It never went away. As pop music diversified, “within each of the styles grew a desire to sing about and to listen to mu-



Photo by Amy Harris/Invision/AP. Photo by Vadim Besaljev/Sipa USA/Sipa via AP Images; Wikimedia Commons, unplash

We are living through a renaissance in protest songs, and their creators are more diverse than the Greenwich Village strummers of yesteryear. Pictured from left: Maria Alyokhina of the band Pussy Riot, Ramy Essam and Childish Gambino.

vate and public spheres, music can still be our hammer.

On Tahrir Square in Cairo in 2011, a guitarist named Ramy Essam led protesters in song he called “Leave,” helping to bring down President Hosni Mubarak. In Russia, the feminist punk rock collective Pussy Riot trumpeted opposition to President Vladimir Putin. For the Women’s March in 2017, singers organized a choir online to perform MILCK’s “I Can’t Keep Quiet.” In December, a Chilean song protesting rape culture called “A Rapist in Your Path” went viral, sung at protests around the world.

Last year’s “Songs of Our Native Daughters” is a brilliant album celebrating the history of African-American women, recorded by four banjo-playing women of color, including Rhiannon Giddens, one of Americana music’s biggest stars. Giddens was one of many political artists who has been nominated for a Grammy this year, along with the bluegrass outfit Che Apalache and the Kenyan folk singer J.S. Ondara, a Kenyan immigrant who moved to Minnesota partly out of love for its native son Bob Dylan.

Hip-hop might lead the fight. In “Alright,” Kendrick Lamar raps faithful resilience: “But if God got us then we gon’ be alright.” Childish Gambino’s “This is America” captured the pain of racial dysfunction. In “The Whittest House,” Jasiri-X protests the current administration.

And, of course, Spotify and YouTube make it easy to pull up the 1960s classics my mom and Uncle Earl played throughout my childhood, like early Bob Dylan or Barry McGuire’s “Eve of Destruction.” Those songs made me fall in love with music as a pulsating, soul-boosting weapon: To

make things better, sing out!

A song commanding three minutes stands out in a bad-tempered, short-attention-span world. A song begs to not be interrupted. A song can be beautiful, even if you don’t agree with its argument. When Bruce Springsteen premiered his anti-police-violence anthem “41 Shots” in 2000, it sparked controversy. “You get killed just for living,” he sings. In recordings, the cheering beats out the boos; the message sticks.

The Egyptian Essam told me he became a protest singer after attending marches and thinking the chants would be empowered with a melody and a beat. In the social media age, “songs can travel the planet in no time,” he said. “We will not find people repeating speeches but we can guarantee that there might be millions of people at the same moment singing the same song.” And music can persuade. “People have told me it was my songs that drew them out in the street to see what was really going on,” said Essam, who worships Woody Guthrie and Johnny Cash. “It’s one thing to post something on Facebook, it’s another to go out in the streets and ask for your rights.”

That spirit is universal and timeless. As the all-American troubadour Pete Seeger wrote in 1955: “We need thousands of new songs these days: humor, to poke fun at some of the damn foolishness going on in the world; songs of love and faith in mankind and the future; songs to needle our conscience and stir our indignation and anger.”

In modern protest music, musicians often seem to be protesting not particular policies but polarization itself.

sic of social change, whether that was hip-hop, rap, reggae, country or rock,” Noel Paul Stookey—of the 1960s protest music icons Peter, Paul and Mary—told me.

Luckily for this despairing era, we are living through a renaissance in protest songs, and their creators are more diverse, creative and international than the Greenwich Village strummers of yesteryear. In both pri-

In modern protest music, musicians often seem to be protesting not particular policies but polarization itself. ●●

The 2016 presidential election shook the British folk punk singer Frank Turner. Social media appalled him. “A disaster,” he called it in a long email conversation. “A cesspit, a tragedy, for our civilization.” The result of his meditations is an album called “Be More Kind.” It’s a lovely work full of catchy tunes—and a warning about the precipice we are perched on. Turner said he thinks the album is more “social” than “political.”

“Be More Kind,” he said, “is a record about how we relate to each other, the nature and tone of our collective political discourse, how we conduct our disagreements, rather than about the specific content of those disagreements.”

In the title track, Turner sings: “In a world that has decided/ That it’s going to lose its mind/ Be more kind, my friends, try to be more kind.”

Like many musicians, including Dylan in his heyday, Turner resists the label of protest singer as too limiting: “Songwriting, and art more generally, is a broad and versatile river.”

Political music is often associated with hippies and the antiwar movement. It is not inherently left wing. In the 1950s, Ferlin Husky, also known as Terry Preston, sang “Let’s Keep the

Communists Out.” In their 1962 song “Weapon of Prayer,” Charlie and Ira Louvin praised foreign intervention by the U.S. military. Merle Haggard’s “Okie From Muskogee” protested 1960s youth culture. Although some critics have postulated that Haggard was singing ironically, it became a rallying cry for conservatives in the 1970s. “We don’t burn our draft cards down on Main Street,” he sang.

A Brief History of Music Activism

The history of protest music is intertwined with three categories of activists: labor, racial minority and Christian social justice.

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, a Presbyterian pastor from Owego, N.Y., has written hundreds of political hymns, about everything from gun violence to immigration, which she publishes on her website. She has appeared on PBS and BBC, and her September 11 song “O God, Our Words Cannot Express” was made into a music video featuring Noel Paul Stookey.

Gillette pens new words to existing hymns. “People in churches love to sing traditional tunes,” she said. “And you don’t have to worry about copyright.” When people go to church, she said, “they’re not leaving the outside

world behind them. They’ve heard about a shooting or a hurricane or a flood.” People have told her they changed their minds about an issue after hearing her hymns, she said.

In seminary, “I was taught to teach a sermon with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other,” she said. “Social justice should really be called Biblical justice.”

For centuries, music has been used to make political points.

According to Donan Lyndsey, author of *33 Revolutions*, an authoritative and brilliant history of protest tunes, the first protest song was John Ball’s sermon during the 1381 Peasants’ Revolt. “When Adam delved and Eve span/ Who was then the gentleman?” he sang, as an argument that the Garden of Eden was, idealistically, classless.

Modern protest music got its start in the early part of the 20th century, when marchers on labor’s picket lines needed something to say, and it was more fun to sing than shout.

This labor strand of political music was picked up by America’s two great troubadours, Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie, who met in 1940 and shared a fascination with the ballads, hymns and folk songs of a rural America groaning its way through the Great Depression and a looming world war. Guthrie’s album “Dust Bowl Ballads” pioneered a new wave of political storytelling for everyman. In the liner notes, John Steinbeck wrote that Guthrie, who famously wrote “This Machine Kills Fascists” on his guitar, represented the “will of a people to endure and fight against oppression. I think we call this the American spirit.”

It was on a trip to Tennessee in 1947 that Seeger discovered “We Shall

Overcome.” That song found a place in the other great music-fueled struggle of the century: civil rights for African-Americans. Songs like Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit,” Nina Simone’s “Mississippi Goddam” and James Brown’s “Say It Loud- I’m Black and I’m Proud” sit atop one of the grandest canons in popular music.

In the 1960s, such civil rights-inspired protest music helped make folk, for a brief shining moment, *the* music. Dylan and Joan Baez sang at the March on Washington. Peter, Paul and Mary topped the charts. Three-part harmonies were sexy. In 1964, Phil Ochs, a singer who had studied journalism at Ohio State, released a popular album called “All the News That’s Fit to Sing,” possibly the summit of politically engaged folk music.

The times *were* a’changing. We would sing and sing and love and milk and honey would wash over the land. “We went to church, but it was protest music that made me think about how to turn Christian ideas into activism,” my mom, who grew up in a Catholic neighborhood in Baltimore in the 1950s and 1960s, told me.

Noel Paul Stookey said his generation got interested in “music that mattered” as it grew up. They were “looking to make the world a better place,” he said.

That social justice commitment of pop music faded in the late 1960s, after Dylan famously went electric and bands celebrated drug trips instead of preaching social change. But other genres picked up the baton. In his 1971 classic “What’s Going On?” Marvin Gaye sang: “We don’t need to escalate/ You see, war is not the answer/ For only love can conquer hate.” Musicians expanded the scope of their activism.

Loretta Lynn sang pioneering feminist anthems about divorce and the pill.

More recently, under President Barack Obama, protest music became part of the administration’s political brand. Obama frequently quoted or sang classic protest tunes, directly paraphrasing Sam Cooke’s 1964 masterpiece “A Change Is Gonna Come” in his 2008 victory speech. Pete Seeger played the inauguration, and the White House hosted Lin-Manuel Miranda in a debut “Hamilton” recital.

Now, in opposition to an administration far less invested in supporting the arts, protest music has found its antiestablishment place again. And there is a reason to bring back the 1960s classics: Writing a good political song isn’t that easy.

The tricky part is pitching it “right between platitudes and being overly specific,” said Frank Turner, the British folk punk singer. But, he said, “there is something about the right words with the right rhythm and melody that is ‘just so’ and pulls you out of your ambivalence.”

For example, said Turner, “the sentence ‘the times they are a’changing’ isn’t especially profound. Dylan’s delivery of it was, somehow; and somewhere indefinable in there lies the magic of the craft.”

It is instinctive, he said, “to look for songwriter to be that [moral] voice, but they don’t want to do that all the time.”

For Joe Troop, a bluegrass singer from North Carolina, protest music is a way of integrating his worlds. Troop is a bluegrass traditionalist steeped in gospel and other iterations of the old school. He is also gay and an immigrant, having moved to Buenos Aires in 2010.

His response to this swirling whirl of identities has been to make music that spoke to all of them. The result is a sparkling fusion band called Che Apalache, fronted by Troop and including three banjo students from Buenos Aires.

The group was nominated for a Grammy for its album, “Rearrange My Heart,” which includes two protest songs, “The Wall,” and “The Dreamer.” On the bluegrass circuit, the band sometimes encounters hostile audiences.

In “The Wall,” Troop uses Christian language to protest the border wall with Mexico: “To love thy neighbor as thyself/ Is a righteous law to live by.”

When I met up with him on tour in Washington, D.C., last year, Troop said he was determined to keep playing his music for all audiences, even those he disagrees with.

“You have to speak people’s language,” he said.

John W. Miller is a Pittsburgh-based writer and former staff reporter and foreign correspondent for The Wall Street Journal.



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Rising

By Diane Vreuls

*“There is a cloud small as a man’s hand rising
from the sea.”*

—1 Kgs 18:44

There is a bird large as a seraph lighting on the sand.
There is a shadow swift as a rumor traveling the grass.

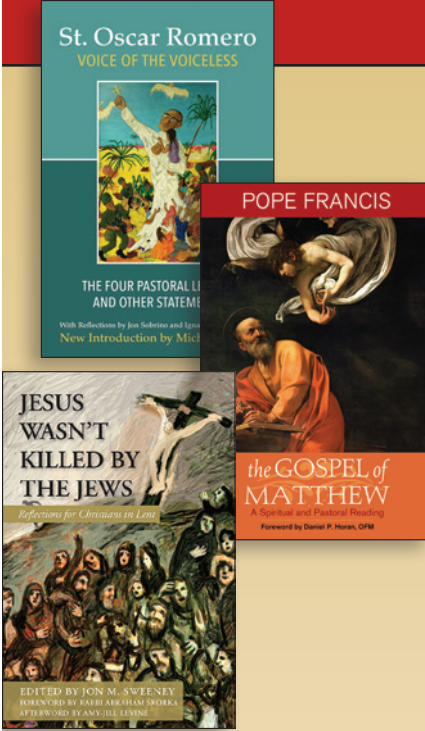
They were right, the ancients, to fear water
Cling to cliffs, pitch dwellings high above the tide

To know all lands are islands in one ocean
And fewer the islands as the waters rise.

Build boats, then, if you must, and sail them if you dare
But the path you make will be erased by wind

And crueler than hunger is thirst amidst the deep.
And God alone may know where you find shore.

Diane Vreuls has published a novel, two books of poems, a collection of short stories and a children’s book. Her work has appeared in *The Paris Review*, *Commonweal*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere.



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Why poetry sustains us

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The Mystery of It All
By Paul Mariani
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We click and scroll. And scroll some more. And hunger. And every once in a while, we come across an unassuming little poem that satisfies us in a striking and enduring way.

The poet Dana Gioia says that people read poetry to “illuminate their lives.” Ryan Wilson tells us that poetry has always been about “the health of the human spirit.” Something about the poetic form—condensed, radiant and multifaceted—reaches us in that interior space where the material and the eternal intermingle.

In his recent book, *The Mystery of*

It All: The Vocation of Poetry in the Twilight of Modernity, Paul Mariani draws on wisdom from his literary career spanning half a century to examine this deep human yearning for poetic sustenance and its spiritual fruits. The book asserts the poet’s call to bear witness to “the Mystery of presence” in a time that often feels “unserved, untuned.”

The word “vocation” in the book’s subtitle evokes invitation and fulfillment but also responsibility and risk. Linked to our deepest yearnings and unique gifts, a vocation coaxes us out of complacency and urges us to share ourselves with others. When approached as a calling, Mariani says, poetry opens the writer to the “incomprehensible certainty” of mystery: the “face of God.” Writing becomes a form of adoration. Whether experiencing spiritual consolation or desolation, the poet reaches for God through wordcraft, trying to discern “God’s mysterious way of speaking to the

world,” celebrating the numinous in the mundane.

The “Catholic sacramental perspective,” as Mariani terms it, urges the poet to recognize in even “the meanest thing” some glimmer “of inestimable worth,” some sign of the Creator. With the Emmaus story in the Gospel of Luke as an anchor, the Christian poet sees with the “lens of companionship,” trusting in Christ’s accompaniment and, in turn, accompanying others. Much of the book reflects on the way different poets have carried out—and continue to carry out—this responsibility to accompany others journeying toward God.

Poetry’s enduring purpose, then, is to acknowledge the work of the Father, to share the salvific message of the Son and to ignite faith as the Holy Spirit does. Of all poets, the one whose work has filled this purpose most powerfully for Mariani is Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J.

Something about the poetic form reaches us in that interior space where the material and the eternal intermingle.

A while back I came across a video of Mariani reciting Hopkins's "Carri-on Comfort" during a presentation at the 2019 New York Encounter Conference, a three-day public cultural event. In the video, Mariani powerfully delivers the piece.

A beat of silence followed the final phrase, "(my God!) my God."

Then, energetic applause.

When I first saw the recording, I thought, "Now that's how that poem is meant to sound!" After reading *The Mystery of It All*, I realized why I found this performance so moving. It isn't just that Mariani masterfully interpreted the poem in his reading (he did) or that "Carrion Comfort" is a masterpiece (it is). Rather, the power lay in this friend of Christ sharing a profound source of spiritual nourishment.

For Mariani, Hopkins fills the poetic role informed by the Paraclete: consoling the disheartened, facing the world's brokenness unruffled and beckoning the way to the beloved savior. A substantial section of the book is made up of Mariani's previously published essays examining Hopkins as a servant of God who courageously lived out the poetic vocation, at times amid bleak circumstances. Hopkins never knew that one day his works—generally regarded during his lifetime as odd—would speak clearly to the searching and disheveled modern mind.

"Hopkins knew how generation after generation had seared all of nature with our excesses and failings because we continue to insulate ourselves from the living world around us with our own self-bent concerns and virtual non realities," Mariani reflects. "But that was not how God

saw the world, nor how Christ saw it. With Christ it was a matter of giving and then giving again, of spending himself until he had literally emptied himself." Hopkins is, for Mariani, the model of one who follows Christ in this self-emptying. It is no wonder that that Mariani devotes substantially more space in this book to Hopkins than to other writers.

We are used to thinking of poets in terms of their creative gifts, impact or style, but we don't often consider a poet's gift of self. Mariani looks to Hopkins and sees first a priest's offering to God. He sees an artist who let God transform suffering into "a thing of beauty for generations to come." Weaving together poem excerpts, biographical insight and critical response, Mariani provides an excellent introduction for the reader new to Hopkins and edifying scholarly reflections for seasoned Hopkins fans.

The section of the book titled, "In Ordinary Time: Variations on a Theme in Modern American Poetry," Mariani examines selected 20th-century writers who also sought the transcendent in the physical world, including Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams and John Berryman. Each voice featured in this section adds something unique to the great, centuries-long poetic conversation. Williams championed mindfulness, an attempt to see the "thing itself" amid the babble and chaos of modern life. Stevens helped readers steadily face "whatever social, political, and economic troubles humans of his time were compelled to endure," even the modern era's "eclipse of God." Berryman candidly portrayed himself wrestling with

doubt and acknowledging that we suffer for human sin, but "not forever." Lamenting Berryman's eventual suicide, Mariani honors the writer's struggle to wrestle himself free from alcoholism and surrender to God.

Framing these essays on Hopkins and the American voices are chapters advocating faith-informed humanism in the literary arts. Mariani also celebrates—cautiously, hopefully—today's renaissance of sacred poetry. He reminds us of the treasure trove of literature produced by the Catholic imagination.

This book betokens Mariani's lifelong gift of self through wordcraft and scholarship. He has dedicated himself to becoming the kind of person who can proclaim "a glimmer of the phosphorescent truth" in his writing. How stirring to know that "the work goes on for those for whom the Mystery continues to beckon and burn." Today's poets must pick up pieces, those "luminous shards," and reverence the sacramental mystery in a post-reverence, "post-everything" age. They must say yes to an exultant, demanding vocation. Mariani's book suggests that readers seek God in the modern age's scattered fragments, pieced together in a dazzling mosaic of praise by poets who sense the great design.

Lesley Clinton's *chapbook of poems, Calling the Garden From the Grave, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press in 2020. She teaches English at Strake Jesuit College Preparatory in Houston.*



The Zookeepers' War
An Incredible True Story From the Cold War
By J. W. Mohnhaupt
Translated by Shelley Frisch
Simon & Schuster
272p \$26

Zoo versus zoo

Germany's reconstruction after World War II was complicated, to say the least. Treaty negotiations at the Potsdam Conference in 1945 divided the country and its capital, Berlin, into four occupation zones overseen by the Allied forces (Britain, France, the U.S.S.R. and the United States). A precarious combination of war reparations, material shortages and the collapse of the Reichsmark—the country's currency—forced Germany into a bleak economic situation. The occupiers split the country, already divided by attitudes toward the Nazi regime, into the Federal Republic of Germany in the west and the German Democratic Republic (G.D.R.) in the east. Berlin, too, was split, becoming a political hotbed when the G.D.R. erected a concrete wall that separated West Berlin from East Germany in 1961.

The Berlin Wall not only divided the city physically, but also sparked intense cultural competition on both sides. The most popular of these cultural tug-of-wars occurred between the venerable West Berlin Zoological Garden and East Berlin's modern Tierpark. What started as a series of independent endeavors for zoo profitability and innovation soon evolved into an ideological bat-

tleground, where the struggle for animal park superiority would be proof of the vitality of capitalism in West Berlin or that of socialism in East Berlin, respectively.

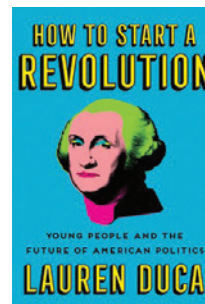
This is the stage for J. W. Mohnhaupt's first book, *The Zookeepers' War*; an earnest plunge into the extraordinary history behind Berlin's competing zoos and the enthralling rivalry of Heinz-Georg Klös and Heinrich Dathe, the two zoo directors, who were equally determined to build the world's greatest animal park.

Klös and Dathe stockpiled rare, exotic animals, built imaginative displays, schmoozed with the press and canvassed politicians and aristocrats for more funding—all while keeping a close eye on each other's progress. These efforts increased international attention on the West Berlin Zoo and the Tierpark, thereby boosting the zoo directors' reputations among the globe's leading zoologists.

Fame proved to be a double-edged sword, as Berlin's bureaucrats recognized the zoos' marketability for their cities. Soon, Klös and Dathe learned that “victory in this war was no longer a matter of currying favor with visitors, but rather of pleasing the bigwigs in Bonn and East Berlin.”

With its comprehensive coverage of Berlin's zoos, as well as Mohnhaupt's penchant for dramatic, sometimes humorous details, *The Zookeepers' War* is a highly entertaining true story that is sure to delight history buffs and general audiences alike.

Isabelle Senechal, a Joseph A. O'Hare, S.J., fellow.



How to Start a Revolution
Young People and the Future of American Politics
By Lauren Duca
Simon & Schuster
192p \$26

Politics as brand

Lauren Duca is a columnist for Teen Vogue and the author of the viral op-ed “Donald Trump Is Gaslighting America,” as well as (of late) an instructor at New York University who is under scrutiny for having “more interest in promoting her book than teaching a group of students eager to learn.” She is also on a mission to document the democratic outpouring of youth following the 2016 election.

In *How to Start a Revolution: Young People and the Future of American Politics*, Duca counters the claim that Gen Z and millennial cohorts are detached from the political process with examples of people moved, primarily by the ascendancy of Trump, to advocate for change. Interviews with young activists, from the Parkland gun-control advocates David and Lauren Hogg to Kat Calvin, founder of Spread the Vote, appear between critiques of the “political-industrial complex,” “gatekeepers” and the poor state of civic education.

This “informal alliance of industries that conspire to maintain or increase power” alienates voters by replacing substantive conversation with artificial competition intent on preserving a two-party status quo. Duca mirrors previous work on

the detachment of political debate from reality, notably E. J. Dionne Jr.'s *Why Americans Hate Politics*. Where Dionne claims that political engagement buckles under a series of false choices framed by liberal and conservative ideologies, Duca paints this complex in market terms, looking at voters as “customers” asked to swallow an increasingly unappealing product.

How to Start a Revolution suffers from some myopia, however, viewing legitimate forms of activism as those that conform to the aesthetic preferences of the like-mindedly “woke.” These aesthetics were on display at the 2018 Teen Vogue Summit, which “is designed to look, more or less, like Urban Outfitters.” This, we are told, is something politicians ought to emulate. A performative progressivism is evident in these pages, blind to the fact that not all 28-year-olds live in Brooklyn, espouse love for A.O.C. and enjoy reading *The New Yorker*. In fact, some of them might have voted for Trump.

While Duca reports in detail difficult discussions with her Trump-supporting parents, a simplistic image of the #resistance and its opposition obscures the call for honest dialogue in the book's final pages, and the author's emphasis on personal branding and political style over substance leaves this young reader questioning whether Duca's revolutionary vision will, or even should, succeed.

Anna J. Marchese is a program associate at the American Council of Learned Societies and a former intern at America Media.



The Grammarians
By Cathleen Schine
Sarah Crichton Books
272p \$27

Word crazy

A novel about two young girls who are crazier about words than just about anything else holds a natural appeal to those of us in the ink trade. (For one thing, they would no doubt get that last reference.) But how about for everyone else? Cathleen Schine's *The Grammarians* is an only-in-New York story, for sure, perhaps unsurprising from a novelist who brought us *The New Yorkers*. But it is also a story about sisters who are impossibly close until they are not anymore. Anyone, anywhere can relate to that.

Laurel and Daphne are a pair of precocious twins (redheads, natch) who share a secret language that even their parents cannot understand. Raised on Long Island, they later move to New York City, their differences defined (perhaps a touch too obviously) by the boroughs they ultimately settle in: Laurel in Manhattan, Daphne in Brooklyn. Daphne works as a copy editor, begins freelancing and earns a following for her hot takes on questions of grammar. Laurel becomes a mother and stays home with her daughter in order to be as close as possible to her as the words start tumbling out.

Over time each achieves a measure of professional success: Daphne becomes a columnist at *The New*

York Times (“The People’s Pedant”) and Laurel begins publishing short stories sampled from letters and other primary-source material she discovers in public archives. Perhaps inevitably, their intense relationship deteriorates. When Daphne’s husband reveals to her that he remains close with Laurel’s husband, Daphne responds with a blizzard of insults worthy of Roget: “This is treason. This is treachery. This is two-faced. This is perfidy. This is sedition.”

For Laurel and Daphne, words are much more than words, and the rules that govern them must be upheld with a believer’s zeal. “There is something fair and just in what we do,” Daphne says. “Grammar is good. I mean ethically good. If you think of all these words just stumbling around, grammar is their social order, their government.” It is no coincidence that religious language seeps in. The New York Public Library is a “cathedral of words.” A cherished family dictionary sits on “an altar.”

At one point, a character asks, “But should points of grammar carry so much moral weight?” Anyone who has witnessed arguments over the serial comma has probably pondered the same question. An answer, perhaps, comes from Daphne, after the death of her father: “There were no words for what she felt, the depth of the emptiness, the breadth of the emptiness, the emptiness of the emptiness.” The moral weight of words becomes apparent when they are not available to us.

Maurice Timothy Reidy, deputy editor in chief.
Twitter: @mtreidy.

'The Trojan Women' speaks to the brutalities of war

By Deniz Demirer

Since 1975, a production of "The Trojan Women" staged by New York's La MaMa Experimental Theater Club has traveled to more than 30 countries.

"The Trojan Women," Euripides's 2,500-year-old tragedy, was inspired by the conquest of Melos by the Athenians in 416 B.C. during the Peloponnesian War. The subjugation of the Melesians by the Athenians that followed was devastating. Euripides took these historic events and transformed them into a play about the conquest of Troy by the Greeks. The women of the city play a central role, and it is through their perspective that we witness the tragedies of war: the brutal murder of their soldiers and husbands, the rape and enslavement of the women, the separation of children from their mothers and consequent exile.

In the play, the conquered Trojan queen, Hecuba, laments the desecration of the holy Athenian temples and the exoneration of the rapist who defiled her virgin daughter. The play is timeless, as humanity continues to be assailed by seemingly endless in-

justices and conflicts, and it is often women who are the most affected by violent instability.

Since 1975, a production of "The Trojan Women" staged by New York's La MaMa Experimental Theater Club has traveled to more than 30 countries across the globe. Beginning in 2013 in Guatemala, La MaMa transitioned from merely performing the show to collaborating with arts groups in various countries. Now called "The Trojan Women Project," the show has been transmitted orally to new generations of artists. The staging, words, music and movement was given to artists in countries where the wounds of war had scarred communities and often remain unresolved.

What makes La MaMa's production of "The Trojan Women" special is not only its unique form as a "composed, epic opera" using a completely invented language but also its deep

sensitivity to the role women play in the aftermath of war. It magnifies the ability of theater to give bone-chilling immediacy to the notion that none of us are above passively witnessing crimes against body and soul while doing nothing to stop them.

The play was first developed at The Great Jones Rep in New York by Elizabeth Swados, Andrei Serban and Ellen Stewart—La MaMa herself—in the early 1970s. The most recent New York iteration of "The Trojan Women" at La MaMa in early December brought together a cast of about 50 performers in total. Some came from the same war-torn regions of the world where prior collaborations had taken place, including Cambodia, Guatemala, Kosovo (Serbs, Albanians, Roma), as well as actors from New York and members from the original cast.

I spoke with the Kosovan actor Il-ire Vinca during the show's rehearsals

a week before opening night. When I asked how her experiences with the war in Kosovo connect to her role in the play, Ms. Vinca became thoughtful: “It feels like I am not playing—my own life just continues.” She explained that there is little distinction between her own life and the life she portrays on stage because of her experiences in the war that go back to her childhood. Kosovo’s ethnic conflict between Serbs and Albanians stretches back over 100 years, finally erupting into its bloodiest clash in 1998, when many thousands were killed and well over a million were displaced.

The night I saw “The Trojan Women,” Ilire Vinca played Hecuba. The play began with the audience being

herded from the theater’s second floor foyer into a huge hall where the story would unfold. High ramparts stretched along the periphery of the great dark room, and there we witnessed the indecencies of the aftermath of war perpetrated against the innocent women of Troy—terror illuminated by a spotlight. We could do nothing but watch.

It was exactly this expression of the deepest flaws of the human condition, combined with the coming together of artists from all over the world who understood in their very bodies the pain of war and the aftermath of war, that made “The Trojan Women” indispensable as a healing kind of theater. Like the sensation of fire on flesh, it could be understood by any creature, bringing everyone together at a primal level.

Deniz Demirer is a Polish-born writer, actor and filmmaker.

An oasis amid Syria’s bloodshed

The mercy, mystery and even the wrath of God are invoked during “The Cave,” the director Feras Fayyad’s valiant misfire of a movie about a hospital that operated in—or rather under—besieged Syria, until being overrun last year. Cries of “O God! O God! O God!” greet the commencement of the daily bombings. “God, are you really watching my children?!” moans the father of numerous wounded. God is part of “The Cave.” So is guilt.

A portrait of courage under fire, resilience and hope—how else could they do what they do?—“The Cave” is also something of a talking-dog movie: You’re astounded it exists, never mind what it has to say. The Syrian director Fayyad, best known for the justly celebrated “Last Men in Aleppo,” was apparently not in the “Cave” when his film was being shot, which would not matter if the results didn’t feel both awkward and unfair. Dr. Amani Ballour, a pediatrician, is the elected manager of the Cave, a labyrinthine hospital that operates underground, and the obvious heroine of the piece. What she does is remarkable, as are the operations performed by her surgical colleague Dr. Samir and the general maintenance and cooking of the woman named Samaher, who feeds

150 people with the equivalent of a camp stove.

But the effort to make the movie about Ballour’s emotional reaction to what she sees around her—or, worse, using “The Cave” as a forum about sexism in the Middle East—trivializes both subjects when juxtaposed with the life-and-death struggle that “The Cave” is all about. There is an urgency and immediacy to much of the film, but the poetic voice-overs by Ballour seem, in contrast, trite. Yes, there are pressing social issues to be dealt with in the world, and Ballour’s life has not gone the way she planned. But hey—there’s a child bleeding to death in a corner. And an abattoir outside.

Dubious story structure aside, “The Cave” portrays a miraculous oasis in a hellish landscape. It documents a gesture of compassion, and even godliness, amid a situation that human rights organizations have declared a crime against humanity. The grace of someone like Dr. Ballour and her colleagues is unquestioned, endlessly valuable and deserving of all the recognition in the world. What it is not is banal, which is what “The Cave” comes dangerously close to making it.

John Anderson is a television critic for *The Wall Street Journal*.



“The Cave” is a portrait of courage under fire.

National Geographic

Godly Love

Readings: Lv 19:1-2, 17-18; Ps 103; 1 Cor 3:16-23; Mt 5:38-48

Jesus sets high standards for his followers. He calls on them to be perfect and to love as God loves. Is Jesus setting unattainable goals? Yes and no. As in last Sunday's readings, today's Gospel comes from the Sermon on the Mount. This Sunday, the focus is on retaliation and the treatment of enemies.

Matthew depicts Jesus critiquing “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Mt 5:38, see Ex 21:23-25, Lv 24:20, Dt 19:21) and instead calling for his followers to “turn the other cheek.” Jesus seems to endorse passivity and submissiveness rather than vengeance. Ancient and modern audiences have almost opposite interpretations of the original command, though both would be likely to reject Jesus' call to turn the other cheek. In antiquity, “an eye for an eye” was a call for moderation in punishment. It might be better understood as “only an eye for an eye.” This law limited retaliation; it should be in proportion to the crime being punished. In modern idiom, however, “an eye for an eye” serves as a rationale for harsh sentences and an invitation for retaliation. It has unfortunately been used to justify capital punishment, though it was originally intended as a law of restraint.

Jesus' apparently passive responses have a message for both ancient and modern readers. By telling his followers to turn the other cheek, Jesus calls on them to resist tendencies toward punishment. Implicitly, Jesus introduces the idea of reconciliation rather than retaliation. Jesus does not want his followers to be abused and taken advantage of, as the passage might suggest. When Jesus says, “Offer no resistance to one who is evil” (Mt 5:39), he does not mean do nothing in the face of injustice. Instead, Jesus insists that his community reject and work against retaliation by focusing on love, an idea that he continues to develop in the following verses.

As the Gospel continues, Jesus refers to a law that says, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy” (Mt 5:43). There is no known Jewish law that calls for hatred of enemies, and hating enemies is only rarely encouraged

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Lv 19:18)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How can I work toward reconciliation instead of retaliation?

What can I do to live out *agape* (divine love)?

What can I do to emulate God?

(e.g., Ps 139:19-22). Jesus insists that his followers focus less on hatred and more on love (Greek *agape*). There are multiple words for love in Greek (e.g., *philia*, brotherly love; *eros*, sexual love). This passage calls for *agape* (divine love), a term that expresses God's unconditional love. Jesus compels his community of believers to treat all people with Godly love.

Jesus' interpretations of Scripture in the Sermon on the Mount are rooted in the first reading from Leviticus, which similarly advocates love over hate. The law insists, “You shall not hate...take no vengeance and cherish no grudge” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lv 19:17-18). By loving all people, even enemies, Jesus' followers can “be perfect” *as the Father is perfect* (Mt 5:48).

What does Jesus mean when he calls for perfection? The call to be perfect is a call to strive to be like God. On this topic, the first reading calls for people to “be holy” *as the Lord is holy* (Lv 19:2). Luke's version of this passage says “be merciful” *as the Father is merciful* (Lk 6:36). Matthew, like Leviticus and Luke, calls us not to be formed by instincts for retaliation or vengeance but to emulate God in our treatment of one another, continually working to love one another as God loves all of us.

Confronting Sin and Death

Readings: Gn 2:7-9, 3:1-7; Ps 51; Rom 5:12-19; Mt 4:1-11

As we embark on the 40 days of Lent, today's readings prompt us to confront our human tendency to sin and our mortality.

The first reading includes two excerpts from the Book of Genesis that describe the creation of the man (later named Adam), the planting of the garden of Eden, in which are found the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and includes the infamous story of the serpent tempting the woman and man in the garden. The verses omitted from the Lectionary reading describe the creation and naming of animals and the woman (later named Eve). In Genesis 3, the serpent, symbolizing temptation, entices the woman and man to disobey the divine command not to eat the forbidden fruit.

This narrative should be read as an etiology, a story that explains known phenomena. Genesis 3 provides a myth to reveal the causes of human sin and death: disobedience. In this story, the central figures are referred to only as "the woman" and "the man," allowing them to symbolically represent all people and our propensity to sin. This human attribute is also on display in today's Gospel reading, which describes Jesus' temptation to sin.

Through the obedience of one the many will be made righteous. (Rom 5:19)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

What can you do to avoid temptations to sin?

What do you do to seek forgiveness when you sin?

What actions can you take to increase your relationship with God?

The Gospel of Matthew depicts Jesus spending 40 days in the desert during a period of fasting, offering us a model for the liturgical season of Lent. In the reading, Matthew suggests that because Jesus was fully human, he too faced temptations to sin. Matthew expands on Mark's short account of the temptation (Mk 1:12-13) and, like Luke (Lk 4:1-13), includes three explicit refusals to sin. Jesus' refusals are examples of how we should confront temptations. When we know something is wrong, we should refuse to do it. This may sound overly simplistic, but the Gospel reminds us that the way to begin resisting temptation is to recognize that sin really is sin. Then our course of action is clear: Don't sin.

Paul's Letter to the Romans is a great hinge text that connects the first reading and the Gospel. Paul alludes to the Genesis narrative by saying that sin and death entered the world through the actions of one man (Rom 5:12). Yet Paul also highlights the divine gift of grace through Jesus Christ and his ability to overcome sin and death. "Just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so, through one righteous act, acquittal and life came to all" (Rom 5:19). Paul asserts a collective identity through the story of disobedience in the garden of Eden. Paul's logic provides the foundation for what would become the doctrine of original sin. But Paul also asserts a collective redemption through the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Christ.

As we journey through these 40 days of Lent, we can emulate Jesus' acts of prayer, fasting and almsgiving and recognize his obedience and willingness to sacrifice himself for our salvation. Lent gives us an opportunity to work against temptations towards sinful behavior and instead live simply and justly, inspired by Christ. May these actions guide us through this Lenten season and throughout the year.

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

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Money and Mercy

How does faith influence our finances?

By Victoria Sechrist



As my then-fiancé and I were preparing to get married this past year, I ordered *Men, Women and the Mystery of Love: Practical Insights From John Paul II's Love and Responsibility*, by Edward Sri. Initially I let it fall by the wayside; but now, as a newlywed, I am working my way through it. The best summary is perhaps in St. John Paul II's own words: "The greater the feeling of responsibility for the person, the more true love there is."

I wondered: Could love and responsibility have something to do with how we manage our money? I work for the Financial Gym; I write financial plans and coach clients through decisions like how much to save for retirement, how to strategize debt repayment or how to negotiate a new salary. I also write on my blog, *Consumer Catholic*, about how our faith can influence our finances.

Though I am a practicing Catholic, religion is not something I discuss with most of my clients (unless they bring it up). I know that some of them are Catholic; some are Protestant; some are Jewish; some are Muslim; and some are "nones," unaffiliated or not religious at all. And yet my faith informs how I approach every client. Each is a daughter or son of God. That means I do my best to bring him or her a Christ-like experience of compassion, kindness and acceptance.

Many times when clients first come to me, they do not see a way out of their financial mess. But just as God says everything is forgivable, in finances everything is fixable.

Pope Francis says, "Hope is the virtue of a heart that doesn't lock itself into darkness, that doesn't dwell on the past, does not simply get by in the present, but is able to see tomorrow." That tomorrow I am helping my clients to achieve is one where they do not feel shame or fear around their money and can make decisions confidently.

There are several benchmarks for financial health that we focus on (debt-to-income ratio, credit score, credit utilization ratio, savings rate, etc.), but I also help my clients understand that not everything comes down to dollars and cents. For example, sometimes a client's emergency fund is running low because he or she just used it to pay for unexpected medical bills. If we were looking purely at numbers, you could say this person has less in savings today than he or she did yesterday. But if you look at it holistically, this person was able to cover life's necessities without worrying about how to afford it.

Some people are called to a life of poverty, but not most of us. So there is absolutely no shame in using your God-given gifts to earn money and support your family and the church. In fact, it is what we are called to do. In 1

Tim 5:8, the writer says, "But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." Providing for your family will look different for everyone, and that is O.K. Sometimes providing for your family does not even involve directly earning money.

In the Gospel parable of the talents, the master rewards the servant who made the best investment of the gifts he had been given. We are called to do the same. That comes with a lot of responsibility.

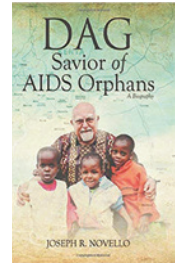
That is why this all comes back to love. As St. John Paul II said, the greater the feeling of responsibility, the more true love there is. By being responsible with the gifts God has given us, we are both receiving and acknowledging the heavenly Father's love and loving him back. Yes, there can be safety in our financial numbers, but that is just a small taste of the ultimate safety we have in God.

Victoria Sechrist has been working for the Financial Gym since 2018. She created her blog, Consumer Catholic, in 2017 and her podcast, "Treasures in Heaven," a year later.

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Angelo D'Agostino, S.J., M.D. (1926-2006) was a Jesuit's Jesuit. As a practicing psychiatrist in Washington, D.C., he became known as "the psychiatrist to the stars," but it did not satisfy him as a priest. Finally, his "Ignatian itch" was satisfied when the superior of the Jesuits, Pedro Arrupe, S.J., personally missioned him to East Africa. One night in 1987 Dag, as everyone called him, discovered AIDS orphans on the streets of Nairobi, Kenya. When he learned that nothing was being done for them, he vowed, "I'll do it myself." In spite of tremendous obstacles, he did it. He established the first orphanage for HIV+ children in Africa and later, in spite of threats to his life, was the first to import life-saving ARV medications. As a result, thousands of lives were saved. Dag died a hero in Kenya and was given a state funeral. His candidacy for sainthood is being considered at the Vatican.

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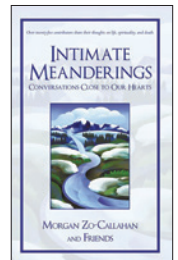
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Daniel Berrigan, S.J. (may he enjoy eternal peace), our great friend and contributor, says: "This book is an amazing potpourri of wisdom. I am so grateful to you, Morgan and the friends. *Intimate Meanderings: Conversations Close to Our Hearts* should be required reading in every Jesuit tent."

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