

America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC REVIEW

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A Family Embrace

RENEWING THE CHURCH'S PASTORAL
SUPPORT FOR MARRIAGE
DIARMUID MARTIN

FOLEY POETRY
CONTEST WINNER

This spring marks the 11th anniversary of my association with **America**, first as a Jesuit novice, then a regent, and lately as the 14th editor in chief. You might think that after all that time, I'd have learned pretty much all there is to know about **America's** storied history and its spectacular, even eccentric cast of characters. On the other hand, there's quite a bit of history to know: We've been publishing this magazine for 106 years and counting, through several papacies, an ecumenical council, a half-dozen wars, unimaginable triumphs and unspeakable tragedies. So it's no surprise, really, that I still learn something new almost every day.

On a recent road trip I did what I usually do to pass the time: I synched my iPhone to the car radio, turned up the volume and spent three glorious hours listening to Frank Sinatra. I'm a big Sinatra fan, as I have been for most of my life. I'm probably one of the few people under the age of 60 who is magically transported back to his childhood when he hears "Angel Eyes" or "Night and Day." Well, I was talking about this one day in the office when Brother Frank Turnbull casually mentioned that I'm not the first editor in chief to take Sinatra with him on a long car ride. My predecessor twice-removed, George W. Hunt, S.J., also liked to travel with the Chairman of the Board and once wrote about that fact in this very column. A curious coincidence to be sure, but the real gem in this story is this: It turns out that Mr. Sinatra was an **America** reader, and when he read Father Hunt's glowing column about his music, he wrote a letter to the editor, which George printed in the next issue with what we can only assume was unbridled glee.

Though it was a surprise to learn that Mr. Sinatra was a reader, it was no surprise to learn that Sinatra's music was just one more strand in

the rich, eclectic tapestry of literary and musical tastes of Father George Hunt. As his friend Fay Vincent, former commissioner of Major League Baseball, once remarked, "George demonstrated to me that he knew more than just about anyone alive about football and baseball, jazz, the movies, modern fiction—especially John Cheever and John Updike—the Civil War, political history, Winston Churchill, Irish history, Tammany Hall and Boss Tweed, military history—especially World War II—and the list could go on and on."

It's no accident then that when we launched the literary prize that bears Father Hunt's name, we decided that it should be awarded to someone with an unusual mix of interests; someone who uses art, literature and culture to reach people in new ways. I am pleased to report that we have found that person. The 2015 and inaugural winner of the George W. Hunt, S.J., Prize for Excellence in Journalism, Arts and Letters is Philip J. Metres III. A poet and essayist, Professor Metres's writing—which has appeared widely, including in *Best American Poetry*—has been called "beautiful, powerful, magnetically original."

A graduate of Holy Cross, Dr. Metres is today a professor of English at John Carroll University in Cleveland. When I reached him to inform him that he had won the Hunt Prize, he was in Belfast, Northern Ireland, where he was leading a group of John Carroll students on a faith and reconciliation trip. George would have liked that: a poet at the intersection of the church and the world helping the next generation to find its way. He also would have liked that we found the best of the lot, for Father Hunt had exacting standards. As Mr. Sinatra might have put it, for George, when it came to excellence, it was "all or nothing at all."

MATT MALONE, S.J.

106 West 56th Street
New York, NY 10019-3803
Ph: 212-581-4640; Fax: 212-399-3596
Subscriptions: 1-800-627-9533
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EDITORIAL E-MAIL
america@americamedia.org

PUBLISHER AND CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER Edward
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Cover: The Chicago Archdiocese's annual Mass to
celebrate couples' golden wedding anniversaries
at Holy Name Cathedral in Sept. 2013. CNS
photo/Karen Callaway, Catholic New World

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ON THE WEB

The **Catholic Book Club** discusses *Simply Jesus* by N. T. Wright, and **Kerry Robinson**, right, talks about the spirituality of fundraising on "America This Week." Full digital highlights on page 23 and at americamagazine.org/webfeatures.



Egypt's Trial

Mass death sentences have emerged as a disturbing fixture of post-Arab Spring Egypt. The latest ruling, handed down on May 16, could make a martyr of the deposed president, Mohamed Morsi. Mr. Morsi, Egypt's first democratically elected leader, along with over 100 members of the Muslim Brotherhood, were sentenced to death for breaking out of prison during the revolt in 2011 against President Hosni Mubarak. The sentence has been referred to the country's highest Sunni authority for his nonbinding opinion, and a final decision is expected on June 2.

The trial and sentence have been widely condemned by the international community. The European Union's top diplomat said the trial violated Egypt's obligations under international law, and an unnamed official in the U.S. State Department expressed "deep concern" over the verdict, stressing the need for "individualized judicial processes for all Egyptians in the interests of justice." Elliot Abrams, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, doubts the death sentences will actually be carried out because of external pressure on President Sisi but warns that even the pronouncement of draconian punishments could drive supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood to violence.

Four years after protests brought down Hosni Mubarak, ushering in a brief period of hope for a true democratic awakening, a different kind of revolution has occurred: a near complete turn back to authoritarian rule. The United States seems ready to press reset as well. In late March the Obama administration announced the restoration of \$1.3 billion in military aid to Egypt, citing regional security interests. Buying stability at the expense of human rights may seem like a necessary bargain amid the chaos of the Middle East, but we need not look far to see where such a shortsighted policy ends.

Assaults in the Academies

A recent column on the op-ed page of *The New York Times* (5/12), by Ashley Anderson and Elizabeth Deutsch, seeks to shed light on the "entrenched sexism" at West Point, the Naval Academy and the Air Force Academy. The authors, both students at Yale Law School, are representing the Service Women's Action Network, a nonprofit organization aimed at changing military culture by aiding women in the fight against sexual assault, harassment and gender-based discrimination.

According to recent data from the Department of Defense, over 80 percent of women experience some form of sexism and discrimination; almost 50 percent have faced

sexual harassment; and 8 percent were sexually assaulted in 2014. Yet fewer than 5 percent of these victims have filed reports. The column argues that an exemption made by Congress to Title IX is partly to blame. Title IX, which requires that U.S. universities receiving federal money maintain suitable policies to prevent sexual violence and discrimination, does not apply to military campuses. Victims must file any complaint at their own campus and within the chain of command. If reports are mishandled, victims have nowhere to turn outside their schools, and they cannot appeal the way a decision was made.

The two writers recommend an executive order for military campuses, similar to Title IX, that would focus on creating better policies to protect against sexism and assault on military campuses. The academies should also create a system that would allow the Defense Department, rather than campuses, to deal with reports filed by victims in certain cases. Those preparing for military careers should be able to count on better support and protection.

Tracking Train Safety

The Amtrak train derailment outside in North Philadelphia on May 12, which left eight people dead and scores injured, makes clear yet again that our nation's transportation infrastructure urgently needs more than Band-Aid fixes. Sustained and systemic reforms are the only way to ensure that such tragedies do not become commonplace.

Compared with that of Europe, the U.S. rail system is lacking in concrete railway safety protocols. Kevin Hassett, director of economic policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, notes that "we have a really, really sub-par railroad system, when it comes to safety." And the numbers bear him out. Last year there were 813 fatalities out of a total of 11,855 railroad incidents, compared with 707 deaths from 11,588 incidents in the previous year. One would have to travel on average more than four million miles on French and German trains before an accident occurs, while in the United States an accident occurs once every 84,300 miles. According to Robert Sumwalt, a board member of the National Transportation Safety Board, if Amtrak had "positive train control," technologies that monitor and control train speeds to head off accidents, the Amtrak tragedy could have been averted.

Whatever the cause—human or mechanical error—tragedies like this demand urgent attention. Officials in Chicago are heeding the lesson; a safety system about to be implemented will take about four years and \$400 million. That is the track the whole country ought to be on.

Moynihan's Message



Fifty years ago, a young scholar at the Department of Labor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, wrote *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. “The racist virus in the American blood stream,” he said, “still afflicts us,” and “the Negro family in the urban ghettos is crumbling.” Mr. Moynihan had discovered that nearly a quarter of African-American births were “illegitimate.” Only a minority of African-American children who were 18 at that time had lived all their lives with both parents.

Mr. Moynihan’s report was misunderstood by both the left and the right. Some found it offensive to African-Americans and defended the one-parent family, arguing the “new family” was not necessarily limited to married men and women. Today’s intellectuals, shocked by civil disorder in Ferguson and Baltimore, have rediscovered the truth of Moynihan’s main point: troubled neighborhoods filled with jobless men and broken families are incubators of hopelessness.

The numbers have only grown worse since Mr. Moynihan raised hackles in 1965. According to the Urban Institute, the number of African-American children born to unmarried mothers has tripled since the report. Now nearly three quarters of African-American births and three tenths of white births occur outside marriage. Children who grow up in families headed by single women are more likely to do poorly in school and drop out, to be arrested and to become single parents themselves.

The Russell Sage Foundation reports African-American men between 25 to 54 are effectively “missing” because of homicide—over 90 percent of the victims are murdered by other African-American men—or because of the nation’s vast social experiment with mass incarceration. Almost one in 12 African-American men is behind bars. The number for white men is one in 60.

Many will review today’s urban conditions and, citing Moynihan, declare that it is an interventionist government weakening families that leads to continuing dysfunction; others, also citing Moynihan, will argue that only a comprehensive government response can shore up both families and communities. The truth is that strong families make better futures for children, but so do strong communities—communities where people have educational and job opportunities that allow them to escape cycles of poverty, communities where police truly come to protect and serve and are not perceived as a hostile occupying force.

Young men in Baltimore describe life as a constant

running from police and the city itself as a “Murder Land” they want to leave.

They join gangs to escape loneliness, make friends and even experience love. President Obama, in a discussion with African-American and Hispanic students at Lehman College in the Bronx, poignantly asked, “Do we love these kids?”

It is a fair question, especially as crises within African-American neighborhoods continue to be discussed as if they were something happening somehow elsewhere. To speak of “two Baltimores” or “white communities” and “African-American communities” may focus analysis in sociological studies like Mr. Moynihan’s and speak a regrettable truth about continuing U.S. segregation, but it is fatal to the solidarity Christians are called to embrace. There is no crisis in “their” community in Baltimore that is not a crisis for “our” community. If African-American families are being broken down by poverty, by inadequate educational opportunity, by inequities in the application of the law and in criminal sentencing, by police brutality and “black on black” violence, that is a crisis that needs to be raised up in compassion and concern before the whole community. It should provoke a call to action that is not undermined by ideologies and rhetoric that belittle communal obligations.

Mr. Moynihan eventually tried to answer the urban crisis in his time with New Deal-inspired policies aimed at full employment and even proposed a minimum family wage to end poverty once and for all. How should the nation respond now? A comprehensive review of police policies and procedures and efforts to equalize educational opportunity make a good start. And creative consideration of ways to free the nation’s incarcerated men, captives of shortsighted policies of the past, are surely welcome.

Urban churches should embrace this crisis as an opportunity to renew their identities as opponents of racism and companions of the poor, with a theology of the family to guide their thinking. Mr. Moynihan would no doubt have welcomed the words of Baltimore’s Archbishop William Lori. Freddie Gray’s death, the archbishop said, “symbolized the rawest of open wounds, and the only salve that will heal them is that of truth: truth about what happened to Freddie, truth about the sin of racism that is still present in our community, and truth about our collective responsibility to deal with those issues that undermine the human dignity of every citizen.”

REPLY ALL

S.J.'s and Ph.D.'s

Re "Company Men," by William J. Byron, S.J. (5/11): The fact is, the best way for a Catholic to be guaranteed a tenure-track university position is to become a member of a religious order and to get a Ph.D. Jesuit schools are drooling all over themselves to try to get qualified Jesuits to take faculty positions. The problem isn't the inability of assignment. The problem is that such a small number seem to be genuinely interested in the academic life. They love being pastoral, saying Masses and being super-priests. All of these things are well and good. But a few need to suck it up for the team and excel at academics, so as to provide a model for younger Jesuits and to preserve the great institutions they created.

I genuinely enjoy the Jesuits I teach, and I love the Jesuits I work with at Saint Louis University; but the crisis lies in the Jesuits themselves. We're a long way from the glory years when Jesuits like de Lubac, Rahner and Lonergan were towering figures. Obviously there are exceptions. The order needs to take more pride in the academic part of life or quit complaining about their diminished role in the universities they founded. I am not against what Father Byron suggests here, but some of the presuppositions are a thousand miles off course.

GRANT KAPLAN
St. Louis, Mo.

Alternatives in Iran

Re "Preventing a Nuclear Iran" (Editorial, 5/4): I would like to hear an intelligent alternative from those who see only failure in these talks. So far, the alternative seems to be war with Iran. Is this plan based on Senator McCain's famous "Bomb, bomb Iran" rant? I hardly view that as an intelligent alternative. The sanctions imposed by the free world have

brought the Iranian government to the table. This is a most critical time, and it should be a time for unity from our political leaders. I don't believe Iran's government is trustworthy. Neither was the U.S.S.R., and yet President Reagan signed a treaty with them. It can be done. Thanks to **America** for a thoughtful editorial.

EDWARD HELLER
Online Comment

Work in Progress

As a physician who continues to meet more male and female victims of sexual abuse by clerics, I found informative "Answering the Unspeakable" (5/4), the review by Frank Brennan, S.J., of James T. O'Reilly's *The Clergy Sex Abuse Crisis and the Legal Responses*. I am grateful that Father Brennan is honest enough to admit that dealing with sexual abuse of children in the church is still a work in progress, since some bishops want us to believe that it is past history.

I have a question, however. Is Father Brennan aware that parish bulletins around the country ask that accusations of abuse be directly reported to church officials, with no request to also report to the police? Even now Pope Francis seems to want the church to be in control of investigations. This is self-defeating. There will never be credibility that the right thing is being done unless all investigations are under the control of civil and criminal law enforcement.

ROSEMARY EILEEN MCHUGH, M.D.
Online Comment

Space at the Altar

Re "In Defense of Altar Girls," by Kerry Weber (5/4): Thank you, Kerry Weber! I am amazed that some Catholics continue to argue that having girls around the altar takes a space from a boy, who in later years may be called to the priesthood. If God wants a man, the message will come across. And who knows, maybe the girl at the altar will be the mother, sister, friend

or cousin that encourages a man in her life to become a priest because of her experience. Or maybe she will become a religious or a woman of great faith who evangelizes others to come to Christ because of her experience as an altar server.

ELLEN MARIE DUMER
Online Comment

Nuclear Contamination

Re "No More Nukes," by Kevin Clarke (5/4): The letter by Pope Francis read at the Vienna Conference offered nothing beyond what St. John XXIII said in 1963. The Catholic bishops of the United States tried to declare nuclear deterrence immoral in "The Challenge of Peace" (1983) but were called on the carpet in Rome to answer the objections of the archbishop of Berlin and other "NATO bishops." The Catholic Church has not been in the forefront on the nuclear issue for more than a generation. (Some Catholics have been, notably the Plowshare activists.)

The crux of the matter is that nuclear deterrence is intrinsically immoral. Deterrence works, insofar as it does work, only when there is the fixed intention to use nuclear weapons. The nuns taught us that bad thoughts were sinful. What thought could be more sinful than the intention to turn my key and set in motion the obliteration of millions of human beings? The humanitarian consequences the Vienna Conference speaks of go beyond what would happen in the event of a nuclear war. We're already living with these consequences. It's too bad there's not something like a Geiger counter to measure the contamination of the soul.

MICHAEL GALLAGHER
Shaker Heights, Ohio

Inside the Church

In "Outside the Lines" (4/27), Helen Alvaré makes it clear that women's ability to maneuver from outside bureaucracies could be good for the future church. Perhaps history can assist with an additional point. There

have been men, like St. Vincent de Paul, as well as women, who have so maneuvered and envisioned new ways for the church and for women to lead and serve. In 1617, Vincent founded the Confraternities of Charity, a lay association led by women, to serve people who were poor and sick. These confraternities spread throughout the world. Nearly 400 years later they are still flourishing as the International Association of Charities of St. Vincent de Paul, known in the United States as the Ladies of Charity of the United States of America.

Today's church could benefit from St. Vincent's vision, creativity and pragmatism. He read the signs of the times and developed sustainable, Gospel-driven responses "outside the lines" and inside the church.

May all holy men and women work together to shape the church of the future that our world needs so badly. "Love is inventive even to infinity," said St. Vincent de Paul.

MARY ANN DANTUONO
East Williston, N.Y.

The writer is the president of the Ladies of Charity, AIC-LCUSA.

Old Order

In "Confirmation Bias" (4/27), Michael A. Marchal begins by complaining that we are losing young Catholics, and he cites the decline in the rates of confirmation as evidence. But his proposal is to place confirmation in a position where it would essentially get lost in the run-up to Communion. This hardly seems likely to improve the author's stated purpose of evangelizing young people. And the only supporting evidence he offers is that he did not find his own confirmation particularly meaningful.

So as a Catholic who did find it meaningful and clearly distinct from Communion, which I also found meaningful, I want to express my strong support for the current order, though moving confirmation back to

age 16, 18 or even later, when it can be a real choice for the individuals involved, should also be considered.

I would also point out that the current order is consistent with the most original practice in the sense that this is the order that the events in the Bible occurred on which the sacraments are based. It seemed to work effectively for the apostles' faith formation.

MICHAEL ALEPRETE
Online Comment

Adoption Hospitality

Thanks to Holly Taylor Coolman for her essay, "Adoption and the Christian Life" (4/13). As someone adopted into the secret world of closed adoption in the 1950s, it was affirming to read of an adoptive parent's willingness to enter the experience of adoption with an attitude of hospitality. Open adoption, for all its challenges, is the only honest segue into the world of adoptive family relationships.

Sadly, the U.S. bishops do not embrace the same values. Ms. Coolman mentions that she and the birth family entered a church for a "blessing"—probably not a baptism. The bishops insist that baptism not be administered before the adoption is finalized so that the information from the amended birth certificate can be copied into the baptismal register. Thus, mention

of the birth parents' identities, or the child's birth name, can be conveniently omitted.

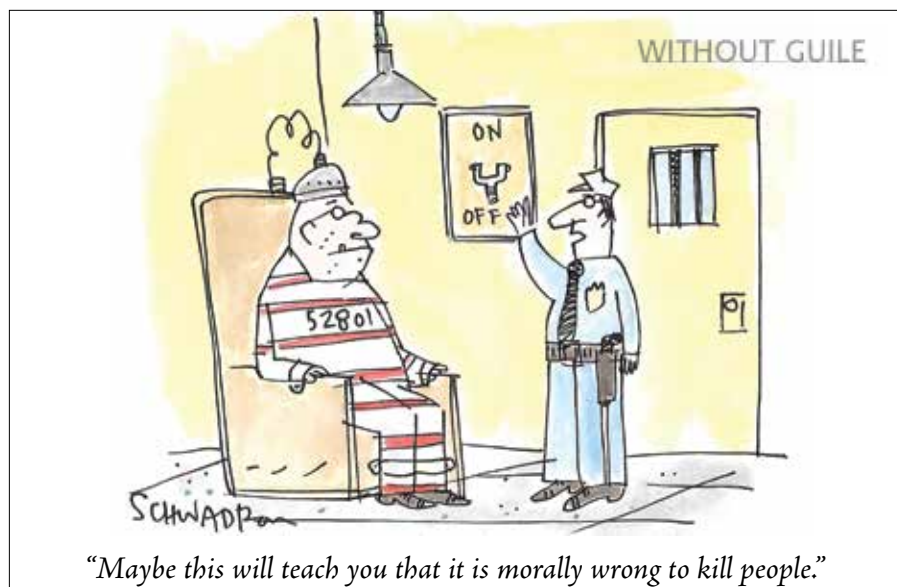
Hospitality, not secrets or lies, is the best response to a child who needs a home—and adoption should be about the needs of the child, not those of the prospective parents. Adoptive families are no better or worse than families formed biologically, but they are different. And such differences need to be acknowledged as Ms. Coolman has done so well.

(REV.) THOMAS F. BROSNAN
Bayside, N.Y.

Overestimating Aid

In "A Mess and a Miracle," by John Carr (4/13), it is noted that most Americans overestimate the percentage we spend on foreign aid. They guess 25 percent; they think it should be 10 percent; it is actually less than 1 percent. Just a couple of pages later a graphic accompanying "Metaphysics and Money," by Gary A. Anderson, plays into that misconception by picturing the United State as number one in the "World Giving Index," which measures foreign aid in real dollars. When U.S. giving is calculated as a percentage of our gross national product, we rank somewhere around number 20.

EILEEN REILLY, S.S.N.D.
Woodhaven, N.Y.



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SIGNS OF THE TIMES

EL SALVADOR

As Romero Is Beatified, Violence Remains a National Menace



AT PRAYER WITH ROMERO. A Salvadoran woman visits the chapel where Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated.

Archbishop Romero, too, was a victim of violence, shot down on March 24, 1980, as he celebrated Mass. He was one of the more than 70,000 Salvadorans killed during the country's armed conflict that lasted from 1979 until 1992. He had pleaded with soldiers the day before to stop killing innocent civilians.

Even after the conflict came to an end, a series of factors—weapons left over from the war, an influx of gang members from the United States and narco-trafficking—over time have contributed to the country's present state: a designation as one of the most dangerous countries in the world and a threat to pass neighboring Honduras as the most dangerous place on earth that is not in an official war.

Mauro Verzeletti, a Scalibrini priest who preached on Ascension Sunday, May 17, at St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Soyapango, outside San Salvador, invoked Archbishop Romero to help the country move forward. There's nothing left but to follow the Gospel, to fight for truth, transparency, an end to corruption, extortion and killings, all the things that God calls on people to reject, he said. No one knew this better than Archbishop Romero, who, like Christ, was assassinated, he said.

"Oscar Romero, a martyr, was hated for his faith, as one who loved the poor. He proclaimed the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and those who proclaim it are hated in this world, persecuted, maligned," which happened to Archbishop Romero even after he was assassinated, Father Verzeletti said. "But we can't be fearful, or the devil will creep in," he added. "The devil manifests itself in the form of injustice, impunity and corruption." He called on Salvadorans to live with fortitude even in the midst of what seems like a hopeless situation.

If there is any place in need of salvation at this moment, it is the Central American country named after Jesus Christ. Even as it prepared to mark one of the biggest events in its history—the beatification on May 23 of the slain Archbishop Oscar Romero—El Salvador, which in Spanish means “the Savior,” suffered in the midst of one of its most violent periods.

March marked one of the deadliest months in a decade, with 481 people murdered, an average of 16 homicides a day, many committed by the nation's violent and ubiquitous gangs, said officials from the National Civil Police. Almost as an affront, gang leaders in April said they would provide some momentary respite from the violence as a “gift” to the Salvadoran martyr on the occasion of his beatification.

That means little to people like Lourdes Molina, a mother of three teenage boys who lives each day in fear that her sons will be hurt or worse by the gangs that terrorize the six million people who live in El Salvador. The violence is “unbearable,” she said. The only thing left to hang on to is the divine intervention of Christ or the intercession of the soon-to-be Blessed Oscar Romero, she said.

Though the impending beatification brought an air of festivity to a country with little to celebrate, the long-term outlook for the young people of El Salvador is dim, she said. No matter how many precautions she takes, Molina fears violence will one day come knocking at her door, as it does for many Salvadorans.

“Being Christians doesn’t mean we’ll sit around like Galileans, with our arms crossed looking at the sky,” he said. “Being Christian is to act against the reality of this violence, of these

killings, of this evil, of all these many things that prevent us from living with dignity in our society.”

That is what Archbishop Romero and Christ called for, he said.

IMMIGRATION

U.S. Bishops Issue Scathing Report On Federal Detention Center Policy

A detailed and highly critical analysis of the U.S. immigration detention system by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Center for Migration Studies is calling for a radical restructuring of the way the government handles undocumented immigrants.

Released on May 11, the 44-page report tracks the growth of the detention system over the last 20 years and the rise of private prison companies to help handle the load, while documenting the long delays and lack of funding in the immigration court system. The report makes the case for “alternative to detention” programs that would be as effective, less costly and more just than the current system, which relies on local, state and federal facilities where detainees’ lives are governed by standards designed for criminal defendants.”

“The U.S. detention system deprives persons of liberty, divides families, inhibits integration, and prevents participation in the broader society,” the report’s authors conclude, adding later that the system is “neither humane nor, in its current form, necessary.”

“Unlocking Human Dignity: A Plan to Transform the U.S. Detention System” is prefaced by a letter from Bishop Eusebio L. Elizondo, chair of the U.S.

bishops’ Committee on Migration, and Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio, a member of the committee and the chair of the Center for Migration Studies. “The U.S. detention system represents a far cry from solidarity or communion,” the bishops write. “It divides us from our brothers and sisters. It contributes to the misconception that immigrants are criminals and a threat to our unity, security and well-being.”

In the past, the bishops have called for the termination of detention for undocumented families, an argument they reiterate here. Facilities for women and children have expanded since the influx of families from Central America in 2013-14. But the current report goes a step further, calling for all detention facilities to be used “sparingly, for a brief period and as a last resort.”

The report argues against using detention as a way to deter other migrants

from traveling to the United States, citing a U.N. report that “harsh detention policies over a 20-year period have not resulted in a decrease in irregular migration.” It also compares the detention system to the U.S. criminal justice system, in which defendants are routinely released with the expectation that they will show up for court hearings or face penalties.

Such a strategy should also be used for undocumented immigrants, the report argues, especially since many of these individuals have no other criminal record: “Many persons in removal proceedings enjoy strong family, employment, and community ties in the United States, making them unlikely to abscond with proper supervision and support.”

The report’s authors acknowledge that “alternative to detention” programs would have to be expanded to accommodate the undocumented population. But they argue that “community-based, case management services” would be less expensive than holding undocumented immigrants in prison-like settings.

The report also argues that the role of for-profit prisons, which lobby heavily for their own interests, “should be curtailed and rigorously monitored.” Nineteen percent of detainees are held in private facilities. It suggests that Congress should eliminate the national policy of mandatory detention “in all but the most egregious criminal and national security cases” and that immigrants seeking asylum should not be “penalized for legal entry or stay.”

To reduce backlogs, the report recommends that Congress set aside more funds for the immigration court system. Finally, the re-



MEN AT WORK. Sorting sneakers at a processing center for immigrant detainees in El Paso, Tex.

PHOTO: CHRISTIAN FUCHS/JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE/USA

port notes that while “properly crafted” laws could help reduce the burden on the current system, “detention reform does not require and should not wait for passage of comprehensive reform legislation.”

MAURICE TIMOTHY REIDY

Call to Disarm

The U.S. bishops’ International Justice and Peace Committee urged Secretary of State John Kerry to step up efforts to advance nuclear disarmament. The comments were made in a letter on May 12 issued as the meeting of the Ninth Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons continued at the United Nations. “For most Americans, there is an assumption that the nuclear threat receded with the end of the Cold War. Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth,” said Bishop Oscar Cantú of Las Cruces, N.M., chairman of the committee. “In a multi-polar world where there are risks of nuclear proliferation and even nuclear terrorism, it is imperative that the world move systematically and relentlessly toward nuclear disarmament and the securing of nuclear materials.”

Trials in Jewish-Catholic relations

A key turning point in the relationship between Catholics and Jews was reached 50 years ago with the Second Vatican Council document on inter-religious relations, a cardinal and rabbi told a group of religious leaders on May 20. The document, the “Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,” promulgated on Oct. 28, 1965, by Blessed Paul VI, was described by Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, as “the

NEWS BRIEFS

The boards of trustees of America Media and of the Saint Thomas More Chapel and Center at Yale University announced on May 21 that **Philip J. Metres III**, poet, essayist and professor of English at John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio, has been selected as the inaugural recipient of the \$25,000 George W. Hunt, S.J., Prize for Excellence in Journalism, Arts & Letters. + Nebraska lawmakers passed a bill on May 20 to **abolish the death penalty**—replacing it with a sentence of life in prison—by a margin big enough to override a threatened veto by Gov. Pete Ricketts. + On May 19 the city council of Los Angeles voted to **raise the minimum wage** from \$9 to \$15 over the next five years. + Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle of Manila, Philippines, was elected the new **president of Caritas Internationalis** at the confederation’s 20th general assembly in Rome on May 14. + Cyprian Davis, O.S.B., a chronicler of the history of African-American Catholics, died on May 18 at the age of 84. + Indonesian and Malaysian officials, responding to fierce international criticism, have agreed to reverse a policy of forcing **Rohingya Muslim “boat people”** back to sea and will offer temporary refuge to thousands fleeing persecution in Myanmar.



Philip J. Metres III

compass of reconciliation between Jews and Christians today and into the future.” Rabbi Irving Greenberg, author and scholar, praised the document for its courage, saying its authors had to “override church fathers.” The two religious leaders spoke at a conference marking the historic document’s 50th anniversary at The Catholic University of America in Washington. Cardinal Koch stressed that the Catholic Church “has a unique and distinctive relationship with Judaism that is has with no other religion, and it cannot understand itself without reference to Judaism.”

End Hunger? Help Farmers

A major independent survey reports that the best way to end global hunger may be to help small farmers, especially as they try to adapt to the changing climate. According to 98 Caritas orga-

nizations, the top three causes of food insecurity are lack of resources—land, seeds, loans, access to markets—for small farmers, low agricultural productivity and the impact of climate change. “The findings of this survey are a window into the struggles of impoverished small farmers, especially those in the developing world,” said Michel Roy, secretary general of Caritas Internationalis, the Rome-based umbrella group of national Caritas organizations. Just 19 percent of Caritas respondents said that their countries enjoyed full food security, defined as reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. Almost a third said their countries faced food insecurity, and almost half said their countries were only somewhat secure in their food resources. The results of food insecurity were not just hunger and malnutrition but also migration, income disparity and crime.

From CNS, RNS and other sources.

DISPATCH | LOS ANGELES

The Church in the West

It's rare to hear much about the church in the western United States. Given that the national media and the bishops' conference lie in the East, that's no surprise.

Still, it warps our sense of the American church. In 1950, the Northeast was home to 46 percent of the nation's Catholics. Today, it has just 28 percent. Los Angeles surpasses New York in Catholic population by more than 1.7 million. L.A.'s Our Lady of the Angels pastoral region alone has more Catholics than over 90 percent of dioceses in the country.

The church in the West is different than in the East. It's booming; indeed, the Fresno, Orange and San Bernardino dioceses are among the fastest-growing in the nation. It is also young. Fifty-six percent of Catholics in the West are under the age of 50, according to the Pew Religious Landscape Study. And only 31 percent are white, compared with 75 percent in the Northeast.

Ask the bishops of the western United States to name the important issues of their dioceses, and they don't start with the divisive topics bandied about by the East Coast press. They talk about poverty and the blessing that is Catholic Extension (an organization that supports mission dioceses), about their prison populations; and about the needs of immigrants and issues related to agriculture.

And again and again they speak of hospitality. "In Mexico, one of our values is *mi casa, su casa*," says Bishop

Gerald Barnes of San Bernardino. "Just put more water in the soup, in the beans; there's always enough for someone else.... Everyone has a right to be at the table."

"I wish there were some relief that could be given to Catholics in difficult situations, a tangible welcome," says Bishop Patrick McGrath of San Jose. "You're a part of the family and you're welcome to the table."

'If people can't come to church, we bring the church to them. We're missionaries.'

There's a restless creativity here, a pioneer's drive to understand and adapt. In Fresno, after realizing farmworkers could not come to the church during the day, Bishop Armando Ochoa began conducting nighttime funerals. In a Tucson parish youth program called Arcoiris ("the Rainbow"), children put on a retreat for their parents. "Parents want their kids to be a part of the church," says Bishop Gerald Kicanas. "Here the children are helping lead the parents into a deeper relationship with Christ."

For Bishop Joseph Tyson in Yakima, the central question is, "How do you aim the Gospel to the person in front of you in the circumstances that they're in?" Knowing that summers bring more than 10,000 fruit pickers to the area, Bishop Tyson conducts Mass and confessions for them in the fields. "If people can't come to church, we bring the church to them. We're missionaries."

He also sends his seminarians to help pick fruit. "If you want to be worthy to lift the bread and the cup, you're going to know the weight that allowed that to happen. You're going to see what it takes to put the bread and the wine on that paten."

The Second Vatican Council comes up frequently, especially the centrality of the laity. When Bishop McGrath had his entire diocese help him formulate a pastoral plan, a Harvard student called the choice "revolutionary." The bishop was puzzled; "How could you come up with a pastoral plan and not ask the people? That would never enter our mind here."

In San Bernardino, a diocese of 27,000 square miles, where Masses are offered in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, Indonesian, Igbo, Taglog, Arabic, Tongan, Chamorro, Samoan and Guamanian, Bishop Barnes emphasizes education—and not just for work within the church, but "leadership in the civic community, in the business world, in the political world. How do we train people to live their faith?"

No. Press reports aside, one does not meet many princes of the church out here in Galilee, nor warriors in lace; just pastors trying to be a gentle sign of hope and love. "One of my priests asked me, 'Why are you wasting your time going to these little missions?'" recalls Bishop Ochoa.

"Why am I wasting my time? These people are praying for me every time they celebrate the Eucharist. The least I can do is go to each of them.

"I admire those in specialized ministry," he adds, "but all I ever wanted to be was a parish priest."

JIM McDERMOTT

Visit americamedia.org to read complete interviews with bishops of the West.

JIM McDERMOTT, S.J., a screenwriter, is America's Los Angeles correspondent. Twitter: @PopCulturPriest.

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In Jesus' Footsteps

‘It sounds so Jewish!’ one woman exclaimed during our recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land. We were in the Church of the Pater Noster, outside the walls of the Old City in Jerusalem. On this spot, according to tradition (which means it could have happened anywhere nearby), Jesus taught his disciples the Our Father. Our tour guide, a Melkite Catholic from Galilee named Maher, had just recited the prayer in Aramaic, Jesus’ native tongue. Of course everyone in our group knew that Jesus spoke Aramaic, but it was something else entirely to hear it spoken aloud in the confines of the stone chapel.

From April 18 to 25, America Media sponsored its first-ever pilgrimage to the Holy Land, for roughly 50 pilgrims. We began at the Sea of Galilee, visiting sites where Jesus definitely lived or that he visited—and not simply “according to tradition”—like Capernaum, Bethsaida, Nazareth and Cana. After a few days we journeyed to Jerusalem via Jericho and Bethany. Each day Jeremy Zipple, S.J., executive editor of America Films, produced a new video highlighting our visits. (You can find them on America Media’s YouTube page.) With us were our editor in chief, Matt Malone, S.J.; Dan Pawlus, America Media’s vice president for advancement; and Brendan Lally, S.J., rector of the Jesuit community at St. Joseph’s University in Philadelphia, who had visited the Holy Land 23 times before.

Like the pilgrim who realized how Jewish Jesus was, everyone was

graced with new insights. Many centered on Jesus’ humanity. Standing in Capernaum on the site of the first-century synagogue where Jesus healed the “man with the unclean spirit,” within sight of St. Peter’s house a few hundred feet away, grounded the Gospels for many of us in a fresh way.

An aside by Father Lally struck me. Not long ago, he said, archeologists discovered in Capernaum a house with a Roman bath. The excavators were baffled: Who in this first-century Jewish town would have had a Roman bath? Then it hit them: The most likely candidate was the Roman centurion spoken about in the Gospel of Luke. “It is he who built our synagogue for us,” the people tell Jesus. This is the man who later says, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof.” When excavators realized whose house this probably was, they paused in prayer. Not long after hearing Father Lally’s aside, we celebrated Mass and repeated the centurion’s words to Jesus.

For me, it was an emotional trip. How could it be otherwise for any follower of Jesus? Simply looking at the Sea of Galilee (I had been there only once before) was moving. But let me tell you about another moment.

It happened aboard a boat on the Sea of Galilee. When a boat ride was proposed to us by Catholic Travel Centre (our superb travel agency), I rolled my eyes. It sounded unbearably cheesy. Stepping aboard the motor-powered wooden boat didn’t allay my fears of cheesiness. Maher quietly

relayed the offers of the boat’s captain. Did we want him to play the “Star-Spangled Banner” as we left the harbor? We did not. Did we want him to play Gospel music as we plowed the sea? We did not. Did we want him to cast a net off the boat as if he were a fisherman? We did not. Instead we asked the captain simply to turn off the engines while Father Lally read aloud two Gospel passages. So all of us heard again, but as if for the first time, the accounts of Jesus stilling the storm and walking on the water. After the engines were silenced, it was just us and the sea.

In the Holy Land we were able to meet Jesus in a new way.

And the wind. The plastic pennants that hung from a thin rope strung around the boat snapped loudly in the strong wind. Then I imagined what it would be like if the wind stopped suddenly—at someone’s word. I realized how terrified the disciples must have been, and a wave of pity for them swept over me. “Who then is this,” they said, “that even the wind and the sea obey him?” How could the disciples have been anything other than afraid? How amazing that after any of the miracles they could be with Jesus without fear.

The Holy Land is often called the “Fifth Gospel,” the Gospel that explains the other four. Here we were able to meet Jesus in a new way. But you needn’t travel there to do that. Jesus comes to all of us, in so many ways, including in prayer. Because of this, any ground that we traverse is holy ground, and wherever we are is a holy land.

JAMES MARTIN, S.J., is editor at large of *America* and author of *Jesus: A Pilgrimage*.
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The Gospel According To the ‘Nones’

Reading Scripture without religion

BY ELIZABETH DRESCHER

The data just keeps piling up. Since the 2008 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey from the Pew Forum on Religion in Public Life first noted a substantial increase in the number of Americans reporting no religious affiliation, report after report has confirmed what religious leaders outside the evangelical resurgence of the 1980s had known for some time: checking “no religion” is increasingly normal in the United States.

Following the report in 2008 of a doubling in the percentage of so-called nones, from a mere 7 percent in 1990 to more than 15 percent in 2008, Pew’s 2012 “Nones’ on the Rise” survey tracked further and more rapid growth in the number of unaffiliated. One in five Americans told researchers they had no religious affiliation, an increase of 30 percent in only four years. In April of this year, a new Pew report projected that nones would make up more than a quarter of the U.S. population by 2050.

Count those as the good old days of growing unaffiliation. The latest Pew research, published in May, shows that nones are closing in faster than anticipated. The new numbers show that between 2007 and 2014, nones grew to nearly 23 percent of the U.S. population. Among Americans under age 30, the percentage of nones has jumped to nearly 40 percent. At the same time, Roman Catholic affiliation has dropped from 24 percent in 2007 to 21 percent in 2014, and mainline Protestant affiliation has ticked downward from 18 percent to below 15 percent of the U.S. population.

What is the bottom line? It would seem to be that the United States will remain at least nominally a “Christian nation” for some time into the future. But the role and influence of Christianity in U.S. culture will certainly change as more people set aside spiritual and religious pursuits entirely or

undertake them primarily outside of institutional religious settings.

Some of the effects of the decentering of religion in general and Christianity in particular are easily recognizable. In the political arena, for instance, religious background is less and less important. Indeed, Mayor Bill de Blasio of New York City has highlighted his spiritual-but-not-religious self-identification as a credential for working effectively with diverse religious groups as well as those not affiliated with institutional religions. Where being unreligious was once a political liability, in some political races being too religious can now be problematic. Similar shifts in the role of religion in culture have been playing out for decades in education, health care and popular media.

But more subtle transitions are also under way, those associated with how religious idioms—symbols, rituals, artifacts, doctrines, holy figures, turns of phrase and, by no means least, sacred stories—circulate in the wider culture. It is here that what might be called the none-ing of the United States will likely have its most pervasive and enduring effects on ways of perceiving, interpreting and expressing our experiences of reality, which have for centuries been shaped extensively by

Christian ideas and practices. The wellspring of Christian idioms is, of course, Scripture; and we can fairly wonder if and how the growing population of nones might contin-

ue to engage Scripture and how this might change Scripture itself.

Over the past three years, as I have interviewed different kinds of nones across the United States—atheists, agnostics, secular humanists, spiritual-but-not-religious, spiritual and sundry other sorts who identify religiously as “nothing-in-particular” or “all of the above”—about their spiritual lives, I have been surprised again and again by the degree to which many of the unaffiliated continue to find Scripture—especially the parables of Jesus—spiritually meaningful and morally relevant. My conversations with nones have likewise revealed a somewhat different emphasis in their engagement with Scripture than is often seen among the churchgoing

THE LIVING WORD

Scripture in the Life of the Church

ELIZABETH DRESCHER is an adjunct associate professor of religious studies at Santa Clara University, Calif. Her next book, *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America’s Nones*, will be released by Oxford University Press later this year. This article is part of *America’s* series, “*The Living Word: Scripture in the Life of the Church*,” cosponsored by the American Bible Society.

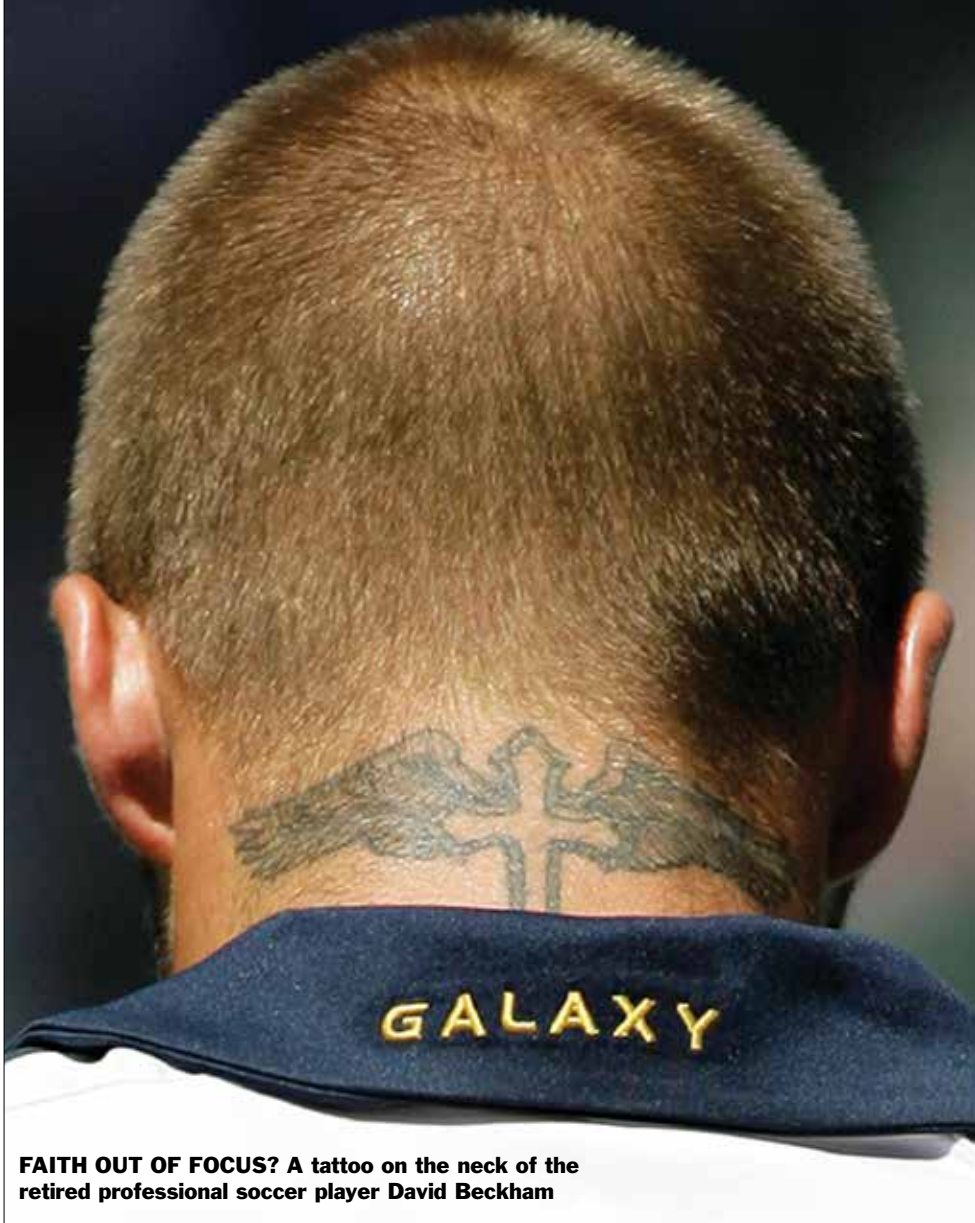
set. I will turn to that shortly. But first, it is worth considering how nones find their way to Scripture in the first place. After all, aren't nones unrepentant unbelievers with Bill Maher-like hostility toward the church and all its practices? Not so fast.

Liminal Christianity

For all the (digital) ink spilled in the coverage of nones over the past couple of years, there are some complexities in the data on nones that are often missed in both public reporting and religious handwringing about the “decline of religion in America.” First, we should bear in mind that the majority of nones—nearly 70 percent in the 2012 Pew data—report that they believe in God, a higher power or a transcendent life force of one sort or another. A scant 3 percent of the population identify as atheists, the proportion of the unaffiliated that has grown the least since 2007.

Furthermore, given the longstanding Christianized culture of the United States, it should be no surprise that the majority of nones come from an at least nominally Christian background. Christianity is very much the framework for American “civil religion,” and its more or less subtle influences are found everywhere from sporting events to the “Real Housewives of New Jersey” to Lady Gaga videos. One would have to be more resolutely unplugged than unreligious to escape the circulation of Christian idioms in the culture. Given the Christian background (however slight) of many nones and Christianity's continuing influence (however much it might be waning) in the wider culture, we find what might be described as “feral” Christians of a sort—undomesticated religiously by regular church experience but more than happy to lap from time to time from a saucer of spiritual sustenance set out in the churchyard.

The “Nones' on the Rise” survey stirred the anxieties of religious leaders when it reported that among the religiously unaffiliated only one in 10 is “looking for a religion that would be right for you.” But here the humble “a” in Pew's survey question hits far above its typographic weight. No, most of the unaffiliated are not looking for a single religious group to call their spiritual home till kingdom come. But some, earlier research from Pew revealed, are engaging multiple religious traditions, often quite actively and with sustained congregational participation, without necessarily becoming



FAITH OUT OF FOCUS? A tattoo on the neck of the retired professional soccer player David Beckham

members or identifying with that tradition.

I think of these nones as the “free-range faithful,” ambling all about the religious landscape to partake of its diverse offerings without seeking a single set of answers (or questions) or intending to settle in one spiritual place. The journey, as the saying goes, is the destination. Or, as a 33-year-old none from Waimea, Hawaii, told me, “There's something about selecting one religion, one path, in the narrow way that I was brought up that seems so wrong, so unhelpful. The world is filled with wisdom. Human history is filled with wisdom. Why would I close myself off to that?”

Finally, religiously unaffiliated nones continue to interact with “somes,” as I have come to call the religiously affiliated, in everyday life as family members, friends, colleagues, customers, neighbors and so on. They gather over holiday dinners and at weddings, baptisms and funerals regardless of their differences in beliefs and practice. However muted by social norms that restrict the discussion of religious per-

PHOTO: REUTERS/DANNY MOLOSHOK

spectives, nones and somes share many religious and spiritual experiences, many of them shaped by expressly Christian traditions.

The religious engagement of nones and somes unfolds, then, in the rich in-between of everyday life, in their shared spiritual experiences—however differently they might interpret them. This mutually influencing interaction creates a liminal religiosity that I consider the defining character of religion in the United States today. It is widely distributed rather than congregationally confined. It is relational and experiential, oriented toward being present to the spiritual based in the self, the other and the world instead of in structures of belief, belonging and behaving associated with traditional religions.

All this makes clear that the unaffiliated should hardly be considered wholly unreligious, even if their religiosity plays out largely beyond the doors of the neighborhood church. Further, we cannot assume that nones are any less steeped in Christian traditions than are Catholic or Protestant somes. Indeed, many of the more than 100 nones across the country I have interviewed over the past three years were deeply conversant with Christian traditions, especially Scripture. What is more, regardless of where they fell on an atheist-to-spiritual continuum, the nones who talked with me often retained considerable regard for the Christian Scriptures, especially the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament.

Good Samaritan or Golden Rule?

Nones' regard for the Jesus of the Gospels has nothing to do

with doctrinal beliefs about the divinity of Jesus, his status as the Son of God or the promised Messiah or his resurrection from the dead. For the nones for whom Jesus remains a meaningful spiritual figure, stories of his healings, his embrace

of social outcasts and his critiques of religious hypocrisy and government-sponsored violence and injustice mark Jesus as a moral and spiritual exemplar.

A 30-year-old none who was raised in a conservative Presbyterian family in San Antonio, Tex., insisted: "Being an atheist doesn't mean I hate Jesus. You have to love the whole good Samaritan story, or the way he stood up for the adultery woman. You don't want to throw that away, because we need those stories."

"When you let go of the idea that all of the so-called facts of the Bible have to be quote-unquote true with a capital T—when you just treat them like important ancient teachings like, I don't know, *The Odyssey*," a 55-year-old secular humanist from Boston told me, "then you can really get to understand why Jesus has been such an enduring spiritual figure. I mean, there is real truth in a lot of these stories—as there is in other ancient myths. I don't have to either dismiss all of that because I'm a humanist or believe in Catholic doctrine on the virgin birth to have it make sense."

A 28-year-old agnostic from Oakland, Calif., also shared with me her appreciation for the parable of the good Samaritan:

I just was always inspired by that story ever since I was little. You know, that we could be that way toward each other. It's really the ideal for me of how people should behave. Not "do unto others," but more like "do what *they need* when you find them on the road." That still really matters to me even though I don't think of myself as a "Christian" in a religious sense anymore. Spiritually, though, I guess I still have that in my personal beliefs—that this was what Jesus stood for and expected us to emulate.

Among the nones who talked with me, the person of Jesus and the Bible came up regularly when I asked about spiritual influences. These nones tended to highlight the humanity of Jesus and his social action over his divinity or his miracles. A 19-year-old none from Marietta, Ga., who was actively involved in efforts to develop

Nones' regard for the Jesus of the Gospels has nothing to do with doctrinal beliefs.

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clean water sources in drought-affected regions of Africa, put it this way: “I don’t need ‘magic trick Jesus.’ I’m not interested in that, and I’m not interested in ‘saving my soul.’ I’m not about saving myself. I want to save the world.”


In this regard, the nones I spoke with differed from the “Golden Rule Christians”—practicing believers across Christian denominations and ideological spectrums who take as the core Christian value the scriptural teaching that one should “do unto others as you would have them do to you” (Mt 7:12). The sociologist Nancy Ammerman, in *Lived Religion in America*, describes these mostly suburban, middle-class Christians in her research this way:

Most important to Golden Rule Christians is care for relationships, doing good deeds, and looking for opportunities to provide care and comfort for people in need. Their goal is neither changing another’s beliefs nor changing the whole political system. They would like the world to be a bit better for their having inhabited it, but they harbor no dreams of grand revolutions.... The emphasis on relationships among Golden Rule Christians begins with care for friends, family, neighborhood, and congregation.

Professor Ammerman points out that Golden Rule Christians, not unlike good Samaritan nones, are largely uninterested in theological doctrines and debates, focusing

instead on the practices of congregational communities. She suggests, however, that Golden Rule ethics practiced by congregationally affiliated Christians invite “a certain narrowing of the circle of care” that can prevent serious or sustained engagement with larger, more distant or distributed problems in the world. At the same time, this parochialism can also ensure a deeper level of care for the most vulnerable in a local community, like the elderly, the sick or children. Such practices, on the one hand, help to sustain existing congregational communities. On the other hand, Golden Rule Christians may hesitate to reach out much beyond their narrow circles of care.

The difference here is subtle but significant: Nones who engage Scripture tend to do so by way of inspiring cosmopolitan rather than communitarian action. The starting point for engagement is a recognition of otherness rather than a reinforcement of commonalities. It is about receptivity to difference rather than reinforcing community on the basis of similarity.

Now, this Good Samaritan ethic hardly requires a radical re-reading of Scripture in light of some new assessment of Christian values. But it does insist, as Pope Francis seems to be doing to great spiritual if not affiliational effect, that the realm of religion, faith, spirituality, moral action—all those things that used to be seen as the exclusive purview of institutional religions—begins outside the doors of the church rather than inside. Open the doors, nones seem to be saying in their reading of Scripture, and see all the people. 



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A Family Embrace

Renewing the church's pastoral support for marriage

BY DIARMUID MARTIN

I was surprised to find myself one of a small group of veterans at last year's Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Family, one of the very few who had been present also at the Synod of Bishops on the Family in 1980. I also have attended many synods since then, albeit in a variety of capacities. This has given me some insight into how synods work and into where they have worked well and where they have run into difficulties. Last year's Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod let me compare and reflect on what has happened in the past 35 years.

I found it interesting, first of all, that both Pope John



Paul II and Pope Francis took the family as the theme for their first synods. Both had been diocesan bishops up to the moment of their election—one in a country under Communist persecution and the other in the challenging and changing religious reality of Latin America—yet both saw clearly, from their own perspectives, how Christian marriage and the family are vital for the transmission of the faith and for the stability of society. Both saw the need not just to defend the teaching of the church but to foster the Christian vision of the family and to present that vision in an attractive and appealing way in the real situations of today's changing world.

It is interesting to recall that Pope Paul VI had, in fact, wanted to hold a synod on the family, but he feared that right after the publication of the encyclical "Humanae Vitae" (1968), it would not be possible to create the proper

MOST REV. DIARMUID MARTIN is the archbishop of Dublin, Ireland. This article is adapted from his address given at All Hallows College, Dublin, on March 4, 2015.

atmosphere. Ten years later, however, he felt that the time to hold a synod on the family had come, and he communicated that to the secretariat of the synod just before he died.

The question was taken up by Pope John Paul I, who formally communicated his decision to dedicate the synod to the theme of the Christian family in the contemporary world. But he also died before the theme was formally made public. Pope John Paul II took up the question shortly after his election, but he was not happy with the theme as formulated by his predecessor. Instead he chose the unusual term *de muneribus*, the mission of the family in the contemporary world.

He used the concept of the threefold mission of all Christians, priestly, prophetic and kingly, as a reminder that the family has a vital contribution to bring to the life of the church and to society and must be supported. Christian married couples have a mission within the church that must be fostered and never supplanted. Christian marriage and family life are ecclesial realities, realities of faith and of Christian life.

Synods have traditionally involved a preparatory position paper (*lineamenta*) on which bishops' conferences could reflect, followed by a working document (*instrumentum laboris*), which constituted an agenda for the synod's discussion. These were prepared by the Permanent Council of the Synod, 12 bishops elected at the conclusion of each synod and three others appointed by the pope. Pope Francis surprised us all last year by asking that the *lineamenta* be accompanied with a lengthy questionnaire, which not just the bishops but as wide a representation within the church as possible should study.

It was a revolutionary challenge. I think that some bishops had to read the instructions a few times before they realized exactly what they were being asked to do.

This surprising idea prompted varied reactions. One reaction was typical of us Irish. We immediately found fault with the questionnaire. The language was too complex, the time available was too short; how then were we going to carry out such a consultation?

This questionnaire, however imperfect, did in fact bring about a change in direction for the synod. This change was evident on the first morning of the synod, when Pope Francis said that he wanted an open and honest discussion:

After the last consistory [February 2014], in which the family was discussed, a cardinal wrote to me, saying: what a shame that several cardinals did not have the courage to say certain things out of respect for the pope,

perhaps believing that the pope might think something else. This is not good, this is not synodality, because it is necessary to say all that, in the Lord, one feels the need to say: without polite deference, without hesitation. And, at the same time, one must listen with humility and welcome, with an open heart, what your brothers say. Synodality is exercised with these two approaches.

It is necessary to say with *parrhesia* all that one feels.

The worldwide consultation had shown that the church's teaching on marriage and the family is not easily understood today, especially by young people.

I had to Google the word *parrhesia*, and I found that it is a Greek New Testament term that means "courageous and bold speech" and the ability of believers to hold their own in discourse before political and religious authorities. We find it in Acts 4:13: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they

were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus."

This Gospel *parrhesia* does not just encourage us to speak candidly and boldly; it seems to be saying also that in a sense, boldness of speech must be characteristic of the followers of Jesus. Catholicism is not a "yes man" faith. Candid affirmation of faith is not the gift just of the learned. It is rooted in a depth of faith rather than in a degree or diploma.

Pope Francis attended every working session of the synod except for his Wednesday general audience. He arrived every morning on foot, surprising some on the first morning when he arrived 20 minutes early and began the session exactly at nine o'clock. It was funny to watch eminent cardinals, used to having five minutes' grace at Vatican meetings, having to discretely slip into their places in the synod hall, like children arriving late for school.

What We Learned

The worldwide consultation had shown that the church's teaching on marriage and the family is not easily understood today, especially by young people. In today's culture, many of the classical terms regarding marriage and the family have taken on a different meaning.

The synod's analysis was realistic. The perfect family rarely exists. Families struggle everywhere. They struggle with poverty, unemployment and marginalization. They find it difficult to transmit faith to their children. In many parts of the world families are struck by wide-scale emigration and the separation that this entails. A couple from Iraq spoke movingly of the struggle that families in that region face, being driven from their homes if they do not renounce

their Christian identity. The perfect family rarely exists, but in the midst of great challenges great families do exist and struggle. And they must be supported.

With so many countries represented, it was inevitable that concerns and challenges would be different. My English-speaking discussion group included five African bishops, seven from Asia, one from Papua New Guinea and just two from historically Christian countries, myself and Cardinal Dolan of New York. There were lay couples from the United States and Iraq, a lay theologian from Lithuania and a Presbyterian pastor from Nigeria.

Bishops from Africa spoke about polygamy; bishops from Asia spoke about marriage between people of different faiths. We discussed annulment processes. We discussed marriages of Christians who have a very weak understanding of their faith. An interesting aside was that a bishop from Greece mentioned to me that he had many Irish weddings on his islands, arranged by marriage planners as a sort of business within which the faith dimension was reduced to a colorful ceremony.

The strong message of the synod was a call for a radical renewal of the church's pastoral support for marriage and the family. In today's pluralism, we need a radical catechesis on marriage and the family. Marriage preparation is not just for a ceremony, much less just filling out canonical forms. Marriage must be understood as part of a lifelong

catechesis or itinerary of faith. Marriage preparation and accompaniment is a lifelong task for parishes and for the day-to-day work of evangelization; it cannot be outsourced.

Our Changing Society

The 1980 synod referenced secularization and a changing understanding of family in Western societies. That challenge has become worldwide. The number of Catholics who are married only civilly or who cohabit is increasing. This can be due to a different anthropology or to a lack of awareness of the Christian vision of marriage, to harsh economic and social conditions or simply to the expense of church weddings. Permanence in human relations is difficult today. Marriages fail.

Pope Francis' tone was never condemnatory. The church must encounter families where they are. It must listen to where God is speaking also through the witness of those Christian married couples who struggle and fail and begin again. The tone was one of reaching out pastorally and of reflecting the mercy of Jesus. Pope Francis uses an image of the church as a "field hospital on the scene of a battle." At the field hospital what matters is the first contact with one who is wounded. It is not a place for diagnostics, but a place where people are taken up into the caring arms of someone, where their wounds are washed and cleaned and they receive a welcome of care and concern. One bishop took up this image saying that too

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often the church appears more like the city morgue, where all the pathologies of the things that have gone wrong with the family are examined without emotion.

It is inevitable that in reporting a major church event like the synod certain issues become what I called “celebrity issues.” Last year’s celebrity issues were the admission of divorced and civilly remarried Catholics to holy Communion and the pastoral response to people of homosexual orientation. The synod dedicated much time to these questions, and the views were different. There was also a vast amount of extra-synodal reflection and even polemics around the issues.

It is important to remember a difference between last year’s session of the Synod of Bishops and the one to come. Last year’s meeting was to gather information. This year’s is to take up the conclusions from last year and propose pastoral reflection on how to strengthen and renew our ecclesial support for marriage and family life. This year’s process aims not at further analysis but at pastoral strategies for the future.

Such pastoral reflection should not focus just on certain controversial questions or on negative factors. We should look at a broad renewal of pastoral services that include marriage preparation, educating young people about the Christian understanding of marriage and fostering an itinerary of faith to accompany men and women during their married and family life. How can families be helped to pass on the faith to coming generations? How can families find new ways of praying together? What can parishes do? Do we hear homilies on marriage and the family? Do parishes celebrate married couples in their calling and struggles?

A Window on Married Life

The teaching of the Catholic Church on marriage and the family is challenging. The bishops at the synod stressed that they were not there to change fundamental teaching about the indissolubility of marriage. Their concern about divorced and remarried couples did not undermine their absolute commitment to the church’s teaching on indissolubility. There was never any idea that the church would simply say to those whose marriage had broken down and who had entered into another union that they automatically could receive the Eucharist. Cases are very different. In some an abandoned partner may have found someone with whom he or she has made a new life, with real mutual love and permanence. In other cases the breakdown of a marriage might have come from irresponsibility and even injustice or abuse. Each case is different.

The covenant bond of the Eucharist and the covenant bond of Christian marriage mirror each other and must be lived authentically. Where the covenant bond of Christian marriage is broken, there is a rupture in the relationship with the Eucharist. Neither relationship is purely personal;


both are public. The challenge is to find ways to restore the covenant relationship through a process of penitence and not just cheap forgiveness. The Eucharist, on the other hand, is not just a reward for the saints but a medicine to heal sinners.

Similarly, in discussing how to reach out to and recognize the situation of men and women of same-sex orientation, it was clearly stressed by all that there is a radical difference between marriage between a man and woman and marriage between people of the same sex. Yet the church has to welcome these, our brothers and sisters, as they are.

People will not come to understand the church’s teaching simply by decree or dictate, and the church has been negligent in presenting its teaching more effectively. There is a sense in which “the church” taught married couples what marriage was about. But married people are not passive recipients of teaching. The sacrament of marriage is not just a blessing for a man and a woman on their wedding day. It is given to build up the church. Married couples have a calling and a special charisma that should make them protagonists in fostering the values of love and life, of permanence and fruitfulness, essentials of marriage life.

The lived experience and struggle of spouses can help find more effective ways to express the fundamental elements of church teaching. The church must listen to married couples and to where God is speaking through couples who struggle and fail and begin again and fail again. The experience of failure and struggle surely cannot be irrelevant to how we proclaim the church’s teaching on marriage and the family.

The church must reach out to families where they are, but this does not mean leaving them where they are. We can be led by the help of grace to move gradually, step by step towards living our Christian vocation more fully. When we reach out to people in what for the church are irregular situations, they may become more open and gradually come closer to the church’s teaching on marriage as a lifelong commitment. We will attain more by reaching out to them than by simply condemning. We have to learn from what I call Pope Francis’ “pedagogy of pastoral patience.”

Marriage and the family are complex social realities. Marriage is not simply about two individuals who are in love. The Christian teaching about marriage stresses the complementary relationship between male and female, which is not just a social construction. Marriage is also about a stable and loving relationship where children are generated and educated. Family is also an intergenerational reality. The stability of marriage contributes in a unique way to the stability of society, even though that reality is realized only partially. It is important that people stop for a moment and look at what marriage and the family mean within society. The challenge for the Synod of Bishops is to reawaken a sense of the importance of the mission of married people in the church. 



Latin American Revival

Something akin to a resurrection is taking place in the Catholic Church in Latin America, thanks to Pope Francis. The memory of great church leaders is being revived and honored; the sacrifice of bishops and priests killed under military dictatorships is being recognized and venerated; and some theologians once accused of unorthodoxy are being embraced.

The first Latin American pope has given the church in his home continent full citizenship in the universal church. Before his election, that 500-year-old church was treated somewhat as a second-class citizen by Rome. Some local church leaders were challenged for their defense of human rights under military dictatorships; many were regarded with distrust, in particular for sympathizing with or embracing liberation theology in its various articulations or for their different style of church leadership.

While this attitude first emerged in the last years of Paul VI's pontificate, it flourished under St. John Paul II and, to an extent, also under Benedict XVI. This caused much suffering not only to theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez (in Peru), the Boff brothers (in Brazil) and others, but also to courageous pastors like Paulo Evaristo Arns, Ivo Lorscheiter and Hélder Câmara (Brazil), Juan Landázuri Ricketts (Peru), Taita Proaño (Ecuador), Óscar Romero (El Salvador), Samuel Ruiz García (Mexico) and many more.

Things have changed radically in the Vatican since Francis became pope. Here are four significant indicators of this change.

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

The first two relate to Latin America's martyrs. Last February, Francis declared Archbishop Óscar Romero of San Salvador a martyr, after the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints concluded that he was killed "out of hatred for the faith." He was beatified on May 23.

Then on April 21, the Vatican gave clearance to open the cause for the canonization of Bishop Enrique Angelelli of La Rioja, Argentina, who was killed on Aug. 4, 1976. He was the first Latin American bishop to be killed "out of hatred for the faith" under the military dictatorships of the 1970s. Bergoglio knew and esteemed him; and in 2006, as president of the bishops conference, he celebrated Mass on the 30th anniversary of his death. As pope, he ordered the release of secret Vatican documents that led to the killers' conviction last July.

A third indicator is the opening of the cause for the canonization of Bishop Hélder Câmara in the Diocese of Olinda and Recife in Brazil on May 3. The memory of this courageous pastor and great friend of the poor can now inspire a new generation of Christians.

The fourth relates to the new freedom theologians are experiencing in Latin America and elsewhere. Persons once suspected of holding unsound theological opinions and not trusted by Rome are experiencing a new climate under Francis. Two cases illustrate this.

Shortly after his election, Francis appointed as archbishop Víctor Manuel Fernández, the Argentine theologian who was his advisor at the Latin

American Episcopal Conference meeting in Aparecida in 2007. Some years earlier, Bergoglio had to fight with the Vatican to have him named rector of the Catholic University of Buenos Aires. Pope Francis appointed him to participate in last fall's meeting of the Synod of Bishops on the family.

Another theologian, Peru's Gustavo Gutiérrez, O.P., the father of liberation theology, is also experiencing this new freedom. A holy and humble man, he studied theology in Belgium and France and came to know some of the great theologians of the Second Vatican Council, among them Yves Congar, O.P., Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., and Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P. But the Vatican did not trust him after his 1971 ground-breaking

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work, *A Theology of Liberation*, and was still investigating him in 2004. He joined the Dominicans when Cardinal Ricketts, his protector, died. Although some prelates still consider him theologically unsound, Pope Francis celebrated Mass with him and Archbishop (now Cardinal) Gerhard Müller on Sept. 11, 2013. In May Gutiérrez appeared on a panel at a Vatican press conference, and he delivered one of the keynote talks at the general assembly of Caritas Internationalis. All this would have been unthinkable five years ago.

There are more indicators of development, but I think the four given suffice as strong evidence that a new day has dawned for the church in Latin America under Pope Francis.

GERARD O'CONNELL

Lessons of the Heart

My first days as a father in the I.C.U.

BY ANTHONY J. ZAVAGNIN

My preparation to become a father was easier than I expected. Apart from attending doctor's appointments, assembling the crib and a few trips to buy frozen yogurt, my life remained relatively unchanged. At one point, my wife, Molly, gave me a book on fatherhood that she had received from a friend. This book bore the scars of a serious father-to-be: worn, dog-eared pages, yellow highlighting and a rainbow of Post-it notes. I thanked her for the book and set it aside on the nightstand, where it stayed. I was excited, for sure, but things just seemed far away, and I was caught up in the day-to-day duties of work and life.

I am not sure how prepared I could have been when our son Sean arrived six weeks early. Sean's birth had come so unexpectedly that it almost did not seem real. But there he was: a tiny little gift from God, a premie whose heart and respiration rates would require extra monitoring. We dug in for an extended hospital stay, holding on to hope that we could bring Sean home in a week or two.

It seems funny to say that a person is acting strange when you have only known him for 10 days; but one Sunday, Sean was not acting like himself. He was sleepy and was not eating. At 10 p.m., we got a knock on the door. The pediatrician had been monitoring Sean's

heart and believed that something was seriously wrong. She had already called Boston Children's Hospital, and they were sending a special cardiac ambu-



lance. Molly and I looked at each other with panicked faces, again wondering if this was actually happening.

It was. Tests confirmed that our son had developed a condition called a coarctation of the aorta, a heart defect that constricts his blood flow and could lead to heart failure. He would need surgery, and the next available slot was the following day. We absorbed the news and took turns holding vigil next to Sean. Molly had the first shift. I went to the family waiting area, took two bites of a muffin and proceeded to stare blankly at it for some period of time. I

became aware of a couple sitting near me; they were parents as well, and their little boy was across the hall from Sean. I could not muster a smile, never mind the usual pleasantries.

I did not know it at the time, but these parents, along with the other families in the cardiac intensive care unit, would teach me more about parenting than any book possibly could. It was here I found the patience and care of parents under incredible stress. It was here that I learned firsthand about the gift of new life and just how fragile it can be. It was here that I witnessed a kind of love that was altogether new to me.

Later that day, a stuffed animal arrived courtesy of the parents I met in the waiting area, along with a card that welcomed us into the world of "heart moms and dads." I became a silent admirer of this couple, whose child had undergone multiple surgeries. They were just across the hall, and though I tried to give them privacy, my gaze kept wondering in their direction, peeking between the curtains to see how experienced parents handle this sort of stress. I could see they had it together. They knew the purpose of each IV line and tube; they asked the doctors spot-on questions.

In a short time, I too became well versed in cardiac matters, thanks to the patient explanations of Sean's doctors. But I also found myself thinking of Jesus' heart, especially the rather anatomical depiction that I have seen in so many stained-glass church windows. Growing up, I was very familiar with

ANTHONY J. ZAVAGNIN is the assistant director of the Providence Alliance for Catholic Teachers in Rhode Island.

ART: MICHAEL KRAIGER

the image of the Sacred Heart, but I had no real understanding of the theology behind it.

Last year, a colleague recommended Henri Nouwen's *Heart Speaks to Heart*, which helped me gain a new understanding of this devotion. Nouwen describes an invitation to enter the wounded heart of Jesus. He enters into a dialogue with Jesus, who tells him, "Know that I have come to give you a new heart and spirit, yes, even a new body in which the struggles of your life can be seen as signs of beauty and hope."

Such signs of beauty and hope were everywhere in the children's heart intensive care unit. It was next door, where I saw a rather tough-looking father asleep, holding the hand of his son, a young man with Down syndrome. There was a young girl of maybe 4 or 5, who came by our room with freshly painted nails, a nurse with an IV line in tow. She, like many other children in the ward, just wanted to see the tiny baby down the hall. She gave a few smiles and ooh's to Sean as she gingerly tested her heart by walking around the floor.

Sean's surgery was, thank God, a success. Unfortunately, his "one and done" operation and excellent prognosis were not the norm. Children come to Boston Children's from all over the country for a second or third chance at repairing their hearts. We had the good fortune of living 30 minutes away from a world-class institution. After Sean's surgery, as we prepared to transfer out of the intensive care unit, a feeling of guilt crept into my sense of relief. Our son was doing better, but so many children were still struggling. In my final conversation with the couple across the hall, they could sense my mixed feelings. Yet they were so positive and happy for us. Rejoice in your son, they said, and pray for ours.

In a place in which each child had a wounded heart, we were overwhelmed by the love and generosity of strangers, of "heart moms and dads" who modeled the most important lessons to two new parents. ■

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'Delayed, Not Destroyed'

Freddie Gray died on April 19 from spinal injuries sustained while he was in custody, being transported in a police van. Protests surrounding his death turned violent on the evening of April 25. The violence intensified on April 27, the day of Gray's funeral, with a night of arson, looting and assault. Belatedly, the mayor declared a curfew and the governor a state of emergency. An uneasy quiet has since settled on the city as Baltimore wonders about its future.

Claims and counterclaims quickly swirled in the ruins. The police force has long suffered from corruption. In the recent past, one police commissioner went to jail; two police detectives were convicted of selling drugs; and the city was forced to pay a quarter of a million dollars for the false arrest of a man legally recording police officers in action. Our vacillating mayor failed to provide leadership as the protests deteriorated into a riot. In a one-party town, monitored by a single major newspaper in that party's pocket, civic officials and programs have long been immune from serious criticism.

The riots laid bare the city's social ills. Approximately a quarter of the city's population has an income below the poverty line. The unemployment rate for African-American men younger than 25 hovers around 40 percent. It is not clear that simple infusions of government funds will resolve the problems. The Sandtown neighborhood, the center of the riot, has received \$130 million in devel-

opment grants, but there is little to show for the investment. Civic officials are reluctant to face the issues of high property taxes and inefficient municipal services, which have fueled the decades-long flight to the suburbs.

Education is obviously a key to municipal reform, but the Baltimore public school system has the second-highest rate of per capita expenditures among urban schools systems, accompanied by a poor record of academic achievement. Only a robust program of school choice, with a generous use of vouchers and charter schools, can provide an alternative to the stagnant public school system; but in the political climate of Baltimore, such thinking outside the box is, well, unthinkable.

In a city where the rate of out-of-wedlock births now approaches two-thirds, the emergence of virtually fatherless impoverished neighborhoods has devastated the urban social fabric, but no political program can resolve a problem that is spiritual at its heart.

For Baltimoreans who love the city, the immediate aftermath of the riots has been a time to celebrate the city's vibrant cultural life, which will never receive equal time with the image of Baltimore in flames. The Baltimore Symphony offered a free outdoor concert in front of Meyerhoff Hall. Theaters, libraries and museums offered impromptu programs not so much to protest recent injustices as to celebrate the joy of living in an old city that has long offered asylum to the off-beat artist.

As a decade-long resident of Baltimore, I have come to love the city's eccentric arts scene. I always seem to be climbing the winding stairway up to An Die Musik's quaint concert hall (complete with stuffed armchairs for the audience and a 19th-century curved sounding wall) or down the concrete stairway to the hidden Spotlighters Theatre, happy to present works hot-off-the-press from

local Charm City playwrights. Not every city offers Bulgarian mime, Japanese ballet and John Waters film festivals in dimly lit basements and attics. This creative, often occult fire is the city's genius.

For longtime Baltimoreans, one memory haunts their anxiety about the future. The city has never recovered

from the riots of 1968. Boarded-up stores and theaters still occupy North Avenue, a center for both the earlier and the recent riots. A newcomer quickly discovers that the department stores that closed after the earlier conflagration had no successors. Major purchases are now made in suburban malls.

No one suffered more during the recent riots than Danto Hickman, a Baptist minister in East Baltimore. A \$16 million senior citizen housing center he had worked to build was destroyed by an arsonist on April 27. Recovering from his initial shock, he affirmed his commitment to stay in the city and rebuild: "This is not a setback but a setup to restart this project.... We are delayed, not destroyed."

JOHN J. CONLEY

An uneasy quiet has settled on Baltimore as it wonders about its future.

JOHN J. CONLEY, S.J., holds the Knott Chair in Philosophy and Theology at Loyola University Maryland in Baltimore, Md.

BOOKS & CULTURE

THEATER | ROB WEINERT-KENDT

GOTTA SING!

The state of the American musical is strong.

Some people watch TV; we sing," says Tanya, a middle-aged prostitute who is part of the downbeat tableau vivant of Lisa D'Amour's grittily sentimental new play **Airline Highway**, now on Broadway. Tanya is explaining to an outsider, a young high schooler from Atlanta, why her tribe of New Orleans motel residents occasionally breaks into lively group song, trading raps to the accompaniment of an overturned plastic drum.

The Big Easy might be one of the few remaining spots in the United States where the sight of people breaking into song would not raise an eyebrow. Another, of course, is New York's

commercial theater district, where the word Broadway is almost a synonym for "musical." If jazz and the blues are America's essential native musics, the Broadway musical is arguably our country's great indigenous narrative form, with roots in minstrelsy, vaudeville and operetta. While its purported Golden Age was roughly between the 1930s and the '50s, and its Dark Ages were the British-dominated 1980s of "Cats" and "Les Misérables," the American musical is currently in the pink of health, if we measure by the current Broadway season (and it shows plenty of vital signs beyond Broadway, as well).

This is true whether we look at

brand new musicals, at revivals or at the odd, chimerical hybrid genre that seems to be a Broadway specialty of late, an original-ish work constructed from spare parts—a hit song catalogue, a popular Hollywood movie. The lauded new musical **An American in Paris** is a bit of both, grafting a new dance-oriented show onto the chassis of the 1951 film by Vincente Minnelli and soldering it with tunes and concert music of George Gershwin.

The show opens with a stark, gorgeous ballet set in post-World War II Paris, danced to the second movement of Gershwin's Piano Concerto in F, and concludes with a lengthy, Balanchine-style ballet set to the lush, strutting Francophilia of the title tune. The director/choreographer Christopher Wheeldon and the librettist Craig Lucas have largely succeeded in knitting together convincing excuses for their talented cast to sing and dance

NATIVE SOUNDS. The cast of "Airline Highway"



PHOTO: JOAN MARCUS

FAIRY TALE? Vanessa Hudgens and Corey Cott in “Gigi”



PHOTO: MARGOT SCHULMAN

Heaven for Little Girls” out of the mouth of an old lecher and given it to the two women who are grooming their young charge, Gigi, for life as a high-end courtesan. But far more damaging to the work’s already wispy charms is the way it has been tailored to the limited stage talents and one-note charisma of Vanessa Hudgens, of “High School Musical” fame. The name of Disney is too often invoked as a pejorative to denote robotic, faux-naïf vapidness, but the shoe fits here.

The choreography in “Gigi” has a certain snap and flair, but its choreographer, Joshua Bergasse, has done much better work as choreographer of the season’s best show, new or old, musical or otherwise: an all-stops-out revival of **On the**

for two-plus hours, which is all such a property requires, though Lucas’s attempts to add postwar gravity to the formulaic plot are often jarring, as when the strapping, square-jawed lead, Jerry Mulligan (Robert Fairchild), segues from describing a former troop-mate’s splattered brains to a vow to fight for his right to love a lithe young French dancer (Leanne Cope).

Less fleet-footed is a new revival of **Gigi**, Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe’s sly, frothy musical about a young girl’s coming of age in Belle Époque Paris, which began as a lavish MGM film musical in 1958 and was later adapted for the stage. Much has been made of the surgical revisions by the writer Heidi Thomas, who, among other things, has taken the tune “Thank

Town, the sassy romp that Leonard Bernstein, Adolph Green and Betty Comden churned out in 1944, directed here by John Rando. For starters, few musicals of any era still sound as fresh and vivid as Bernstein’s score, and though the script is little more than a sexy farce about three young sailors looking for dates on shore leave in Manhattan, it is a sturdy, uncynical

BATTLING THE BARD. The cast of “Something Rotten”



PHOTO: JOAN MARCUS

contraption that moves the piece along seamlessly from song to dance and back. It is glorious, and as good a defense of Broadway musical comedy as an art form unto itself as I have ever seen.

There's a countervailing American musical tradition, though it is often thought of as the mainstream: the earnest mid-century classics of Rodgers & Hammerstein, which owe a bit more to European models of operetta, not to mention the well-made play, than they do to vaudeville and song-and-dance. Few shows of theirs demonstrate both their strengths and their weaknesses more clearly than **The King and I**, the 1951 musical drama about an English schoolteacher in 19th-century Thailand, which is now in a sumptuous Lincoln Center Theater revival, directed by Bartlett Sher and starring Kelli O'Hara and Ken Watanabe.

On the plus side, it has a melodious Rodgers score and strong, compelling characters at its center; on the debit side, its mid-century liberal ideas about race and culture, though well-intentioned, do not amount to much more than West-knows-best moralizing. While O'Hara and Sher last breathed bracing new life and subtlety into Rodgers & Hammerstein's "South Pacific," another tale of an East-West clash, their work on "The King and I" is subdued to the point of somnolence, as if by soft-pedaling the show's conflicts it might seem less offensive.

To give credit where it is due, we have the tradition of the self-serious American musical to thank for Stephen Sondheim, a pupil of Hammerstein's who took away from his mentor the lesson that a musical should not only have something to say but that it could be about anything and take nearly any form. Sondheim's heirs include the fiercely empathetic composer Jeanine Tesori, whose new musical with Lisa Kron, **Fun Home**, is an adaptation of Alison Bechdel's popular graphic novel of the same name.

Previously represented on Broadway by "Violet" and "Caroline, or Change," Tesori has the kind of free-ranging musical style that can trace unlikely, often ambivalent emotions and set them quivering in the theatrical space between us and the actors, and it serves her well here with the wrenching, complicated tale of Bechdel's childhood and young adulthood as a lesbian with a closeted gay father. Staged in the round by Sam Gold, it is an almost unbearably intimate show about hard choices; but it has been conceived with love, and it lifts our spirit even as it wrenches our emotions. Music can do that.

Music can also tease and tickle, of course, and that is where the season's other great new musical, **Something Rotten!**, comes in. This eager-to-please comedy about two playmaking brothers in Elizabethan England who invent musical theater as a way to compete with their chief rival, Will Shakespeare, is in the indefensibly

silly tradition of "The Producers" and "Spamalot," only it is more consistently entertaining than either. Unlike "The Book of Mormon," with which it has been compared, "Something Rotten!" has very little on its mind apart from coming up with stupidly clever—or is it cleverly stupid?—ways to keep us laughing. Miraculously, it does. The product of two Nashville songwriting brothers (Karey and Wayne Kirkpatrick), a British writer (John O'Farrell) and, just as important, the director/choreographer Casey Nicholaw (who in addition to choreographing both "Spamalot" and "Mormon" is behind the bumptious "Aladdin"), "Something Rotten!" is the kind of show about which it is often said, "They don't make 'em like that anymore." Well, yes, they do.

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

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'CALLED TO SALT-WORK'

This year's Foley poetry contest

The original title of this year's Foley poetry contest winner was, "After the Molt, the King of Crabs, Feeling Tender, Addresses the Folk." On first reading, the poem seemed messy, too strange, haphazard. The long title contributed to that impression.

As I read the poem again a few weeks later, it became clear this was a very strong piece of writing. The Foley panelists and I named it our winner and shortened the title to "King of Crabs." Along with its publication, the author Scot Brannon will receive the \$1,000 prize provided by the Foley Foundation.

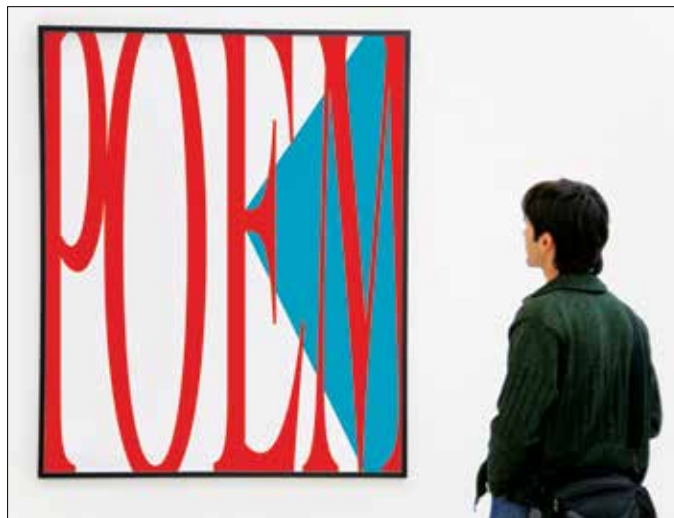
Analyzing art too much is not always helpful to the art or to its audience. I won't reel off this poem's worthy qualities, except to say it goes deeper with each new read. We are very happy to have it in our pages.

We are also pleased to name three runner-up poems, which will be published in later issues. In no particular order, they are: "After This," by Dan O'Connell; "Ars Poetica, the Art Institute of Chicago," by Barbara Burgess; and "On the New Physics," by James Matthew Wilson.

Two judges worked with me on this contest. Amit Majmudar is a prize-winning poet whose work has been published in several journals and collections. Dan McCarthy is a singer-songwriter from Omaha who fronts McCarthy Trenching. He also tours with bands from the Saddle Creek label—Bright Eyes, Azure Ray and others.

In this year's contest we received

nearly 1,000 poems. Some arose out of people's prayer. They were inspired by their beliefs about social justice, abortion, the homeless, the hierarchy of the church. More than a few poems were about the death of a loved one. Poems were about nature, love, the Holy



Spirit and the works of Christ and his disciples.

I whittled them down to 25, sent them to our panel, and we went from there. Why did some of them make it to this second round, while the rest were passed over?

I cannot precisely tell someone how to write a good poem (no one can). But for future entrants, maybe consider this.

A few years ago I was on retreat in Faulkner, Md. I decided to pray in the choir loft by contemplating the crucifix that hung over the altar below.

As I "prayed," I tried to figure out what the crucifix meant for me. What was its symbolism in my life. "How am I, in my own life, on some kind of modified crucifix?" In other words, I thought about my thoughts.

Then I stopped myself and decid-

ed to actually contemplate the cross. Simply see what is there, without trying to find any meanings or drawing conclusions for my own life. It turned from analysis to prayer.

Behold any crucifix. Wood. Body. Nails. Body twisted. Head looking up. Head looking down. Crown of thorns. INRI. Pierced side. Loincloth. Dead man. (Dying man?) Crying to God. Asking for water. Waxy looking, or rough. Coming to mind: a house fire you saw in your youth. Why? The corpus is carved exquisitely. You feel good being in this chapel. You feel guilty being in this chapel. You are sleepy.

No conclusions, meanings, symbols, allegories, life applications. Just look at the thing and then write about what you saw, using the words that work for you.

Maybe this is one way to begin to write a poem. Symbols and meanings and allusions often will take care of themselves. They can come later. Maybe they are not needed at all.

Of all the entries we received in this year's contest, one was the most startling, and the most moving. It was not the poem but the cover letter that did it. An older man wrote that the contest was horribly prejudiced and unfair. It was unjust. A contest rule says that submissions must be typed. What about those who could not afford typewriters or computers, he demanded. Or who, like him, never learned to type?

His letter was furious. It was handwritten. It included a poem, handwritten.

I completely agree. He is right. We don't want to exclude anyone. For future entrants to the Foley Contest, and any **America** poetry submissions, feel free to write them by hand.

JOE HOOVER, S.J., is *America's* poetry editor.

The editors of **America** are pleased to present the winner of the 2015 Foley Poetry Award, given in honor of William T. Foley, M.D.

King of Crabs

Water leaped here not long since.
Then earth belched up a ridge,
and here we cluster, crabs all, cleaving
to this land, this unfinished work. Why?
For water will lap again, the deep
that is not kind to crabs, we who live
in a thin, flat country, we who love
to be taxed in the arts of scuttle
and tunnel, and in the cleansing of the Bay,
our business.

And after the mad day
of dance and war, what crab can forget
those nights so soothing that the sea itself
bedded down; the moon rose, a chitin disc,
and in the glow, crabs pulsed along the shore,
the only wave.

But still you ask:
Why live where land falls away, cedes
to water the heights, whether crest of hill
or skull of dune? I answer that each crab
sifts the sea within himself, is called
to salt-work, the dark twisting of inward
oceans, like kelp whips miles-long,
into a muscled braid, the work of years.
Crabs, friends, I raise and wave my one
enormous claw, my molt work,
my burden, and my clacking joy.

SCOT BRANNON

Scot Brannon is a Kentucky native whose work has been published in the Kentucky Poetry Review and Roanoke Review, among other places. He is the editor and publisher of Through the Gap: An Anthology of Contemporary Kentucky Poetry. He lives now in Seattle.

The publication of poetry in **America** is underwritten
by a generous grant from the William T. Foley Foundation.

PRIVACY SETTINGS

MORE AWESOME THAN MONEY

Four Boys and Their Heroic Quest to Save Your Privacy from Facebook

By Jim Dwyer
 Viking. 384p \$27.95

In February at the Academy Awards Neil Patrick Harris made the quip that “Edward Snowden couldn’t be here for some treason.” In 2013 Snowden more or less gave up his life so that the world could find out about the extensive and illegal surveillance measures of the United States government. Two years later, most of that is still happening, and he’s just a punch line. LOL.

In point of fact, infringements on our privacy have never been greater, and also have never been such an accepted part of the fabric of our lives. Every online search that we make is tracked by the companies that own our search engines. Google even makes that part of its sales pitch, saying the more you use Google, the more it knows what you’re looking for and the better suggestions it can make.

Most of the browsers we use to get around on the web—Explorer, Safari, Chrome—likewise keep track of our choices. (Firefox, run by the not-for-profit Mozilla Foundation, does not.) Even our emails get scanned by our providers.

More than that, virtually every website that we visit employs trackers that latch on and follow every move that we make on their site—what pages we look at, what items we browse, where our cursor hovers. They also sell the right to allow other marketing research companies to add their own bugs. One web page can have well over a dozen different companies each watching everything that we do. Truly, as much as

we call it a “web,” the Internet today is much more the realm of ticks and fleas; everywhere we go, we take on new passengers who relay back our personal information.

Some would say that’s the price of doing business today. Except most of the time that it’s happening we don’t understand ourselves as involved in a business transaction at all. We’re just surfing the web, scanning our favorite websites and blogs. The websites we visit do not alert us to the fact this is happening, nor tell us to whom else they’ve sold the right to watch us.

Enter Diaspora

In the winter of 2010, four idealistic New York University students with an aptitude for tech heard a talk by Eben Moglen, a tech historian, engineer and lawyer who had clerked for Thurgood Marshall in the 1980s. The topic was the Internet, privacy and surveillance. “Facebook holds and controls more data about the daily lives and social interactions of half a billion people than 20th century totalitarian governments ever managed to collect about the people they surveilled,” Moglen opined. It then made money by selling that data to advertisers. And because there was no obvious harm, we accepted it.

To Moglen’s mind, not only did this constitute a troubling reality, it was a terrible business proposition. Why would we agree to let someone else make money off our personal information not only without that process being transparent but without getting a cut for ourselves?

Moglen proposed that what was needed was a new model for social media, one that allowed each person to maintain complete control over who sees and doesn’t see his/her personal information. He insisted the technol-

ogy was already there; it was just a matter of someone investing the time to make it happen.

It was big-picture dreaming, and these four students loved it. One of them, Dan Grippi, had recently deleted his Facebook account, only to have Facebook begin to send him messages saying his friends missed him, using photos of not just any of his friends but the ones he interacted with most regularly. Facebook automatically watched him so closely, it knew exactly which people to try to use to get him back.

That night, those four students decided to do what Moglen had suggested. They would try to create the tools for a new decentralized kind of Facebook, “Diaspora.”

Soon after they began their quest, they were joined by Jim Dwyer, a twice-awarded Pulitzer Prize winning writer for *The New York Times*, who had heard about them when their Kickstarter campaign to raise funds for a summer’s work on the project exploded into a \$200,000 windfall. Dwyer wrote an article on them for *The Times*, then stayed with their story over the following years, finally publishing the new book, *More Awesome Than Money*.

While reading Dwyer’s book, it’s almost impossible not to think of “The Social Network,” the late 2010 movie about Mark Zuckerberg’s creation of Facebook. Both begin with elite college students taking on the world. In the early going there’s that same giddy sense of excitement and possibility. For each there is also an eventual comeuppance, as the realities of Silicon Valley and venture capitalism crash down upon them. For as exciting as Diaspora is as a concept, it’s notable that today we’re not hearing about it. This is not a story that is going to end well.

But “The Social Network” is the tale of a brilliant, semi-pathetic loner who in the process of building a social media empire betrays everyone around

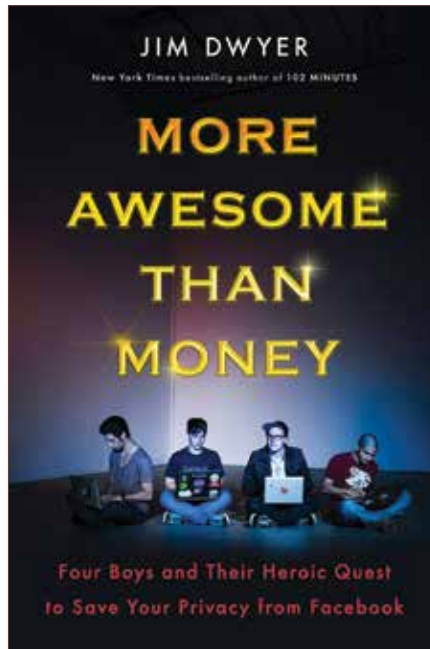
him. *Awesome*, on the other hand, is instead a story of idealism and collaboration. Dwyer gives significant attention in the book to Ilya Zhitomirskiy, the Diaspora Four's charismatic free spirit and endless font of ideas to help people, like "penny stoves" that would use ethanol and soda cans to provide heat for the homeless; billboards that would humiliate drug dealers by posting data like the fact that most dealers still live with their parents; or making a service project that benefits humanity a prerequisite for high school graduation. Ilya is in every way the antithesis of Zuckerberg, a sweet, anarchic dreamer who believes not in himself but in progress and people. Among the items on his bucket list are ending bribery in Congress; sneaking into a company and rearranging everything in the file cabinets and partying with the Amish.

Yet Dwyer also takes care not to overemphasize Ilya's place in the group. Diaspora is a group effort, and its story is always the story of all four of them, as well as the broader community of young technological idealists of which they are a part. More than as founders of a company, they see themselves as part of a social movement of idealists trying to make the Internet and the world a better place. They don't set out to create their own money-making version of Facebook but to develop tools they hope the bigger online community can tinker with and use to build together a rich and expressive social network. Says Dwyer: "In this vision, Diaspora would be a platform owned by no one, but to which anyone could bring new applications. It was like the skateboard, the simple device capable of tricks that its early designers had never dreamed of."

Idealism Rules

As it ennobles them, so their idealism lies at the heart of their struggles. Making the world a better place is a great sales pitch; the fact that a network with greater privacy could help social movements in countries struggling

against repressive regimes is admirable. But where is the potential profit? Diaspora rides into Silicon Valley on a wave of ecstatic techy enthusiasm; venture capitalists throw open their doors; software development companies offer office space and advice. But as they make some rookie mistakes



and cannot be fitted into the normal startup categories, the Vallerati drift away to chase the next would-be billions. Dwyer writes, "In fairness, they were wandering in an unmapped land they had been transported to by public attention that they had not sought and by public support that they had not expected. They were kids. Everything that happened was a first in their lives."

As a reporter Dwyer proves to be the consummate fly on the wall, capturing every important moment, offering himself as sounding board and confidant to the main players. He also demonstrates an extraordinary ability to make this world both accessible and compelling. *More Awesome Than Money* is not a book for the millionth of one percentile of people who can comprehend the hermetically sealed jargon of tech, or even for those who

can explain the difference between RAM and memory. (Seriously, I've been told it a thousand times, and I still can't remember it.) Through rich metaphors Dwyer casts wide the doors to all of us.

The Internet at the time the Diaspora Four were beginning was "still in its big bang moment, the clouds of its atoms nowhere near settled into recognizable forms." About the disturbing evolution of the Internet he writes, "From the richness of the World Wide Web grew an information economy, and then an ecosystem of surveillance." "Using the web was like walking on soft grass, leaving traces of every step."

Likewise, in trying to explain the magnitude of Diaspora's challenge, Dwyer says of Facebook, "Whether an individual feature was good or bad, beautiful or weak, the gravitational force of hundreds of millions of users made the giants inescapable, like dark stars. No Diaspora feature, no matter how clever the gut instinct from which it arose, could match those forces." Facebook, like Google, he writes, was the online equivalent of shopping malls, "territories that had become laws unto themselves: banning or restricting political protests, demonstrations, and solicitations as they—and they alone—saw fit, employing sweeping approaches that could not be used on the public streets because of free-speech protections." I could go on.

Dwyer also has a talent for turning the mundane into the dramatic. I can't imagine ever wanting to read a single paragraph about the evolution of web browsers from Netscape (remember Netscape?) through Microsoft Explorer, Safari, Chrome and Firefox. But in Dwyer's hands the story of Firefox alone becomes the Internet equivalent of Superman's parents fighting to launch baby Kal El into space while Krypton blows up around them. So, too, Facebook, Kickstarter, WikiLeaks, online encryption, blog-

ging software and the Arab Spring all are given fascinating treatments that offer both context and insight.

For instance, we learn that private browsing settings—often dubbed “porn mode” in the States—in fact emerged rather as a way to protect people living under repressive regimes from possible harm. At the same time, it turns out the software many of those regimes use to crack down on free speech often comes from American companies (who predictably break those contracts only after the press spotlight descends).

If I have one quibble with the book, it’s that near the end, as the team comes up with a brilliant (and seemingly profitable) final distillation of their work, Dwyer goes suddenly silent. Whether Dwyer was left out of a few significant conversations that led to a very unexpected change of course or something else happened, it’s the one hiccup in an otherwise brilliant text.

J. GREG PHELAN

TIME IN A BOTTLE

MY STRUGGLE

Book 4

By Karl Ove Knausgaard

Translated from the Norwegian by Don Bartlett

Archipelago Books. 350p. \$27

When I received the go-ahead to review Karl Ove Knausgaard’s latest book, my editor asked me to “deal with the big question so many have: What is so great about this guy?” What is so great about this Norwegian writer that would prompt critics and his fellow writers to almost universally praise his work? That would compel his fans during last year’s book tour to line up around the block to see and hear him read? Or make fanatical readers like me so eager to get their hands on the latest installment of his six-volume autobiographical novel, an extremely long chronicle of a not so extraordinary life?

They say the greatest trick the devil ever did was to make us believe he wasn’t real. Every day, Facebook and the like do something similar, obscuring what they’re doing with our data behind book-length legalese Terms and Conditions, lest we realize that instead of the consumers we are, as Michael Hiltzik once put it in *The Los Angeles Times*, the merchandise. We continue to think of technology in old categories, it’s a tool to help us, like a shovel or a car. But in fact it’s at least as much a camera and a bug.

Through the story of *Diaspora*, *More Awesome Than Money* sheds much needed light on these matters. And much like its title, it invites us into a community of hopeful ideas and people trying to build a world that is so much more awesome.

JIM McDERMOTT, S.J., a screenwriter, is *America’s Los Angeles correspondent*.

Though Knausgaard does exude a rock-star aura—his long hair and craggy, bearded face makes him appear as if he’d spent his life on the road—his writing expresses little of the bravado. On the contrary, in much of his work he seems intent on convincing you he is nothing special. Each volume of *My Struggle* (at least the four published in English) is filled with a succession of cringe-worthy episodes recounting his nervousness, ineptitude and shame as he struggles with the mundane realities of his life.

I’d wager there have been many readers like me who gave up on *Book One*, passing judgment after a few dozen pages that it wasn’t worth

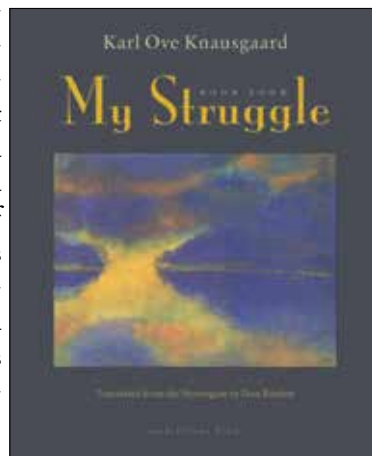
their time. But if you persist and pick up the book again, it’s as if a pleasurable chemical is released in your brain that makes you want to read more about him sneaking beers to a party or being bored and frustrated as he cares for his young children. With the epic accumulation of detail, you get the wonderful sense you are glimpsing something that resembles the truth.

The latest installment, *Book 4*, starts with the protagonist, Karl Ove, soon after graduating from high school, traveling to Northern Norway to spend a year teaching in a small fishing village to save money and write. As he arrives in town, he considers the many books he likes to read, which are “basically about the same topic”:

Books about young men who struggled to fit in to society, who wanted more from life than routines, more from life than a family, basically, young men who hated middle-class values and sought freedom. They traveled, they got drunk, they read, and they dreamed about their life’s great passion or writing the great novel.

Everything they wanted I wanted too.

It’s a promising beginning for a coming-of-age story that makes you thirsty for more insight into his influences and eager to witness first hand his first attempts to write, his struggles, failures and early triumphs. But what Knausgaard delivers here is far less romantic. Young Karl Ove does write stories, read books and listen to music (there’s a great scene when he’s dancing alone to the Talking Heads), but mostly he spends his time up north like any other wayward 18-year-old, obsessing over girls



and getting drunk—so drunk in Karl Ove’s case that he often blacks out and spends the next day racked with embarrassment as he recalls fleeting images of his shameful behavior.

Oh hell, did I do *that*? the cries resounded inside me the next day as I lay in the darkness. Oh no, s***, did I say *that*? And *that*? And *that*?

I lay there, rigid with fear, as though someone was throwing bucket after bucket of my own excrement over me.

Look what an idiot he is. Look what a stupid fool he is.

But I got up, started a new day, and I always got through it.

Throughout, a sense of dread persists that he is going to lose his teaching job or worse, get involved with an under-age student. That he is going to be exposed.

Just as your patience for Karl Ove’s self-destructiveness runs thin, the narrative jumps back two years to the time when he is still in high school, living with his mother after his parents’ divorce. That’s when his principal antagonist returns to the stage—one of the great antagonists in all literature someone said and I agree—Karl Ove’s abusive, alcoholic father, who provides the gravitational pull that shapes the multi-volume narrative. And despite how much he suffered as a child, Karl Ove works hard to maintain a relationship with his father, who is sinking into the alcoholism, we know from *Book One* that would eventually kill him, and we develop a natural sympathy for the 16-year-old Karl Ove that eluded us when he was older up north making a fool of himself.

But the younger Karl Ove is learning to drink as well, and the drunken episodes begin to pile up in the past, too, including one particularly sorry incident at his father’s wedding to his new wife, when Karl Ove passes out in

a bathroom stall for hours during the reception: “It was fantastic. I loved being drunk. I came closer to the person I really was and dared to do what I really wanted to do.” It’s a portrait of an artist as a young alcoholic, in painful slow motion with no myth-making or grand epiphanies. Rather, like real life, it’s just the sad truth.

But that’s just it. What makes these books so compelling and yes, great, is Knausgaard’s refusal to label or judge anyone’s behavior—his or his father’s or anyone else’s—no matter how shocking, inappropriate or self-destructive it may be. Despite the drunkenness that

pervades almost every page, the only alcoholic labeled as such in the entire book is a bum who hangs out at the convenience store. It’s as if the entire 12-step, therapeutic, self-help culture doesn’t exist, as Knausgaard knows that labeling our experience only distances us from what really happens. He paints his selfish, superficial, shameful past with an unerring clarity and vividness. And so we read onward, with his father’s fearsome presence always looming, to see what happens next.

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

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Translator

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The Kingdom Unusual

ELEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), JUNE 14, 2015

Readings: Ez 17:22–24; Ps 92: 2–16; 2 Cor 5:6–10; Mk 4:26–34

“With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?” (Mk 4:30)

The first sign that the kingdom of God is not what you expect comes not so much in Jesus’ use of parables to describe it but in the content of those parables. Why describe a kingdom by comparing it to the most ordinary of things, like shrubs, seeds and nesting birds? It is a sign that God is not building a kingdom in line with human expectations. Parables about an ordinary kingdom might focus on the beauty of princesses, the power of warriors and authority that exalts itself over the weak.

In today’s reading from Ezekiel, the prophet also describes in his parable the coming of the unusual kingdom, comparing it to a tree growing from “a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar.” That “sprig” was planted by God on the highest mountain and became “a noble cedar. Under it every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind.” Jesus reimagines this metaphor, comparing the kingdom of God not to a cedar sprig but to something even more unassuming, a mustard seed, which “when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

Both of these biblical metaphors imagine planting something modest, a shoot or a seed, which grows beyond its inconspicuous beginnings. The cedar gives us a sense of the majesty and

nobility of God’s unusual kingdom, but the mustard shrub remains ordinary, for even when grown it is only the “greatest of all shrubs,” a designation meaningful only to mustard lovers and shrubbery aficionados. But that seems to be Jesus’ point.

The growing shrub is not notable for its majesty but for its purpose. And the purpose of the cedar and the mustard shrub is to offer shelter for birds of every kind. What do these birds represent? Biblical scholars agree that the birds represent the nations, the Gentiles, who will find a home in the branches. Though the growth of God’s kingdom overwhelms no one, somehow this shrubby kingdom develops to become the home for all people.

But this is not the only metaphor Jesus uses for the kingdom of God, for the kingdom is not simply a shrub waiting for the birds to nest. Jesus uses the parable of the sowing of the seeds to explain how the kingdom is spread to the world. The seeds are scattered over the ground by a sower so that “the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how.” There is a mystery at the heart of the kingdom’s growth, here reflected by the unknown growth of the seeds, which stand for the individuals who populate the kingdom.

But just as there is mystery in the sowing and in the growing, there is mystery in the harvesting, for when “the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”

The harvesting is the most mysterious of all the agricultural metaphors of the kingdom of God, for it is our destiny to be cut down. While we grow, struggling to root ourselves, threatened with drought, heat or other enemies, we are growing to be harvested. Yet our reaping is not our death, for though the kingdom is mysteriously present in us, embodied and alive, the kingdom truly comes when we are “at home with the Lord.”

In the parable of the mustard seed, it is clear God



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How have you seen the kingdom of God grow in you and through you?

has prepared a home for us, which opens itself up to provide shelter and security in its branches for all. Yet God has also planted us and nurtured us to grow for the kingdom of God, a time and a place still to come. But as God has caused the kingdom to grow for us, each of us is also helping the kingdom to grow, providing shelter for others along the way, sowing seeds of love along our own path in the world, the work of the unusual kingdom unknown perhaps to all but God. For the kingdom of God is not the usual game of thrones but a work of love, in which the weak are raised up and the power comes down to earth to live with its subjects, until they are called home to live in the kingdom fully grown.

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

ART: TAD A. DUNNE

New Creation

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), JUNE 21, 2015

Readings: Jb 38:1–11; Ps 107: 23–31; 2 Cor 5:14–17; Mk 4:35–41

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation” (2 Cor 5:30)

Even before Darwin, scientists were studying the origin of species; and though some might think there is a perpetual and permanent war between science and religion, it is simply not the case. St. John Paul II asked in a letter to George V. Coyne, S.J., director of the Vatican Observatory, “If the cosmologies of the ancient Near Eastern world could be purified and assimilated into the first chapters of Genesis, might not contemporary cosmology have something to offer to our reflections upon creation?” While some Christians maintain that the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis describe the literal process of creation, most Catholics understand that there is nothing at odds between proclaiming God’s sovereignty over creation and studying the means by which creation took place, including the evolution of species.

Yet there is one thing Catholic thought insists on: God is the beginning of all things, the one from whom and through whom all existence emerges. In Job’s encounter with God in today’s reading, God challenges Job. He asks: “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? Or what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone.... Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?” The Book of Job describes God’s creative activity using the lan-

guage of human building and tools. It is not the scientific reality of these cosmic images that Christians maintain but the insight that we are finite creatures and God is the infinite being, the master builder, who created all out of nothing.

Human beings function as co-creators with God, attempting to understand nature, work with nature and harness nature. Yet even as human knowledge and technology increase, the tools of human ingenuity are often overwhelmed by the depth of creation, as was Job, not just by how it surprises us with its majesty but because of the limits of our understanding.

For creation is an ongoing work sustained by God. God the creator is not a reminiscence of past events but an affirmation of God as the sustainer of all creation, the one who cares for creation and the one who continues to do new things, even now. God’s work in creation is often pronounced in the beauty and power of nature, the vistas of ocean waves, rolling prairies or soaring mountains. This is the natural world and God is revealed here.

But God’s supernatural presence also reveals the God beyond comprehension. The apostles experienced one aspect of God’s presence when Jesus, in the midst of a storm, woke to his disciples’ anguished cries, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” Jesus then “woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there

was a dead calm.” The apostles were shocked—an appropriate response, for the might of God rests beyond all human calculation.

And while we might not experience God’s supernatural power in a public display that awes us, we might see it worked out at a personal level. Those who have never experienced a natural miracle might experience God working in individual lives, creating something new in people who were lost, forgotten, who were thought beyond redemption. This is why no person is a “loser,” no person worthy of being “written off.” Cannot the God who creates and sustains all creation, who acts in nature, act in the most precious of creations, human beings? Whenever we cast humanity as masters of the universe, we have lost our way; but whenever we think we are nothing to God, we have misunder-

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

In what way has God been making a new creation in you?

stood God’s creative power.

God is smaller than that: God dwells in people, working graces unseen. He came to earth out of love and “the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all.” Each of us is a miracle not only in the womb but at every stage of our lives. This is why Paul says, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” We are new creations, for God is working in each of our lives even now. The creator beyond all human imagining loved us into being and makes each of us new.

JOHN W. MARTENS

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