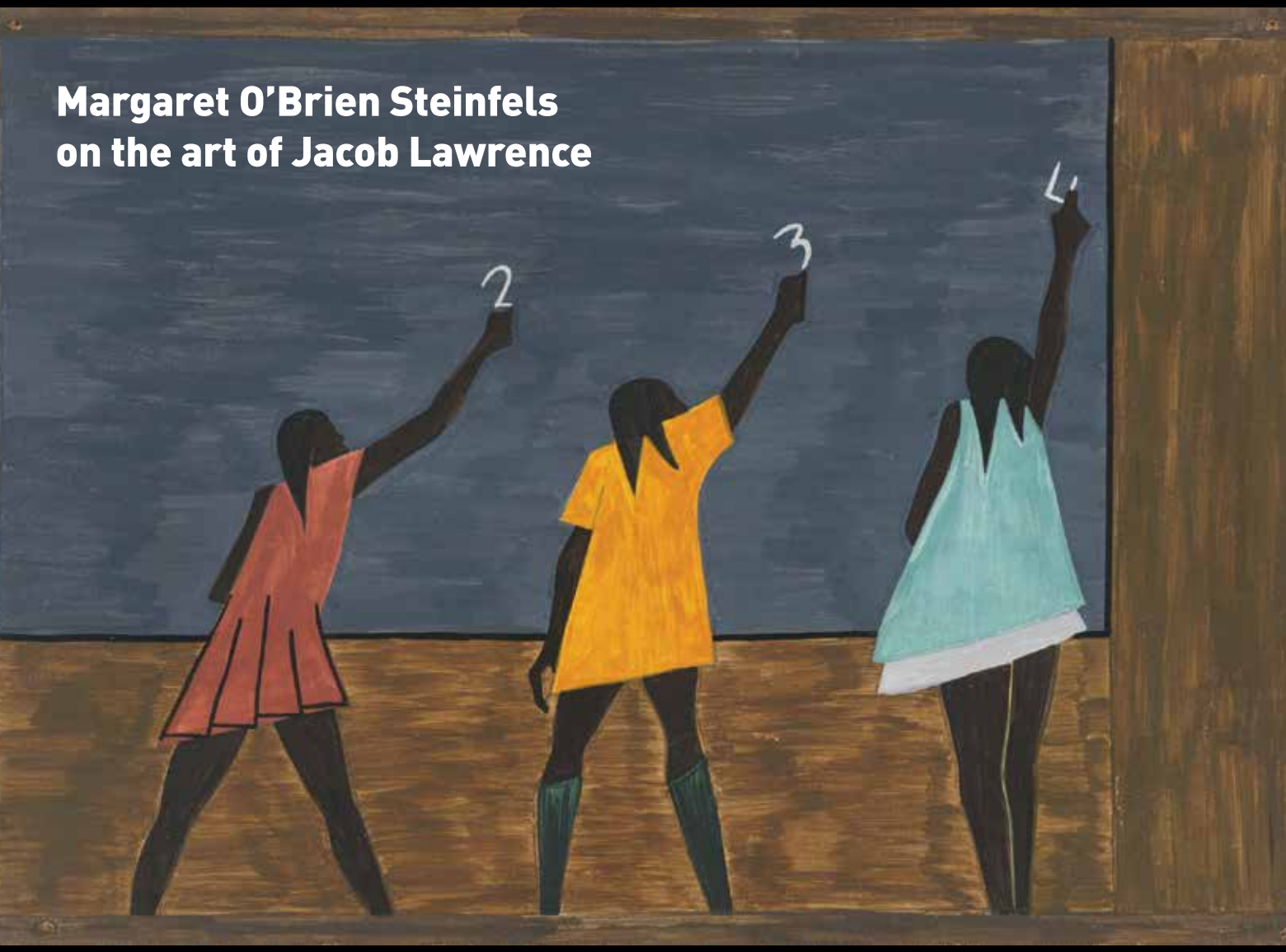
A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

Commonweal

MARCH 6, 2015



Margaret O'Brien Steinfels on the art of Jacob Lawrence

How We Train Our Priests

Paul Blaschko, Barbara Parsons & Mary Gautier

Rand Richards Cooper on 'American Sniper'

Andrew Bacevich on West Point

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HOLY LAND PRINCIPLES

A vacuum crying out to be filled

A Role Waiting For You

The Mac Bride Principles has been the most important campaign ever against anti-Catholic discrimination in Northern Ireland. The Holy Land Principles—also launched by Fr. Sean Mc Manus—can do for Palestinian Muslims and Palestinian Christians what the Mac Bride Principles did for Catholics in Northern Ireland.

England—NOT GOD—sowed the seeds of partition in both lands: the Balfour Declaration for Palestine (1917) and the Government of Ireland Act (1920).

Until Fr. Sean Mc Manus—President of the Capitol Hill-based Irish National Caucus—launched the Mac Bride Principles on November 5, 1984, the American companies doing business in Northern Ireland were never confronted with their complicity in anti-Catholic discrimination. Incredibly, that obvious domestic and foreign policy nexus, with its powerful economic leverage for good, was missed. Same, too, with the American companies (apart from a few with obvious military-security aspects) doing business in Palestine-Israel ... ***A vacuum crying out to be filled***—and filled by the Holy Land Principles, launched on International Human Rights Day, December 10, 2012.

The Holy Land Principles are a corporate code of conduct for the 546 American companies doing business in Israel-Palestine. The 8-point set of Principles does not call for quotas, reverse discrimination, divestment, disinvestment or boycotts—only American fairness in American companies. The Holy Land Principles are pro-Jewish, pro-Palestinian and pro-company. The Holy Land Principles do not take a position on any particular solution—One State, Two State, etc., etc. The Principles do not try to tell the Palestinians or the Israelis what to do—they only call on American companies in the Holy Land to proudly declare and implement their American values by signing the Holy Land Principles.

One hundred sixteen American companies doing business in Northern Ireland have signed the Mac Bride Principles. Can American companies now say: "Catholics in Northern Ireland deserve these principles but Palestinian Muslims and Palestinian Christians do not?" And can fair-minded Americans—companies, consumers, investors and other stakeholders—go along with that?

PLEASE SUPPORT OUR SHAREHOLDER RESOLUTIONS

Shareholder resolutions are proposals submitted by shareholders for a vote at the company's annual meeting. Holy Land Principles has three Resolutions filed for 2015 proxy votes: GE—Annual Meeting, April 22; Corning—Annual Meeting, April 29; and Intel—Annual Meeting, May 21, 2015.

We need your help to get these **Resolutions *passed***.

Please urge investors you may know in these three companies to vote for these three Resolutions filed by Holy Land Principles.

ALSO, please email the Investor Relations Contact (IRC), the person who deals with the issue for the companies: **GE (gary.sheffer@ge.com)**; **Corning (nicholsoas@corning.com)**; and **Intel (linda.l.qian@intel.com)** urging the company to sign Holy Land Principles. Just address them as "Dear IRC."

WHAT MORE YOU CAN DO

Go to HolyLandPrinciples.org—to "Contact Companies," to the list of companies. See email address list of the Investor Relations (ICRs)—the individuals who deal with the issue for the Companies. Please follow directions and email all the IRCs urging their Company to sign the Holy Land Principles.

CAMPAIGN TO DATE

1. Holy Land Principles campaign was launched by mailing Fr. Mc Manus' Memoirs, *My American Struggle for Justice in Northern Ireland ... And The Holy Land* to all the 550 CEOs and 550 IRCs, to all Members of Congress, House and Senate, and to thousands of media.
2. Monthly mailings and emails to all the CEOs and IRCs.
3. Our Pamphlet publications to date are: *Why Cisco Should Sign The Holy Land Principles*, *Why Intel Should Sign Holy Land Principles*, *Why GE Should Sign the Holy Land Principles*, and *Why Corning Should Sign Holy Land Principles*.

   These pamphlets contain a Special Report, we commissioned, by the Sustainable Investments Institute (Si2): "The first reports of this kind published by Si2 or any other organization." WE TOLD YOU THERE WAS A VACUUM CRYING OUT TO BE FILLED.
4. Shareholder Resolutions: Filed with Intel, GE, and Corning. With many more to come, like Coca Cola, FedEx, General Motors, Cisco, and so forth.

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Commonweal

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Commonweal [ISSN 0010-3330], a review of public affairs, religion, literature, and the arts, is published biweekly, except in April, July, August, and November, when it is published monthly, by Commonweal Foundation, 475 Riverside Drive, Rm. 405, New York, NY 10115. Telephone: (212) 662-4200. E-mail: editors@commonwealmagazine.org. Fax: (212) 662-4183. POSTMASTER: send address changes to *Commonweal*, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834-9982.

Commonweal is indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Book Review Digest, and Book Review Index. *Commonweal* articles are available at many libraries and research facilities via ProQuest and OpinionArchives. Serials Data program No.: ISSN 0010-3330. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional offices. Single Copy, $3.95. Yearly print subscriptions, U.S., $65; Canada, $70; other parts of the world, $75. Special two-year rate: U.S. $108; Canada, $118; other parts of the world, $128. Add $45 for airmail. For digital and online subscription options visit www.commonwealmagazine.org/digital.

Cover design: Cecilia Guerrero Rezes
Cover image: Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration Series,* panel 58. Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York

LETTERS

Migration—winged & otherwise

FORESEEN CONSEQUENCES

In your interview with Archbishop Blase Cupich of Chicago ("A Listening Church," February 6), he mentioned two reasons that Mexican immigrants come to the United States: "A whole system of labor that no one else wants to do" and "recreational drug users who are in fact funding the violence that people who come to this country are trying to escape."

There is one more factor that should be mentioned. The North American Free Trade Agreement drove many Mexican farmers from their farms. The National Farmers Organization (NFO) warned Americans that this would happen if NAFTA passed, but no one would listen, and so it happened.

TERESA MOTTET
Fairfield, Iowa

UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES

I am totally flabbergasted by Fran Quigley's proposal to eliminate the charitable donation deduction ("The Limits of Philanthropy," January 23), for at least two reasons:

1. If the deduction is ever eliminated, it will be *in exchange* for lower tax rates. So how will the lost donations be replaced by more government spending? Put another way, we the people are O.K. with 28-percent-to-39-percent tax brackets because they are linked to charitable donations and a mortgage-interest deduction. No deduction, no 28 percent rate. Sorry.

2. Eliminating the deduction will be the end of the $10 weekly donation in the parish collection basket. (Why do you think people use envelopes?—they want the deduction.) The resulting devastation to local parish finances is incalculable.

PAUL CONLIN
Lake Zurich, Ill.

MISSED FLIGHT

Richard Alleva's review of *Birdman* (January 9) makes all the right connections with the masterful view of Broadway theater and Hollywood blockbusting, but it misses the point of the film's ending. Alleva finds fault in the scene near the end in which Riggan takes flight over Times Square, wafted aloft in Birdman's arms. He should be flying *away* from Birdman at this point, the reviewer argues. But Riggan is not ready yet. Only after his near death and return to life does he fly out the hospital window on his own power. The audience does not see him in the air, just his daughter who looks down in fright and then looks up and smiles. We see him through her eyes, and all is right with this world.

JAMES FINN COTTER
Newburgh, N.Y.

IN THE KNOW

I was so interested to read Ananda Rose's article "Seeking Refuge: Life and Death at the Border" (January 9). What wonderful work is done by the staff of La Posada, a shelter for migrants. But then one politically driven sentence made me want to stop reading the article (though I did keep reading). I do not want to read that "apparently he [Texas Governor Rick Perry] is not aware that Obama has deported more migrants than any other president." Really? Anyone reading *Commonweal* would know there is much more to that statement. Please do not make a simplistic declaration in the midst of a great humanitarian article without any supporting evidence cited, and not an iota of discussion. I would like to learn about a facility such as this without the condescension of reading what we "apparently" should know.

SHIRLEY FARMER SCHOLTZ
Wind Lake, Wis.

Let Greece Breathe

Of all the countries affected by the euro crisis, Greece has been hit the hardest. A quarter of the Greek population is currently unemployed. In the years between 2007 and 2013, the country's per-capita GDP fell by 26 percent, while its debt-to-GDP ratio reached 175 percent. Greece now owes its creditors about $300 billion, and few expect that it will ever be able to pay it all back.

Much of Greece's suffering has been self-inflicted. No other EU government borrowed quite as recklessly as Greece's center-right government did in the years leading up to the crisis. Because of widespread tax evasion, Greece couldn't bring in enough revenue to pay its bills; because of rampant corruption, it squandered what little revenue it managed to collect. To make up for its massive fiscal shortfalls, it turned to foreign lenders, who were more than happy to help, confident that, however irresponsible Greece's leaders might be, the EU would never allow a member of its monetary union to default.

The creditors were right: when an international debt crisis hit the continent, the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund—together known as the "troika"—reluctantly rescued Greece with two bailouts, one in 2010 and another two years later. But the bailouts came with strings attached. In return for emergency loans, Greece had to agree to a program of harsh fiscal austerity, which only increased the economic distress caused by the crisis itself. Pensions were cut, salaries frozen. Many public-sector workers lost their jobs. Valuable public assets, including Greece's main port, were put up for sale. Prime Minister Antonis Samara begged the troika to let him relax the austerity measures, but the consensus in Europe, and especially in Germany, was that Greece had to be disciplined. Desperate for international assistance, Samara complied with EU demands, despite growing outrage among Greek voters.

On January 25, a new left-wing anti-austerity party called Syriza defeated Samara's New Democracy Party at the polls. The new prime minister, Alexis Tsipras, immediately pledged to reverse some of the most painful reforms undertaken by his predecessors at the behest of the troika. His government would raise the minimum wage, increase pensions, suspend privatizations, and provide more support to those most affected by the recession. Above all, Tsipras and his finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis, would stand up to the technocrats in charge of the eurozone and demand that Greece be allowed to spend more of its revenue on meeting the needs of its people and less on servicing its debt.

Syriza's victory at the polls and its apparent willingness to make good on its bold campaign promises have annoyed nearly every other country in Europe. Having implemented severe fiscal programs in their own countries, governments in Spain, Portugal, and Ireland worry about how voters will react once they discover that there might have been an alternative to austerity after all. France and Italy are unwilling to let Greece off the hook because much of its debt is owed to French and Italian banks. Germany is annoyed at Greece's general lack of gratitude and contrition, and fears that yielding to Syriza's demands will give other countries the idea that they can spend beyond their means with impunity. Above all, Germany is worried that the euro will lose value because of an irresponsible Greek government. Germans still haven't forgotten the damage hyperinflation did to their country's economy in the 1920s.

Unfortunately, Germans do seem to have forgotten that Germany was the beneficiary of debt forgiveness several times in the twentieth century, after their country made mistakes far worse than Greece's. As the economic historian Benjamin Friedman told a group of central-bank governors last summer, "There is no economic ground for Germany to be the only European country in modern times to be granted official debt relief on a massive scale and certainly no moral ground either."

Greek voters have clearly signaled their unwillingness to let Germany's over-scrupulous (and highly selective) sense of fiscal hygiene keep the Greek economy from recovering. If the European Union's commitment to democracy is genuine, it cannot afford to ignore this signal—any more than it can afford to ignore the concerns of German voters. The EU's governing institutions must not treat national elections as if they were nothing more than a way for the dissatisfied masses to blow off steam. EU officials should at least be willing to negotiate with the new Greek government, which is asking not that its nation's debt be forgiven but that it be restructured, so that Greece can use more of its modest resources to take care of its own citizens. It's time for the troika to take its foot off Greece's neck. ■

February 17, 2015

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

Northward Bound

JACOB LAWRENCE'S 'THE GREAT MIGRATION'

The instinctive pleasure we sometimes get from a work of art usually says more about us than about it. Tell someone you "just love" Mozart's *The Magic Flute* or Fra Angelico's *The Annunciation* and they'll ask, "Why?" A fair question. Yet, after reflecting critically on your initial response, it may be that when you next hear *The Magic Flute* or see *The Annunciation*, your first feelings of instinctive pleasure will still be more powerful than any aesthetic analysis you've done. That's how I feel about Jacob Lawrence's *The Great Migration*: I just love it.

Jacob Lawrence, The Migration Series*, panel 52: "One of the largest race riots occurred in East St. Louis," 1941*

Lawrence painted the sixty captioned panels of *The Great Migration* in 1940–41. Each panel, tempera on masonite, is 12 x 18 inches. Together the sixty create a tableau of the journey black Southerners made to Northern cities during and after World War I. Lawrence grew up in Harlem in the middle of the Depression, during the final years of the Harlem Renaissance, a period of intense creativity in African-American music, art, and writing. In the midst of both creativity and poverty, Lawrence painted what he saw and what he knew: strivers and beggars, con men and workmen, children and prostitutes, gamblers and preachers, above all women, like his mother, Rosa Lee Lawrence, who kept the family fabric together. In 1930, she sent him at the age of thirteen to the Utopia Children's House for art lessons. There his natural talent bloomed. His teachers supplied him with materials—pencils, paper, and tempera paint—and left him to develop and create his own art. In time, he had access to formal training, worked on WPA projects, and studied the murals of José Orazco and Diego Rivera. Still, Lawrence was remarkably faithful to his own vocation and vision, even to the tempera paints that were his first medium. Simple colors (mostly the primaries) and simple forms (usually angular and overlapping) shaped the core and spirit of his art.

Critics eager to categorize and celebrate his work have called him a primitivist, a cubist, a modernist, and an expressionist. They have compared his use of colors to Matisse and his sense of composition to Stuart Davis. Lawrence neither denied nor accepted the labels of others; he went his own way, painting with tempera on hard board until his death in 2000.

His distinctive format of captioned panels, which he first devised in the late 1930s, portrayed the struggles of Toussaint L'Ouverture, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Tubman. In laying out the far larger project of *The Great Migration*, he undertook to tell the story of his own parents as well as thousands of his Harlem neighbors. The subject of each panel was sketched and then painted, one color at a time, over the sixty panels, giving unity of color across a range of contrasting events: the push of Jim Crow laws, lynchings, poverty, and depleted farm land; and the pull of northern jobs, better wages, and the promise of freedom.

A vigorous competition for *The Great Migration* between New York's Museum of Modern Art and Washington's Phillips Gallery was resolved with the even-numbered panels staying in New York and the odd-numbered panels going to D.C. It was at the Phillips that I first saw *The Great Migration* in its entirety in 1993 and "just loved it!"—a consummate match of color, form, and content. The first panel above all: it depicts a dense crowd pressing toward gates for trains to Chicago, New York, St. Louis. Sharp overlapping angles emphasize the eagerness, even desperation, to leave. After all the subsequent panels evoking those forces of push and pull, the final panel (no. 60) echoes the first. Cast in horizontal lines, it shows a standing, impassive, long-suffering crowd waiting—for a train or, perhaps as Lawrence saw it, for the chance to enter the American dream.

The panels from *The Great Migration* are joined with other works from the Harlem Renaissance in "One Way Ticket," an exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art (April 3 through September 7, 2015). Get there if you can. You'll just love it. ■

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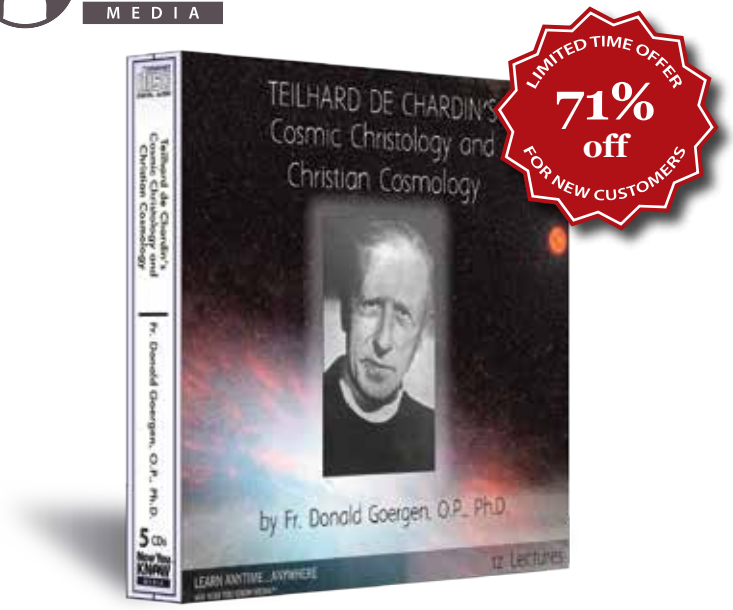

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Rita Ferrone

Unity, Not Uniformity

WHAT THE VERNACULAR LITURGY SAYS ABOUT THE CHURCH

March 7, 1965, came to be known as Bloody Sunday in the civil-rights movement, as peaceful protesters in Selma, Alabama, were assaulted by police wielding clubs and tear gas. The same day, Pope Paul VI entered All Saints Church in the suburbs of Rome and said Mass in Italian. It was the first vernacular Mass celebrated by the pope in modern times. Pope Francis will mark that anniversary this month.

At first glance, these two events seem to have nothing to do with each other. After all, what difference can it possibly make to the cause of racial justice that Catholics are now permitted to celebrate Mass in the vernacular? It was a big deal for the Catholic faithful and clergy at the time, to be sure. But we've gotten used to it. For many, then as now, its value seems to rest in nave and sanctuary and not in the streets. I believe a link exists, and is worth considering. The introduction of the vernacular was not only undertaken for the good of the people already within the fold. It was also intended as a pledge and a promise for the Catholic Church to reach out beyond itself, for the sake of its mission. Pope Paul VI said it clearly from the balcony of St. Peter's on that day: "The church has made this sacrifice of an age-old tradition [Latin] and above all in unity of language among diverse peoples to bow to a higher universality, an outreach to all peoples."

Use of vernacular languages in the liturgy is an outstanding sign of Vatican II's famous "opening to the world"—the world not as a great shopping mall of delights, but as angry and wounded, a despairing world in need of the gospel of compassion and justice and joy. The world of the poor. The world of Selma. In the words of *Gaudium et spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: "The joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men [and women] of our time, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ." Too many Catholics tend to think of the document on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, as one end of the spectrum, and *Gaudium et spes* as the other. They belong together.

Paul VI's words surely resonated with missionary bishops and others on "the periphery"—the developing world, churches oppressed under communism, Eastern Rite Catholics—who took part in the debate at the council. Although they remained respectful of Latin, they were not convinced by the claim that Latin is the great "sign and psychological agent" of the church's unity. Bishop Franz Simons of Indore, India, for example, pointed out with merciless clarity that Latin, which was supposed to unite, had actually become a source of division: between clergy and laity, between East and West, and between the church and the world. Patriarch Maximos IV Saigh, leader of the Melkite delegation, famously refused to speak Latin at the council, preferring to use French as a reminder to the Latin Rite bishops that Latin is not the language of all Catholics. It's not as though these bishops didn't prize unity. They did. But they wisely looked to the Holy Spirit to provide it through many tongues, as the Spirit provided it on the day of Pentecost.

Patriarch Maximos IV Saigh with Pope Pius XII

Arguments explaining the shift to the vernacular have so often been pragmatic that I fear we've overlooked the symbolic importance of what we do when we celebrate the liturgy in our own language. The result is a flat, ho-hum account of what the church is up to. Latin is mystical and interesting. The vernacular? Just words. Besides, if we evaluate the shift to the vernacular only in terms of practicality, the story is over. The goal of a fully vernacular liturgy has been achieved. Taking the vernacular for granted has left the church vulnerable to efforts to "re-Latinize" our vernacular translations.

We have vernacular liturgy but we may have missed what is most essential about it. Use of vernacular in the liturgy is a matter of mission and evangelization. When Paul VI celebrated the liturgy in Italian, it was a pledge to future generations that the church and her liturgy would lean toward outreach and mission. This is where the growth continues. The Mass Pope Francis will commemorate was the end point of a long journey; but, more important, it is also a starting point.

A liturgy "open to the world" is not a liturgy without structure or boundaries, but it is one that can extend hospitality to seekers, remove barriers to ecumenism, and speak in a language contemporary people can claim, own, and understand. It is a liturgy that takes place in a dynamic relationship with the world around us, for the vernacular languages are not "dead" languages; they continue to change as the communities that speak them change. The vernacular liturgy is a sign that our discipleship must unfold in the world. It is a promise by the church to be there for the people who actually need us. ■

Anthony Annett

Papal Economics

WHY THE CHURCH REJECTS BOTH COLLECTIVISM & INDIVIDUALISM

Perhaps prompted by nervousness about the agenda of Pope Francis, recently there has been a flurry of activity pushing the compatibility of Catholicism with capitalism. In a recent op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, Tim Busch—trustee of the Catholic University of America—praises the power of free markets to lift people out of poverty. In his view, the free-market system advances the virtues enshrined in Catholic social teaching, and is therefore superior to "collectivist" economic systems in which big government impinges on personal freedom.

Busch presents a false dichotomy. Who does not oppose the collectivism associated with the oppressive Marxist regimes of the twentieth century? Catholic social teaching has always staked out a middle-ground position that opposes the excesses of collectivism on the one hand, and laissez-faire individualism on the other—the "twin rocks of shipwreck," as Pope Pius XI put it in *Quadragesimo anno* (1931).

The Catholic Church has always taught that the right to private property is never absolute, and must always be subordinated to common use—making sure that the needs of all are met. And while collectivism can elevate common use at the expense of private ownership, free-market individualism errs in the opposite direction. Writing at the time of the Great Depression, Pius XI was particularly blunt: "The right ordering of economic life cannot be left to a free competition of forces," he said. "For from this source, as from a poisoned spring, have originated and spread all the errors of individualist economic teaching."

Later papal teaching has reiterated that point, most recently in Pope Francis's condemnation of the "sacralized workings" of the free-market system. "We can no longer trust in the unseen forces and the invisible hand of the market," he warned (*Evangelii gaudium*, 2013).

In what, then, can we trust? The answer is not radical. It's actually quite old-fashioned. It boils down to the kind of "mixed economy" that worked so well during the postwar era, before the resurgence of laissez-faire individualism over the past three decades. That model envisioned a partnership between the public and private sector in which the market would take the lead, but the state would curb the market's excesses and fill in its gaps. In that kind of economy, the government serves as guardian of the common good, intervening in economic matters when it must. Just as the government must not smother individual initiative, neither should it ignore individual needs in the name of maximizing freedom. As is often the case with the Catholic sensibility, finding the right balance requires prudence.

In a mixed economy, for example, the government would provide goods and services in areas where the private sector falls short. It would establish reasonable regulations to support the common good—for example, to stabilize the financial sector, to prevent environmental damage, and to make sure the basic standards of justice are met by, say, protecting the rights of workers and ensuring that all have access to affordable health care. It would also provide safety nets to catch those who fall through the cracks that inevitably appear in the structure of any market economy. Think of the Christian Democrat–inspired "social market" economy in Europe, or the New Deal in the United States, which was heavily influenced by Catholic social teaching.

Pope Pius XI

CNS PHOTO / L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO

That was a model that worked. It is no accident that the three decades after the war are remembered not only for robust economic growth but also for economic stability and social equity. It is no accident that the swing back toward laissez-faire in places like the United States has failed to boost long-term economic performance. But it did manage to dramatically increase both economic instability and income inequality—leading to an entrenched economy of exclusion. Pope Francis, for one, can see the writing on the wall.

What about the considerable economic gains across the world, including the astounding reduction in poverty? That is certainly real, but, once again, it often came from moving away from an extreme economic position—the most obvious example being China's decision to jettison its harshly collectivist economic system. More recently, many of the gains in poverty reduction in regions like sub-Saharan Africa came as much from public-policy decisions—through the Millennium Development Goals, for example—as from the magic of the market.

The Catholic promoters of the free market are right about one thing—the role of government, important though it is, is nonetheless limited in what it can accomplish. They are right to emphasize, as Busch does, that markets work well only within a moral culture. But free-market boosters rarely tease out the full implications of what that means. They usually focus on factors such as honesty, accountability, and transparency—and the need to avoid cronyism and corruption. But that is just the tip of the iceberg. The real problem is that a true moral culture is simply out of reach once self-interest is held up as the primary virtue of the market.

But is there a realistic alternative? Yes, according to an influential group of economists inspired by Catholic social teaching. That school of thought—which has its roots in the Italian civil-economy tradition associated with Antonio Genovesi, a contemporary of Adam Smith—upholds reciprocity rather than self-interest as the supreme virtue of the market. That means foregoing the maximum benefit to oneself in order to offer a benefit to others, trusting that the blessing will be returned. This fits with the (very Catholic) idea that human beings are primarily social and cooperative rather than atomistic and egoistic. It also fits with the theological vision of the human being as a relational person and not just an autonomous individual. That might sound naïve, but it has some practical—and even radical—implications. What it means is that we can no longer create a sharp divide between the market and the state, with the former focusing on the creation of wealth and the latter concerning itself with distribution. Instead, distributive justice now belongs right in the heart of the marketplace. Business must support the common good too—not just the private good. That was a major theme of Pope Benedict XVI's social encyclical *Caritas in veritate*—where he argued that principles like fraternity, gift, and gratuitousness must suffuse all areas of economic life.

This outlook has major implications for how business operates. For a start, it challenges the core idea of maximizing profit at any cost and prioritizing the interests of shareholders over other stakeholders like workers, society at large, and the environment. It challenges the strategy of corporations that exploit a globalized economy to limit taxes, wages, and regulations. It challenges the idea of corporations spending enormous sums of money to tilt policies toward their own short-term interests and away from longer-term sustainability and the common good—a striking example of the crony capitalism the Catholic free-market cheerleaders claim to loathe.

Finally, when the likes of Busch and the Koch brothers talk about "free markets," they are not really talking about the market as mode of cooperation for mutual benefit. Rather, they are peddling an ideology of self-interest designed to push the economic system toward one extreme, which deviates from the core principles of Catholic social teaching. They claim to oppose collectivism, but their laissez-faire individualism actually mirrors its errors—both "rocks of shipwreck" threaten human dignity. ■

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Robert Cowan

Prisoner's Dilemma

WHY WOULD SOMEONE CHOOSE JAIL OVER COLLEGE?

The brightest student in the class was a lean African-American kid named Fernando, who applied to Kingsborough Community College secretly from Upstate Correctional Facility. According to him, he wasn't allowed access to a computer, but he somehow managed to submit the online application and get accepted. Then he took his acceptance letter to his parole hearing and got out.

The class was "Literature and Film," and his insights into both the readings and the movies were much subtler than those of the other students. Discussing the connections between William Blake's poetic work *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and Jim Jarmusch's existential western *Dead Man*, Fernando asked: "Professor, you said Blake was critiquing Swedenborg, right? Well, Swedenborg saw things as much more black and white, while Blake and the Indian character in the movie seem to see things as more unified." I had never had a Kingsborough student who had even heard of Emanuel Swedenborg, much less understood critiques of his dualistic worldview.

But then, a few weeks into the semester, Fernando vanished. I asked a young woman in the class, a good student who seemed to know a lot of the guys, where he'd gone.

"Oh, he's back in jail," she said matter-of-factly. "He had to get his teeth fixed."

I must have looked puzzled.

"He had a bad tooth and no dental insurance," she went on, "so he just started dealing again and he got picked up—no problem." Then she added, as if this would explain everything, "He lives in the Red Hook Houses." Quality of life at the Red Hook housing projects, which were called "the crack capital of America" by *Life* magazine in 1990, hasn't improved significantly during the gentrification of Brooklyn in the past couple of decades. Federal and state budget cuts had led to steadily deteriorating physical conditions, even before damage from Hurricane Sandy. Volunteering there after the storm, I had talked with residents who said they also felt trapped by an overwhelming police presence on one side and the drug trade on the other. Indeed, periodic busts still yield a dozen arrests at a time. I told the young woman in my class that I understood, but what I was really wondering was how such a bright, promising student like Fernando could end up back in jail so quickly.

When people ask me how I characterize my students, I often say something like, "Well, there are those who got into Columbia but couldn't afford it and are saving a hundred grand by getting their associate's at Kingsborough and then going on to a school like Columbia. And there are students who seem to have barely made it out of the eighth grade."

A Bard Prison Initiative class

Actually, this doesn't accurately characterize the vast majority of Kingsborough students, who together represent three-quarters of the world's countries, speak more than a hundred languages, and range in age from teenagers to nonagenenarians. There are veterans and single moms and, yes, former prisoners. Almost half of them come from households with incomes under the national poverty threshold.

This range of backgrounds and circumstances is reflected by the widely varying levels of preparedness for college-level work, and many people justifiably associate such schools with low incomes and low readiness. What many people even in education don't know is that community colleges, in addition to helping the underprepared, offer honors programs aimed precisely at the most promising and most motivated students, and geared to helping those students—like Fernando—who might otherwise be trapped in a cycle of recidivism. Honors programs provide more challenging work for these students, including opportunities to present their work at national conferences, and create an environment of individualized attention necessary for them to obtain scholarships and transfer to prestigious four-year institutions. For some students, it's simply finding their place in college—with people of similar abilities and interests—that makes the difference between whether they thrive or not, and where they go next. An honors program can help them do that, but many of our students have never thought of themselves as honors material. They need to be told that they're smart, creative thinkers whose personal histories have value.

In the case of the formerly incarcerated, this involves understanding the numerous and considerable obstacles they face and giving them a second chance. But how do we shift the national conversations about mass incarceration and disinvestment in public education so that the public sees the connection between these two things—and so that those at risk of entering the penal system see the connection?

PHOTO: CHINA JORRIN, COURTESY BARD PRISON INITIATIVE

Derek, a student from one of my Honors English composition courses, served seven years for driving what he supposedly didn't realize was a get-away car from a drug deal. In his early thirties and the father of six, he was working to get his life back on track. He applied for the Salzburg Global Seminar—a week-long, full-scholarship program in which students take a global ethics class at Kingsborough and, over spring break, travel free to Austria to engage in seminars on globalization taught by professors from across Europe and the United States at the castle where *The Sound of Music* was filmed.

Derek, who had never been abroad except to visit family in Puerto Rico, came back from Austria transformed, with his worldview dramatically larger in scope. He began telling the professors and administrators who worked with him about conversations he was now having with his children—about global issues like human trafficking, climate change, and economic disparity.

But to make this possible, Derek needed someone to believe in him, to look past his prison record and give him another chance. He had been my student previously, and when he was selected for the program only as an alternate I made a special appeal to the college's associate provost to fund his admission. This was the crucial step and it was not likely to happen in other parts of Derek's life. As legal scholar Michelle Alexander notes in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, "Once you're labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination—employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service—are suddenly legal." In recent literature about incarceration, Alexander and others emphasize how the current setup of the penal system practically ensures that once people enter it, they forfeit many of the rights and privileges that would help them get back on their feet, get a job, and live responsibly upon release. Their debt to society can never be paid, despite the fact that, in so many cases, they have served disproportionately lengthy sentences for relatively minor crimes, such as those related to drugs. Given this reality, it's perhaps understandable that someone would choose to go back to jail for dental work.

One proven method of helping former prisoners build a normal life after their release is providing them with college-level courses while they're incarcerated, which a 2013 U.S. Department of Education study found drops recidivism rates an average of 43 percent. The City University of New York (CUNY), of which Kingsborough is a part, used to offer classes in prisons. Such programs have largely disappeared in the years since President Bill Clinton began denying Pell grants to prisoners and former New York State Governor George Pataki made inmates ineligible for the state's Tuition Assistance Program. (How and whether President Obama's recently announced plan to make community college tuition-free may address this particular issue remains to be seen.)

CUNY's University Faculty Senate Committee on Higher Education in the Prisons has been trying to figure out how to reverse this state of affairs, jump-starting the conversation at CUNY by reaching out to correctional facilities and by trying to learn from private colleges, such as Bard, that have kept their prison-education programs afloat without public money. It seemed as if some progress was being made on this front when New York Governor Andrew Cuomo proposed in February 2014 that the state pay for college classes for inmates again. But, as the *New York Times* reported two months later, the plan was dropped from the final budget because it was too controversial. Those who opposed it didn't want to pay for "Attica University," as one Albany lawmaker termed it, when tuition costs were rising for those who were deemed more deserving. In December 2014, the Obama administration moved to make Pell grants available to people held in juvenile correctional facilities that fall under local and county jurisdictions, but this seems unlikely to receive congressional support for the same reasons that Cuomo's proposal was withdrawn.

This is shortsighted. The Vera Institute of Justice found that prisons cost American taxpayers $39 billion in 2012. In the same year, because of government disinvestment in public higher education, public universities covered 44 percent of their operating expenses with tuition, the highest percentage ever and an increase of 24 percent over the past twenty-five years. What this suggests is that it's time to rethink our priorities when it comes to the penal system and the public higher-education system, and to reconsider how the two are related. With access to college-level courses, prisoners are much less likely to return to the behaviors that landed them in jail in the first place. What's more, they might begin to meet the requirements for enrolling in a public university and navigating the post-release obstacles that scholars like Alexander highlight. Once in college, they would have exposure to the kind of opportunities the honors programs at Kingsborough and other public colleges offer. After that, some of them might even be able to head off to a place like Columbia.

Fernando, however, was back in jail by the time my "Literature and Film" class read Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and viewed Woody Allen's *Sleeper*. I found that the concept of dystopia inherent in the book and movie needed little explanation to many of my students; they already feel that they live in a society in which slogans about universal access and colorblind opportunity are just propaganda. Unfortunately, I don't know what has happened to Fernando since. He disappeared into a system I don't have access to, while I continue to work in a system that tried but failed to embrace him. ■

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Clerical Errors

How Are We Training Our Priests?

Paul Blaschko, Barbara Parsons, Mary Gautier

Paul Blaschko

Any college-aged man entering a Catholic seminary during the ongoing crisis of the priestly sexual-abuse scandals does so with a certain amount of self-consciousness. Alongside predictable questions raised by the decision to embrace a life of celibacy, the seminarian faces widespread doubt about whether the church is capable of providing the formation necessary to produce well-adjusted, sexually healthy priests. Some critics of the church see sexual abuse as the natural result of celibacy, which they regard as a psychologically unnatural way of life. On this view, there is nothing mysterious about the church's failure to provide adequate sexual formation, since the very attempt to form sexually normal celibate men poses an impossible task. The only solution to the problem of priestly sexual abuse would be to drop mandatory celibacy.

But this view is simplistic. For one thing, most sexual abuse is committed by non-celibates, a lot of it within families. For another, the percentage of celibate clergy who abuse tends to mirror the percentage among their non-celibate counterparts in other faiths, as well as among secular professionals. And even if the alleged psychological abnormality of celibacy explains why a particular priest commits abuse, it does nothing to explain the equally or more troubling fact that large numbers of non-abusing priests and bishops have been willing to ignore, or in many cases cover up, the actions of those who did. The critique of celibacy alone cannot explain why priests systematically shirked their moral duty to report such crimes, or why bishops chose to assign and reassign serial child molesters to unsuspecting parishes. It does not account for the systemic nature of the church's failed response to the abuse of children, and this is at least partly what makes these scandals so heinous.

From 2008 through 2010, I was a seminarian in St. Paul, Minneapolis, an archdiocese now entrenched in its own

Seminarians at the Pontifical North American College in Rome

CNS PHOTO / PAUL HARING

abuse scandal. My experience there led me to believe that the problem of priestly sexual abuse is due, at least in part, to the failure of seminaries to provide adequate human and sexual formation to men studying for the priesthood. More specifically, my seminary formation failed to confront the questions surrounding sexual abuse in a candid and psychologically sophisticated way. I realize that my experience is limited, and that it would be unwise to generalize about seminary education from the the operations and culture of one institution. Nonetheless, I feel compelled to tell my story in the hope of calling attention to what might very well be more widespread problems.

At a recruitment event I attended before joining the seminary, the specter of the abuse crisis was addressed by the rector. He was an imposing man, revered by his seminarians, and well known throughout the archdiocese as a direct and forceful preacher. In a speech given in the seminary's chapel, he told us that he didn't want any "perverts" in his seminary, and that the church was done tolerating any form of "sexual deviance" in the priesthood. This got a round of vigorous head nods from the seminarians attending the event with us visitors. The rector went on to warn that if he found any of us unable to live a healthy celibate life in the manner prescribed by the church, he would throw us out on the spot.

The speech was terrifying, but it also inspired a certain amount of confidence. Here was a man with the vision—and the power—to enact change for a priesthood in crisis. When I entered the seminary a few months later, I was optimistic about the formation I would receive. Under the guidance of our rector and his staff, I trusted that my fellow seminarians and I would receive the resources necessary to live healthy and satisfying lives as Catholic priests.

But just a few weeks into my time at the seminary, my confidence began to waver. I recall the day when the first-year seminarians, or "new men" as we were called, gathered in the seminary's spacious basement to attend a workshop on sexual ethics titled "Freedom and Victory." The workshop was run by a psychologist from something called the Theology of the Body Training and Healing Center, together with a blind priest who, we were told during his introduction, had witnessed at least one eucharistic miracle and had had extensive experience with exorcisms. The breakout sessions had titles like "Masturbation: Is it Healthy? Is it Holy?" (you can guess the answer to both questions); and at various points throughout the workshop we were invited to approach the microphone and share stories of sexual pain and healing—"if you feel called by the spirit to do so"—with the sixty or so priests and other seminarians in the room.

The whole thing felt more than a little strange to me, and for the most part I kept my head down, pretending to take notes in the workbook that had been provided. The strangeness culminated with a workshop session devoted to reenacting the "spiritual warfare" that goes on when a young man watches pornography. Each of us was given a nametag with the name of a demon on it. These demons,

AFTER READING "A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS"

At the pond by the condominiums,
the great blue heron
stalks the shallow water,
slow, lugubrious dance
almost beautiful.
Head speared for fish,
disturbing his own reflection,
he hunts along the edges.

One day, he stood, perfectly still,
as if at prayer,
then broke and flew
toward his endless
blue freedom.

A flock of them in flight
astonished Henry and his brother
as they prepared the raft
for their journey home,
strange, fierce wind behind them,
world changed to autumn overnight.

"Now comes good sailing,"
Henry said, death near,
as his sister read to him
his own words about that morning.

—Louis T. Mayeux

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we were told, were the principalities most closely associated with sexual temptation. We were then gathered around the chosen man and told to hiss and curse at him, trying to entice him to "watch pornography" and "masturbate." Afterwards, the priest came around with a coffee tin, collecting the nametags—he had to burn them, he told us, while reciting prayers of exorcism. Demonic influence wasn't something to take lightly.

After the session, I caught up with one of the priests on staff and hesitantly expressed my doubts about the workshop. He reassured me that the formation staff knew exactly what they were doing, and encouraged me to defer to the authority of the workshop leader. Doubts about the spiritual realities associated with temptation were not uncommon, he said; and while temptation to such doubts could be a sign of demonic influence, my increased sensitivity in this area might also signal a spiritual gift, an ability to discern the presence of angels and demons. It would probably be good, the priest told me, to try to develop this gift.

There was something obviously circular about this logic; doubts about explanations involving strange spiritual entities were being explained by the presence of strange spiritual entities. But my attempts to point out this circularity were lost on the formation staff. Obedience and humility were the most important virtues of a parish priest, I was reminded; I was encouraged to pray for an increase in these virtues.

The structure of the seminary I attended, like the structure of the priesthood and the church more generally, emphasizes an almost blind trust in and obedience to those in charge. This, in itself, is no critique: our church's structure is unapologetically hierarchical. But in my seminary experience critical inquiry and systematic self-reflection were generally discouraged, and resistance to a particular practice or mode of explanation was often seen as dissidence and promptly disregarded. So how, in such an institution, can lay people, priests, and bishops hold each other accountable? How can we identify and fix problems when it is never our place to doubt or to question? How can the church grow and flourish when a culture of conformity and deference is the norm, and I would argue, a distortion and degeneration of what a hierarchial institution can be at its best?

The problem, as I've suggested, is systemic. If bishops are working with the kind of overly spiritualized conception of sexuality we were offered, it's no wonder that abuse spreads as it does. If a priest's sexual misconduct is seen *merely* as his inability to resist temptation, why not assign him to another parish in another town? That's what priests and bishops *do*, after all: when people sin, they forgive them their sins, make them pledge to try harder, and send them on their way. The reason that grossly inappropriate actions continued to seem like business as usual for many bishops is precisely because no finer-grained distinctions were available in the area of sexual conduct than those captured by the cat-

egories of "sinful" and "permissible." If my seminary experience is any guide, we are still failing to provide our clergy with the concepts and tools relevant for identifying and addressing sexual abuse.

From time to time at the seminary, this or that fellow seminarian would simply disappear. A guy would be sitting next to you during adoration one morning, and his chair would be empty the next. Usually we were told that our colleague had "discerned out," or had "agreed to leave" for some opaque reason. Always we were told that he had left "in good standing with the seminary," even though most of us would never have thought otherwise.

The day after one such leave-taking, a good friend came into my room before night prayer. "Did you hear what happened?" he asked, referring to the seminarian who was gone. "It was pretty messed up."

Apparently, a few weeks earlier, the seminarian in question had been caught—some said in a trap set by an ex-seminarian—looking for anonymous sex online. A week later, I was told, a priest friend of this seminarian had tried to kill himself by jumping from the choir loft of a church upon learning that the police were on their way to arrest him for alleged child abuse. The seminarian, my friend told me, was back in their diocese now, being questioned by police in connection with the charges.

Whether and how any of these events fit together was unclear at the time. Now, though, the unexplained departures of other seminarians started to take on a different light. I found out that some men had been leaving abruptly because it had come out that they were gay; others had been caught acting inappropriately and were asked to leave. This was disconcerting; suddenly there was no way of determining why a man with whom I had regularly interacted had been removed. Worse, there was no way of knowing whether I myself might have said or done something that could get me dismissed. A priest had warned me once that some of the priests on staff found my close friendship with one of the other seminarians suspect. He suggested that we stop hanging out together. When I told him that neither of us was gay, that we really were just good friends, he shook his head and stood his ground. Now I worried: Was his suspicion enough to get me kicked out?

I found all of this deeply disorienting. The sexual formation that trickled down to us from the staff was presented in spiritual doublespeak, and issues of human sexuality were taboo in the conversations among seminarians. These factors contributed to a "don't ask, don't tell" mentality. If men left or were removed for reasons connected with their sexual formation, it seemed better not to share too much with anyone in the seminary—not even with one's spiritual directors.

In my view, the culture that emerged in this context mirrors the culture that long prevailed among clergy before the abuse scandals came to light—a culture of silence, in which most of those in close contact with abusive clergy are kept

A number of activities were forbidden for allegedly carrying "connotations" of a homosexual subculture—things like gathering in groups to draw or paint. Or wearing shorts. Instead we were encouraged to dress and act "like men."

in ignorance, and justice and accountability are reserved as the prerogatives of those higher up. Not only was it to a seminarian's advantage to be selective about what he shared with others in such a culture of silence; indeed, there was a sense that it was in everyone's best interest to know as little as possible about anyone else's private life.

Nevertheless, several of us thought it would be better to get clarity on some of these issues. During a weekly meeting, we asked a priest on staff if we could start a group to discuss issues of sexual formation—a forum for staff and seminarians, and a resource for those who wanted to better practice the discipline of celibacy. The priest seemed confused by our request. He asked what sorts of things such a group would discuss. Things that young men had to deal with in today's world, we told him; issues like sexual identity, masturbation, and pornography.

"I don't think anyone who masturbates should be in seminary," the priest said. The room went silent. He went on to inform us that the disclosure that any seminarian masturbated or habitually had "impure thoughts" would represent a "serious formation issue." Interpreting this as "possible grounds for dismissal," we dropped the idea and never brought it up again.

The next semester, two more seminarians left without explanation.

There were other things that confused me during my time in the seminary. A number of activities were forbidden for allegedly carrying "connotations" of a homosexual subculture that, we were told, had infected some seminaries in the 1960s and '70s. Things like gathering in groups to draw or paint. Or wearing shorts. Instead we were encouraged to dress and act "like men."

Then there was the problem of women. We were often told that girls at the university where our seminary was located, were more attractive than most, and moreover were fond of dressing immodestly. This was a message repeated at floor meetings, all-seminary gatherings, in private conversation, spiritual direction, and in more than one sermon. In fact, it was a sermon the priests involved in our formation took turns giving—in their own way—at some point each spring. Accordingly, we were encouraged to stay off the main quad, and to approach women only in the company of several of our "brother seminarians." After being caught chatting with a woman from one of my classes, I was approached by an older seminarian who told of priests who had left the priesthood because they had been "seduced" after seemingly innocuous interactions with women. Sexual temptation was often best avoided by avoiding women altogether, he said, and reminded me to "guard my heart."

In general, attitudes toward women, sexuality, and gender issues among the men I studied with in the seminary were alarmingly retrograde. Women were often regarded with suspicion, either because of their potential to lure men away from the priesthood, or because of the perceived threat that demands for gender equality in the church present to a patriarchal institution in crisis.

Let me be clear: I don't think the formation staff at my seminary was intentionally trying to confuse or scare us through its approach to sexual formation. Nor do I think that the formation we received was completely useless. I recently received a magazine from my seminary with pictures of my newly ordained classmates. There are some very good priests among them, men I'm glad to see serving the church in this vital and difficult role. I also know men who have been priests for twenty or thirty years, and who have seemingly led healthy and fulfilling celibate lives.

But if my experience is any indication, the state of priestly formation in American seminaries is still far from ideal. Current practices are failing to provide the next generation of priests with the conceptual resources and independent judgment they will need to recognize and avoid the sorts of problems that allowed the sexual abuse of children to occur. This needs to change. No longer can seminaries afford to ignore awkward questions regarding human and sexual formation. A broader dialogue and, perhaps, an openness to hitherto-untried approaches to discerning whether a candidate possesses the spiritual gift of celibacy, are needed. The way forward is uncertain, but we must try. We can't continue to ignore these issues.

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Barbara Parsons

Amid the near euphoria expressed by so many regarding, as one publication put it, the "Groundbreaking First Year" of Pope Francis, there remains a sobering reality that no exuberance over a "rock star" pope can either hide or transform. As one who has lived through several papacies, I too can rejoice over a Jesuit pope inspired by the thirteenth-century man from Assisi; I can also appreciate the sentiment be-

hind his depiction of the church, in his celebrated 2013 interview in *America*, as "a field hospital after battle," a place whose purpose is "to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful."

At the same time, however, living in the trenches of parish life, I am painfully aware of an ecclesiastical environment that *produces* a good number of those "wounded" people. For despite all the pious talk about how those working in the "field hospital" labor under the direction of the chief physician (God), if the hospital's medical professionals (the ordained) turn out to be either inadequately trained—or even, on occasion, bona fide quacks—then the mortality rate among the wounded in this hospital will most likely continue to rise.

Like Paul Blaschko, I realize that my parish experience is but one instance of the possible difficulties that newly ordained priests and their parishioners face when seminary formation is poorly designed or misguided. Still, my own experience does offer a concrete example of how not to run a parish. What follows is, in my humble opinion, a brief history of the unraveling of a community.

In the past four years the city of twelve thousand where I have lived for nearly five decades has had four new priests assigned to its two Catholic parishes. Our first priests arrived in July 2010. Within a few months, two letters had already been written about them. One was an open letter, signed by seventeen parishioners, expressing concern about the highhanded manner in which various changes (such as ending the practice of having girl altar servers and lay eucharistic ministers) were being made or proposed, with little or no consultation with the laity. The other letter, signed by 70 percent of the families with children in the elementary school that had been flourishing in one of the parishes for seventy-five years, stated flatly that "the less involvement of our priests with the school, the better."

By October about a third of the fourteen hundred families of the combined parishes had signed a petition requesting our bishop to remove the priests. The bishop's response was a rebuke, couched in citations from canon law and threatening to put us all under interdict. Meanwhile, a number of us had been writing directly to the priests in the hope that they might understand the reasons for parishioner discontent. One reason was the priests' seeming lack of interest in Catholic social doctrine. Such letters frequently went unanswered and unacknowledged. By the end of the 2012 school year, the Catholic school had to close, a consequence of many parents withdrawing their children and/or financial support. An exodus of people from both parishes had begun in the previous year, and this depletion has drained treasuries, in both parishes, that a few years ago were financially solvent.

Unlike many friends who have moved on to other Catholic churches—or Protestant ones, or none at all—I re-

mained in our church, attending Sunday liturgies through the end of my pastoral council term last May. But my sense of connection with the parish has become so tenuous that I find myself pondering a new challenge: In what locale should I plan my funeral? At my age, eighty-one, that's not an idle question. And I've already made life-changing decisions. The chief one was ending my attendance at daily Mass—a practice I'd begun when I was nineteen and entering my first Catholic school. After having experienced the blessings over many decades of being acquainted with priests who gave inspiring and scripturally well-grounded sermons, I found I could not endure one more day of what I can only call spiritual assault.

What do I mean by "spiritual assault"? Last year a fellow parishioner and I were conversing with one of our priests, a man in his forties; the topic was the importance of an appeal to Scripture for understanding the meaning of "church," and the priest declared: "I hate the word 'interpretation.'" A few minutes later, he added: "I hate the word 'conscience.'" And our other priest, who is in his thirties, has proclaimed, in three respective sermons: "Men should govern women"; "You cannot love yourself"; and "The Catholic Church has always supported science." The same man, moreover, informed all of us non-ordained folks at a pastoral council meeting that when a priest dies and enters heaven, "he goes to a higher place in heaven than laity do." Finally, at the beginning of Lent both priests signed a letter, distributed in both parishes, advising us "to remember that all suffering is a gift from God."

Moral nonsense, scriptural distortion, historical inaccuracy, and theological make-believe: this is what I mean by spiritual assault. (God help the people who get a barrage of all four at once!) It is the price we pay when ecclesiastical leadership forsakes both knowledge and wisdom. Even for Catholics who welcome a "leaner" church such a price would seem excessive. To return to Pope Francis's notion of the church as a "field hospital," can the "wounded" in its care really expect to be healed by doctors whose training peaked with the employment of leeches?

That metaphor may seem shocking, but it highlights one of the more troubling issues facing our church today—namely, that some of the very people positioned to offer advice on how to train the field hospital's practitioners may well be oblivious to why casualties keep increasing. Take, for example, Monsignor Stephen J. Rossetti, a clinical associate professor at the Catholic University of America, author of *Why Priests Are Happy: A Study of the Psychological and Spiritual Health of Priests*, and presenter in June 2013 at an international symposium in Quebec on "The Training of Priests Today." In "The First Five Years," an article in *America* based on his Quebec presentation, Rossetti reports that his research "suggests that young priests today are happier, more optimistic about the priesthood, accepting of Catholic teaching, and personally committed to priestly celibacy than the cohort before them."

"Accepting of Catholic teaching" is surely the pivotal phrase. What does Rossetti mean by it? He tips his hand when he commends the quality of seminary education today, praising seminary faculties for being "well trained…and faithful to the church." But Pius XII's 1943 encyclical on how to interpret the Bible, "On Promoting Biblical Studies" (*Divino afflante spiritu*)—the Magna Carta of Catholic scriptural scholarship—should give pause to anyone inclined to view "accepting of Catholic teaching" as an unqualified good. The question is, *which* Catholic teaching? The kind that properly applies to Scripture the "interpretive methods" embraced by Pius XII's encyclical, methods further affirmed in 1965 by the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei verbum*)—or the kind that "hates interpretation" and abuses Scripture?

This question sheds light on the tendency of some Catholics—including members of the magisterium—to use Scripture passages, without regard to their contexts, to justify current "Catholic teaching," as though such teaching were what the biblical authors clearly intended. Recently, Margaret Nutting Ralph published an exposition of this kind of distortion of the Catholic tradition in *Why the Catholic Church Must Change: A Necessary Conversation*. If I thought "happy" young priests might encounter Ralph's kind of discourse (or listen to it if they did), I would be more hopeful about the capacity of these men to be effective healers in the field hospital. Young priests encouraged to study Ralph's theological reflections might well themselves escape the crippling affliction of clericalism, a key symptom of which Ralph identifies as "the ordained's resistance to learning from the non-ordained."

One point Rossetti stresses makes me less than sanguine, though, about the church's immediate future. I'm referring to his call for "a masculine spirituality" as one of the "new requirements in priestly formation and support." Assuring his readers that he is "not referring to something that is the sole province of men," Rossetti proceeds to identify several "traits" that he argues "in this increasingly secular age… are becoming more essential for priests"—traits "like 'willing to take a stand,' 'defends own beliefs,' 'willing to take risks,' 'assertive,' and 'acts as a leader.'"

The problem with such "traits," however, is that besides being virtue-neutral, they are compatible with a personality that is authoritarian and intransigent. Does that fact not point to the problem of emphasizing priestly "leadership" in today's church without acknowledging that many among the Catholic laity will no longer accept what theologian Paul Lakeland calls "the condition of passivity, if not infantilization, to which they had become inured...[in] previous centuries"?

In my view, young priests would be better served by being deeply grounded in the virtues of faith, hope, and love than in the "leadership" of so-called masculine spirituality. To

those theological virtues I would add the cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. Weaving these seven fundamental virtues into the formation of priests would provide, I submit, not only the kind of spiritual depth called for in the life of any Christian, but also the best assurance that those "assigned…to love and nourish [our] faith" (Rossetti's words) would be equipped to do so.

Catholics are looking for a church grounded in Scripture and animated by mutual respect and cooperation, one in which baptism, not ordination, has preeminence. Theologian Elizabeth Johnson, in her magisterial 2005 book, *Friends of God and Prophets*, contrasts the "vastly distinct" relationships exhibited in a *community of friends* characterized by "mutuality and reciprocity" with those in a *patriarchal system* characterized by the unequal exercise of power. It is time for Catholics to learn how to practice a kind of leadership that encourages both ourselves and others in the becoming of friends of God and prophets. And if that sounds fanciful, it is perhaps a measure of how far we've drifted from a too-long neglected understanding of church as a community of equals, variously gifted, and called by the Spirit of Christ for the transformation of the world.

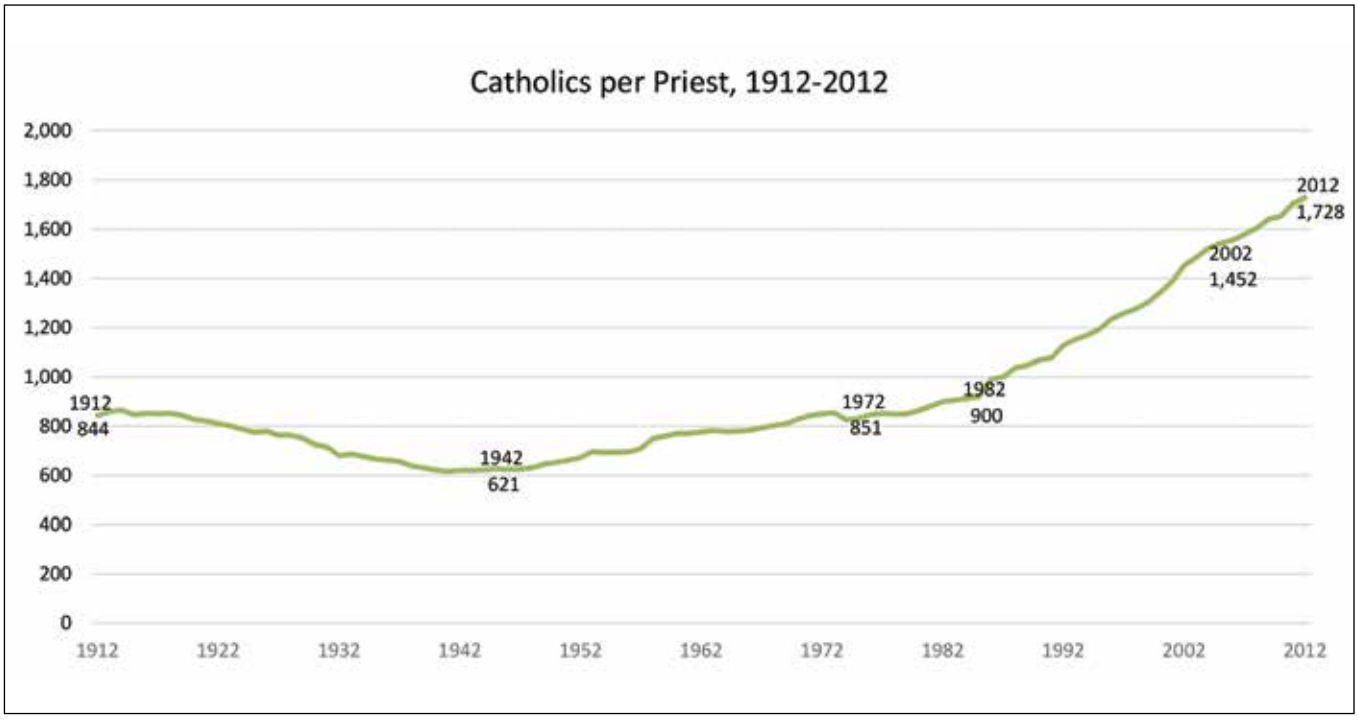
Barbara Parsons *is professor emerita of philosophy at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, where she helped found its Social & Environmental Justice Program.*

Mary Gautier

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) has been collecting data about priestly formation for fifty years and therefore is in something of a privileged position when it comes to examining trends over time and their implications for priestly ministry today.

As the anecdotal reflections by Paul Blaschko and Barbara Parsons suggest, seminaries now find themselves between a rock and a hard place for several reasons. The first factor is a dramatic decline in the number of priests over the past forty years and a corresponding decline in the number of ordinations. The total number of priests in the United States reached a peak in the late 1960s, and has been decreasing steadily since then. The number of men being ordained each year is only about a third of the number needed to replace priests who are retiring, dying, or leaving. In fact, in the United States more priests die each year than are ordained. This fact puts additional pressure on seminaries to do their very best to retain seminarians.

At the same time, there are more Catholics in the United States today than at any time in the nation's history. Unlike previous generations, however, these Catholics no longer live where their grandparents and great-grandparents first



Source: The Official Catholic Directory

settled. The demographic and geographic changes have resulted in massive closures of underutilized parishes in the urban core of cities in the Northeast and the Upper Midwest, like those most recently announced in the Archdiocese of New York.

In the South and West, where many Catholics have moved, much larger parishes are being built in the suburbs of major cities. So there are now more Catholics but fewer priests available to staff the large, complex parishes that remain. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the number of Catholic parishes has declined by 7.1 percent—from more than 19,000 in 2000 to fewer than 17,800 in 2010, almost the same number of parishes as in 1965. The national average of registered Catholics per parish is 3,500—an increase of 17 percent from 2000. Many dioceses have been trying to make up for the declining number of priests by bringing in priests from other countries to minister in parishes in the United States. The number of "international priests" has more than doubled over the past fifteen years, from about 3,500 in 1999 to close to 7,000 today. These priests come from India, the Philippines, Nigeria, Mexico, and other countries, and commit to serve in U.S. parishes so that bishops do not have to close or merge existing parishes.

Seminaries have four to five years of post-college priestly formation to train men to be spiritual and pastoral leaders of the small "corporations" that parishes have now become. This is a tall order and not one that seminaries traditionally were set up to handle.

Another factor that is influencing seminaries and priestly formation is the changing ages and experience of seminarians. In the 1970s, young men typically started their training in college (or even high school) seminaries followed by four years of theology. Most were ordained in their mid-twenties. Today, the average age at ordination is mid-thirties. More than half of contemporary seminarians have already completed college, and more than half also have full-time work experience. Some have degrees in chemistry, engineering, medicine, law, and other professional fields as well as years pursuing other occupations. These men bring varied experiences and expectations with them into the seminary, which is both a blessing and a challenge. Being in positions of responsibility and decision-making in secular careers does not necessarily provide you with the skills and training needed to be a good priest. Years of formation are still necessary.

All theologates (graduate-level seminaries) require that candidates who did not attend a college seminary attain an undergraduate degree in philosophy or complete a two-year pretheology program in philosophy. This is followed by four years of graduate training in theology, typically requiring achieving competence in Spanish as well. American seminaries all have field placement programs, which usually means summer work in parishes but may also include time in hospitals, prisons, or schools. Many seminaries also require a year in a ministerial setting under the supervision of a mentoring pastor. By the time of ordination, these men have gone through a rigorous, extended period of academic, spiritual, pastoral, and human formation.

Nevertheless, the shortage of priests means that supervised time in a pastoral setting (such as serving as an associate priest in a parish with a resident pastor) is sometimes abbreviated or even eliminated.

Over the past forty years, seminary formation has evolved under the guidance of Pope John Paul II's *Pastores dabo vobis* (1992). As a consequence, there were major revisions in formation in the 1980s and 1990s (see *The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States, 1950–2010*, available at the USCCB's website). To an unprecedented degree, seminary programs formalized and structured human formation, including formation in celibacy. The *Program for Priestly Formation*, first published by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1971 and revised five times since, outlines this process of reform. Candidates for the priesthood now undergo extensive psychological testing and screening. Every seminary has a formal program for teaching and forming men in celibate chastity and moral behavior. I cannot attest to the formation in celibate chastity that Paul Blaschko received, but I do know that CARA has recently been commissioned to survey and evaluate current seminary formation programs with an eye for areas where improvements can be made.

Once ordained, priests are typically placed in a parish as an associate, under the mentorship of an experienced pastor. In the 1960s and '70s it was not uncommon for associate pastors to chafe under the expectation that it might take twenty-five years before getting a parish of their own. Today, given the shortage of priests, many of the newly ordained find themselves in charge of one or more parishes after serving only briefly as an associate pastor. Where the shortage of priests is particularly severe, some are placed by themselves as the administrator of a parish, under the supervision of a pastor in another parish. These arrangements place a tremendous amount of responsibility on a newly ordained priest and not all of them are equipped to handle this well. Horror stories abound, such as those related by Barbara Parsons.

Generational differences are very likely a contributing factor in some of the parish dynamics alluded to by Parsons. Just as Bing Crosby's young Fr. O'Malley in *Going My Way* shocked and appalled his pastor by his breezy pastoral style and willingness to engage the neighborhood toughs, the youngest and least experienced of the newly ordained sometimes clash with long-standing parishioners and parish staffs. Research shows, for example, that priests in their thirties and forties are significantly more likely than older priests to score higher on the "cultic model" scale, which attempts to differentiate between those with more "progressive" ecclesiologies and those with more "traditionalist" expectations (see *Same Call, Different Men: The Evolution of the Priesthood since Vatican II*). Priests who formed their ministerial identity during and just after Vatican II tend to embrace the "servant-leader" model of leadership. Younger men, influenced by the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, are more likely to emphasize the role of the priest as a "man set apart." Predictably enough, differences in perspective between younger priests and older parishioners, combined with a lack of experience and pastoral sensitivity, sometimes result in misunderstandings, miscommunication, and even badly executed decisions.

Despite these conflicts and challenges, nine in ten Catholics believe that, on the whole, parish priests do a good job (see *American Catholics in Transition*). The Catholic priesthood is a difficult calling, with low pay, long hours, and often little professional or personal support beyond the seminary. Nevertheless, there are some thirty-five hundred men in theologates now preparing for this life. About five hundred of them are ordained each year, and nearly all say they are happy with their life as a priest, even after many years of ministry. Priestly formation is still far from ideal, but to meet the needs of an ever-changing church seminaries are continually revising curricula and formation programs in consultation with vocation directors, faculty, and other experts. Progress is being made. ■

Mary Gautier *is senior research associate at the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.*

Rand Richards Cooper

Mawkish & Hawkish

'AMERICAN SNIPER'

Moviegoers are up in arms about a film of arms—*American Sniper*, Clint Eastwood's tense account of the bloody saga of Chris Kyle, the Navy Seal who, during four tours of duty in Iraq, notched more kills than any sniper in U.S. military history. Some critics have trashed the film as warmongering, racist, right-wing propaganda. Amy Nicholson in the *L.A. Times* calls it "a rah-rah war-on-terror fantasy." On *Vox*, Amanda Taub deems it "recruitment propaganda" and "a Hezbollah martyr video for the Fox News set." Even an approving review, by the *New York Times*'s A. O. Scott, asserts that the film "reaffirms Mr. Eastwood's commitment to the themes of vengeance and justice in a fallen world...[where] violence is a moral necessity," and that it represents "an expression of nostalgia for [George W. Bush's] Manichaean approach to foreign policy."

Bradley Cooper in American Sniper

I'm guessing this vehemence has surprised Eastwood, who set out to make a film of some nuance. And in fact, you can pick out a number of scenes in *Sniper* that challenge received notions of patriotism and a soldier's duty. Take the decision made by Kyle (Bradley Cooper) to return to Iraq again and again, even when his wife Taya (Sienna Miller), at home with two little children, begs him not to. When he insists that he's "doing this for my country," she retorts, "You're doing this for *yourself*"—a soldier following the siren call of battle, even at the cost of abandoning his family. In another crucial scene, a fellow Seal confesses to Kyle his doubts about the war; later, that soldier is killed, and at his funeral his grieving mother reads a letter that he wrote, highly critical of the invasion. Driving home from the cemetery, Kyle's wife asks him what he thinks. "That letter killed Mark," Kyle says tersely; "he let go, and he paid the price for it." It's the soldier's code as straitjacket, binding Kyle in a patriotism that borders on denial.

The problem is that these antiwar moments are allowed into the film the way a liberal is allowed onto Fox News—to state a mildly dissenting case before being overwhelmed by the other panelists. *Sniper* puts war critiques forward, only to blow them away with fusillades of patriotic invective. To begin with, though the doubting soldier alludes to "evil on both sides," the only evil we see is the evil committed by the "savages," Iraqi insurgents who torture hostages, keep shelves of dismembered body parts, and brutally murder little children in front of their parents. Their wantonness is a given, while the killing done by Americans is presented as a tragic necessity. When Kyle is forced to shoot a young boy, it is only because the boy is about to hurl an improvised bomb to kill the squad of American soldiers Kyle is protecting. And when Kyle pulls the trigger, we see the wound it makes in his humanity.

Eastwood has described *Sniper* as apolitical, insisting in one interview that "there's no political aspect there other than the fact that a lot of things happen in war zones." Yet in simplifying the background to the Iraq war in order to highlight the individual story, he and his scriptwriter, Jason Hall, have in fact staked out a political position. Kyle is spurred to enlist by the embassy bombings in East Africa; and his gung-ho departure for Iraq occurs shortly after he and Taya look on in horror at the scenes of 9/11 on the news. Linking the war in Iraq—and Kyle's patriotic avidity to fight in it—to the embassy bombings and 9/11 both ratifies and bolsters the error of association that drove the war: namely, that invading Iraq was necessitated by Al Qaeda's attacks. In this sense the film commits a gross misrepresentation of history—the same one that continues to hold sway in the United States—and does us a civic disservice.

Clint Eastwood made his name as an avatar of violence, the angel of vengeance in such westerns as *High Plains Drifter* and *Hang 'Em High*. In the 1970s, the Dirty Harry movies brought the Man With No Name to the streets of the city in the figure of Harry Callahan, a strong silent man wielding lethal righteousness to clean up an urban world corrupted by liberal permissiveness. Later in his career, both as actor and director, Eastwood sought to revise this motif. The effort peaked with *Unforgiven* (1992), where dishing out

WARNER BROS. PICTURES

lethal vengeance occasioned not exultation but degradation and shame, and continued with such minor entertainments as *True Crime* and *Blood Work*, which addressed the recipients of violence and their suffering. *Mystic River* (2003) was a film haunted by the silence of the victim and the ever-unfolding legacy of male violence, themes Eastwood continued in subsequent films, notably *Changeling* (2008).

American Sniper takes an ambiguous position in this evolution. One can view the film as a PTSD chronicle, since it explores the trauma and the stress that disorder a soldier upon his return from war. But what Eastwood is really up to, finally, is romanticizing the code of the warrior, a task he performs with powerful sentimentality and symbolism. The real Chris Kyle survived his four tours and returned to the United States only to be killed by a troubled vet he set out to counsel, and Eastwood closes his film with footage of Kyle's actual funeral: a motorcade, followed by a ceremony in the Dallas Cowboys stadium. In the end, whatever doubts the film may have raised about the merits of the Iraq war melt away into the American pageantry of the funeral—flags, flowers, football—and the prospect of grieving Navy Seals pounding gleaming gold trident pins into the wooden casket in a ritual of brotherhood.

This solemn pageantry is very much a piece of who we have become in the post-9/11 era. Kyle and Taya's decision to marry, made immediately after watching the World Trade Center attacks, places their relationship in the tradition of wartime romance, where the pressure of impending battle both sharpens and hastens the commitment of marriage. But more significantly, it also sacralizes the attacks; the scene in which the couple console each other while watching the towers fall emanates a holy quality, its dire implications blending weirdly with the sacrament of marriage and configuring military service as a sacred responsibility.

Whether Eastwood admits it or not, this sacralizing impulse discloses a political agenda. American national self-understanding after WWII followed a long arc of disenchantment, with Vietnam as the crucial turning point. As historian Christian Appy notes in his new book, *American Reckoning*, Vietnam "exposed American exceptionalism as a dangerous myth" and threw into doubt "the once widely held faith that [this] country is the greatest force for good in the world." In the aftermath, the political right undertook what Appy calls "a restoration project," whose goal was "to rebuild everything they thought the war had destroyed—American power, pride, prestige, and patriotism." It was a project boosted by Reagan and aided immensely by the attacks of September 11.

It's hard not to see *American Sniper* as little more than another tool in this effort of restoration. The film is awash in patriotic spirit; even its notes of lamentation are sounded in a patriotic register. As Appy penetratingly observes, our attempts to reckon with Vietnam ultimately cast the war as an American tragedy and crucible of American suffering. "The focus was on healing, not history," he writes, a focus that "encouraged citizens to honor military veterans without debating the merits or meaning of the wars they fought." This is precisely the problem with *American Sniper*, and the reason the film has provoked such controversy. To the left, Eastwood's chronicle of American hurt and healing is morally grotesque, since it evokes the toll the war took on our soldiers while conveying no inkling of the catastrophe it visited upon the Iraqis. To the right, meanwhile, such critiques outrageously besmirch patriotism. Are critics of Eastwood's film implying that we are the savages? *American Sniper* reminds us that we're still fighting Vietnam among ourselves.

Should I mention that it's also a pretty bad movie? Herky-jerky storytelling, with an entire story arc (Kyle's work with wounded vets) crammed into five minutes at the end; the duel of our Good Sniper vs. the equally talented Iraqi Bad Sniper, turning a war into a sports face-off; crassly sentimental echoings of mythic father-son moments, and on and on. In places the film is hackneyed and obvious. Granting it an Oscar nomination for Best Picture seems itself an act of deference to heroism in arms.

In retrospect we see that during the Vietnam era, the political critique of the war overwhelmed our instinct—and our obligation—to honor soldiers for their duty. Today we have swung in the opposite direction, and refrains of "thank you for your service to our country" all but obliterate the political critique. Confecting the mawkish and the hawkish, *American Sniper* extols a worship of duty, sacrifice, and honor, inviting us into the cult of the warrior. Nothing remains of the sense of absurdity, or farce, or skepticism, or outrage—any of the sentiments that can and should be raised against military policies gone terribly wrong. Bradley Cooper does a valiant acting job, but he's just a grunt in the film's trenches. In moviemaking, as in war, the fault lies with those who write the script and direct its execution. ■

Andrew Bacevich

Preparing to be Unprepared

No Man's Land
Preparing for War and Peace in Post-9/11 America
Elizabeth D. Samet
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $25, 223 pp.

At the West Point I attended well back into the previous millennium, Elizabeth Samet would have constituted a subversive presence on the academy faculty. Of course, in those days she would never have received an appointment to teach cadets, being doubly disqualified as a civilian and a woman.

Back then, with an all-male corps of cadets taught exclusively by active-duty officers, the academic curriculum was narrow and highly prescriptive. Encouraging inquiry took a back seat to answering questions, free thinking to recitation. "Speck" and "dump" were colloquialisms commonly used to define the learning process. A classmate recently told me that seeing the movie *Whiplash*, with its sadistic music teacher portrayed by J. K. Simmons, reminded him of our days at West Point. An overstatement, but I got the point.

That was back in the 1960s. Since then, things have opened up some and for today's cadets having a teacher with Samet's nurturing qualities—the very inverse of the J. K. Simmons character—must surely rank among the benefits. Yet my guess is that as a professor of English she remains a subversive. Her quiet insistence that literature—not mathematics, engineering, political science, or beating Navy in football—offers the proper grounding for the aspiring military professional must surely rankle those devoted to tending the flame of tradition.

Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel is welcomed with an honor cordon at West Point.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

This book, a sequel to the author's well-regarded *Soldier's Heart* (2007), is an amalgam of memoir and meditation. As memoir, it ruminates on Samet's experiences teaching cadets in an era of seemingly perpetual conflict. That temporal space defines the no man's land to which the title refers, "a peculiar world, full of hazard, doubt, and deceit."

When Samet's students graduate, they become "war commuters," sent to wage wars that begin, slacken, escalate, and may seem to end, but then resume, their defining feature an absence of definition. She cares deeply about the fate of these young men and women. "The soldiers I know," she writes, "form the core of my emotional life." None of those soldiers return home unaffected by their experiences. Some simply do not return.

As meditation, *No Man's Land* has a meandering, discursive quality. But the careful reader will discern two specific themes. Samet has bones to pick, one with American society, a second with the Army itself. Both, she believes, have failed the former students to whom she remains devoted.

We, the people, pretend to care about soldiers but actually don't, Samet believes. She derides the "theater of gratitude" with its "histrionic gestures" intended to convey a collective sense of appreciation. The phrase "Thank you for your service" becomes "a mantra of atonement," absolving the speaker of responsibility. "The objects of a public's simultaneously overheated and fleeting regard," soldiers find upon closer examination that this regard is mighty thin on substance. Others before Samet have made this point, but seldom with such eloquence and carefully modulated anger.

Her second theme strikes me as more

original and therefore more important. The unbloodied professor with her fancy Ivy League degrees presumes to suggest that the army doesn't understand war and is therefore clueless about how to prepare young people for the responsibilities of officership. At first glance, this seems pretty brash. But given the Army's rather fitful performance of late, she just might be on to something.

The essence of Samet's argument runs like this: War is never, ever what you expect it to be; every instance of war offers its own unique form of chaos. Here Samet quotes the journalist A. J. Liebling to great effect. Regarding a collection of his reporting on World War II, Liebling observed: "I have been advised to write an epilogue to this book to 'give it unity'...but I find this difficult, because war, unlike drama, has no unities, classical or otherwise." To imagine, therefore, that war can be tamed or controlled or, worse still, reduced to a formula is a vast delusion.

By extension, to assume that inculcating an identifiable set of attitudes, habits, and skills provides an adequate preparation for war is to do a tremendous disservice to those sent to fight, especially in positions of leadership. Yet that very assumption constitutes West Point's abiding raison d'être.

Samet offers a contrary view, one corroborated by writers such as Tolstoy and Clausewitz whom she cites approvingly. That view posits that among the many perquisites for successful wartime leadership a capacity for creativity ranks near the top, with the demand for creativity increasing as responsibilities become greater.

Training does not inculcate creativity. Its whole purpose is to enforce conformity, binding rather than liberating. At West Point (along with the Army as a whole), as Samet correctly observes, training has acquired a "ritual, almost sacral dimension." If you're not fighting, you ought to be training. Anything else and you're wasting your time. In this context, what the army calls TTP—tactics, techniques, and procedures—has achieved a status akin to that of a holy trinity.

That the American troops sent to Iraq and Afghanistan were well-trained, as they indubitably were, represents a non-trivial achievement. Yet unanticipated challenges caught the officers charged with leading those troops completely by surprise. Over the course of the past decade and more, efforts to respond to those challenges have fallen woefully short. "What seems most sorely lacking," Samet writes, "are imaginations bold enough to anticipate a future that may look nothing like the past or remarkably like some forgotten past." Imagination holds the key, plus "the need to prepare to be unprepared so you can draw on what you really need when you need it." As a pointed and pithy description of the essential flaws of contemporary American military leadership, that's about as good as it gets.

Samet dares to proffer a solution: increased emphasis in officer development programs at West Point and elsewhere on the study of literature, broadly defined to include not only poetry, fiction, and drama, but also movies and history. Within this realm, she contends, lies the possibility of fostering creativity. In effect, Samet suggests a second trinity, not to supplant but to complement the first. Call it SSP—Shakespeare, Simenon, and Plutarch—those figures merely suggestive of the broad range of works she believes have something to teach about war, leadership, and, not so incidentally, what it means to be human.

Coming from an English professor, Samet's critique is unlikely to garner serious attention either from the hierarchy at West Point or in the military as a whole. Samet herself knows that. In such quarters, she writes, "the prospect of unleashing the forces of the imagination seems more intimidating...than unleashing massive firepower." Sadly, she's probably right. And that's too bad. ■

Andrew J. Bacevich, *professor emeritus of history and international relations at Boston University, is writing a history of America's war for the greater Middle East.*

Paul K. Johnston

Zen at Auschwitz

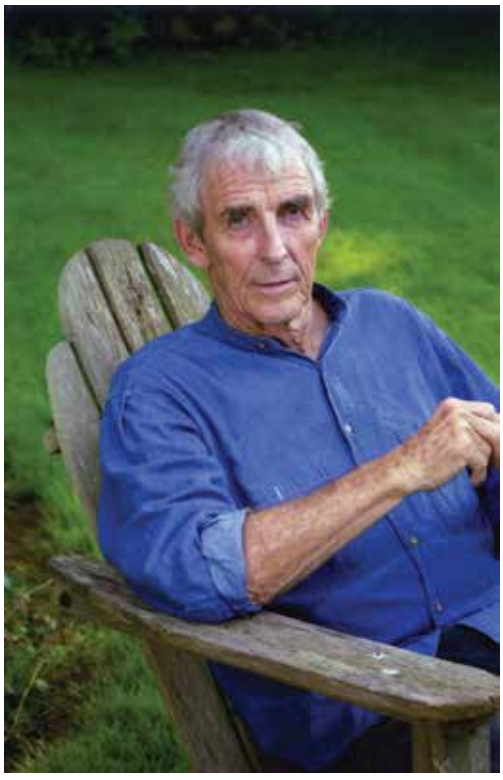
In Paradise

Peter Matthiessen
Riverhead Books, $27.95, 246 pp.

On the dust jacket of *In Paradise* is a photograph of forking railroad tracks that disappear into a sooty fog. Ahead, and unseen, are the ramps where Jews and others destined for the ovens of Auschwitz were off-loaded. To this bleak place Peter Matthiessen, along with more than a hundred others of various nationalities and faiths, came in 1996 to meditate, pray, and bear witness to the atrocity that had taken place there. *In Paradise*, Matthiessen's final book, is his meditation on this experience. Matthiessen, who died last year, was among the most spiritual of the American writers born between the two world wars, his writing often reflecting the teachings of Buddhism. But are spiritual epiphanies proper, or even possible, in a death camp?

The setting of *In Paradise* is in some ways a significant departure for Matthiessen, whose stories often take place in the disappearing natural world. *In Paradise* travels to the heart of the modern state, to the hard, lifeless concrete out of which were built the windowless walls and ceilings and floors of the crematorium, as well as the blockhouses and mess halls of the SS. On one wall of the camp a child has scrawled the words "No butterflies live here."

The main character of the novel, Clements Olin, is a stand-in for Matthiessen. An American professor of twentieth-century European literature, Olin joins the gathering at Auschwitz only because it allows him to pursue interests of his own. Only slowly is he drawn into the activities of the retreat, as aggrieved Jews confront guilt-ridden Christians, while Buddhists look on and secularists blandly repeat familiar points borrowed from anthropology, psychology, and sociology, as they struggle to explain to themselves how such a thing could ever have happened. Two European writers are particularly important to Olin: Tadeusz Borowski, a Polish survivor of the death camps at Auschwitz and Dachau who wrote the disturbingly sardonic *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* before committing suicide in 1951 at the age of twenty-eight; and Anna Akhmatova, the Russian poet who lived through the terrors and stark privations of the Russian Revolution and the Stalinist state in her native St. Petersburg. These two writers are important to Matthiessen as well. *In Paradise* aspires to Borowski's refusal of sentimentality and to Akhmatova's continued discovery of life and



Peter Matthiessen

RIVERHEAD BOOKS

joy amid the most terrible conditions. Both aspirations end up leading the book astray.

The dangers of dishonest sentimentality notwithstanding, any response to the Shoah that refuses to engage the reader's sympathies ends up perpetuating a dehumanized worldview that made such atrocities possible in the first place. The error, then, is not that *In Paradise* does finally make an appeal to the reader's heart, but that most of the book tries so hard not to. The spiritual failure of *In Paradise*—its failure to achieve Akhmatovian joy—is another matter. The book's finest spiritual moments come in passages that describe Jewish practice—Kaddish and shofar, Old Testament laments and hopes—but these moments are few. More time is given to the ineffectual spiritual efforts of the Christian participants, particularly two novice nuns and the priest supervising them. The Buddhists are mostly relegated to the sidelines, given less prominence than even the secularists. Still, the spiritual epiphany Matthiessen wishes to communicate reflects his Buddhism, and it comes at the expense of the real-life retreat's ecumenism. The novel's moral message, conveyed by its deliberately paradoxical title, is both smugly superior to Catholicism (Protestant Christianity is scarcely present) and dismissive of Judaism. Speaking to one of the nuns, Olin quotes her namesake, St. Catherine of Siena: "All the way to heaven is heaven." He then shifts, more darkly, to the moment on the Cross when Christ says to the good thief, in reply to his request that Christ take him to paradise, "Thou shalt be with me this day in paradise." Christian readers, who know that Christ himself does not go directly to paradise, are challenged to consider in what sense the good thief will spend that day both on the cross and "in paradise." But Olin seems to think the paradox isn't sufficiently conveyed by the Gospel account, and so he substitutes a gnostic version in which Christ says "No, friend, we are in paradise right now." Matthiessen's fictional nun only stares dumbly as Olin explains, "No hope of heaven, no Trinity, no Resurrection. All creation right here right now." The nun only replies, "This not our idea of things," and walks away.

But Matthiessen must have known that a better Catholic response is available. The apocryphal "no" transforms Christ's words into something like a Buddhist koan on the necessity of transcending worldly suffering through detachment rather than hope. Nearly fifty years ago, Thomas Merton probed more deeply into the differing Catholic and Buddhist responses to this very passage of Scripture. Meditating on Christ's paradoxical reply to the good thief, Merton wrote in *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (1968), "Paradise is not 'heaven.' Paradise is a state, or indeed a place, on earth. Paradise belongs more properly to the present than to the future life." At the center of Buddhist meditation, Merton observed, is nothingness. At the center of the Catholic mystic's medi-

tation, by contrast, is the presence of Christ. This presence does not replace heaven or the hope of heaven; it is heaven's "antechamber." Merton thus affirmed St. Catherine: all the way to heaven is heaven. The believer depends on the presence of God as she moves toward her ultimate goal.

But both versions of paradise, the Buddhist and the Catholic, may sound extraordinarily offensive in the context of Auschwitz. Should the millions who suffered and died in the death camps have realized that they were nevertheless in paradise because suffering is only the product of attachment to the world, as Buddhism teaches? Or should they have realized they were in paradise because Christ was with them? Maybe Matthiessen is thinking not of those who suffered in the death camps, but of his fellow retreatants and, by extension, his readers. How are we to live in a world where something as terrible as the Shoah has taken place? Though the book's title comes from the exchange between Olin and Catherine, its spiritual epiphany appears in a long section titled "Dancing at Auschwitz," in which a number of the retreatants do just that. This is supposed to be the moment of Akhmatovian joy—a joy, which in the words of the book's epigram from Akhmatova, "is, and always has been, wild in our breasts." I don't know whether such a dance actually took place at the nonfictional retreat, but the fictional scene is not convincing, and for the novel to work, it needs to be. Much better, and much more in keeping with the author's gifts, is a small moment at the site of the crematorium when Olin comes upon "heart-shaped prints of a small deer [that] traverse new snow on the tilted slabs of collapsed concrete." Unlike the dance, this seems entirely real, whether Matthiessen borrowed it from his journal or imagined it. This is a true Akhmatovian moment.

But it's not enough. The railroad tracks on the book's dust jacket ask for something more than moments of spiritual transcendence. They extend into an ominous, unseen future, and any spiritual response to what they represent must address the future, not just the past or the present. Both Peter Matthiessen and Thomas Merton offered their resistance to these steel rails by the lives they chose to live—Matthiessen by traveling to those places the modern world has not yet overwhelmed, Merton by traveling to just one such place in rural Kentucky and, for the most part, staying there. But the world of Auschwitz, embalmed in concrete, where human beings were tattooed with numbers and transformed into things, challenges us to greater acts of resistance. It requires us to remember—to insist—that the world is God's creation and not our own, and that all people, including those unlike ourselves, are created in the image of God. They are never just things. We have forgotten this before; without vigilance, we could forget it again. ■

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John Schwenkler

Choosing a New Self

Transformative Experience
L. A. Paul
Oxford University Press, $27.95, 189 pp.

In a well-known passage from his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke discusses a question that was posed to him by the Irish politician William Molyneux: Suppose, Molyneux writes, that a man was born blind, and learned to identify the shapes of things through touch. Later in his life, the man's sight is restored. Will the man be able to recognize by sight the shapes he had previously known by touching them?

Molyneux's question was meant to invite reflection on the similarities and differences in how the world is perceived through different senses. (He and Locke both thought the answer would be No: the way a shape looks when you see it is too different from how it "appears" to touch for the newly sighted man to recognize immediately the shapes he saw.) But it also invites us to reflect more broadly on the nature of the senses and their place in our lives. *What would it be like* to have been blind from birth, and then suddenly be able to see? If you were Molyneux's blind man, and had the opportunity to have your sight restored, is this something you would choose to do?

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L. A. Paul

It's tempting to think that the answers to these questions are obvious. *Of course* it would be good, if you were blind, to be made to see! Think of all the things—colors, distant objects, subtleties of gesture and facial expression—you'd now be able to perceive. Think of how much richer your daily experience would become.

But in fact things are not this simple. For one thing, the results of surgery to restore a person's sight are widely variable, and sometimes troubling or disappointing to the newly sighted person. (For an illustration of this, see Oliver Sacks's description of his patient Virgil in the essay "To See or Not to See," and the dramatic rendering of this story in Brian Friel's play *Molly Sweeney*.) Moreover, even a successful transition from blindness to sight isn't like the lights turning on in a dark room, or the picture changing from black and white to color in Victor Fleming's *The Wizard of Oz*. Coming to see takes work, and the addition of a new sense-modality has far-reaching consequences for the way one lives from day to day. Finally, even if these consequences are positive on balance, that's much easier for us to say than it would be for someone who's never been able to see, and who's structured his or her life around this constraint.

In *Transformative Experience*, the philosopher L. A. Paul argues that experiences like coming to have sight for the first time raise problems for a conception of rational choice that depicts it as a matter of weighing the probabilities and subjective desirability of various possible outcomes, and settling on the choice that seems most likely to have

a result that pleases you. First: How does one choose rationally whether to become sighted when it's not possible to know, prior to making the choice, what being able to see is like? Precisely because you've never been able to see, your consideration of whether you will be happier if you gain this ability can't be settled by comparing the experience of a sighted person to what your life is like now. Second, such a choice is difficult because it's likely that one consequence of coming to see will be a deep change in your preferences: certain activities that you enjoy in your blindness will become less interesting to you, whereas others will become newly enjoyable. Which preferences, then, should be given priority—the ones you have now, before the transformative experience of coming to see, or the ones (as yet unknown) that you'll have afterward? The situation here is entirely different from one in which you have to choose between, say, having chocolate or vanilla ice cream for dessert, or going on vacation or staying home. In these cases you have a good sense of what the possible outcomes will be like, and none of them are likely to have drastic and possibly irreversible effects on who you are as a person. Transformative choices can't be approached in this way, and this is what makes them so terrifying, as they face us with the prospect of losing the selves we know in exchange for the radically unfamiliar selves we might become.

If Molyneux's hypothetical example sounds too far-fetched to you, there are more mundane cases that illustrate the point just as well. (Note, however, that the example is not far-fetched: today there are cures for both congenital blindness and deafness—and the latter are very controversial.) One of Paul's most vivid examples is the experience of becoming a parent: it's only when you've had a child that you can really know what it's like to have a human being be radically dependent on you for his or her sustenance and upbringing, and what it's like to have your own happiness bound up with that of such a fragile creature. Moreover, coming to have a child changes your preferences in

wide-ranging and unpredictable ways, so that while your non-parent self might hate (or love) many of the things you'll have to do as a parent, once you are a parent you might feel differently about them, as well as about many things you loved to do when you were childless. Given this, you can't choose rationally to have a child in the way you can choose dessert or a vacation. If you try to imagine life as a parent, the results will be wildly inaccurate and incomplete. Nor can you use your current preferences to determine whether life with a child would be enjoyable for you, because if you become a parent this will give you a very different set of likes and dislikes than you have right now. How, then, are you to choose? How can you *reason well* about what to choose, if the choice itself will transform you in these ways?

A version of this problem arises in any situation where (1) a person has to make a choice whose wisdom depends importantly on considerations of her own subjective well-being, but (2) she's not in a position to determine how the choice will affect her subjectively, or how it will alter her preferences. Situations like this abound in modern life, which makes it all the more striking how inadequate the modern conception of rational decision-making is for dealing with such dilemmas. As Paul shows, the difficulty such situations raise for this conception arises not from mere *uncertainty* about the possible outcomes of a choice, but rather an inability even to *grasp* some of these outcomes because they're too subjectively different from the life one already knows. Nor can one simply rely on the testimony of others or even on "expert" scientific opinion on how people's lives are changed by such choices, since there's no guarantee that one's own experience will be the same as theirs.

As a final example of this quandary, consider the challenge of settling on a career, or discerning a religious vocation. There's no way to resolve this sort of deliberation without attention to one's individual preferences, since even if you conceive of a vocation as a divine calling or think your life's work needs to

benefit others more than yourself, you can't tell what kind of life to choose without considering what it will be like *for you* to live in various ways. And while you can certainly get a lot of relevant information by reflecting on your preferences and learning from others about the different options, everything you learn will be seen "from the outside," without the kind of commitment that would give you a real grasp of what these possible lives are like. Moreover, it's in the nature of commitments that they are not supposed to be easily reversible: like parenthood, they are not something you can merely simulate or "try out." It's only after you've committed your life to a certain trajectory that you can really understand what it is like to have done so.

Paul argues persuasively that these features of transformative experience pose a significant challenge to the orthodox conception of rational choice described above. Her tentative alternative suggestion is that the rationality of transformative choices should be seen in terms of what they reveal to us. According to Paul, one can rationally choose to have a transformative experience if one rightly values what one reasonably expects to learn from it—specifically, what it's like to live in the light of this transformation, with the new set of preferences that results from it. I'm not sure that this is always enough. The value of learning what something is like might be a good basis for deciding whether to go sky-diving for the first time or try an exotic fruit, but deciding whether to have a child or commit oneself to a career seems to require more than this. One thing that might be added is a role for *trust*: not a mere confidence that if you make a certain choice, various results will follow, but trust in a person who is in a position to share the results of this choice with you. As many philosophers have argued, to trust someone in this sense is not just to take what he or she says as a piece of evidence: if you invite me to do something, and I really trust you, then I won't need to weigh your word against my prior determination of whether this is something I'd like to do. Instead, I can simply believe that you wouldn't invite me to do this if you weren't in a position to know that it would make my life better.

One limit of this suggestion is that coming to trust someone is itself transformative in all the ways Paul discusses. Nevertheless, if you *already* trust someone, then that person's perspective can be for you something more than a source of evidence about what your future will be like if you make a certain choice. Perhaps the reassurance of such a person can provide you with a different kind of reason to choose an experience even when, from your current perspective, you can't foresee how the experience will change you. ■

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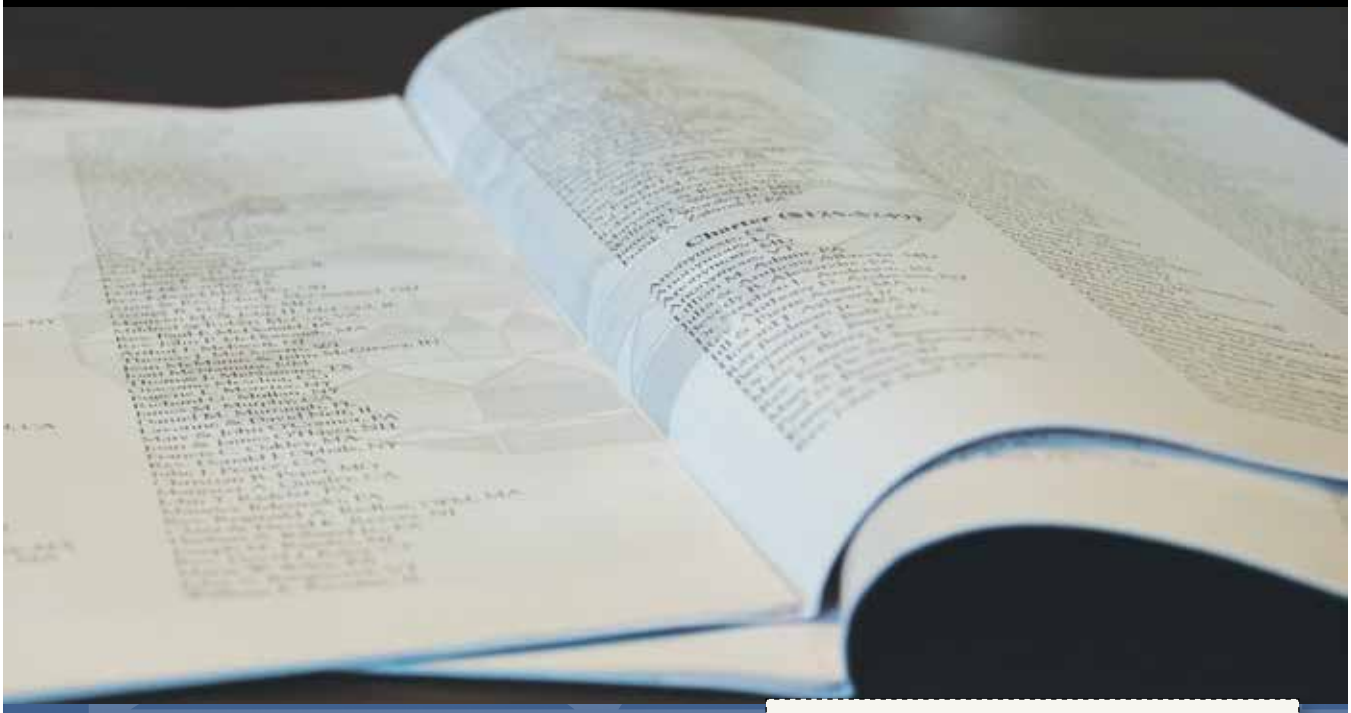

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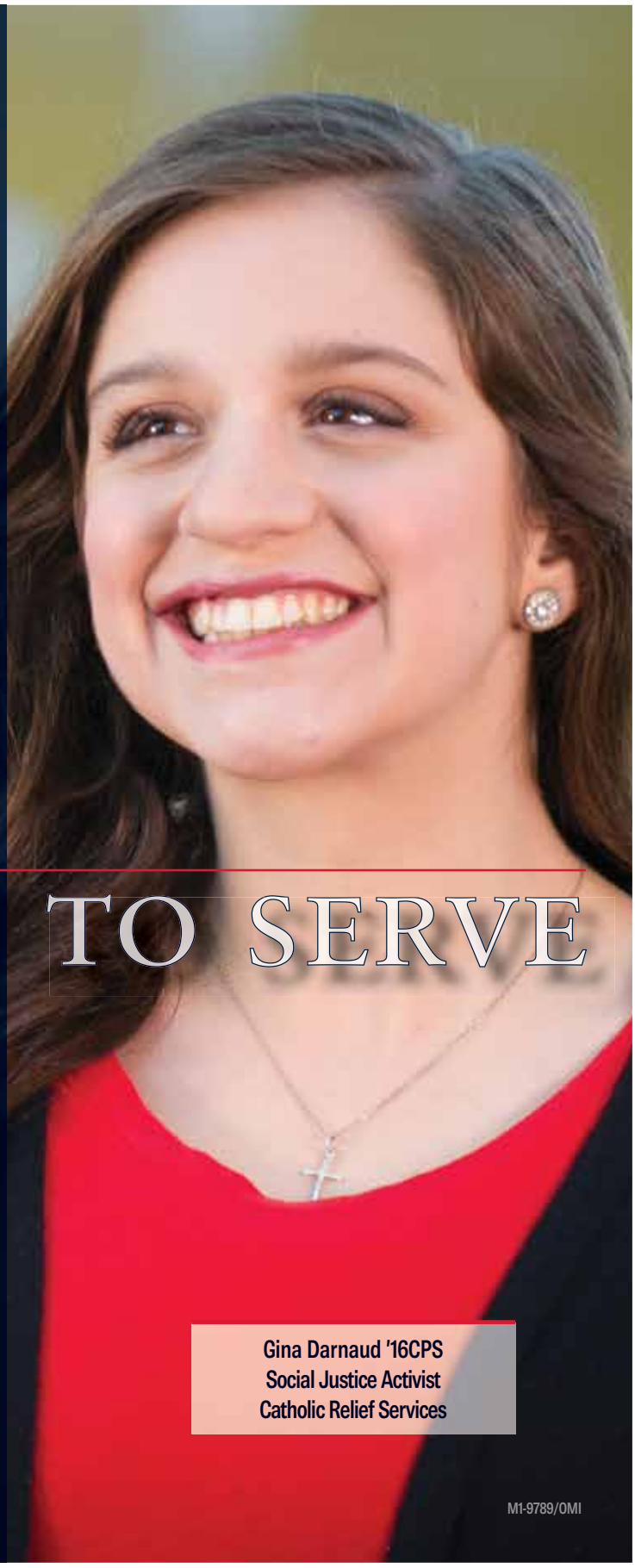

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