

# America

A stylized, high-contrast portrait of a Black man with short, curly hair, wearing glasses, a white shirt, and a dark tie. The portrait is rendered in shades of blue and white, set against a solid orange background. The man is looking slightly to the right of the frame.

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## Black and Catholic

ON RACE, FAITH AND FREEDOM

Last week, while attending the Catholic Media Convention in Charlotte, N.C., I was lucky enough to catch “Freedom Riders” on my hotel room television set. This PBS documentary from 2012 tells the story of the brave Americans who in 1961 risked their lives just to travel together on buses and trains through the segregated Deep South.

I tuned in just in time to watch the interview with Jim Zwerg, one of a handful of white Christians who joined the nonviolent movement. At the bus terminal in Montgomery, Ala., he recalled, a racist mob knocked his teeth out and were about to kill him when a black man stepped in and ultimately saved his life.

In an interview in USA Today last year, Mr. Zwerg described what went through his head and heart as he was being beaten unconscious: “In that instant, I had the most incredible religious experience of my life. I felt a presence with me. A peace. Calmness. It was just like I was surrounded by kindness, love. I knew in that instance that whether I lived or died, I would be O.K.”

What a testament to the power of Christian faith, to the power of Christian witness! Like Jim Zwerg, many white Christians, including many white Catholics, joined the civil rights movement, speaking up on behalf of their black brothers and sisters. But not enough did.

Similarly, many Jesuits, including one of my predecessors as editor in chief, as well as many of the men who served on the editorial board of this review, also supported the civil rights movement, as you will see in these pages. But not enough did.

As M. Shawn Copeland writes in this issue, “Too often, Christians not only failed to defy slavery and condemn tolerance of racism; they supported it and benefitted from these evils and ignored the very Gospel they had

pledged to preach.”

True, Christian faith is no guarantee of personal perfection, and thank God that the hypocrisy of the messenger does not make the message false. Still, Christians have much to account for. I know I do.

I was born 11 years after the Freedom Riders, but I am also a product of a time and culture that was and remains anything but post-racial. And while I still have a lot to learn, I do know this: the notion that whites—even the most enlightened among us—“don’t see race” is ridiculous. It’s quite obviously the first thing that we see. I don’t forget that someone is black, any more than he or she forgets that I am white. That’s just something white people tell themselves in order to feel a little less complicit in the whole ghastly history of racial prejudice.

Like it or not, whites, like all of us of every race, are heirs to that history. I know I am: I recall as a young man being surprised and feeling ashamed when I impulsively and without thinking locked my car door as a black man approached. Where did that come from? It didn’t come from nowhere.

We all see race. The question is, What do we do when we see it? Do we openly acknowledge our history, our complicity, our shame, while not forgetting our triumphs and joys and especially our hopes for healing? Or do we just pretend that everything has changed, when in reality some important things have changed and some important things have not?

What we need is plenty of honest conversation, painful conversation about what we have done and what we have failed to do—not just between blacks and whites, or whites and Latinos, as important as these are, but also between whites and whites. It is our modest hope that this issue of *America* will contribute to such conversations.

**MATT MALONE, S.J.**

106 West 56th Street  
New York, NY 10019-3803  
Ph: 212-581-4640; Fax: 212-399-3596  
Subscriptions: 1-800-627-9533  
[www.americamagazine.org](http://www.americamagazine.org)  
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**CORRESPONDENTS**

John Carr – Washington, D.C.

**MODERATOR, CATHOLIC BOOK CLUB**  
Kevin Spinale, S.J.

**EDITORIAL E-MAIL**

[america@americamagazine.org](mailto:america@americamagazine.org)

**PUBLISHER AND CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER**  
Edward Spallone

**DEPUTY PUBLISHER**

Rosa Del Saz

**VICE PRESIDENT/ADVANCEMENT**

Daniel Pawlus

**DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR**

Kerry Goleski

**OPERATIONS STAFF**

Chris Keller, Glenda Castro, Judith Felix

**ADVERTISING CONTACT**

[ads@americamagazine.org](mailto:ads@americamagazine.org); 212-515-0102

**SUBSCRIPTION CONTACT/ADDITIONAL COPIES**

[subscriptions@americamagazine.org](mailto:subscriptions@americamagazine.org);  
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## ON THE WEB

Vincent D. Rougeau, right, talks about the **Civil Rights Act** on our podcast. Plus, coverage of the civil rights movement from **America's** archives and a video clip from "**Band of Sisters.**" All at [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org).



### A Vote for Peace

The armed struggle has gone on for more than 50 years, with 220,000 lives lost, 5.7 million internally displaced people and over 20,000 disappeared. These are not figures from Syria or the Congo but from Colombia, where violent conflict between the government and several factions—leftist rebels, right-wing paramilitary groups and criminal gangs—has dragged on since 1964. President Juan Manuel Santos initiated peace talks with the largest rebel group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, in 2012. His re-election on June 15 is widely seen as a mandate to continue negotiations.

Mr. Santos narrowly defeated his challenger from the right, Óscar Iván Zuluaga, who attacked the president for sacrificing justice for peace and promised to place tougher preconditions on negotiations with the guerrilla fighters. While Mr. Zuluaga's uncompromising position resonated with many Colombians, in the end a slight majority, 51 percent, voted to give peace a chance. "I'm obliged to put my soul, life and hat into this process," Mr. Santos said in the wake of his victory. He pledged, "This will not be peace with impunity—this will be peace with justice."

Clinching a final deal, however, remains an uphill battle. The two sides have reached agreements on land reform, combatting the drug trade and the political participation of former rebels. But major sticking points remain: how to compensate victims and how to prosecute combatants who have committed human rights abuses. Displaced peasant farmers and indigenous people have suffered the brunt of this conflict, and the restoration of their livelihoods must be a top priority. Still, both parties will have to compromise during a period of transitional justice. As one reluctant supporter of Mr. Santos said, "I would rather have a flawed peace process than a perfect war."

### Iraq Again?

In seeking to define the Obama Doctrine, the president and his aides have resorted to a crude saying that amounts to "Don't do stupid stuff." It is a pithy if frustratingly vague slogan that is now being tested in Iraq, where the Sunni militant group that calls itself the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, is waging a fierce battle against the Shiite-dominated Iraq government. Once again, hawks in the United States are pushing for U.S. intervention, and the president seems open to the military option. Why the United States would intervene in Iraq and not Syria can only be explained by the fact that we seem to feel a greater duty to a country that we destabilized through a grossly

ill-advised invasion. But U.S. policy in Iraq, or anywhere else, must be based on a sober assessment of whether intervention is worth the inevitable costs.

President Obama has called for Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki to set up a representative government that would give more power to Sunni and Kurd leaders. The Obama administration's willingness to work with Iran to broker a peace deal is a good sign that the White House will explore all options before deploying U.S. military might. Unfortunately, Mr. Maliki has been intransigent thus far, which points to a larger problem in Iraq. The government is a strongly sectarian entity that so far has not proven itself interested in governing a pluralist country. With the Kurds in the North already living in a quasi-independent state, the possibility that the breakup of Iraq is inevitable is something the international community may soon have to consider.

### Galway Gothic

In June a horrific tale emerged in Ireland of the nearly diabolical indifference of a group of Catholic sisters who ran a home for mothers and babies between 1925 and 1961 in Tuam, County Galway. As the story was retold in press accounts by *The Irish Independent*, the *Associated Press*, *The Washington Post* and many more, the public was led to believe that hundreds of infants and toddlers were disposed of, after their untimely deaths, in a septic tank.

If that were true, it would certainly be more damning evidence of institutional depravity in Ireland. But after the initial Internet hysteria subsided slightly—some reporters had dubbed the emerging tale an "Irish Holocaust"—more careful reporting revealed that the septic tank story had been badly misconstrued.

What can be said of the Tuam home with certainty is that over almost four decades as many as 796 babies and toddlers passed away there from a variety of ailments common at the time, among them malnutrition, tuberculosis, measles and influenza. Much needs to be discovered about the short unhappy lives of these children and how they were laid to rest, and Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin has wisely demanded a full investigation by the Irish government, which was the supervising authority of the Tuam home. It is important to get to the bottom of this story.

Despite the extravagant media accounts, baby bodies have not been located in a septic tank. As for the "Irish Holocaust," it may prove to be a conflagration mostly of sloppy and indifferent reporting and twitter/Facebook frenzying—signifying nothing more than how quickly misinformation can travel in this era of social media.

# Children's Crusade

Though a comprehensive immigration reform package was passed by the Democratic-controlled Senate more than a year ago, the legislation has completely stalled in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives—not least because of the efforts of the House majority leader, Eric Cantor of Richmond, Va. Ironically, that did not prevent his opponent in the Republican primary from bludgeoning him with accusations of equivocation on immigration.

The Tea Party favorite and political neophyte David Brat, an economics professor from Randolph-Macon College, heckled Mr. Cantor's unprecedented fall from political grace with cries of "Amnesty!" Immigration reform has always been acutely vulnerable to superheated partisan rhetoric and demographic delirium. Now, because of the presumed effectiveness of this Brat-attack, Republican political consultants are urging their congressional clients to run as far as they can from immigration reform. Mr. Cantor's defeat thus portends that comprehensive reform is, once again and for the foreseeable future, dead on arrival in Congress.

But other headlines in June demonstrated that immigration reform as a public policy problem cannot be wished away, even if an army of political consultants rises up against it. A humanitarian catastrophe is quietly escalating at the country's southern borders. After a perilous crossing through Mexico from countries like El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, a forlorn children's crusade of unaccompanied or separated minors, some as young as 5 or 6, is creating an entirely new migration challenge to handle.

Just a few years ago, as few as 4,000 unaccompanied children from Central American states were apprehended at the border. But beginning in October 2011, the United States experienced a "surge" in the number of these unaccompanied children. Detentions of unaccompanied minors jumped from 4,059 to 10,443 in 2012 and then more than doubled again, to 21,537, in 2013. This year the Obama administration expects something in the vicinity of 60,000 of these minors to reach the border, often "escorted" by coyote networks paid by their families, and projects that even more will come next year, as many as 130,000.

The pileup of children and teens at the border creates unprecedented challenges for U.S. policymakers, beginning with how to protect the minors who make it safely into the hands of U.S. authorities. Send them back? Place them in detention or foster care? Find their parents?

A more sorrowful responsibility will be to conduct search and rescue (or recovery) missions across the nation's southwest deserts for children who have become lost or have been abandoned by their traffickers.



Though regional poverty is surely one of the factors propelling these dangerous sojourns, 60 percent of the children heading north told U.N. investigators they left their home communities to escape the relentless gang and drug violence that is seriously destabilizing nations in Central America. Separated from their families as infants and toddlers, many children are coming north to rejoin mothers and fathers and aunts and uncles they may not even remember.

Their parents, part of earlier migrant waves, are in many cases without legal standing in the United States. They cannot be reunited with their children through normal channels, and they cannot leave the United States to retrieve their children without exposing themselves to the costly and cruel human trafficking industry. Resuscitating comprehensive immigration reform would be a small step toward responding to this deepening humanitarian crisis and reuniting these families—safely.

"The time to act is now," said Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Ky., president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a statement on June 5. "As pastors," said Archbishop Kurtz, "we see the human consequences of this broken system each day in our parishes and social service programs, as families are separated, migrant workers are exploited, and our fellow human beings risk everything to find a better life for themselves and the ones they love."

Passing immigration reform will not magically resolve the suffering of these parents and these children in flight; it will not answer all the complex issues created by contemporary migration in this hemisphere. It may allow, however, a good number of people living and working and contributing to life in the United States to normalize their status and begin to rebuild their families through legal—and safe—avenues of migration. It will mean that the United States, recognizing the primacy of human need over imaginary border lines, will not be complicit in the suffering and terror—and sometimes the lonely deaths—of children coming north in search of refuge. "Our Lampedusa" has become the southern border where children are washing ashore, hoping someone will save them.

We should.

## REPLY ALL

### Love and Truth

There is much to commend in “Simply Loving,” by James Martin, S.J. (5/26). There is no doubt that “loving the sinner, while hating the sin” is easier for God than for man. We imperfect and fallen humans tend to either love both or hate both. It is hard to get it right, but we must try. It is the only way to see through to truth. The phrase became a mantra because it has always been a Christian maxim.

I do think we are in more difficult territory in some modern moral controversies. What the church teaches (and has always taught) as a sin, is being challenged as not a real sin at all, but an actual good. The faithful Catholic person cannot accept these redefinitions of morality, and Pope Francis will not succumb to the political pressure to abandon these central moral teachings.

The pastoral approach, however, is, I think, open to a shift, and this is what I think Pope Francis is doing. He is calling us to focus our gaze first on the person, to love the person, to “see the person,” before we see his or her religion, ideology, “orientation” and life circumstances. Only that way can we properly distinguish the person from the sin and keep love primary, without departing from the truth.

TIM O’LEARY  
*Online comment*

### Correct Perception

As a member of Courage, the Catholic ministry for gay men and women, I find myself at odds with Catholics and non-Catholics alike far more often than I feel I should. I’m mocked for wanting to pursue a life that keeps Christ and the church at the forefront, with certain principles that do not always conform to what the gay culture thinks I should do.

At the same time, I feel disrespected by a church that doesn’t seem fully willing to accept the fact that I believe—brokenness and all—that I was created

exactly as God intended, for his specific purpose. It’s frustrating, but I think we’re on the verge of a breakthrough, and I want to play a part in that. The message that the church is not welcoming to gay men and women is simply not true, and we Catholics with a same-sex attraction need to step up and correct that perception in the community.

STEPHEN MILLER  
*Online comment*

### Couples’ Stories

I write as an elder, a happily married heterosexual Episcopal priest, still studying, still learning at 78. I keep reflecting on Pope Francis’ insistence that “realities are greater than ideas.” The column “Simply Loving” is very good, but it starts out with an idea. What a different essay we might have had if it had begun like this: Among the many same-sex couples I know, three stand out.

Mark and Anthony, both in their 50s, have been together 20 years. They are raising a 4-year-old girl and a 2-year-old boy entrusted to them by birth parents unable to care for them. They are initiating adoption proceedings for the kids, who have begun to flourish in their care.

Marie and Antoinette, also in their 50s, are raising Marie’s granddaughter, a 9-year-old who in their loving care is overcoming years of trauma. Both these couples are integral to our parish life and active in the community. And they have the unstinting support of their fellow parishioners.

A third couple, Dee and Lee, are both Episcopal priests. Without strong institutional support but with the faith that moves mountains, they have founded and grown a Nativity-model middle school for children living in poverty. They’ve been together over 10 years and from close observation I can say what they have accomplished couldn’t have been done by one of them alone. Their gifts and graces truly complement one another.

(REV.) FRANK BERGEN  
*Online comment*

### Immoral Cover?

Re the cover photo for the May 19 issue of **America**: The detainees at Guantánamo Bay are shackled, blindfolded and kneeling with U.S. soldiers standing over them. The caption on the inside front cover says the photo is from 12 years ago!

You have given us a visual presentation of what appears to be abuse and inhumanity. Is that your intention? Within the issue is “Morality and Morale,” an article by Luke Hansen, S.J., in which he asks whether the operations at Guantánamo Bay are moral. I do not have an answer to that and have struggled with this question for a long time. Without a complete picture of detainee treatment today, your cover is one-sided, prejudicial and immoral.

DOROTHY A. DELANEY, C.S.J.  
*Flushing, N.Y.*

*Editor’s Note: Because the story was about the Guantanamo soldiers’ moral quandaries, we felt it was important to depict both soldiers and detainees. The image we used was only one one available to us at the time that met that requirement.*

### Following Orders

As a Marine officer from 1951 to 1956, I found “Morality and Morale” most disturbing, especially what General John F. Kelly said about following orders.

I was taught that an order must be followed. But as a thinking person, I needed to be certain that it was a legal order before I executed it. Any question about legality was to be submitted for review and evaluation prior to following the order.

The chain of command begins with President Obama as commander in chief. With due respect to General Kelly, I cannot help wondering how he can avoid evaluating “policy” orders that the president has said “are contrary to our interests.” At a bare minimum, does he not have a responsibility to present questions about the “legality and morality” of his orders? Is that not “who we are,” in the words of our pres-

ident and commander in chief?

EILEEN F. PARKER, C.S.J.  
*Los Angeles, Calif.*

## What is the West?

Re “The West Knows Best?” (5/19): What is the truth about the West? One has to go back at least to the 16th century, when Britain was brutally cut off from the unity of Christendom and entered upon a new age of colonialism and imperialism. That was the age when we encounter the two “mighty opposites” of William Shakespeare and Francis Bacon, the one siding with Catholic tradition (if in secular disguise) and the other with Protestant innovation. And it is, sadly, the latter side that has won out, even to the extent of representing “the West.”

It might well be added that early on in this period it was Islam that was the aggressor, by sea until the Battle of Lepanto in 1571 and by land until the relief of Vienna as late as 1683. The so-called “Christian” nations of the West only became aggressors thanks to the advantages accorded them by science and industry in the new age, when the advent of “secularism” (whose other name is “anti-Catholicism”) had long since set in.

PETER MILWARD, S.J.  
*Tokyo, Japan*

## Faith and Fiction

I have been following with interest the ongoing discussion about the dearth of literary works written recently by Catholics. I have an ear to the ground, so to speak, regarding the literary tastes of ordinary Catholics. So I am bemused by your lack of attention to popular fiction. Isn't that the field where evangelization and pre-evangelization is most needed?

I look for fragments, hints in the wind, in that field. Dean Koontz is an avowed Catholic who writes about God, eternity, the ongoing struggle between good and evil, violence and nonviolence, in a literary form I'd call “supernatural

## STATUS UPDATE

Readers respond to “Simply Loving,” by James Martin, S.J. (5/26):

The flaw in the analogy is that Zacchaeus's sin was that of hurting people by defrauding them, while gay people's alleged sin is that of loving the adult person that God designed them to love. Equating consensual committed love to theft is precisely the kind of condescension that forces gay people to doubt the good faith of the hierarchy's purported “respect.”

MICHAEL DONNELLY

For decades, I attended the Gay and Married Men support group in Washington, D.C. For years, the non-Catholic members would complain that the Catholic Church screwed them up. Why they would blame the Catholic Church was inexplicable. The Catholic guys in the group, to a man, said that they found the church and their pastors to be very supportive.

PAUL LEDDY

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thriller,” reminiscent of the novels of Charles Williams, one of the Inklings. Koontz's “Odd Thomas” series is especially spiritual and insightful, with a spiritual optimism and humor much needed in today's popular culture.

MARY C. WEISENBURGER  
*Cheektowaga, N.Y.*

## Just Employment

Thank you for the courage of your new mission, as presented in “Pursuing the Truth in Love,” by Matt Malone, S.J. (6/3/2013). **America** has been faithful to its goal of exposing and exploring many of today's social injustices, offering conscientious solutions based on the truth found in Catholic social teach-

ing. Sadly, however, there is one issue I have yet to see explored: the Catholic Church as an employer.

I have been an employee of the church at the parish level for over 35 years. It is a calling, so low wages and long hours are accepted. My experience, however, has exposed much darker issues: the use of “at will” employment, the lack of due process and the absence of any financial safety net upon dismissal.

The problem is extensive, and few are willing to discuss it. I ask **America** to expose and explore this issue, which affects so many within our parish communities.

CHRISTINE NYHOLM  
*Brighton, Colo.*

## WHAT YOU'RE READING at [americanmagazine.org](http://americanmagazine.org)

- 1 **The Ethics of Exit**, by Daniel J. Daly (6/9)
- 2 **Galway Gothic: When Headlines Attack**, by Kevin Clarke (In All Things, 6/9)
- 3 **Familiarity Breeds Content**, by Helen Alvaré (6/9)
- 4 **Simply Loving**, by James Martin, S.J. (5/26)
- 5 **A Letter from Pope Francis**, by Michael Kennedy, S.J. (In All Things, 5/28)



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# SIGNS OF THE TIMES

IRAQ IN CRISIS

## U.S. Bears ‘Special Responsibility’ As Islamist Militant Surge Shocks

**T**he chairman of the U.S. bishops’ Committee on International Justice and Peace called for diplomatic measures rather than a U.S. military response to the crisis facing Iraq as Islamist militants gain ground. In a letter to Susan E. Rice, the U.S. national security adviser, Bishop Richard E. Pates of Des Moines, Iowa, called upon the United States to urge Iraqi political leaders to “form an inclusive government” so that people who feel they have no voice in the country’s affairs are included in its governance.

“Our nation bears a special responsibility toward the people of Iraq,” Bishop Pates wrote on June 19. “The U.S.-led invasion and occupation unleashed both sectarian conflicts and extremism in Iraq, two tragic unintended consequences that have profound and continuing repercussions for the people of Iraq.”

Iraq’s crisis was spawned by the rapid movement of thousands of armed members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria through much of northern Iraq. The militant organization has killed Muslims and Christians while functioning with military efficiency during its press toward Baghdad, the capital, during June.

“It is critical that all ethnic and religious groups are represented at the table of governance so that the common good of all is served,” Bishop Pates said. “Extremists have been exploiting the divisions born of exclusion and the weakening of the rule of law.” The fall of Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city, to Islamist militants in early June sent half a million residents scurrying for safety. Church officials reported that virtually every Christian who was physically capable of doing so fled the city before the militants arrived.

Bishop Pates said diplomatic efforts also must be undertaken in neighboring Syria. He urged Rice and U.S. officials to work with other countries, particularly Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia and “all responsible parties in Syria.”

“It is critical to obtain a ceasefire, initiate serious negotiations, provide impartial humanitarian assistance and encourage efforts to build an in-

clusive society in Syria,” Bishop Pates wrote. “These actions will help protect the rights of all citizens, including Christians and other minorities.”

Pax Christi USA also called for a “fully inclusive international diplomatic process” to address the burgeoning Iraqi crisis and the continuing violence in Syria rather than any military response by the United States or other countries. The Catholic peace organization urged the United Nations to initiate multilateral diplomacy involving organizations like the Arab League.

Sister Josie Chrosniak, a member of the Sisters of the Humility of Mary who chairs Pax Christi USA’s national council, told Catholic News Service that the challenges facing Iraq will be resolved only through nonviolent action and diplomacy. “As an organization committed to the belief in nonviolence we do continue to be saddened by all the violence in the world,



but most especially at this time by the violence that is causing increased suffering to the people of Iraq,” Sister Chrosniak said.

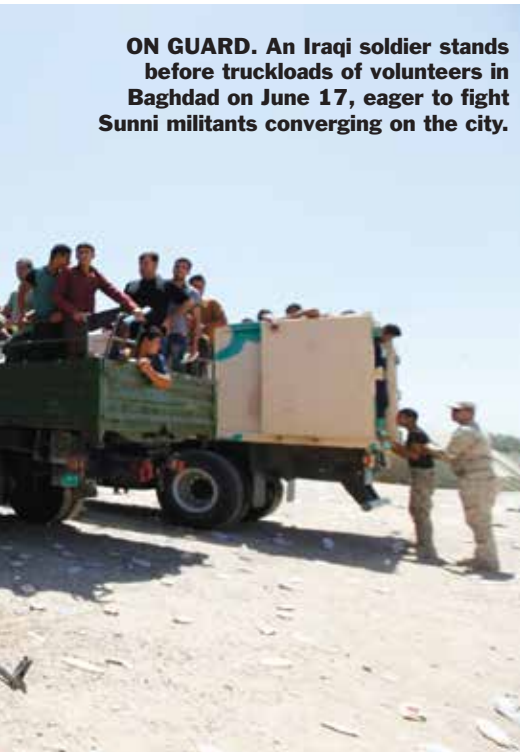
Military intervention would only lead to more conflict, she added. “The more we fight, the more people will fight us. We really believe the only way for any kind of solution to be reached is through the United Nations. The U.N. has the ability to address the concerns for all the people in the area, all of the countries involved,” Sister Chrosniak explained.

In its statement, Pax Christi USA maintained that “U.S. military intervention will not achieve the peace and stability that the people of Iraq deserve.”

“A military solution—whether it includes air strikes or ground troops or an increase in the flow of weapons into Iraq—will only serve to increase the suffering of the Iraqi people, not alleviate it,” the statement said.



**ON GUARD.** An Iraqi soldier stands before truckloads of volunteers in Baghdad on June 17, eager to fight Sunni militants converging on the city.



## HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

# Private Investing for the Common Good?

**W**hile billions have been spent on direct efforts to bring the worlds of the haves and the have-nots closer together, perhaps the largest movement in history of people out of abject poverty was achieved over the last three decades in China. In that socialist state, capitalist practices created vast riches for a few but also new wealth for millions of workers. The resulting improvements in living standards, however, were an almost collateral outcome, and they were not achieved without a large degree of social and ecological disruption.

What if investors were intent on using the mechanism of the free market and the power of the economy to

improve social and environmental outcomes from the outset?

That is the challenge thrown down by a new development model that seeks to turn the power of the market economy to social good. So-called impact investing puts private capital to work jump-starting for-profit entities or supporting nongovernmental organizations with the intention of creating fiscal profit that can be tracked in accounting books but also a social profit that can be observed in improved living standards or environmental conditions in developing nations around the world. Impact investing was the focus of a conference on June 16 to 17 in Rome, sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Catholic Relief Services and the Mendoza College of Business of the University of Notre Dame.

The conference drew participants from the worlds of high finance, industry and emergency disaster relief. One attendee, Carolyn Woo, president and C.E.O. of Catholic Relief Services, said finding sources of private capital that can be directed toward impact investing has become especially important in an era of reduced economic expectations among individuals and governments. “We have to be creative,” said Woo. “We can’t rely [exclusively] on donations and grant money because both of those streams are diminishing.”

While much of the direct service that relief and development agencies like C.R.S. provide will inevitably rely on donors—it is hard, after all, to locate a business model that satisfactorily re-

sponds to a typhoon—Woo suggests that other programs C.R.S. helps start up or support could benefit from lessons learned by for-profits with an eye on creating long-term sustainability. “How can these ministries be structured like a business, but in a way that has a deep conscience?” she asks.

There are examples of such models from the past and the contemporary Catholic world, she says—self-supporting monasteries that market beers, cheese and even coffins, for example, or fair trade product marketing.

“Not all social ministries can be handled in this way,” she adds. “Some are very high risk that will never deliver returns. I’m not talking about replacing grants or donations; we’re not asking anyone to stop giving to the church,” Woo says. But what about repurposing 5 percent of your retirement account to impact investing? Woo says that kind of commitment among individual and institutional investors would add private capital to the quiver of groups like C.R.S.

According to Woo, while the idea shows great promise because of its sustainability and scalability, impact investing requires patience as human capital is developed and would have to set in place strong certification



**SOWING THE FUTURE.** Can private investment be put to work against poverty? A farmer digs irrigation channels in Alauca, Honduras.

# SIGNS OF THE TIMES

policies—can social “pay-offs” be verifiable?—and vigorous monitoring to prevent exploitation of the communities and people being affected.

The conference was joined by Pope Francis who as usual was not at a loss for provocative thinking. “It is important that ethics once again play its due part in the world of finance and that markets serve the interests of peoples and the common good of humanity,” he said on June 16, calling it “intolerable” that “financial markets are shaping the destiny of peoples rather than serving their needs, or that the few derive immense wealth from financial speculation while the many are deeply burdened by the consequences.” He denounced in particular speculation on food prices as “a scandal which seriously compromises access to food on the part of the poorest members of our human family.”

KEVIN CLARKE

## States Pursue Minimum Wage Hikes

While Congress has stalled on adopting an increase in the federal minimum wage, steps are being taken across the country to boost the income of low-wage workers. From Massachusetts and Vermont to Washington State and California, state legislators and city councils have either implemented or are negotiating minimum wage hikes. Despite concern from opponents to any wage increase, most legislators have come to see that the likely benefit to workers outweighs the cost to businesses. President Obama, not waiting for Congress to act, followed through on his February executive order by announcing on June 12 rules for raising the wages of workers under federal contracts to a minimum of \$10.10 per hour. Meanwhile, a new report from Oxfam America called for Congress to end the

## NEWS BRIEFS

On **World Refugee Day**, June 20, Bishop Eusebio Elizondo of Seattle, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Migration, called on the U.S. government to do more to assist Syrian refugees and to protect the rights of children crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. • Noting simply, “We need solidarity” to survive the **deadly Ebola virus**, the Rev. Peter Konteh, executive director of Caritas for the Archdiocese of Freetown, Sierra Leone, issued a prayer request on June 20 for West African countries affected by the outbreak. • Pope Francis spoke out **against legalizing marijuana** and other so-called “recreational drugs” on June 20, arguing that legalization will not curb drug addiction rates and has little impact on the criminal organizations trafficking drugs around the world. • The **Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)** had a busy general assembly in June, voting to redefine marriage to allow its ministers to perform same-sex marriages and to divest from three U.S. firms considered to be facilitators of Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories. • The **Association of U.S. Catholic Priests**, in a letter to Pope Francis in June, criticized the head of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for his recent comments chastising the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.



**In Liberia, fighting Ebola**

gridlock and adopt an increase in the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 per hour to \$10.10 per hour, with an index to inflation. The legislative actions and new round of advocacy come with one basic message: Anyone who works full time should not live in poverty.

## Court Win For Vulture Funds

The U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal on June 16 from Argentina of an order to pay a so-called vulture fund \$1 billion. That decision lets two lower federal court rulings stand, and Argentina now must turn over information about its U.S. bank holdings. Eric LeCompte, executive director of Jubilee USA, said that because of this decision it is now open

season on the assets of other heavily indebted poor countries. “It has incredible impacts in terms of how the financial system operates, how poor countries have the ability to become middle income countries,” he said. LeCompte fears that the floodgates could open for other hedge funds to recover the assets of defaulting countries, to the detriment of poor citizens. “A small group of hedge funds—less than 100 engage in this predatory behavior—are the winners. The losers are most of us. The U.S. government, the International Monetary Fund, legitimate Wall Street investors who supported Argentina and any poor country that would qualify for debt relief are the losers.”

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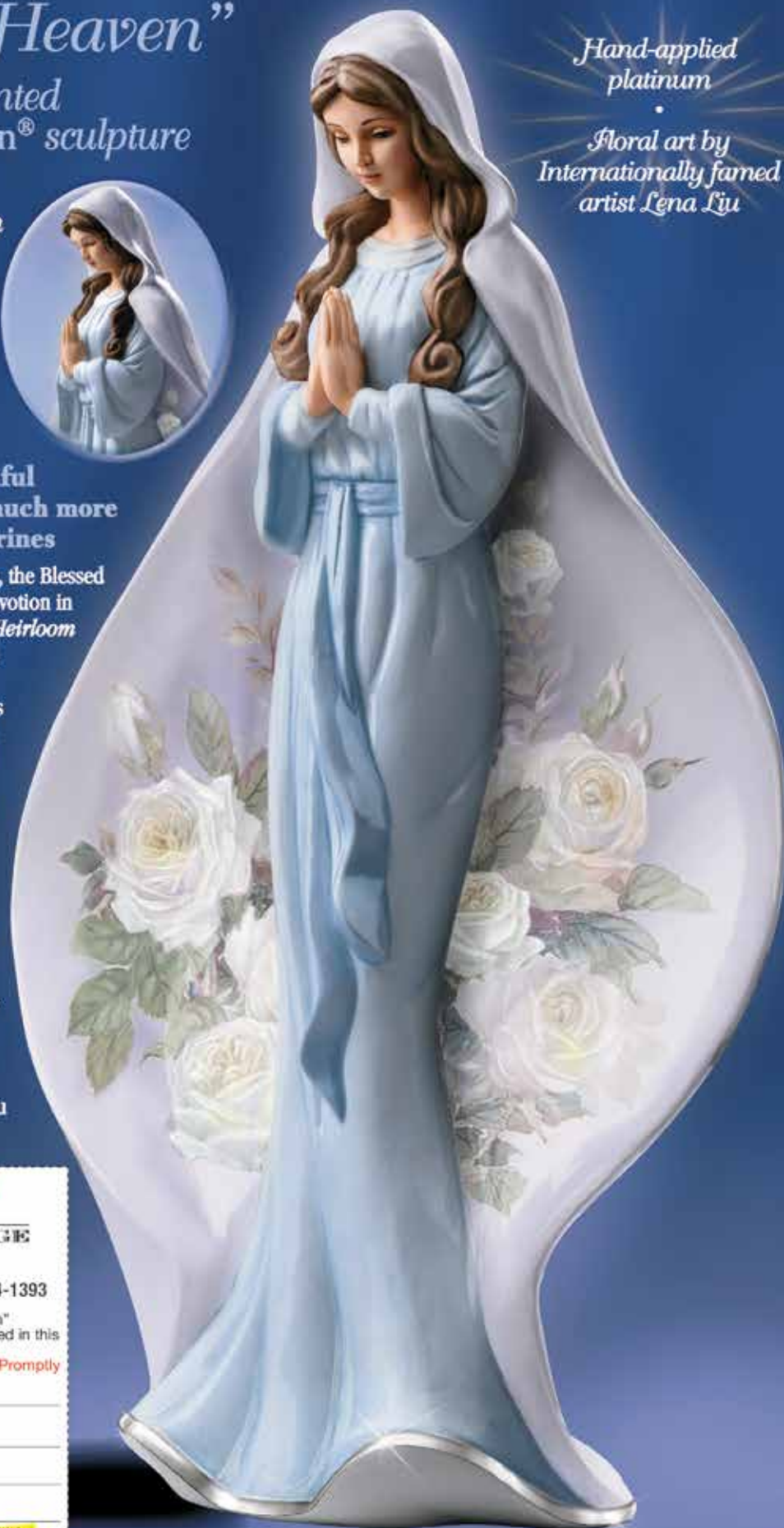
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# American Idol

In Graham Greene's novel *The Power and the Glory* (1940), a soon-to-be-martyred Mexican priest on the run from government troops encounters a haunting sight while saying Mass: local peasants who, having toiled all day at their back-breaking work, come before the altar and spread their arms as if on a crucifix, imitating Christ on the cross. "One more mortification squeezed out of their harsh and painful lives," thinks the priest.

While the Marxist lieutenant chasing the priest sees the answer to their torment in the overthrow of the ancient alliance between an exploitative economic system and the church, the priest sees the answer in trust in the afterlife. After all, "If they really believed in Heaven or Hell," as the lieutenant later mockingly parrots him, "they wouldn't mind a little pain now, in return for what immensities...."

One can admire Greene's novel while also noting that he was not particularly subtle in his characterizations. There are the passing things of this world, and then there is the eternal glory of paradise, and so what's a little injustice, economic or otherwise, in the meantime? Added bonus: it builds character.

His depiction speaks to a tension present in Christianity and Christendom since Luke recorded Jesus' mention that "blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." When, and where? In paradise? In the here and now? Depending on one's worldview, Jesus' words are a call to economic revolution and the

widespread redistribution of wealth or a justification for economic inequality and laissez-faire capitalism. In the United States, many of us seem to view Jesus' words as a promise to the poor that one day we'll make it up to them.

Pope Francis, who saw the Argentine economy shrink by a third in only four years at the turn of the millennium, has raised eyebrows and ruffled feathers in recent months by referring to American-style capitalism as "a new tyranny" and the equivalent of idol worship for the way it exploits the poor. Other prominent church leaders have gone further: "This economy kills," Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga of Honduras recently told an audience in Washington, D.C., "That is what the pope is saying." For some American Catholic public figures accustomed to a close alliance with the Vatican on all matters but war, it has come as a bit of a shock to be compared to the high priests of Ba'al.

In fact, a prominent American prelate recently argued that Francis wasn't referring to American-style capitalism at all in his condemnation of this new idolatry: "[W]hat many people around the world experience as 'capitalism' isn't recognizable to Americans. For many in developing or newly industrialized countries, what passes as capitalism is an exploitative racket for the benefit of the few powerful and wealthy."

Prescinding from the question of how many Americans see our current system as exactly such an exploitative

racket, there is another problem with this argument: Francis' own words. "We discard a whole generation to maintain an economic system that no longer endures, a system that to survive has to make war, as the big empires have always done," the pope noted in a recent interview with *La Vanguardia*. "But since we cannot wage the Third World War, we make regional wars. And what does that mean? That we make and sell arms. And with that the balance sheets of the idolatrous economies—the big world economies that sacrifice man at the feet of the idol of money—are obviously cleaned up."

Francis is not blaming the crony capitalists of the third world. He's blaming us.

Of course, Francis is no economist, nor do his remarks have any binding force. But we shouldn't fool ourselves

as to who he thinks are the tormentors of the poor, or who are the idolaters. He is not blaming the banana republics and crony capitalists of the third world. He's blaming us.

Ironically, Pope Francis would have found an ally in Graham Greene, despite the latter's earlier convictions. Greene came to believe that the economic suffering of the poor was neither necessary nor favored by God, and that the proliferation of the Western economic order threatened Catholicism everywhere. A vocal supporter of liberation theology and critic of unfettered capitalism, he once told a journalist that Marxist regimes could only destroy the church physically, "whereas the Americans destroy its soul."

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JAMES T. KEANE is an editor at Orbis Books in Ossining, N.Y., and a former associate editor of *America*. Follow him @jamestkeane.

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**GOOD POINT.** President Barack Obama and Representative John Lewis tour the Cornerstones of Civil Rights exhibit at the LBJ Presidential Library.



THE LEGACY AND ONGOING CHALLENGE  
OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT

# Freedom Bound

BY VINCENT D. ROUGEAU

**F**ew societies in modern history have been more invested in the social construct of race than the United States. The perpetuation of race-based chattel slavery in a nation founded on radical notions of individual freedom fueled enduring, albeit simplistic, dualities around the concepts of “black” and “white” in American law and culture. Although a gruesome civil war ended the legal institution of slavery, it was not enough to prevent the ongoing political and social marginalization of those of “traceable” African descent. Our obsession with race has been at the root of some of the most shameful incidents in our history, but it has also led to some of our greatest triumphs in response.

One of those triumphant events occurred 50 years ago this summer, when the U.S. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Although designed to address more than racial discrimination, the act is seen as a great triumph of the civil rights movement and the effort to end discrimination against black people in the United States. The legislation helped complete the transformation of the United States from a parochial, self-involved nation to the pre-eminent global power it is today.

## Facing Discrimination

Fifty years is a long time in a human life—an entire life in my case—so it is becoming increasingly difficult for people alive today to imagine what the United States was like prior to 1964. For those who do remember, the changes unleashed by the Civil Rights Act were extraordinary and were part of a period of jarring cultural and legal change.

Prior to 1964, racial discrimination and racial segregation were habitual and ingrained parts of life for most Americans. Although the U.S. Supreme Court had outlawed racial segregation in public schools in 1954, there continued to be widespread resistance to that ruling in the early 1960s and for many years thereafter, in both the North and the

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VINCENT D. ROUGEAU is dean of Boston College Law School in Newton Centre, Mass.



PHOTO BY DAVID HUME KENNERLY

South. Segregation was still the norm in most other areas of life, both implicitly and explicitly.

In the mid-1950s, my grandfather and his brothers migrated to the oil towns of south Louisiana from the surrounding rural civil parishes to satisfy the growing need for low-skilled and semi-skilled labor. On payday, they would make their way to the oil refinery to collect their wages. On some days they would be paid right away. At other times they would spend the entire day watching while every white person at the plant was called into the office to be paid, which often meant that they did not get their money until the end of the day. These practices were part of the everyday indignities of being black in the United States, hardly worth remarking upon for many of those who suffered them despite the inconvenience and humiliation they caused, and not unlike certain types of indignities often suffered by undocumented migrants today. Marginalization and powerlessness make one easy prey for casual acts of cruelty, both petty and severe.

By the early 1960s, it was clear that how Americans thought about race was changing, but real change would still be a long time coming. In 1961, my wife's father became one of the first black engineers hired by Bell Labs. He was hazed relentlessly upon his arrival—garbage was dumped on his chair and effigies swung routinely from his desk lamp. Meantime, he and his wife struggled to find a decent place to live until my mother-in-law took matters into her own hands. Apartment hunting on her own, her olive skin and long, brown hair announced a suitable tenant for an apartment in the affluent town of Summit, N.J., where they ultimately settled and where my wife spent her early years. Nevertheless, buying a home there proved very difficult—my mother-in-law could not buy a home by herself—and they ultimately settled in a more diverse but increasingly segregated and declining city nearby. Like so many other black professionals of their era, if they wanted to live in a community that offered them some measure of acceptance, they were denied an opportunity to build wealth through their investment in their homes, which often lost value as their neighborhoods become more segregated over time.

The Civil Rights Act became the catalyst for a torrent of legislation designed to promote racial and gender equality, fair housing and pay equity, but when one looks back over the history of the last 50 years, what is particularly conspicuous is how long it took for real change to take root, and how often much of it was due to extraneous factors like economic change, immigration and, more prosaically, the passage of time. What is equally striking, however, is what appears on the horizon. Although it may be too early to call the United States a post-racial nation, clearly the emergence of that type of society is well underway.

## Exceptional History

Despite the pervasiveness of race as a driving feature of our history, Americans are very uncomfortable embracing and owning that history as a communal story integral to our shared identity. Many people often bend over backward to pretend that they do not see race in everyday life—how many times has someone been described in excruciating detail before we are told that he or she is black?—although they typically are very comfortable acknowledging the corrosive ongoing effects of racism institutionally and structurally. Others tend to insist that American racism was simply an unfortunate aberration from the nation's glorious founding story. Many insist that race no longer matters and resist even modest efforts to offer redress for America's racist past. That is unfortunate, because we also have some victories over our racial demons that are well worth celebrating, and these moments in our history signify some singular accomplishments of the American experiment.

The United States was not unique in its creation and maintenance of an underclass, although few nations are so quick to assign an exceptional status to themselves that would suggest otherwise. Not long ago, in his commencement speech at West Point, President Obama declared that he believed, "with every fiber of [his] being," in American exceptionalism and that the United States remains the one "indispensable" nation. The Civil Rights Act was certainly a moment of exceptional self-awareness for the United States, and it is almost impossible to imagine such sweeping legislation being passed today. But the United States also had a

remarkable attachment to the institution of slavery, long after most other societies had ended the practice, and it took a shockingly brutal civil war to end slavery here. After the war, we maintained a highly effective system of racial segregation through both legal and extra-legal means for another 100 years. All of this marks the United States as exceptional—and perhaps not so indispensable—but not in ways that we generally want to talk about.

But over the last decade or so, there is a growing sense among many Americans that something fundamental has changed in the way we understand race. We have an African-American president who had a white, American mother and Kenyan father. The fastest growing racial category on the U.S. census is now "mixed race," and suddenly the black/white duality that was so much a part of the American consciousness has begun to sound stilted and anachronistic. In metropolitan Boston, where I live, the black population is growing rapidly because of immigration from Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. Many of these immigrants reject the American black/white dichotomy, and many want nothing to do with the term "African-American." In my own family, most of my

### ON THE WEB

Vincent Rougeau talks  
about the Civil Rights Act.  
[americamagazine.org/podcast](http://americamagazine.org/podcast)



children's first cousins are part of multiracial families, and I expect this to continue as I watch my children date and prepare to select their life partners.

## The Next Struggle

Although it is important to honor the past as we celebrate 50 years of the Civil Rights Act, it is also essential that we consider the future. How will we understand race and racial discrimination in an increasingly multicultural America? The descendants of slaves in the United States still find themselves disproportionately represented in negative statistics about poverty, education, single-parenting, wealth creation and life expectancy. Discrimination and racism still rear their heads on a regular basis. The president has been the victim of a stunning effort by the Republican Party to make it almost impossible for him to govern, and we routinely hear statements from Republican legislators that make it clear they would rather see the government grind to a halt than work with Barack Obama. We have even been treated to the shocking indignity of the president being heckled by a member of Congress during a State of the Union address. Yes, I think a lot of that is about race, but how much longer can angry white men (for the most part) from gerrymandered districts ignore America's multiracial reality and the long-term challenge this will present to politics in our democracy?

As someone whose possibilities in life were transformed by the Civil Rights Act, I am deeply indebted to the men and women in the civil rights movement and in the government who had the courage and vision to make it a reality. But looking ahead, I will welcome an America that will no longer be cast in black and white. I am encouraged by the young men and women I meet from places like Ghana, Nigeria, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Brazil who have pushed Americans toward a richer and more global understanding of black identity. I celebrate immigration from Latin America, Asia and elsewhere, which has been instrumental in making our cities more cosmopolitan, vibrant and welcoming.

In many ways, the treatment of immigrants is emerging as a new civil rights issue, and it raises a number of concerns around exclusion, membership and participation in a democratic society that characterized the civil rights movement in the mid-20th century. These issues should have particular resonance for Catholics because our social teaching takes a very strong position in support of social inclusion for the poor and the stranger. As Congress devours resources of time and money to accomplish little of lasting value when it comes to immigration, their inaction and indifference should announce an opportunity for the rest of us to act in a way that honors the legacy of the Civil Rights Act.

Immigration is no more a threat to the United States than

was letting black people compete for jobs on an equal footing or buy houses where they wanted. Treating people with dignity regardless of the color of their skin, their gender, sexual orientation or national origin does involve letting go of long-held prejudices, and it does require change. Embracing the possibilities and opportunities that will come with a more humane system of immigration in this country will allow us to recognize the reality of a change that is already underway and offers hope to our children and grandchildren that the multicultural America that is emerging around them will be a place of hope, opportunity and strength, as opposed to an angry fortress of fear.

There was a lot of fear back in 1964, and overcoming centuries of racial discrimination in this country is still a work in progress. But we are at our best as a society when we are open to the possibilities of the many and when we look beyond ourselves to see God in the face of the other. Celebrating the Civil Rights Act allows us to remember a very difficult period in our shared history and reminds us how far we have moved beyond it. It also recalls the decency and vision of those who came before us who knew that this nation could be better. Developing a humane, fair immigration policy would be one more step toward reaching that goal—and a fitting way to honor the legacy of the Civil Rights Act in a nation that is quickly moving beyond black and white. ▲

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# Civil Rights Aftermath

BY THE EDITORS

One had a feeling all along that the civil rights bill would pass. There was too much at stake even to think of defeat. In the history of nations, as of men, there inevitably arise great crises during which the future hangs precariously in the balance. Sometimes the crisis is surmounted and nations go their triumphant way. Sometimes it is not, and then they either disappear from history or languish in weakness and decadence.

to grant them the full birthright of free men. It has taken a stand for the liberation of colonial peoples everywhere, but has condoned second-class citizenship at home.

For a number of reasons—not the least of them the manly demand of Negroes for the full enjoyment of their rights—this lie can no longer be ignored or endured. It was this realization that led President Kennedy to sponsor the civil rights bill; that moved President

the Senate vote, will ultimately assure the oneness of American society, “law must today lay the foundation of justice on which alone charity can flower.”

There was never any question that the Senate would pass the civil rights bill if it had a chance to vote on it. A national consensus existed and Congress knew it. It was a pity, then, that the South did not surrender gracefully; that so much time and effort were wasted in a morally repugnant cause. Senator [Richard] Russell and his band had reason, of course, to hope that they could thwart the national will, as the closeness of the closure vote showed. But what a dangerous and ignoble hope it was. We believe that there were millions of Southerners who did not share it. In their heart of hearts they know that a way of life insidiously calculated to destroy the dignity and manhood of an entire race is as displeasing to God as it is insulting to His creatures. In this case, surely, the silence of so many decent Southern whites did not mean consent.

Despite the sectional battle lines in the Senate, the civil rights struggle, which now enters a new phase, is not today, if it ever was, a purely North-South affair. As this Review has said time and again, the North shares with the South the guilt of racial discrimination. Far from being a second Union victory over the Confederacy, the vote in the Senate was a victory for the nation. If there are any wounds that need binding up now, they are the wounds of our Negro brothers. This is a task for North and South alike. Let us get on with it together.



**SHARED DREAM.** President Lyndon B. Johnson meets with civil rights leaders Martin Luther King Jr., Whitney Young and James Farmer in January 1964.

Surely, the civil rights issue is such a crisis. Ever since the Emancipation Proclamation—indeed, ever since the founding of the Republic—the United States has been living a lie. It has proclaimed that all men are created equal, but has denied in practice the equality of Negroes. It has vindicated a universal right to life, liberty and happiness, but has compromised that right for nearly a tenth of its people. It has emancipated its slaves, but has refused

Johnson to grasp the fallen torch and see the fight through; that persuaded Sen. Everett McKinley Dirksen—who alone in the Senate could mobilize the conservative Republican votes needed for closure—to place country before party and assure final victory. And it was this consideration that led to an unprecedented mobilization of religious forces, which enlightened minds darkened by prejudice and purged the nation’s conscience. While love, rather than law, as the Catholic bishops of Pennsylvania said on the eve of

*This editorial was published on June 20, 1964.*

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# Revisiting Racism

## Black theology and a legacy of oppression

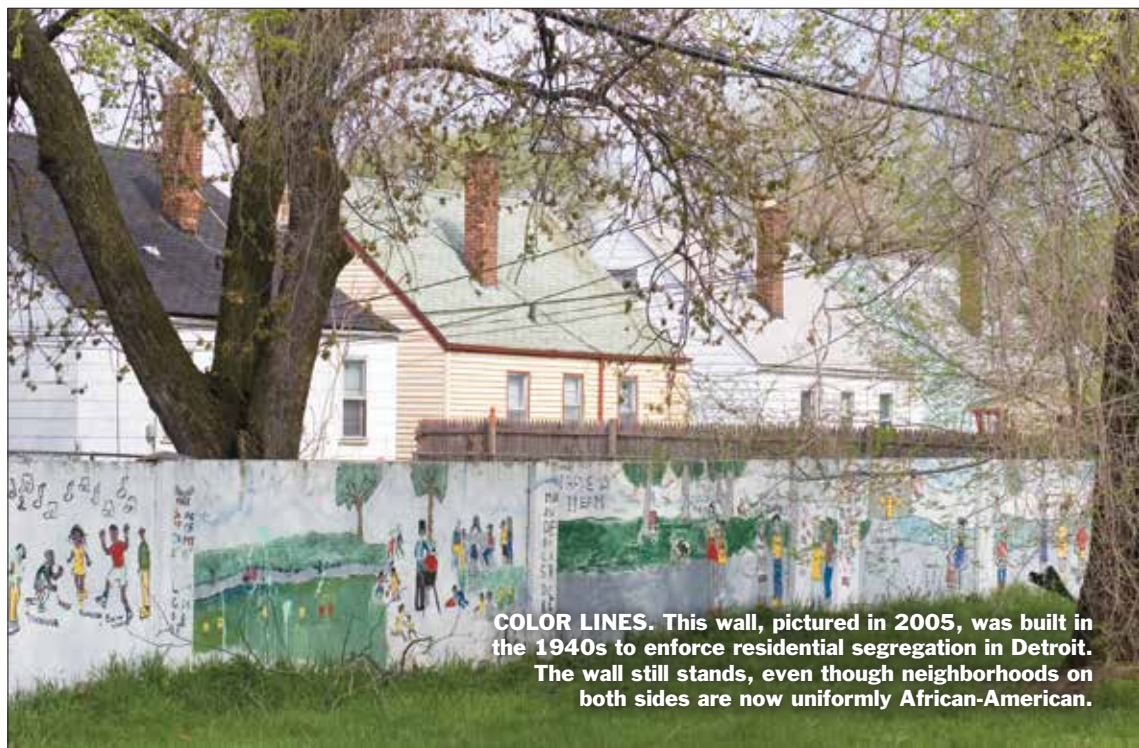
BY M. SHAWN COPELAND

**F**or white people living in the United States, the entanglement of Christianity with chattel slavery and antiblack racism forms a set of deep and confusing paradoxes. As a nation, we understand ourselves in terms of freedom, but we have been unable to grapple with our depriving blacks of freedom in the name of white prosperity and with our tolerance of legalized racial segregation and discrimination. As a nation, we have been shaped by racism, habituated to its presence, indifferent to its lethal capacity to inflict lingering human damage. Too often, Christians not only failed to defy slavery and condemn tolerance of racism; they supported it and benefited from these evils and ignored the very Gospel they had pledged to preach.

Not surprisingly, 11 a.m. on Sunday morning remains the most segregated hour in Christian America, yet most white Christian theologians have given little attention to slavery or racism. In the wake of the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the black liberation theologian James H. Cone denounced the lukewarm responses of mainline Protestant and Catholic Christians to the plight of black Americans as well as the willful blindness of Christian theologians. He declared racism to be America's original sin and proposed the concept of black theology.

When confronted with this unseemly history, many Catholics argue the "immigrant thesis," which dates the bulk of Catholic European immigration from the 19th century, thereby exempting Catholics from earlier slaveholding and

active participation in racism. This is not the case. Many Catholic planters in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries acquiesced in and prospered from slaveholding, and many white Catholic neighborhoods in the 20th century intentionally staved off housing integration. Most Catholics have heard little, if anything, about black theology, and given our national insistence that we now live in a "post-racial age,"



**COLOR LINES.** This wall, pictured in 2005, was built in the 1940s to enforce residential segregation in Detroit. The wall still stands, even though neighborhoods on both sides are now uniformly African-American.

many may wonder whether such a theology is at all relevant. Recurring public acknowledgments of landmark events in the modern black struggle for civil rights provide opportunities for reflection on our nation's recent past and for an examination of conscience.

### Time of Turmoil

The years extending roughly from 1954 to 1968 remain a controversial yet pivotal period in American history. These 14 years were marked indelibly by the courage and suffering, prayer and resolve of American women and men of all races and religions who dedicated themselves to secure basic civil rights for the disenfranchised, the segregated and oppressed

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M. SHAWN COPELAND is professor of systematic theology at Boston College in Chestnut Hill, Mass.

CNS PHOTO/JIM WEST

black women and men of the nation. These were the years of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Montgomery bus boycott, Dr. King's leadership of the civil rights movement, the involvement of black and white college students in sit-ins, freedom rides and voter registration drives. These were years of bombings and burnings, of police wielding batons, water cannons and cattle-prods, of sanctioned torture and murder of blacks and those whites who fought for justice alongside them; of protest and marching, mourning and rebellion. Montgomery, Little Rock, Jackson, the Mississippi Delta, Selma, Birmingham, Cicero, Memphis, Watts and Detroit were other stations of the cross.

Given Dr. King's thoroughgoing appeal to the Hebrew prophets and the teachings of Jesus, the civil rights movement could not but present a challenge to the consciences of Christians and Jews.

Catholic vowed religious women and men, along with priests, seminarians and lay people, Jewish rabbis, Protestant pastors and ministers joined protests and marches; several Catholic members of Congress supported civil rights legislation; bishops of many Christian churches denounced racism as a sin; and some Catholic bishops either integrated parochial schools under their direct control, or condemned publicly the most egregious instances of discrimination. Many individual Catholics made a difference. But what John Deedy argued in his 1987 book *American Catholicism: And Now Where?* still rings true: The Catholic Church in the United States, as an institution, had a marginal effect on the civil rights movement.

Despite passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960 and 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the masses of black people in the United States remained disenfranchised, segregated, discriminated against and mired in poverty. Sidelined by intentional presidential and bureaucratic refusals to deploy government resources and enforcement, these laws proved to be little more than legislative gestures. When in 1966 Stokely Carmichael, then chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, took up the phrase "black power" (most likely from a speech given by Congressman Adam Clayton Powell at Howard University), he disrupted the ethos of the civil rights movement and captured the frustration many blacks had begun to feel about nonviolence as a strategy for social empowerment.

The notion of black power was freighted with manifold meanings. In an economic sense, black power called for black ownership and control of economic and institution-

al resources in black communities—housing and schools, businesses and industries, banks and health care, land and real estate. Supporters of black power reasoned that even if blacks were guaranteed the exercise of political rights, without economic resources they remained locked in a distinctive type of colonial subjugation and economic exploitation. In cultural expression, black power advanced an aesthetic aimed to eradicate the internalized self-hatred that extended and deepened the psychic effects of slavery. Ron Karenga and Amiri Baraka (a k a LeRoi Jones), both activists and writers, were among its most notable advocates, and James

Brown sang its slogan in the song "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud."

Cultural nationalism promoted research, adoption and creative adaptation of African rituals and practices, but too often in uncritical ways. Since blacks already were racially

segregated in schools and housing, black power argued its embrace as separation and demanded that blacks build up their communities and ebonize academic curricula. This was also a poignant period. The sudden and violent deaths of John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy sowed suspicion and conspiracy theories that left the nation anxious, wounded and jaded.

Black theology emerged from the existential, discursive and cultural energy generated in black people's struggle for human dignity, liberation and flourishing. Through black theology, James Cone aimed to demonstrate that, as he wrote in his book *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*, "the politics of black power was the Gospel of Jesus to twentieth-century America." Just as Jesus put his ministry at the service of "the little ones"—the physically impaired and ill, the outcast and the poor—so, too, black power was committed to the liberation of the black outcast and poor from oppression. In his 1969 book *Black Theology and Black Power*, Professor Cone questioned the meaningfulness of the Gospel to:

powerless black [people] whose existence is threatened daily by the insidious tentacles of white power. Is there a message from Christ to the countless number of blacks whose lives are smothered under white society? Unless theology can become "ghetto theology," a theology which speaks to black people, the gospel has no promise of life for black [people]—it is a lifeless message.

Despite the passionate language and polemical tone

## Black theology emerged from the existential, discursive and cultural energy generated in black people's struggle for human dignity.

of *Black Theology and Black Power*, James Cone's theology remained a Christian theology, taking into account the complex religiosity of the enslaved Africans and their descendants as well as the tradition of radical advocacy of the historic black church. Professor Cone sought to give voice to the seething pain black people felt at the betrayal of the Gospel through the indifference and racist behaviors of too many white Christian clergypersons and lay people. Thus, he distinguished sharply between sacred Scripture as the word of God and sacred Scripture as it had been manipulated to serve the social and cultural interests of white Protestant and Catholic churches and their memberships. Black theology demanded a new consideration of the cultural matrix that is the United States in light of God's revelation in Jesus of Nazareth.

### Against 'Elegant Racism'

Under James Cone's inspiration and practical commitment to training doctoral students, for more than 45 years theologians of the black theology movement have sustained within Protestant Christianity one of the most provocative, intellectually stimulating and methodologically innovative movements in Christian thought in North America. Initially, these mostly male scholars failed to confront sexism and homophobia within the black community, but in

the ensuing period black theologians have put forward an agenda dealing with issues of gender, race, class, culture and sexuality as these have been posed by womanist theology (that is, theology that takes the differentiated historical, religious, cultural and social experiences of black women as its starting-point).

Black theological reflection calls attention to the perspective of oppressed black men and women as its point of departure; critically probes the meanings and consequences of the religious, historical, cultural and social experiences of black people in the United States; critiques the schism between Christian practice and Christian teaching in relation to race and gender; and contests the persistence of white supremacy and racism.

Public displays of vicious anti-black racial animus have become rare, although racially reactionary opinions are not hard to find. Disdain for these reactionary comments can afford us moments of self-congratulation: "We are colorblind. We have put race behind us; we have elected an African American as president." But our self-righteous reactions to displays of boorish racism distract us from what Ta-Nehisi Coates aptly described in *The Atlantic* (5/1) as "elegant racism," which is "invisible, supple, enduring."

Elegant racism is embedded in our vicious national practices of housing discrimination, redlining and real es-

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tate covenants. "Housing discrimination is hard to detect," Mr. Coates writes, "hard to prove, and hard to prosecute." Elegant racism constricts black and Latino access to adequate public transportation, first-rate schools, good jobs, good quality supermarkets and adequate public services. Elegant racism accounts for the disproportionate rates of incarceration of African-Americans and Latinos in comparison with whites; elegant racism explains what Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow* describes as the "sevenfold increase in the prison population in less than 30 years due to [putatively] rising crime in poor communities of color." Racism, Mr. Coates writes, is "elegant, lovely, monstrous," sinful and evil. Racism, America's original sin, makes black theology crucial and the collaborative theological critique of racism among white theologians necessary.

In 1979, reportedly at the urging of their black confreres, the Catholic bishops of the United States issued a pastoral letter on racism, "Brothers and Sisters to Us." The bishops defined racism as an enduring evil in society and in church. Racism, they stated, is a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father. Yet we have a way to go before we can claim to live out these truths fully as a church. John Deedy's assessment of Catholics and race rings as true today as it did 30 years ago: The church as a

whole has never gone "out of its way to make blacks feel welcome as Catholics" in the United States.

Few white Catholic theologians have engaged with the topic of racism or placed the condition of black Americans at the heart of their scholarly work. The recent work of black Catholic historians and theologians—Cyprian Davis, O.S.B., Cecilia Moore, Diane Batts Morrow, Bishop Edward Braxton, Shawnee-Marie Daniels-Sykes, S.S.N.D., Diana Hayes, Bryan Massingale, LaReine-Marie Mosely, Jamie T. Phelps, O.P., and C. Vanessa White—has enlarged our knowledge of black Catholic experience and enriched Catholic theological and ethical reflection.

But a new generation of white Catholic theologians, following the example of Jon Nilson from Loyola University Chicago, have begun to alert us to the stranglehold white racist supremacy maintains on our church and society—women and men like Jeremy Blackwood, Laurie Cassidy, Katie Grimes, Alexander Mikulich, Maureen O'Connell, Margaret Pfeil, Christopher Pramuk and Karen Teel.

Scholars like these, both black and white, work in the service of faith—exposing racism's sin against the body of Christ, its defilement of the sacrament and celebration of the Eucharist, its disruption of the bonds of charity and love that draw us into union with God and one another, and its mockery of the self-gift of the One who nourishes us with his very flesh and blood. A

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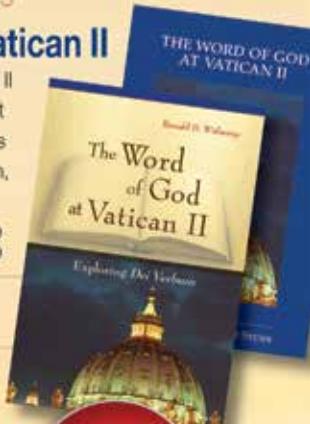
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# To Live Fully

## The witness of Sister Thea Bowman

BY CHRISTOPHER PRAMUK

**W**hile teaching an undergraduate course titled *The Black Catholic Experience*, an unsettling realization broke into my consciousness: How often the prophets and saints we most need to remember are hidden in plain sight among us. It is fitting and easy enough to celebrate the witness of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., as many parishes do, during Sunday Mass before the holiday commemorating his life. But maybe it is too easy for us to think that is all we need to do to fight the racism still present in our society today. Where might we find inspiration to continue to work for justice? The history of black Catholics presents us with a wondrous but too often forgotten cloud of witnesses. Could it be that the lives of these saints challenge many of us in ways that strike too uncomfortably close to home?

### Gift and Challenge to the Church

Arguably no person in recent memory did more to resist and transform the sad legacy of segregation and racism in the Catholic Church than Thea Bowman of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, a scholar and public speaker who inspired millions with her singing and message of God's love for all races and faiths. Sister Thea awakened a sense of fellowship in people both within and well beyond the Catholic world, first and foremost through her charismatic presence. But she also did it through her willingness to speak the truth about racial injustice in society and the church and through her remarkable ability to express such truths in the context of God's universal love.

"We need to tell one another in our homes, in our church, and even in our world, I really, really love you," she said. Indeed! But as Sister Thea taught us, we also need to *sing* the beautiful and demanding truth of God's call into the mystery of love, justice and cross-racial solidarity.

In 1989, at the age of 52 and compelled to use a wheelchair by the ravages of late-stage cancer, Sister Thea spoke before

a gathering of the nation's Catholic bishops about the gift of black Catholic spirituality within the church. In their marvelous book, *Thea's Song: The Life of Thea Bowman*, Charlene Smith and John Feister cite a number of witnesses of the remarkable encounter. Her "voice clear and resonant, eyes



sparkling and hands animated," Sister Thea did not hesitate to challenge and even chide the bishops for their complicity in a "church of paternalism, of a patronizing attitude" toward people of color. She said:

What does it mean to be black and Catholic? It means that I come to my church fully functioning. That doesn't frighten you, does it? I come to my church fully

---

**CHRISTOPHER PRAMUK** is an associate professor of theology at Xavier University in Cincinnati. This essay is adapted from his book, *Hope Sings, So Beautiful: Graced Encounters Across the Color Line* (Liturgical Press).

CNS PHOTO/MICHAEL HOYT

functioning. I bring myself, my black self, all that I am, all that I have, all that I hope to become, I bring my whole history, my traditions, my experience, my culture, my African American song and dance and ges-

baptismal freedom and Christian responsibility for love: "I know people are looking for sources of hope and courage and strength. I know it's important to have special people to look up to. But, see, I think all of us in the church are supposed to be that kind of person to each other."

This seems to me the pearl of great price in the story of Thea Bowman: *All of us in the church are supposed to be that kind of person to each other.* How then, as she put it, is it possible to unlock the "power of personal witness" and "get the word out"? How to ignite our baptismal freedom and go and do likewise? "My basic approach," she said, "was to try to promote activities that help different groups get to know one another. As we learn to know [and] appreciate one another, then we grow to love one another. [You bring people] into situations where they can share your treasure, your art, your food, your prayers, your history, your traditions, the coping mechanisms that enabled you to survive." And, characteristically, she added, "I think a sense of humor and a whole lot of fun can help."

Mutual sharing opens the way for "points of convergence" to emerge between strangers. "I can introduce my black friends to my Hispanic friends, to my Anglo friends, to my Asian friends, to my Native friends. I can be the bridge over troubled waters. I can take you by the hand and take you with me into the black community. I can walk with you into your community. And if I walk with you into your community I don't walk as a stranger. I walk as your sister."

### Fully, Joyfully, Creatively

Asked how she was coping with her cancer, Sister Thea replied, "Part of my approach to my illness has been to say I want to choose life, I want to keep going, I want to live fully until I die." Asked whether she had reconciled with her disease, she said: "I don't want to reconcile with cancer, I don't want to reconcile with injustice...racism...sexism...classism. I don't want to reconcile with anything that is destructive." Reflecting further on her life and death, she said: "I wish I had danced more, I wish I had run around more, I wish I had used my body more joyfully and more creatively."

One of my wishes, if God grants me the grace, is to make a pilgrimage with my family to Sister Thea's grave in Memphis, Tenn. In the meantime, I pray for the faithfulness to choose courage over fear, understanding over ignorance and risk over inertia. In the memory of Sister Thea and a thousand other hidden saints like her, may the Spirit of Christ ignite in us the courage "to live fully until we die," until that happy day when God calls us together again around the great welcome table. **A**

Maurice Nutt, C.Ss.R., preaches during a Mass at the gravesite of Sister Thea Bowman on March 30 in Memphis, Tenn.



ture and movement and teaching and preaching and healing and responsibility as gift to the Church.

It is a point of some embarrassment and even shame for me to admit that as a young Catholic I knew nothing about Sister Thea Bowman. Though her fame extended far and wide even in nonreligious circles, not once do I recall hearing Sister Thea's name mentioned in the Catholic schoolrooms and white suburban parish of my youth. Not once. Nor was I taught the inspiring history (and often scandalous treatment) of black Catholic sisters, priests and lay parishioners across the country. Thus her challenge to another predominantly white audience in 1989 (when I was 25) still resounds with prophetic urgency, poignancy and love, as though she were speaking directly to me: "Are you with us? We can stop and explain this stuff, but I'm asking you, are you with us?"

### Points of Convergence

Like Daniel Rudd, Sister Henriette DeLille, Bishop Vincent Waters, John LaFarge, S.J., the Rev. Clarence Rivers and many others before her, Sister Thea believed that Catholicism was uniquely equipped to forge healing relationships across the color line. "The beauty of universality is that the church is able to speak to people in whatever language they understand best—and we're not just talking about verbal language," she said. It is also important to note that Sister Thea resisted the tendency of her fellow Catholics to elevate her into the status of a "saint," which would relieve us of our own

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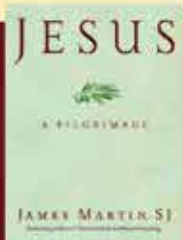
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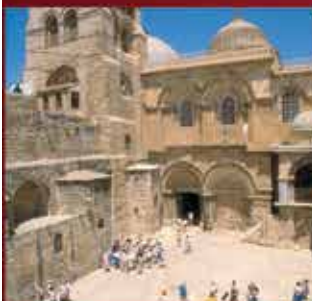
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# Saved by Grace

Striving for a more just and equal church

BY CORA MARIE BILLINGS

**M**y great-grandfather and I both have lived lives closely intertwined with religious orders. I have freely given my life to service through the Sisters of Mercy. My great-grandfather, on the other hand, had no choice regarding his service. He worked as a slave, owned by the Society of Jesus.

My great-grandfather served as a driver for the Jesuits at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. He would transport them to the convent of the Visitation Sisters, where they would celebrate Mass. Often I am asked how I can remain a Roman Catholic when the church I now serve in had ownership of a member of my family. Although this part of our Catholic history might make some people turn away from the

church, this knowledge makes me more determined to stay and to work for greater equality for people in the church and the world today. Change in the church most often comes from within. Standing up to injustice can

third or fourth grade, I was kneeling at the altar rail to receive Communion alongside my classmates. All the girls were lined up together. We were all about the same height and size, but I was the only black student. When it came time for me to receive the Eucharist, the priest skipped me. Now, I don't know what was in the priest's mind that day, but I remember thinking, *This is the sacrament that is the basis of our religion and our faith, and I'm being denied it.* Yet experiences like this motivated me to try to be a force for change.

In the early 1960s, I was sent to teach in a grade school in Levittown, Pa. The school had several thousand students, all of them white. Shortly before I started teaching there, a black family moved into a nearby parish, and a cross was burned in their yard. They moved out of the city. Soon after that, I moved in. I have always tried to embrace other cultures, but

other cultures are not always willing to embrace who I am.

Despite the challenges, I was happy to find that I was good at teaching and I loved children. Being a teacher allowed me to help empower people, and to teach people to empower themselves. I feel honored to be able to help people realize the inner gifts that they possess. Everyone has something to offer.

As a black Catholic and as a woman religious, I have often experienced



The author at an Anti-racism Transformation Team workshop in Pittsburgh in 2013.

be difficult, but if I leave the church out of fear or anger, I'm not helping anyone.

Over the years my faith has brought me such great joy, and my belief in God's goodness has helped me, especially at times when my fellow Christians have let me down. I grew up in West Philadelphia, but from third grade through eighth grade I attended a mostly white school. I often felt welcomed, but there were difficult moments. Once, in

CORA MARIE BILLINGS, R.S.M., is a member of the Anti-racism Transformation Team for the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

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being either “the first” or “the only” in any given situation. So it was especially powerful when I had the opportunity in 1968 to travel to Pittsburgh with the one other black sister in my community at the time. Together we attended the first National Black Sisters’ Conference. The sense of community I discovered at that conference helped to change the way I looked at the world. I had not realized the extent to which many of the systems in our society, and even in our church, perpetuated racism. I had been sent to college, but I learned that other black sisters had not. I learned that instead of being educated, they were given jobs at the switchboards in their communities. These conversations gave me courage and helped me to realize that I had received some benefits and opportunities that not everyone received.

When I came back from the conference, there was a Black Power rally at a nearby church in North Philadelphia. My cousin took me to that, and even though a part of me was scared to go, I found courage and strength from having just spent time among such faithful, black sisters.

My approach to life always has been, just do what needs to be done—and that means taking some risks. In 1969 I became the first African-American sister to teach in the diocesan secondary school system in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. I had to ask myself: What am I going to do to assist the students in a multicultural environment as they face

fear, suspicion, cultural ignorance and sometimes even violence? What am I going to do to increase their self-esteem and develop pride in their iden-

ties? I counseled students through controversies, and I helped to develop a Black Studies Club, which was not only an opportunity for students to learn about their culture and history, but a tool for sharing their identity.

In 1981 I became the first African-American sister to work as a campus minister at a state university in the Bible Belt. I worked full time at Virginia State University, but I also was involved in ministry at four other predominately black universities. Some people felt that the civil rights legislation of the 1960s answered all the dilemmas of race, but the legislation could not automatically remove fear and hatred from the hearts of individuals.

One evening I was asked to do a presentation about racism for a nearby parish. It meant I had to go to a part of town that was unfamiliar to me. I just knew the Ku Klux Klan was active in the area, and there had been protests and attacks. I do not seek out dangerous situations, but if I know there is a larger good that could come from my involvement, I will take that risk. Knowing that I would have to drive back home after dark, I told my friends that if I did not call them by midnight they should contact the authorities. I just knew I needed to be present at that parish to give witness at that time. Sometimes we just have to overcome fear and fulfill our convictions. Thank God, I made it home safely.

In 1990 I once again had the opportunity to live out my faith in a new way. A predominantly black parish in an inner-city neighborhood of Richmond lost its resident priest. I had attended this parish for years, and the

### JESUITS AND SLAVEHOLDING

Cora Marie Billings writes that her great-grandfather “worked as a slave, owned by the Society of Jesus.” How did this come about?

The Catholics of colonial Maryland became slaveholders as a means of asserting that even though they were shunned by the Protestant majority, they held the same political rights as any other English subjects. The English of the 17th and 18th centuries regarded the right to hold property, whether land or chattel, as a fundamental civil liberty. Neither Catholic laypeople nor members of the clergy questioned this conviction. Indeed, the English Protestant conviction that the profession of the Catholic faith meant forfeiture of all political rights prompted Catholic colonists to assert these rights ever more firmly. Lay benefactors saw gifts of slaves to the Jesuits as supportive of the church’s freedom. Similarly, during the early republic, Catholics celebrated the new Constitution for its guarantee of religious liberty while simply accepting its guarantee of slaveholding.

Internal church politics mattered too. When the Jesuit order was suppressed in 1773, the plantation system of the order in Maryland was seen as a protection for their identity and solidarity. The universal church taught that slavery enjoyed the sanction of Scripture and natural law. In an un-ecumenical era, the Protestant roots of abolitionism repelled many Catholics. Likewise, the other major source of abolitionism, the Enlightenment, was suspect to church authorities after the aggressive secularism of the French Revolution.

A combination of financial crisis and fear of Nativism led the Maryland Jesuits away from slaveholding; attempts to keep Catholic academies like Georgetown free of tuition failed because of continued mismanagement of the plantations. The poverty of the slaves and their continued harsh treatment were exploited by anti-Catholic critics. Lacking the conviction that abolition was an alternative, the Jesuits’ solution to these problems was the mass sale of the slaves to a planter in Louisiana in 1838.


Absolute Catholic condemnation of slaveholding emerged much later. This is a legacy that the Jesuits of the United States and the church as a whole still struggle to assimilate.

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**THOMAS MURPHY, S.J.**, *an associate professor of history at Seattle University, is author of Jesuit Slaveholding in Maryland, 1717-1838 (Routledge, 2001).*

bishop asked me if I would become pastoral coordinator for the parish. After a month of prayer, dialogue and advice, I accepted the leadership position.

I had a double challenge in this situation: I was a woman in the Catholic Church, and I was a black woman leader in the South. The dynamic was interesting, because many of the lay men would do anything I asked, but the women would have more questions or create conflict around my decisions. Prior to my leadership, the parish always had been led by a priest. When I took on the role of pastoral associate, there were times when I would be in meetings and if a white male said something, it would be held as gospel truth, but if a black woman raised the same point, it would be seen as suspect. Sometimes I felt I was being encouraged and supported and seen as a leader, but at other times people would leave a conversation with me and then go and try to find someone else to get the “right” answer.

Through all these challenges, I have tried to let people know that the Catholic Church is for everyone. I have hope in the future, because in my 75 years of life, I have seen how far we have progressed. I try to be patient. I try to put life in perspective. I know that our church and our world are not as they once were and they are not yet where I want them to be. But my hope is things will continue to get better. And I will always fight for that as long as I have energy. I will continue to live with the fulfillment of my convictions, and I will continue to move forward with the faith that God will help me to do what needs to be done. 

#### ON THE WEB

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## Something wonderful is happening on the Rosebud.

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# True Identity

There is no single way to define who I am.

BY VANESSA FULMORE

Some months ago, in honor of Black Catholic History Month, I was asked to speak to my parish about what it means to me to be black and Catholic. While honored, I must admit I felt a little overwhelmed. The request could not have come at a busier time for me. I had just finished four straight nights performing in my school's fall production of "To Kill a Mockingbird," a play about Tom Robinson, a character who is wrongfully and unjustly accused of a crime simply because he is black.

While there are many differences between our experiences, I could not help but notice that both the character's experience as a black man in 1935 and my own as a black Catholic today, have a lot to do with being judged by sight. But as Christians, isn't that exactly the opposite of what we are asked to do? You have heard it said, "Walk by faith and not by sight." We are called to have faith in God and in the goodness of others.

Yet every day we judge one another by sight. That homeless man on the street? He must be lazy or he would have a job. That woman in the short skirt? She must be...well, you know. And that black man? Guilty!

All of this made me wonder: How do others see and judge me? Two things are obvious: 1) I am a girl; 2) I am black. A third quality that helps to define who I am is less obvious but

equally important: 3) I am Catholic. This part of my identity is not immediately visible, so how do I convey it to others?

A song we all know comes to mind: "This Little Light of Mine." When you hear it, no matter how old you are, you almost always want to join in and sing the tune, which continues, "I'm gonna let it shine." Every day I have to ask myself, *How will I let my light shine in a way that invites others to join in?*

For one, I sing! In school, at church and at home, much to my parents' delight (well, sometimes). I sing God's praises to let my light shine through music. I also wear a cross every day to remind myself of Jesus' sacrifice and as a symbol to others that I am a believer. This lets my light shine through what I wear. And, of course, I pray—no matter where I am or who is watching. When I am at home, I pray. When I am in the car, I pray (especially when Mom is driving). When I see someone down on his or her luck, I pray. When I see that woman in the short skirt, I pray. And for the Tom Robinsons of 1935 and the Trayvon Martins of 2013, I pray. It is my hope that my light will shine through my prayers.

I am very fortunate not to have lived



The author (clockwise from top) before her 8th-grade formal, conducting a band and singing in "To Kill a Mockingbird"

in Tom Robinson's day. And while Trayvon Martin's tragedy did occur during my lifetime, I am blessed to say that the hate shown toward him is something I have yet to experience. My world is pretty small, between home, school, church, golf, family and friends.

And yet the golf course is another place I find myself in the minority, though it is a sport I have been playing since I was 7, and I have been on my school's varsity team since seventh grade. I have, so far, found people to be accepting of who I am. But as my world expands and I am one day forced to deal with the hatred of prejudice because of any part of who I am—female, golfer, black or Catholic—I know my faith will help me through when that time comes.

VANESSA FULMORE will be a high school freshman at the Aquinas Institute of Rochester in the fall. This article is adapted from a talk given at St. Monica Church in Rochester, N.Y.



I try always to treat others with respect and compassion. This lets my light shine brightest through my actions. I walk tall and proud as a woman—as a black, Catholic woman—in honor of those before me, like St. Monica, Venerable Henriette DeLille

and my mother! This lets my spirit light shine.

So what does it mean to me to be black and Catholic? It means, like it or not, we will almost always be judged by sight; so it is even more important for me to lead by example, to let my little

light shine so brightly through music, prayer and my actions that people will always see me for who I am.

I am Vanessa Fulmore. I am a confident young woman. I am blessed to be black and, yes, I am proud to be Catholic.

# Growing in Faith

BY LYNN FULMORE

**W**hen my little girl became a teenager, I didn't flinch. Raising a daughter who is so solidly grounded in her faith has made this journey (so far) a less stressful experience than those I've heard described by other parents. A very modest young lady, my daughter Vanessa and I don't argue about short skirts and makeup, parties or boys. Our conversations seem more focused on her grades, goals, golf and God, and for that I am grateful.

Vanessa certainly is more confident and comfortable in her faith than I was at her age. Yet there are unmistakable similarities between her childhood and mine. Just as my daughter and son are doing now, I grew up in a predominantly white community, attending a school with a similar demographic. I only knew of one other black Catholic family.

Of mixed heritage with light skin and long hair, my lineage always seemed in question during my youth. I learned quickly that it was easier to just avoid the more uncomfortable questions—"You're Catholic? But, you're black!"—if I just skipped mentioning the fact that I was Catholic. I certainly was not ashamed, but learning to navigate life as a young girl of color in the 1970s seemed struggle enough. As a result of keeping this part of my identity concealed, I eventually attended Mass with less and less frequency. By the time I had begun my own family, attending church had become an occasional event:

Easter, Christmas, Mother's Day, weddings and funerals.

This routine for us, however, would change with a knock at the door in 2006. Vanessa was only 6 years old. A local youth group was visiting door-to-door to invite neighbors to visit their church. Their excitement intrigued Vanessa. In the days that followed she asked more about God and church and said, simply, "Why don't we go more often?" And so it began from "the mouths of babes" (Ps 8:2).

Vanessa helped our family realign our relationship with God and recognize the importance of reinforcing that relationship through regular Mass attendance. We have become quite involved members, teaching at the children's liturgy, serving as eucharistic ministers, participating in the choir and vacation Bible school. Additionally, both Vanessa and her brother Joseph attended the Aquinas Institute of Rochester, as we have always believed in the importance of a faith-based education.

My daughter and I are similar in many ways—from our appearance to the communities and schools in which we grew up. Yet unlike my teenage self, Vanessa does not feel that concealing her faith will make her life easier. In fact, it is quite the contrary. The progress in

our nation since I was her age allows Vanessa to be outwardly proud of who she is: a woman, black and Catholic. She is aware that these are her greatest attributes and lets the glowing light of each shine for the benefit of others in all she does every day.

Although we have made much progress, our country still has far to go. Vanessa has been subject to unwelcoming stares and glares at more than one of the more elite courses where she has golfed. For now this is noticed only by the wide eye of a watchful parent. Vanessa, on the other hand, has not yet noticed these exchanges. Perhaps her youth limits her scope, or perhaps it's just that she tends to see all of life through a lens of goodness. Maybe there is a lesson in that for all of us.

It should always be the goal of our world that growth and progress accompany each generation. Vanessa not only achieved that goal for herself, but she has successfully reached back to my generation and helped me to be a better Christian as well—a Catholic Christian. I am most proud to be her mother.



Lynn Fulmore at her 8th-grade formal.

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LYNN FULMORE, owner and chief operating officer of EPIC Trainings, a health, safety and wellness training company, is the mother of Vanessa Fulmore.



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# BOOKS & CULTURE

FILM | JOHN ANDERSON

## SISTERS ACT

*Two documentaries on the work of women religious*

There is nothing quite like a nun with a voice.

This month, 50 years after Soeur Sourire, the Belgian singing sister, topped the charts with her pop hit “Dominique” (and received the dubious distinction two years later of being portrayed on screen by Debbie Reynolds), Sister Cristina Scuccia of Sicily won the televised talent competition “The Voice of Italy” with her rendition of “What a Feeling,” a rousing performance complete with a kick line of “monks” hiding pastel-colored suits beneath their robes.

In the 1965 Debbie Reynolds movie, the order was embarrassed by the nun with a guitar; on “Voice of Italy,” the judges were only embarrassed when Sister Cristina accepted her award by reciting the Our Father.

Public prayer often makes people uneasy. So do acts of conscience. You see it in **Band of Sisters**, Mary Fishman’s charming and inspiring documentary about American women religious and how they have lived and changed since the Second Vatican Council. Throughout all its captivating interviews with fascinating wom-

en talking about the issues that drive their work—the environment, food, health care, social activism of various stripes—the film keeps returning to Joann Persch and Pat Murphy of the Sisters of Mercy, who hold regular demonstrations at the Broadview Detention Center in Illinois. There they pray for undocumented immigrants who are being bused out, their families often being left behind, and they try their best to console the distraught. (The sisters’ lobbying efforts on behalf of the state’s Access to Religious Ministry Act of 2008 are also recounted.)

What is interesting, aside from the action itself, is how the guards at Broadview treat the prayer group—curtly, even abusively. It is as if the guards were trying to sleep through

**WALKING OUT.** Demonstration against segregation at the Illinois Club for Catholic Women, Loyola University, 1963, from “Band of Sisters.”



“Band of Sisters” behind the scenes: Mary Fishman with JoAnn Persch, R.S.M., and Pat Murphy R.S.M.



their role in an unjustifiably cruel and politically manipulated deportation system, and the sisters were the alarm clock they wanted to knock off the nightstand.

They are embarrassed, in other words, by people putting into practice those values that are supposed to be part of the fabric of civilized society—to say nothing of a society that publicly espouses so much high-flung religious fervor—but that are often principles too inconvenient or unprofitable to actually be followed.

So it has been since Vatican II, which may have been followed by a decrease in religious vocations but which also resulted in a revitalization among many women who stayed. The American sisterhood may not be the conscience of the church, but they are the “risk-takers,” as one nun puts it. This has led to friction between the nuns and the Vatican, tensions that may now be relaxing but were in some ways inevitable. (“Band of Sisters” was made pre-Pope Francis, so its point of view is not quite up-to-the-minute.)

“Band of Sisters,” which offers some of the more intelligent company to be shared at the movies, is also definitive of the grass-roots movie release. “Mary didn’t know about film distribution,” said Ms. Fishman’s associate Jessica Rosner, “but she knew where the nuns are.” Combining their respective fields

of expertise (Ms. Rosner is a veteran of independent film distribution), they have taken the film where the nuns are, where there are concentrations of sisters and sympathetic audiences and have had a remarkably successful, virtually unadvertised tour around the country. Back in Debbie Reynolds’s day the ads used to trumpet, “Coming soon to a theater near you.” Well, “Band of Sisters” may well be coming to a theater near you, but it might also be a church basement, convent or high school auditorium. (To find out, visit [bandofsistersmovie.com](http://bandofsistersmovie.com).)

Another woman religious with a voice worth listening to is Sister Rosemary Nyirumbe. Although she isn’t out to embarrass anyone, her brand of unqualified charity certainly is humbling. The subject of director Derek Watson’s *Sewing Hope*, Sister Rosemary is the power behind St. Monica’s School in northern Uganda, where the madman Joseph Kony has been doing the work of his Orwellian-named “Lord’s Resistance

Army” through murder, rape, pillage and the enslavement of children. Sister Rosemary’s work has been teaching the young girl victims of Kony’s war a trade—sewing—and trying to restore their sense of self-worth in a society that has viewed them as largely irredeemable.

The stories contained in “Sewing Hope,” told by children who have been forced to commit unspeakable crimes, are appalling in their sadistic brutality. The idea that there is some kind of a cure for their psychic wounds is not really



Sister Rosemary Nyirumbe holds beads made by her students.

CNS PHOTO/NANCY WIEGHEC

part of the program at St. Monica’s, but Sister Rosemary’s brand of unconditional love and support seems therapeutic, at least; a sense of accomplishment, a sense that the source of their self-loathing is not their fault is what Rosemary tries to instill in the students. It is an inspiring story, and would be even without many of the film’s moody close-ups of the girls, or the animated sequences that try to appropriate the tensions of a graphic novel, or even actor Forest Whitaker’s narration, which often lapses into portentous sentiment. The story does not need any of these embellishments. In fact, they are less than flattering to a subject who is so matter-of-factly Christian in a very pure sense and who might scoff at the idea that Jesus’ message required dramatic enhancement. It’s her girls that need help, and Sister Rosemary is doing what she can to offer it. (To learn more, visit [prosforafrica.com](http://prosforafrica.com).)

**JOHN ANDERSON** is a film critic for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Indiewire* and *Newsday* and a regular contributor to the Arts & Leisure section of *The New York Times*.

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# ONE JOURNALIST'S JOURNEY

The Washington Post political columnist Eugene R. Robinson is especially sensitive to color—not because he is a tall, 60-year-old African-American male in an overwhelmingly white elite profession, but because he is a careful observer. His eyes send messages to his fingers and they begin to type. He named his first book, a memoir, *Coal to Cream: A Black Man's Journey Beyond Color to an Affirmation of Race* (1999), after two portraits on the wall of his house: one a portrait of his great-grandfather, whose skin was very dark, like coal, consistent with his stern look; the other a portrait of his great grandmother, with a café-au-lait complexion and a winsome Victorian look. This transition from coal to cream, suggested his editor, summed up the pattern of his life.

Later, as a reporter in Brazil, he noticed the various shades of complexion but couldn't collect his reflections on paper, he said.

As a student at the University of Michigan, he said, he found the racial mix was like a "World War II movie foxhole." He was thrown together with a Hawaiian Japanese roommate, Jewish friends and lots of white and black students. He also could not help observing that in America the darkest-skinned Negroes were also "the most ill fed, ill housed, ill educated, ill prepared to make your way in the world."

Of 50 of Robinson's most recent columns, plus another 10 earlier pieces covering the presidential campaigns of the Clintons and Barack Obama in 2008—for which he won a Pulitzer Prize—eight are about being black in America and its consequences.

One of them is about Clayton Lockett, a black man and a convicted murderer, who spent 43 minutes dying as the State of Oklahoma tried to kill him by an injection of an untested cocktail of drugs. Instead of losing consciousness, he writhed and tried to speak. The state stopped the execution and planned to make another, successful attempt later, but he died of a heart attack. Robinson concludes that there is no way to impose capital punishment without betraying our moral standards: "When we murder we become murderers."

At the University of Michigan, a new world opened up when he joined the student paper. He loved interviewing people and making sense of what they said. A teaching fellow encouraged him, and he wrote about the 1968 Orangeburg massacre, when highway patrolmen killed three black student demonstrators. The article won a prize, and he was on his way.

He moved to The San Francisco Chronicle in 1976, then to The Washington Post in 1980, which sent him to Latin America and London, then brought him back to edit its Style section.

Though his principles emerge in his writing, he is far from an ideologue: he favors the defenseless, the multitudes who would never have had health care were it not for the Affordable Care Act, whose triumph he celebrated (4/14). For him Congressman Paul Ryan's line—"blaming poverty on the mysterious influence of culture"—is

an "excuse for doing nothing to address the problem" (3/24). He is "outraged" that the 400-page executive summary of the report on detention and torture during the George W. Bush administration is still secret. We should care about what is in the report not because torture might have been ineffective. Rather, "It's that it was immoral" (4/8).

If I were to ask him about his favorite book, he would refer me to his reflections (4/21) on Gabriel García Márquez, who recently died at 87, and Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which changed Robinson's life by giving him a new way of looking at the world. Reading it was like "stepping through a portal into a Technicolor reality where the streets are paved with metaphor and the air is fragrant with dreams," he wrote (4/21). He recalls a three-day trip

through Colombia with Márquez as a guide, during which Márquez suddenly perceived that the arranged trip might be a propaganda exercise by the Colombian government. Márquez said he had come because he "wanted Americans to understand what their insatiable demand for drugs was doing to the country."

For the most part Robinson hides his emotions, except for election night 2008. Tears flowed as he called his parents in Orangeburg, recalling "the sacrifices they endured so his generation could climb higher." On that night I, and many others, shared his tears of joy.

Though Eugene Robinson's principles emerge in his writing, he is no ideologue.



## BREAKING BARRIERS

What better way to introduce our readers to more black Catholic writers than to ask a selection of black Catholic intellectuals to tell us about their favorite books by their fellow writers? We are happy to present this rich cross section of men and women and a mix of history, biography, liturgy, music and fiction that presents a broader picture of creativity and the Catholic Church in the United States.

Raymond A. Schroth, S.J.

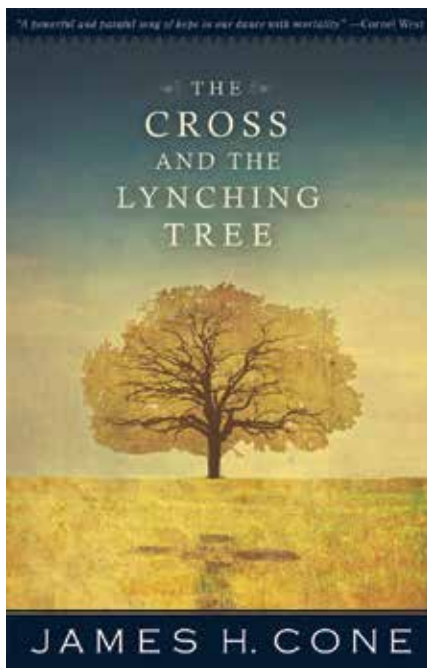
BRYAN N. MASSINGALE

### THE CROSS AND THE LYNCHING TREE

By James H. Cone

James H. Cone, the foremost advocate of a U.S. black liberation theology, is the author of nine books. The most recent is a meditation on one of the most horrifying phenomena in the troubled history of U.S. race relations: lynching—the brutally savage, extrajudicial, sadistic torture and killing of African-Americans, mostly men. Describing it with uncharacteristic understatement as “a shameful and painful way to die,” Cone details how these executions—which included shootings, hangings and burnings, often accompanied by excruciating dismemberment—were public spectacles and widely advertised events that occurred with the “widespread knowledge” of government officials and the “tacit approval” of white churches. Cone notes that these vicious events were intended to bolster white social dominance and to silence any challenge to white rule. Thus our author describes lynching as “a ritual celebration of white supremacy” and the ultimate expression of U.S. callousness concerning the lives of African-Americans and other persons of color.

Cone probes lynching’s two-fold theological significance. First, he details how lynching was both sanctioned by white Christianity and ignored by its leading theologians. Lynching was the tragic consequence



of a faith-based worldview that considered white supremacy a “divine right” to be protected by any means necessary.

Second, Cone sees in lynching an “analogy” with the cross of Jesus. He believes that the cross and the lynching tree need each other. The cross needs the lynching tree “to remind Americans of the reality of suffering—to keep the cross from being a symbol of abstract, sentimental piety.” But without the cross, the lynching tree “becomes simply an abomination,” devoid of hope. The cross, then, enables Christians to stand in solidarity with the victims of unjust suffering who endure contemporary social crucifixions.

Cone unearths the little acknowledged shadow of brutal terrorism

that haunts the racial divisions that still plague us. He shows, with stark clarity, how lynching’s logic continues to sustain public indifference toward persons of color, especially those who are poor. And yet he also reveals how authentic faith leads to genuine cross-racial solidarity. This book is a worthy addition to Cone’s lifelong project of relentless truth-telling with matchless courage.

BRYAN N. MASSINGALE is professor of theological ethics at Marquette University and the author of *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*.

CYPRIAN DAVIS

### FREEMAN

By Leonard Pitt

Read the book by Leonard Pitt, and the Civil War is not very far away. I am now 84 years old. My great grandmother was living when I was a boy and I used to visit her. Had I been a little older I could have asked her many things. The family would not have liked me writing about slavery. My family was shamed about slavery, but my great grandmother would not have been ashamed about being a slave. She always talked about the past. She was frank and open. When I think about my age, I realize now that slaves and slavery are still close by.

CYPRIAN DAVIS, O.S.B., author of *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*, is a monk and scholar at Saint Meinrad Archabbey in Indiana.

KIM R. HARRIS

### WILLIE T.

#### The Untold Story of Willie ‘Bill’ Johnson and His Life Before, During and After the Golden Gate Quartet

By Chandra J. Johnson

Negro spirituals and gospel music accompany and enliven the liturgies of many black Catholic parishes.

Historically, the musical arrangements and performance prowess of landmark groups like the Golden Gate Quartet, forged one of the important links between these distinct genres of music. Less known is a direct connection, through the lives of a black Catholic family, between this pre-eminent quartet and the liturgical music utilized by present-day black Catholic communities.

The Golden Gate Quartet sang “Bible stories with a beat.” To a traditional “jubilee” quartet style of singing spirituals, the Gates added a Mills Brothers-influenced use of their voices as musical instruments. Willie T. Johnson (1913-80) was co-founder, arranger-composer, vocal coach, storied narrator and business manager for the group from 1931 until 1943 and again in 1946 and ’47. Through his efforts, and based on the group’s recordings, radio and film exposure and the support of powerful, progressive friends during segregated times, the Gates garnered international renown.

Numerous accolades, underscored by the events and locations referred to in her father’s Los Angeles Times obituary, surprised the author Chandra J. Johnson. Could a head custodian for the Los Angeles Unified School District and the taciturn father of a faith-filled black Catholic family be the same man who mentored Elvis Presley in singing, and performed at Carnegie Hall for New York City’s staunchly integrated Café Society and in the legendarily segregated Constitution Hall for a presidential inauguration concert?

Without realizing their father’s fame, the Johnson siblings sang along with his recordings as children. Willa Mae (Burke) and Willie T. Johnson, converting from the Baptist and Pentecostal traditions of their upbringing, chose Catholic education and faith formation for their children. The family became deeply involved in Transfiguration parish, eventually leading music for liturgies and retreats.

The Gates arrangements that filled Kevin Johnson’s childhood home inspired and often influenced his widely used liturgical and choral music as he became a prominent contemporary composer, scholar and choral director.

*Willie T.* follows a daughter’s loving search for her father’s past. Adding to the appreciation of the challenges for African-Americans of each era, Johnson places the results of her research within their relevant historical context.

**KIM R. HARRIS** is co-composer of *Welcome Table: A Mass of Spirituals* and specializes in performing and promoting the liturgical, historical and popular understanding of Negro spirituals and civil rights freedom songs.

## ANDREW PREVOT THE SPIRITUALS AND THE BLUES An Interpretation

By James H. Cone

More than 40 years after the first publication of *The Spirituals and the Blues* (1972), this book’s central message still rings true. To encounter God today, we need to internalize the hopes of those who are and have been oppressed by centuries of anti-black terror. God draws close to us in their songs and struggles. Their spirituality is the heart of a black theology of liberation. Moreover, this spirituality has something crucial to offer any theology worthy of the name.

One of Cone’s best known teachings

## FREE RIDE OF GRACE

One February morning, pause  
between kitchen and dining room  
to weep at Belle and Sebastian  
singing about God. The cold is good  
for maple syrup, makes sap run,  
you aren’t sure how, or why this pretty pop  
song makes you snivel and drip like a cut  
twig. You’ve seen God on Bisson street,  
God in a bicycle wheel. Update your status  
with an ooze of sap, or pastoral postcard,  
Scotland or Greece, some foreground  
figures sitting, dark cherries in a bowl.

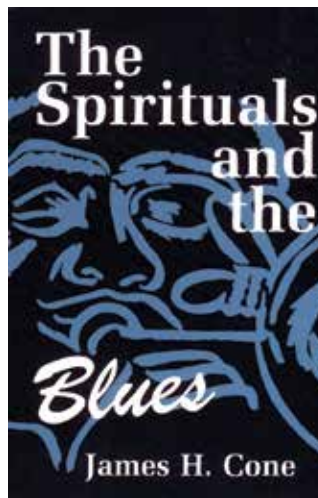
MARGARET YOUNG

MARGARET YOUNG is the author of two collections of poetry, *Willow From the Willow* (Cleveland State Poetry Center, 2002) and *Almond Town* (Bright Hill Press, 2011). This poem was the first runner-up in the 2014 Foley poetry contest.

is that “God is black.” This book helps one better understand why he holds this view. Cone does not merely argue that blackness is a valid way to imagine God because all humans, whatever

their color, are created in the image of God. More forcefully, he contends that God *is* black because, in a slave-holding society and in any society still haunted by its horrors (like ours), the *only* God worthy of worship is one who hears the prayers of the slaves, enters into their lives to the point of radical identification with them, condemns the evil deeds of their oppressors and opens a path to the slaves’

(and finally both parties’) integral free-



dom. In order to pray truly and thereby become a true Christian in such a society, one must pray and show obedience to the God who is actively present in the black slaves' struggles and is faithfully adored by them—that is, the black God.

This is a vocation for all Christians, but it is an especially important and demanding vocation for white Christians who may still (perhaps unwillingly) be devoted to an idolatrous god that disregards black suffering. Like the psalms, the spirituals are for the whole church and should spur its further conversion.

**ANDREW PREVOT** is an assistant professor of theology at Boston College.

**CECILIA A. MOORE**

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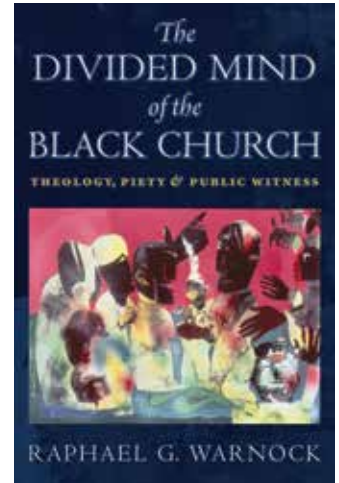
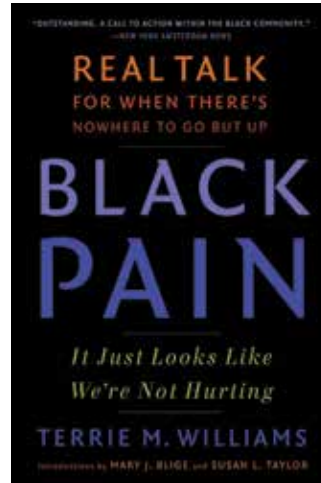
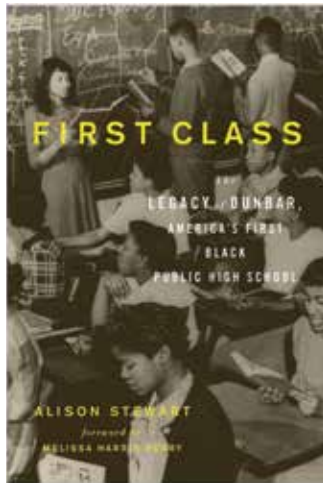
By Alison Stewart

For generations, religious and educational institutions have shaped the lives of African-Americans. From the independent black churches that emerged in antebellum America to the religious communities of black Catholic women dedicated to educating black children

in the 19th century, free and enslaved people of African descent placed their trust in the power of faith and education to liberate, lift and promote. Through

commitments of her parents and their friends.

For over 100 years, Dunbar alumni have made major contributions to their



organizing and leading religious and educational institutions, blacks helped shape their own lives and those of future generations. One of the oldest and most important of these institutions, Dunbar High School, founded in Washington, D.C., in 1870, is the subject of a recent book by the journalist Alison Stewart.

Stewart's book, *First Class*, is for all who love history and biography, for those who believe education is the key to a better world and for those who seek to understand the complexity and richness of African-American lives. As the daughter of Dunbar alumni, Stewart grew up hearing about legendary Dunbar, its faculty and its students. More important, she experienced the ways Dunbar shaped the character, convictions and

communities as doctors, lawyers, business executives, scholars, artists (fine and performing), authors and especially as teachers. Stewart's book looks at why Dunbar came into being shortly after the Civil War and how it successfully educated generations of black youth from all social backgrounds to strive for academic excellence. She presents the positive and negative effects of the civil rights movement, particularly school for, on Dunbar, and the possibility of today's Dunbar to revive a belief in and commitment to academic excellence for African-American students in Washington, D.C. *First Class* is about the power of schools, teachers, parents and especially students to use education to make a positive difference locally and globally.

**CECILIA A. MOORE** is an associate professor in the department of religious studies at the University of Dayton in Ohio.

**C. VANESSA WHITE**

**BLACK PAIN**  
**(It Just Looks Like We're Not Hurting)**

By Terrie M. Williams

There are certain books that need to

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be read and reread to get the full impact of their message. *Black Pain* by Terrie M. Williams is such a book. In powerful and courageous words she writes about the experience within the black community of journeying with a pain so deep that it has been hidden from view for generations.

An Ethiopian proverb says that as long as the pain is hidden, one cannot be healed. Terrie has uncovered the pain that dwells within the black community, a pain that just looks like “we are not hurting” but has done tremendous damage to our sisters and brothers of various ages and backgrounds.

The spiritual journey is shaped by sharing one’s story, speaking the truth and allowing oneself to be transformed. Williams, a clinical so-

cial worker, shares her own story of over 30 years of depression. During this time she managed a successful media relations company while journeying with a debilitating depression that affected her health as well as her relationships and work.

The truth of her story speaks to the ways in which depression manifests itself within the black community and how its insidiousness has deprived so many of a life of hope. This book could be transformative for anyone with the courage and openness to read it.

The chapters address various constituencies within the black community—for example: the black woman: “I’m Not Your Superwoman: Overworked, Undervalued and Under Pressure”; the black male:

“I Wish it Would Rain; Black Men and Depression”; and the young: “It’s a Hard Knock Life; The Young and the Depressed.” She also shares her insights about how the church working with mental health professionals can assist with the incapacitating dimensions of depression. Williams ultimately writes about how she and others need to break the silence and begin the healing process and she offers suggestions on how to do just that.

As one who works with many who are hiding their pain as they try to navigate today’s society, I have found this book to be a must read and highly recommend it to all.

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**C. VANESSA WHITE** is assistant professor of spirituality and ministry and director of the Tolton Ministry Formation Program at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. She is co-editor of the book *Songs of Our Hearts and Meditations of Our Souls*.

#### ON THE WEB

The Catholic Book Club discusses *Rekindling the Christic Imagination*.  
[americamagazine.org/cbc](http://americamagazine.org/cbc)

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DIANA L. HAYES

## THE DIVIDED MIND OF THE BLACK CHURCH Theology, Piety and Public Witness.

By Raphael G. Warnock

In this work, the Rev. Raphael G. Warnock, senior pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Ga., critiques the black churches' tendency to be radical on issues of racial justice yet reactionary regarding women, homosexuality and immigration, among other things.

He asks: "What is the true nature and purpose of the church?" and responds by analyzing the thought of black and womanist theologians regarding the church's mission and examining the responses of the churches and their pastors. He laments especially the growing gap between these two groups at a time when it is of vital importance for the black church to be in dialogue. Calling the divide unfortunate and unnecessary, Warnock calls for an ongoing dialogue between black and womanist theologians and black pastors in order to enable the black church to serve, as it once did, as both a source of personal salvation and a forum and advocate for social protest for a black community in dire need of its strength, compassion and resources.

"Is the mission of the black church to save souls or to transform the social order? Or both?" Warnock highlights four moments along a liberationist trajectory of African-American faith: Christianization, the enslaved's redemption of Christian faith; institutionalization, resulting in the emergence of independent black churches; conscientization, the civil rights and other movements; and systematization, the articulation of black faith in black and womanist theologies. Lastly, Warnock calls for a fifth moment, integrative, resulting in a fully realized self-critical liberationist movement

within the church and community.

I chose this work because of its emphasis on the need for dialogue between theologians and the church, pastors and parishioners alike. Many of the issues raised are applicable not only for blacks in the Catholic Church but for other Catholics who still find themselves marginalized. Black and womanist theologies are still little known in the Catholic community and their solidarity with feminist, mujerista, Asian, Native American, Latino/a

and other theologians is still overlooked. This work encourages all of those historically marginalized in our church and others who find themselves increasingly marginalized, such as gays and women in general, to work in solidarity to overcome the divide between personal piety and social justice that threatens the stability and viability of the universal Catholic Church.

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DIANA L. HAYES is emerita professor of theology at Georgetown University.

BOOK REVIEW | ALEX MIKULICH

## MIRROR TO AMERICA

### PAUL ROBESON A Watched Man

By Jordan Goodman  
Verso. 320p \$29.95

Successful political biographies offer insight both on their individual subject and the time in which that person lived. More rare is the biography that teaches something about who we are as Americans. Jordan Goodman's latest biography, written with the subtlety and humility befitting a black renaissance man, lifts a mirror to America.

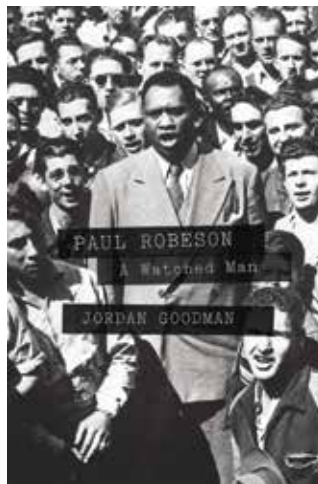
As red-baiting and racism reveal their ugly heads in unrelenting criticism of the first black U.S. president, Goodman reminds us how a deadly alliance between anti-communism and racism, although it ultimately failed to deter Paul Robeson, strangled the American racial and political imagination by failing to attend to the wisdom of black radical politics in the 20th century.

Tracking multiple paper trails

through Canadian, U.S. and U.K. archives and special collections, Goodman weaves a compelling narrative that complements a growing body of history "from below."

W. E. B. Du Bois, who would later become Robeson's mentor, dear friend, comrade for Pan African rights and passionate advocate, first heralded Robeson as an outstanding scholar athlete at Rutgers University through an essay for *The Crisis*, the journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Suffering racism at every turn, Robeson became an all-American football player and the valedictorian of his class of 1919. A devoted student of culture and language, he would eventually sing in 20 languages.

After the bombing of the Basque town Guernica, with its defenseless civilian population, in 1937 during the Spanish Civil War, when Robeson sang to procure relief aid for refugees



and children, he changed the words of "Ol' Man River" from "I must keep rollin' along," to "I must keep strugglin' til I'm dyin.'" Robeson was unswerving in his commitment to justice by seamlessly and defiantly sewing art and politics to bind the dignity and rights of oppressed people everywhere.

For the U.S. government, art was fine so long as it was innocuous, or better, promoted America's image. Indeed, the United States promoted African-American artists abroad, as long as they kept to their art. When the U.S. government withheld Robeson's passport, the aim was not only to silence Robeson's global voice, it was to discredit his American identity.

As independence movements and new nations burgeoned globally, Goodman recounts how the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union were all building the cornerstones of the Cold War.

Meanwhile, Senator Joseph McCarthy, though not the only or principal person, created the anti-Communist hysteria of the era. President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order No. 9835 on March 21, 1947, a set of procedures and requirements used to determine whether or not civil service employees were loyal to the United States. The Truman loyalty program, as it became known, gleaned information from a variety of sources, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Justice Department.

The U.S. attorney general's role included the creation of a blacklist of groups designated as "subversive, or communist." According to Attorney General Tom Clark, of the 12 organizations listed as subversive, only the Ku Klux Klan was not named a Communist front. Sadly, yet unsurprisingly, most of the remaining organizations named "subversive" were groups advocating human rights in the United States, Spain or South Africa.

Although the U.S. Senate eventual-

ly censored Joseph McCarthy in 1954, the State Department, the Justice Department and the F.B.I. undertook a massive propaganda campaign against Communism. Businesses like the Columbia Broadcasting System followed suit, requiring its 2,500 employees to prove their patriotism and answer whether or not they associated with or participated in any of the "subversive" groups listed by the Justice Department.

In addition to wreaking havoc in Robeson's life, that anti-Communist dragnet would tear apart countless friendships and alliances between African-Americans and other progressive forces, and would discredit a wide variety of individuals and groups struggling for the rights of labor and African-Americans.

U.S. anti-Communism played relentlessly on white American racial fears, fueling the myth that African-Americans were somehow less than American and that they would not defend American liberty. As the history of African-American service to the nation in time of war indicates, and as General Dwight D. Eisenhower testified before the House Un-American Affairs Committee, nothing was further from the truth.

Robeson's testimony before the committee is telling, revealing both the moral backbone of Robeson's character and the shrillness of anti-Communism. Robeson flipped the script on his congressional interrogators, asking what

right they had to question him when they failed to uphold the Negro's rights or condemn widespread lynching.

Curiously, H.U.A.C., as well as the U.S. government, failed to take up lynching as a threat to American life. As Du Bois, Paul Robeson and Albert Einstein spearheaded the American Crusade Against Lynching, the U.S. government and Congress were more concerned with naming the imagined Communist threat than combating deadly racism both at home and in South Africa.

Ultimately, as Goodman demonstrates through government documentation, the only officially stated reason for restricting Robeson's travel was his "political meddling." The U.S. government simply did not like the fact that Robeson exposed American racial injustice and hypocrisy to the world.

*Paul Robeson: A Watched Man* ought to be read widely for the light it sheds on contemporary threats to U.S. democracy and for what it teaches about a black renaissance man. As the Illinois poet laureate Gwendolyn Brooks expressed it in her poem "Paul Robeson," we have yet to heed his "Warning, in music-words/ devout and large,/ that we are each other's/ harvest:/ we are each other's/ business:/ we are each other's/ magnitude and bond."

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ALEX MIKULICH is co-author of *The Scandal of White Complicity in U.S. Hyperincarceration: A Nonviolent Spirituality of White Resistance* (Palgrave MacMillan).

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### DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE.

A full-time position exists for the position of Director of Marriage and Family Life for the Archdiocese of Hartford. In this position, the successful candidate will educate and be a resource to all parishes regarding the promotion and enhancement of marriage and family life. The office is responsible for the Archdiocesan Common Policy for Marriage Preparation and ministry to married couples; the ministry to the bereaved; the ministry to the separated and divorced; and multi-cultural family ministry.

Additional duties will include the coordination and support of natural family planning programs for married and engaged couples; administration and monitoring of all family life programs with attention to effective response to all parishes, ministries and community groups; coordination of the ministry to the engaged; oversight and supervision of the deanery engaged couples conference programs throughout the Archdiocese with on-going training, new team orientations, resources, networking and support.

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# Listen!

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), JULY 13, 2014

Readings: Is 55:10-11; Ps 65:10-14; Rom 8:18-23; Mt 13:1-23

*“Why do you speak to them in parables?” (Mt 13:10)*

**W**hy did Jesus speak to people in parables? Scholars are agreed beyond doubt that Jesus taught in parables. The parable is a type of speech act in which the speaker attempts to draw comparisons between one thing and another. In fact, the Greek word *parabolē* might best be translated “comparison.” A parable may be encased in a narrative or in similitudes, by which something is said to be “like” something else. It is generally thought that “parable” translates the Hebrew *mashal*, which has a broader range of meaning than “parable,” and includes riddles, proverbs, allegories and fables. Though other Jewish teachers taught in parables, there are distinctive elements to Jesus’ parables.

Too dry? Let me tell you a story.

Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!

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

Now do you understand?

There is more than one reason that Jesus spoke in parables, but one of the crucial reasons is that people remember stories better than they do definitions. Stories attract people of all ages and allow us to visualize vital scenes.

Most people remember their favorite childhood stories or recall telling their children the same story over and over. Stories pass on meaning encrypted in simple characters and everyday events.

It is not that parabolic narratives are always easy to understand, but the impact emerges from every nook and cranny of a parable, like some sort of linguistic English muffin, dripping with significance. Parables do not shut meaning down, they open it up. This is true when Jesus explains to his disciples why he uses parables to teach in general and when he is interpreting the particular meaning of a parable he has just unfolded for his listeners.

When the disciples ask Jesus why he speaks to the crowds in parables, he explains, “The reason I speak to them in parables is that ‘seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand’” (a citation from Is 6:9). This prophetic explanation indicates not the power of the story, but the opaque nature of the parable for those who do not seek meaning. Yet Is 6:10, also cited by Jesus, stresses that his listeners must “look with their eyes, and listen with

their ears, and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them.” Meaning is present for those who diligently seek it out.

Jesus makes meaning present when he interprets the parable of the sower and so offers a model of diligent seeing, hearing and seeking. The seed is the “word of the kingdom,” and the places where it is sown represent the condition of the human heart that receives the word of the kingdom. Some seed is snatched away from those who lack understanding; others receive it joyfully, but the seed grows quickly and withers; while others receive it but are later drawn away by the “cares of the world and the lure of wealth.” But the seed, the word of the kingdom, which falls “on good soil” bears fruit and yields “in



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Place yourself with the crowds listening to Jesus speak in parables. How are you receiving the word?

one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Jesus unveiled the parable of the sower and offered the disciples an interpretation only when the disciples approached him to ask why he taught in parables. Jesus explained that “to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.” The reason the secret “has not been given” is not that Jesus desires to hide the truth but that he wants his followers to seek the truth. And the interpretation of the parable of the sower coincides with the broad range of hearers to whom he was just speaking. Jesus is performing the parable: Are you rocky ground? Thorny ground? Good soil? How can you tell? Listen: Who comes asking questions and seeking meaning?

# People, Not Plants

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), JULY 20, 2014

Readings: Wis 12:13-19; Ps 86:5-16; Rom 8:26-27; Mt 13:24-43

“Do you want us to go and pull them up?” (Mt 13:28)

The parable of the weeds among the wheat is found only in Matthew, and it is an eschatological parable, a parable about the Final Judgment. For gardeners, it evokes memories of hours in the garden, distinguishing between weeds and desirable plants, which is harder to do than one might think, at least for novice gardeners. It raises another question: What constitutes a weed?

After my family bought an old house over 10 years ago, we moved in the spring, and I noticed that there was rhubarb growing in the garden. As the rhubarb grew into summer, I realized that my plant no longer looked like rhubarb. It was something else; it was burdock, *arctium lappa*. It has long white roots, over a meter long when fully grown, and I found that I could not eradicate it. The roots always snapped before I could dig it out completely.

I found out something else interesting about *arctium lappa*. Some people eat the roots and use other parts of the plant for medicine. It was also the plant whose clinging flowers led to the development of Velcro, since they stick to animal fur and are difficult to disentangle once attached. That it was a weed to me and my garden did not mean it was a weed to everyone. Distinguishing between a weed and a useful plant depends upon what you are trying to grow.

In Jesus' parable of the wheat and the weeds, it does seem that there is a clear distinction made between the wheat,

which produces the stuff of life, bread, and the weed, *zizania* in Greek, known scientifically as the species *lolium temulentum* and as “tares” or “darnel” in older translations of the Bible. *Zizania* looks a lot like wheat as it begins to grow and it is not until much later in its development that it can be distinguished from wheat.

Jesus' parable makes it clear that the *zizania* do not ultimately have a good purpose or good end, unlike the burdock, but that once the farmer finally determines what it is, it will be destroyed. What is clear, however, is that the determination as to what is *zizania* and what is wheat will wait until the *eschaton*, when the reapers, the angels, gather the wheat and the weeds and so determine their final judgment.

Sometimes students ask whether this parable indicates predestination, whether some people are weeds and other people are wheat from the beginning, but this pushes too hard against the metaphoric quality of parables. Plants are plants and people are people. The point of Jesus' parable is not that some people are made evil from the beginning, in their roots, but that the church is a *corpus mixtum* of sinners and saints. It is impossible to know who represents the wheat and who represents the weeds, and human attempts to judge someone a “weed” in advance of God's judgment are bound to fail because of the partial nature of our knowledge and decisions.

It seems that in this parable the church is being cautioned to patience and tolerance with those whom we are just aching to condemn. All of us are in fact a *corpus mixtum*, created good but with proclivities to our own peculiar sins. None of us are wheat without God's help, and the improper rush to create a pure church, excluding those who do not sin the same way we do, or not think like us, is bound to fail. We must patiently allow God to work in us as we prepare for the end of the age.

Matthew is not shy of Judgment, with a capital J, for the interpretation

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Listen to Jesus tell this parable. Are you open to receiving every person in the church?

of the parable promises that for some “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” and conversely that “the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” While the church retains authority to judge behaviors and, as expressed in Matthew 18, who may remain in communion with the church, ultimately without complete knowledge we cannot say for certain who is wheat and who is weed. In fact, at this point, we ought to insist strongly again that a metaphor is a metaphor. We are not plants; we are people. And unlike a plant, which is what it is, we can grow to be who God intended us to be, to serve the kingdom with fruitfulness we never knew we had inside of us.

JOHN W. MARTENS

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