

THE CATHOLIC RADICAL



"...to foster a society based on creed instead of greed." Peter Maurin

June/July 2017

Price: For whatever it's worth.

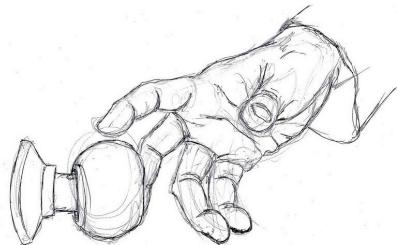
Leaving Catholicism

by Scott Schaeffer-Duffy

On Palm Sunday, I was invited to give a talk about the Catholic Worker during a Unitarian church service. I was impressed with the music and the positive spirit of the prayers, readings, and homily. One thing that did surprise me though is that, as I looked out over the congregation, I recognized many attendees were former Catholics. Their departure from the Church prompted me to ruminant on previous flights from Rome.

The Second Vatican Council, convened by Pope John XXIII in 1962 to open the windows of the Catholic Church, dropped the Latin Mass, empowered the laity, and promoted ecumenism. The changes were too much for some Catholics, like my father, who stopped going to Mass. For a period of time, conservative priests resisted the changes as well. Some, like the Irish monsignor of Saint Peter's Church in Worcester, held onto Latin until the mid 1970s. But other priests followed the lead of post-Vatican II bishops in encouraging lay Catholics to action through parish councils and peace and justice commissions. By the late 70s, bishops like Dozier in Memphis, Matthiesen in Amarillo, Gumbleton in Detroit, Sullivan in Richmond, Hunthausen in Seattle, and Bernardin in Chicago, were challenging capitalism, the death penalty, war, and nuclear weaponry. Worcester's Bishop Bernard Flanagan was one of the first to oppose the Vietnam War and to call for unilateral nuclear disarmament. He and his auxiliary, George Rueger, went so far as to testify in court several times for anti-war protesters. It was not uncommon at that time for activists to claim that episcopal statements inspired them to civil disobedience. Diocesan newspapers, like Worcester's *Catholic Free Press*, featured

peace news and editorials. Married deacons proliferated. Worcester had an active office for women. Catholics like Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, and Dan Berrigan inspired many progressives to become Catholics.



C. Rococokara

But, with the election of John Paul II, the Church backed away from social justice. New bishops rejected Cardinal Bernardin's view that opposition to abortion, war, and the death penalty should be considered a "seamless garment" of respect for life. The new prelates prioritized abortion. Worcester's office for women was closed and its peace and justice office was blended into one which focused thereafter almost exclusively on abortion. The diocesan paper was revamped to reflect the change in priorities. Progressive voices were replaced by anti-abortion conservatives. Some churches restored pre-Vatican II statuary and Latin prayers. This trend accelerated under Pope Benedict who stopped attending an annual inter-faith prayer at Assisi, introduced a more conservative translation of the Mass, and welcomed ultra-traditionalists previously considered schismatics. Benedict went so far as to suggest that a smaller, more purified Catholic Church was the ideal.

This move to the right, coupled with the sex abuse scandal, sent many thousands of

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Learning from SNCC

by Claire Schaeffer-Duffy

I have always believed proximity would help heal the racial divide in our society. Prejudice and distrust are more likely to diminish when we risk becoming neighbors. A white woman from the South, I grew up among brown people because of my father's work overseas. After college, I moved into a Catholic Worker house located in a black ghetto of Washington, DC; and I have lived in black neighborhoods ever since. Whites were such a rarity on 4th street that after a few months of living there, even I, like my neighbors, began to regard them with suspicion.

Proximity spared me the delusion of believing the world was white. Proximity corrected that learned habit of regarding people whose appearance differs from our own as a monolith. I remember, shortly after our family arrived in Japan, looking at the Japanese faces around me and wondering, "How will I tell them apart? Everyone is the same." Within a few weeks, the distinctions were so obvious, my question seemed absurd. Proximity also engendered love. Some of my most life-giving friendships are with people of color.

But proximity cannot erase the profound differences in historical experience between black and white Americans. Maybe that is why Pat, an African American guest at the Catholic Worker on 4th Street, smacked me upside the head during one of her psychotic breakdowns. Who was I to posture solidarity? she demanded. I could never fully know what people of color endured. *Never!*

Earlier this year, I spent ten weeks

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SNCC

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immersed in the history of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), one of many civil rights organizations waging the Freedom Struggle in the American South during the 1960s. Born out of the black student sit-in movement, SNCC (pronounced "Snick") was edgier than the more established NAACP or the strategic Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) of which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a part.

SNCC tackled segregation with pickets, walk-outs, and sit-ins, adopting a pay-no-bail policy that filled county jails with protesting youngsters. Its field secretaries ventured into counties, where white power was viciously maintained, to work with local blacks on voter registration campaigns and other projects promoting black self-determination. They were American democracy-makers who, in conjunction with other civil rights groups, achieved astonishing results. Within five years of SNCC's establishment, Congress passed two major civil rights laws.

All this occurred amid extreme violence. Persistent, terrorizing violence intended to silence pursuits of inclusion and access to power. I did not realize how much violence, until recently.

Of course, I knew about King's assassination. Like many Americans, I had seen news footage of mob brutality at the lunch counter sit-ins and police fire-hosing children, siccing attack dogs, and clubbing suited-up youth and mamas in their Sunday best. I knew too about the patiently executed murder of Medgar Evers, a well-loved NAACP leader and SNCC supporter, who was shot in his driveway while bringing in the groceries; and about the fate of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman, three civil rights workers who were murdered one June night, their remains later discovered beneath an earthen dam on a farm in Mississippi.

But I did not know that while looking

for Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman, searchers found the bodies of Charles Moorer, Henry Dee, and an unidentified teen. All three were lynched by white terrorists who assumed the youths were civil rights workers. I did not know about the brazen killing of Herbert Lee, NAACP member and father of nine. A Mississippi state legislator shot Lee in the presence of many men because he had supported a SNCC voter registration effort. I did not know about the murder of Louis Allen, witness to the Lee killing, or the fatal bombing of NAACP organizer

the shooting of seminarian Jonathan Daniels in Lowndes County Alabama; or the killing of Vietnam vet and student activist Sammy Younge. I have not mentioned the collaboration of local law enforcement with white supremacists throughout the Deep South; the culture of impunity; the sporadic and dubious assistance Washington provided civil rights workers.

In the spring, Holy Cross sociology professor Selina Gallo-Cruz helped me produce a dramatic reading of civil rights texts that featured personal accounts by women in SNCC. One scene told of the brutal beating of female activists, including the indomitable Fannie Lou Hamer. The women were arrested after several entered a white-only area of a Mississippi bus station. A white jailer ordered a black man to beat Hamer who was well-known in the state for her work on voter registration. "It was horrifyin' . . . I had to get over there on the bed flat on my stomach," she said, "and that man beat me till he give out."

Even edited, Hamer's description was unbearable to hear. Worried our production was getting "too heavy," I asked Selina if we should cut the scene. "No," she said vehemently. "People need to hear this."

Post 1965, SNCC abandoned its initial integrationist approach and advocated black power. Militant in rhetoric, its demands were more modest. It continued to organize at black colleges and universities which like their white counterparts were roiled in the turbulence

We didn't have any civil rights. It was just a matter of survival, of existing from one day to the next. I remember going to sleep as a girl hearing the Klan ride at night and hearing a lynching and being afraid the house would burn down.

Rosa Parks

Vernon Dahmer. During the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964, the violence levied against those working for black advancement included at least thirty-five shootings, eighty beatings, and sixty-five bombings, thirty-five of which targeted black churches.

This incomplete tally only reports on Mississippi. I have not mentioned the burning of black churches in Georgia;

Vol. 33, No. 6

THE

June/July 2017

CATHOLIC RADICAL



Published every two months by:

The Saints Francis & Thérèse Catholic Worker Community

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Founded in 1933 by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, the Catholic Worker is a lay movement serving the poor while denouncing injustice and proclaiming peace. We are not tax exempt. We rely entirely on the generosity of our supporters to meet our expenses. We welcome volunteers, letters, poetry, articles, artwork, and donations.



SNCC activists on a Freedom Ride was convicted of inciting a riot and spent seven months in jail.

Orangeburg, which happened two years before national guardmen shot white students at Kent State, is “one of the least known and most misunderstood stories of the civil rights era,” writes Frank Beacham, a New York writer who made a documentary about the tragedy. “Yet the massacre is a chilling history lesson on the horror of law enforcement motivated by racism and hatred.”

SNCC’s story is only a slim chapter in the history of black America which my friend Steve Baggerly describes



as a “heritage of plunder and brutality endured at the hands of white Americans.” (Simplicity summer 2015). And its pattern continues, he argues, from slavery, convict swapping, Jim Crow, red-lining, to today’s

mass incarceration and police killing of unarmed black men. At 57, I confess I have not seen this thread clearly.

“Everyone has a responsibility to deal with racism. As Americans, we have all been lied to,” says Katherine Duncan, curator of Harrison Boarding House located on the West Side of Las Vegas which is where blacks lived during the city’s era of rigid segregation. Denied lodging on the east side, Sammy Davis Jr. stayed at Harrison’s modest bungalow after many a night of crooning to whites on the Strip.

Duncan is tall, graceful, and still beautiful at 62. Her house tour includes personal stories and a heartfelt talk on race relations. She thinks that what we are facing in this country is not “a war against blacks and whites,” but “a spiritual struggle between good and evil.” Knowledge of our histories and forgiveness offer the way out. Whites need to ask forgiveness for their ancestors, and blacks need to find ways to grant that forgiveness, she says. There was more to Duncan’s talk – reflections on restoring peace in black families and communities – but it was her observations on our racial divide that I remember best.

Racism is America’s original sin, one we cannot get out from under without acknowledgement, repentance, and reparation for its occurrence. I know many white Americans fear this process, believing it will result in burdensome guilt or loss of some assumed power. Perhaps. But what it will ultimately bring is loss of hubris and delusion. Everyone would benefit from such an unshackling.

On those occasions, when I have stopped to look at the racism blacks endure, I have been amazed to discover examples of generosity, courage, and faith. The SNCC story, for all its accounts of cruelty and loss, ultimately gave me heart. Like so many civil rights struggles it offered a brilliant example of persistent people power. Here were Americans, black and white, risking their lives for the sake of deep liberation. Ω

of the late 1960s. Southern police and national guardsmen responded with extreme and sometimes fatal force. In the spring of 1967, police wounded student demonstrators in Nashville, Houston, and Jackson, Mississippi, firing several thousand rounds of ammunition on an occupied dormitory during the Houston protest. In Jackson, they killed 22-year-old Ben Brown, a former Freedom Rider and SNCC staffer well-known to police. That fall, SNCC reported two of its field secretaries in Mississippi drowned when Klansmen forced their car off the road.

Several months later the Orangeburg Massacre occurred. On February 8, 1968, after three days of escalating racial tension over efforts by students at South Carolina State College to desegregate a local bowling alley in nearby Orangeburg, nine highway patrolmen fired on a crowd of 200 students, seriously wounding 27 and killing Henry Smith, Samuel Hammond Jr., and Delano Middleton, 17, who was sitting on the steps of a dorm waiting for his mother to get off work.

The shooting reportedly began after someone threw a wooden object injuring one of the police officers. Another officer fired into the air to quell the crowd, triggering a barrage of gunfire from his colleagues. All the students were unarmed, an investigation into the event later revealed. Most were shot while fleeing, some in the back and in the soles of their feet. In a subsequent trial, the nine patrolmen were acquitted. SNCC organizer Cleveland Sellers Jr., however,

Catholicism

(Continued from Page 1)

Catholics to the door. Attendance dropped so precipitously, as did ordinations to the priesthood, that many churches had to be closed.

While activists fought the XL and Dakota Access pipelines, and joined the Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter movements, the Catholic Conference of Bishops became a virtual wing of the Republican party. It was this climate that drove progressives to other traditions. Many a time, my oldest son had to fight the urge to walk out of Mass because of Islamophobic or homophobic homilies.

But then, the unexpected happened — a personalist from Argentina was elected pope. Francis, someone who believes that the heart of faith is its love for those in need, not only tackles a broad range of issues, but also takes personal action on them. Not surprisingly, he is popular with many non-Catholics. Some say he is the world's most respected voice for justice and peace. He established a commission to consider ordaining women deacons. He replaced ultra-right wing bishops. In doing so, he has infuriated the so-called "restorationists." They resist his leadership and openly pray for a short pontificate. Whether or not Francis reigns long enough for his optimism to reach down to seminaries and parishes remains to be seen. Some are willing to wait for it. Others are still leaving.

Interestingly, the pastoral ebb and flow that I witnessed in my life is not new. The Catholic Church, like all institutions, has periods of decay and renewal. There were times when priests would refuse to give communion to union organizers or to allow blacks to sit anywhere except in the back pews. There were also times when priests joined civil rights marches and defended the right of workers to unionize. Like seasons, there have been periods when everything seems dead and times when life springs in abundance. When the devout Catholic Ben Salmon refused to fight in World War I, he was denied the sacraments, but now, Franz Jagerstatter, who refused to fight in World War II, is on the path to canonization. I'm reminded of

Johnny Cash singing:

*That old wheel
is gonna roll around once more.
When it does, it will even up the score.
Don't be weak, as they sew they will reap.
Turn the other cheek and don't give in.
That old wheel will roll around again.*

And I think of Dorothy Day and Francis of Assisi. They could have created a purified entity outside the Church, but did not. They remained when the leadership was hardly exemplary. Why?

They obviously found something nourishing, essential, and inspiring in Catholicism despite the vagaries of



Dorothy Day

politics. The first of these gems was the sacraments. Francis and Dorothy were devoted to the belief that God desires to be intimate with us in tangible signs of grace. Francis would kiss the hands of "any poor little priest," regardless of his individual flaws, because "this person's hands handle the Word of Life and possess something that is more than human." Immersed as they were in the filth and violence of poverty, Francis & Dorothy believed divine perfection was available to them in the Mass. The Eucharist and other sacraments nourished them.

Secondarily, they were deeply in love with the scriptural Jesus. They heard stories of Him at Mass and dug deeper into those stories in prayer. They were enchanted with Jesus' extraordinary love.

Third, they desired to stand shoulder to shoulder with the community of saints and sinners that is the Church. As a young socialist, Dorothy empathized with the immigrant poor, but, as a Catholic, she worshipped with them. The Unitarian church I attended had very progressive politics, but little ethnic diversity. My more

conservative parish is filled with Latinos, Africans, Asians, and whites. When I sit in those pews and reach out to offer the peace of Christ, I have a foretaste of a world where humans live as one family.

Fourth, Vatican II defined the Church as "the People of God." When I complain, "The Church does this or doesn't do that," I could just as easily be criticizing myself. If I believe the Church should do something, then I need to do that thing and, in doing so, the Church accomplishes it too.

And lastly, there is that most feminine part of the Trinity: the Holy Spirit. She is not mocked or diminished by our sinfulness. She remains steadfast in Her desire to fill us with grace, something that always seems to happen just before Catholicism goes over a cliff once and for all. The Holy Spirit unlocks doors of fear and prejudice to open the way for us to become the saints we are called to be. She touched Saint Francis and Dorothy Day. She wants to touch us too. Sometimes the institutional Church helps Her and sometimes it hinders Her, but it cannot stop Her. As Dorothy Day said, "No matter how corrupt the Church may become, it carries within it the seeds of its own regeneration."

I witnessed this regeneration on the feast of Saint Catherine of Siena, a woman who is also a doctor of the Church, when I attended Mass at Saint Dominic's in Washington, DC. The gorgeous 147-year-old church was full of a diverse crowd singing a tribute to Saint Francis' Canticle of the Sun. The homilist used the biblical readings, the life of Saint Catherine, and Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* to defend creation. The liturgy ended with a hymn with lyrics taken from the prophet Micah: "We are called to act with justice, we are called to love tenderly, we are called to serve one another, to walk humbly with God." And then people took up large banners quoting Pope Francis and joined the Climate Change March. While the Catholic Church has failed spectacularly, this was not one of those times.

And so, all things considered, I have to say that Catholicism still puts gas in my tank, or should I say, charges my electric battery? While I won't judge those who decide to leave, I am going to stay. Ω

The Elephant In the Room

by Scott Schaeffer-Duffy

The Republican Party, which largely favors the wealthy, the military, the gun lobby, the fossil fuel industry, and capital punishment, defines itself as “pro-life” because of its opposition to abortion, even though many, if not most, Republicans favor restricting rather than outright banning the procedure.

In contrast, the Democratic Party, which largely champions the downtrodden and the environment, advocates unrestricted access to abortion. In an ironic twist, the party that presents itself as more liberal and tolerant has become increasingly rigid on abortion. When US Representative Dennis Kucinich, a Roman Catholic, vegan, and anti-war Democrat who had long held that “human life begins at conception,” ran for president in 2004, he reversed himself and embraced abortion rights. He did so in the political context of anti-abortion democrats like Pennsylvania Governor Bob Casey being shut out of party leadership over his anti-abortion stance. And now, Tom Perez, the newly-elected Democratic Party Chair has made it clear that the party will not support any anti-abortion candidates. Interestingly, Perez’s statement came out not long after Governor Casey’s son, Bob Jr., an anti-abortion Democrat, soundly defeated two abortion rights opponents in a primary and went on to beat the incumbent, US Senator Rick Santorum. It’s not unreasonable to suggest that Hillary Clinton’s uncompromising support for abortion rights cost her victory in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin, states with sufficient electoral votes to have elected her president.

In his March 27, 2017 *New York Times* op-ed “Can Democrats Win Back Catholics?”, Thomas Groome, a professor of theology and religious education at Boston College, pointed out: “Polls indicate that the nation holds mixed views on abortion. About 80 percent of Americans don’t want to criminalize it again. At the same time, at least 60 percent of Americans — and most likely a higher percentage of Catholics — oppose

abortion after 20 weeks of pregnancy. Yet despite the clear complexity of those attitudes, political discourse largely ignores the possibility of a middle ground between making all abortions legal or prohibiting them entirely. Ms. Clinton, like most Democratic politicians, fell into this either/or trap last year.” Groome went on to suggest: “Democratic politicians should publicly acknowledge that abortion is an issue of profound moral and religious concern.... Politicians should also continue to frame their efforts to improve health and social services as a way to decrease abortions.”

In her May 9, 2017 *New York Times* op-ed, “Abortion Is About More than



Debbie Tomassi

Money,” Lori Szala said: “We should all agree, whether anti-abortion or pro-choice, that abortion is not a solution to the host of systemic injustices driving poverty. Progressives cannot continue to claim every effort to reduce abortion is anti-women and will lead to ruin and disaster. And conservatives must do more than tell abortion-seeking women ‘go in peace and keep warm and well fed’; they must sacrifice their time and treasure to serve women in need.”

As Catholic Workers, a movement grounded in personalism, we do not try to advance our ideals through criminalization. Ours is a revolution of the heart. We do not

want to put anyone in jail, but we earnestly want to see an end to the taking of human life by war, the death penalty, euthanasia, and abortion. To accomplish this goal, we try to live nonviolently ourselves, to make it easier for others to do so, and to articulate, in word and action, the merits of nonviolence and debits of violence.

Although we are not gradualists, we rejoice to see even incremental steps away from violence, such as cease-fires, gun buy-backs, and restorative justice programs. We are pleased that the US abortion rate dropped 21% from 2009 until 2014. While some would argue that this is a result of Republican efforts to restrict access to abortion, Massachusetts, a state which has not introduced restrictions, saw an 11% drop in abortions between 2010 and 2015. Perhaps that decline was related to the state’s generous health and human services. If so, why can’t Republican and Democratic politicians come together to promote them nationally?

While marching down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House during the April 29th Climate Change March, I saw a sign with red and blue hands clasped together and the caption, “Climate Change is Non-Partisan.” A block later, I saw an anti-abortion banner on the sideline which read, “Killing Kids is a Very Cruel Way to Stop Climate Change,” suggesting that voting for the environment necessitated voting for abortion. This kind of divide will become less and less common if we stop trying to crush our opponents and start celebrating common ground. So long as abortion is characterized by clichés and distrust, it will remain an elephant in the room.

I believe the Women’s March benefited from the presence of feminists for life as did the Climate March from pro-lifers for the environment. Big tent thinking has a better chance of problem solving than a fortress mentality. As Lori Szala concluded, “Our society must not settle for leaving women who face unplanned pregnancy no hope but abortion.”Ω

A Life to Inspire Us All

reviewed by Scott Schaeffer-Duffy

Just Call Me Jerzy: Popieluszko in the United States and Canada, by Judith Kelly, fxBear Publishing, 2016. Order it through jerzymail30@gmail.com.

It is extremely rare for me to read a book in less than 24 hours, but that is what I did with Judith Kelly's gem **Just Call Me Jerzy**, about the Polish priest who played an extraordinary role in the struggle for freedom under the communist regime, a struggle which ultimately led to his brutal murder. While some biographies take us safely back to another time from which we can distance ourselves, Judith's book continually challenged and invited me to embrace a deeper and more fearless nonviolence. Father Jerzy Popieluszko's words to the workers in the Solidarity Union and to the secret police and other agents of the repressive government brought me to tears. Having just attended the Center for Nonviolent Solutions' multi-media presentation on the women who worked for civil rights in the American South, I was reminded again how brave and faithful were many whose stories simply cannot be told often enough.

The title of Judith's book comes from the insistence of Popieluszko, as a newly ordained priest, to be addressed only by his first name, an informality unheard of in Poland in 1972. With an enthusiasm for the Gospel fired by the Second Vatican Council, Popieluszko connected with people in an intimate way devoid of clerical patronization. He also had a deep belief in nonviolence marked by his emphasis on Romans 12:21: "Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good," an extraordinary challenge in a country dominated by political and religious oppression.

Two days after Solidarity leader Lech Walesa was named as the winner of the 1983 Nobel Peace Prize, Popieluszko told a British journalist, "In all the time of Solidarity, not one life was lost. We are very proud of that." And yet, Michael Kaufman, the *New York Times* Warsaw bureau chief, said of Jerzy's sermons, "Nowhere else from East Berlin to Vladivostok could



anyone stand before five or ten thousand people and use a microphone to condemn the errors of state and party. Nowhere, in that vast stretch encompassing some four hundred million people, was anyone else openly telling a crowd that defiance of authority was an obligation of the heart, of religion, manhood, and nationhood."

Jerzy threaded a very delicate needle by insisting that justice could only be achieved through nonviolence. In a 1982 homily he said: "Violence is not a sign of strength but of weakness. Whoever fails to win over heart and minds tries to conquer with violence. Every show of force is proof of moral inferiority.... An idea that needs weapons to survive will die on its own.... A living idea conquers by itself. Millions follow it spontaneously."

Judith not only describes Jerzy's courageous work in Poland, but also his

travels in the US and Canada, which may have nourished and emboldened him when he returned home. She points out that he could easily have claimed asylum in either country and have escaped death at the hands of the Polish secret police, but he insisted on going back, saying, "You see, I may be afraid, but I really have no alternative. I could not act otherwise.... But if I must die violently, then I'd prefer to meet death while defending something worthwhile, than save my life by refusing to take a stand against injustice."

With so much distrust in politicians and the media today, I took comfort from one of his last homilies before his murder in 1984, in which Jerzy said: "To live in truth means to be true to one's conscience. Truth always unites and consolidates. It frightens little men because it unmasks their lies... but truth is immortal, while any lie is short-lived."

Judith opens the book with a quote from Daniel Berrigan, SJ: "The nonviolent hero often ends up dead.... So does the... soldier, by the thousand.... An interesting question , however, remains: who dies in a way [that] is a gift to history? Who makes it less inevitable that many others will die, in the same way, in even larger numbers, in the next generation?" Judith describes Jerzy Popieluszko as exemplifying a "nonviolent life well-lived." Such lives are water in the desert for all generations. I'm very grateful she wrote this book. Ω

Catholic Worker Calendar

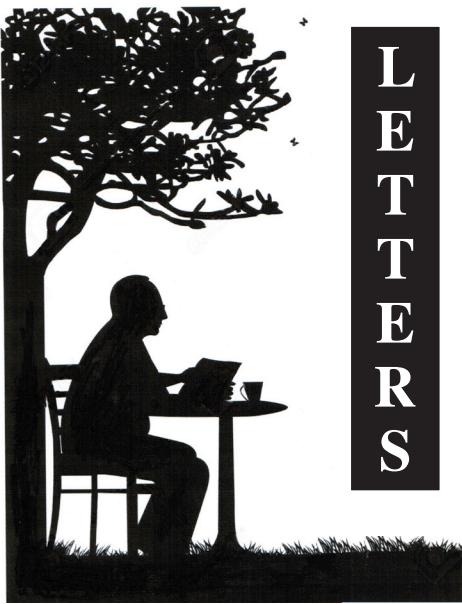
June 7 — Responding to *Laudato Si'*: Join Scott & Claire Schaeffer-Duffy for a slide presentation on responses to Pope Francis encyclical letter on climate change. 7:00 P.M.. 52 Mason Street. Followed by refreshments.



Van Gogh (detail)

June 14 & 28, July 12 & 26 — Evening Prayer: Join us for prayer and Taize chant at 7:00 P.M.. 52 Mason Street. Followed by refreshments.

June 17 & July 15 — Vigil to Reverse the Gun Culture: Join us at the The Gun Parlor shooting range. 12:30-1:30 P.M., 170 Prescott Street, Worcester.



Dear Scott,

I very much enjoyed the latest *Catholic Radical*. The front page article, “The Truth Will Set You Free,” was eye-opening, but, I guess, not surprising. Just to see the Fiction vs. Fact side by side was quite jolting. But, in my heart of hearts, I believe truth and goodness will prevail. In the meantime, prayers are going up for Mr. Trump’s state of mind and the continued ability of Congress to rein him in! Enough politics!!!

Wishing you, Claire, and your family a Blessed and Joyous Easter Season. Love the pictures of your grandkids — too cute for words! Funny how we love our grandchildren as much as we love our kids, but there is NO STRESS involved. No homework, running to the doctors, dentists, discipline, tons of laundry — ONLY EN“JOY”MENT!

**Christine Joiner
Webster, Massachusetts**

To the Editors,

In the April/May *Catholic Radical*, Peter King wrote a letter referring to the “hopeless situation” of Jews in Israel. The truth is that, far from being “hopeless,” Israeli Jews are one of the most powerful people on Earth thanks to the over \$10 million dollars a day we US taxpayers hand to Israel so they will purchase military weapons. Israel is the size of New Jersey, but has stockpiled at least 200 nuclear weapons!

Now, would Jesus choose to speak against Israel’s nuclear arms stockpile and Israel’s ongoing apartheid against innocent Palestinians? Or would he defend Palestinians?

One answer is to teach the truth from the 48-page book, ***Steadfast Hope: The Palestinian Quest for Just Peace***, written & published by both the Episcopalian & Presbyterian churches. Topics include Settlements, The Wall, War on Gaza, etc. and are covered concisely in two pages per topic. The final chapter is on how we can work for peace in Palestine/ Israel. Using this book to teach the truth to your parish or town is one very effective ministerial action you can take.

Books can be ordered from: The Episcopal Peace Fellowship, epfnational.org/PIN/ or (312) 922-8628.

If WWIII happens, it will begin with this Israeli/Palestinian issue. But Israel’s totally unnecessary violence is easily resolved: withdraw all US funding to Israel and they will find a way to peace within a year, rather than paying from their own treasury. Our taxes are encouraging and sustaining the genocide of Palestinians by the Israelis. And that is on our souls.

**Jan Leary, Ph.D., M.Div.
Natick, Massachusetts**

Dear Claire & Scott,

Finally got to read with care your last three issues of the CR which cheered me to no end and also let you know how far behind I am on anything of merit (your CR always remains of merit). My favorite of the three CRs is that great poem “It’s Gotta be the Joy,” by Brendan Walsh. In the Feb/Mar. CR, I’m so glad you included the article on nonviolence by Pope Francis — it is a major blessing that he is the new pope and I’ve never really till this issue read any of his writings. And in the April/May issue, I’m so glad you included all those quotes in “The Truth Will Set You Free.” But we must be charitable and kind to an incredibly spiritual and/or mentally ill person, without question, who is merely the present figurehead of an incredibly spiritually ill country.... No matter what, we have to trust the Great Mystery...all is/was/will be well....

**Joan Thomas
Phoenix, Arizona**

Dear Scott,

“For Jesus there are no countries to be conquered, no ideologies to be imposed, no people to be dominated. There are only children, women, and men to be loved.”

Henri J. M. Nouwen

...The above observation of Father Henri Nouwen might be a beacon to guide us through the dreadfully polarizing social climate that envelops us.

As for “fact checking,” a stand-alone fact has no self-evident meaning — it must be clothed with context, intention, emotion, empathy, and sympathy for the speaker. The so-called fact-checker brings a whole world to the fact, and can turn any fact into a statement of the devil himself. Or can, by manipulating the context make what was intended as a fact to appear as fiction. And then, by claiming divine validation, can justify destroying the perpetrators of this “fiction” as we see in religious wars. Does Fr. Nouwen give us hint and a challenge to seek truth in the service of love for every human being? *Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner [To understand all is to forgive all]*. How does God see the “enemy”? When we, as far as possible, enter the heart and mind of another with an understanding that only un conditional love can give, can we really judge his or her efforts and actions to be lies, or reduce them to fiction?

We’re all pathetic slobs just wanting to be loved and respected as we muddle along trying to find our way home. “There are only children, women, and men to be loved.”

**Ed Stevens
Wayland, Massachusetts**

Editor’s Note: The above letter came in response to “The Truth Will Set You Free.” While we appreciate Mr. Stevens’ call to look compassionately into Donald Trump’s heart, we still believe that verifiably false statements by leaders can have harmful consequences unless they are refuted. Nonetheless, we should avoid demonizing those with whom we disagree.

Dear Scott,

Great *Catholic Radical* issue! Well written and it covered a lot of territory! God Bless! It’s great to be alive and Catholic. Peace.

**Tom Malloy
Providence, Rhode Island**

Mason Street Musings

Our backyard Saint Francis, now leans against a garden fence post. Years of snow and rain have eroded the statue's base, leaving our holy man footless and wobbly. Just beyond his chipped robe, half a dozen marigolds rim the perennials Father Steve planted the summer his sister died of cancer. One afternoon, he and another sister, both disoriented from grief, came in a station wagon filled with mulch and pots of lavender, sage, and corn flowers. They dug, watered, and planted until long after dark, laying down this blooming memorial to a woman who loved gardening and was generous to the poor.

There are other commemoratives – under the lilac bush a stone painted white and inscribed with “Therese” marks the spot where we buried our twelve-year old Tabby last August, and to the left of the garden shed, a cluster of money plants burst purple in celebration of Judy Cahill-Brown, my best friend from college.

Hers was a hectic passing, all of us in the hospital room crying and praying and bidding our good-byes while her organs fell apart. “I’m going to heaven,” she said late that Thursday night. And two days later, she was gone.

This May, as with every other, the back lot throbs with life. Strawberry plants snake into the peas, and day lilies explode from their pots while the oregano runs riot in the bathtub herb garden.

Not every sign of spring’s vitality is welcome. Squirrels have burrowed in the



back wall of the house. The other day a woodchuck ambled worrisomely close to the vegetable patch. Worst of all is the loathsome Japanese knotweed sprouting shoots along the yard’s border. *O devil incarnate! O subterranean Gorgon!* These tubular thugs are the terror of any garden, invading perennials and dislodging stone foundations.

The knotweed’s crown or head can grow to the size of a bull’s head, its multitudinous roots radiating out like strands of hair. In England, its presence can drastically reduce property value, because eradication is so costly. A *Newsweek* account tells of a British property-owner who killed his wife and then himself after spotting knotweed in his yard.

We are not so despairing on Mason Street. Come summer, my neighbor Elizabeth used to take a long-poled scythe and whack the evil tubers protruding

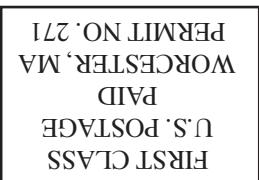
along the seam of her basement wall. The Cambodian tenant before her cleared the invading knotweed jungle behind the house and planted a garden. Tomatoes, pots of ginger, and Asian greens that I could not identify.

He was an officer during the Cambodian war, an experience that left him no peace. His cultivated patch seemed to soothe him. Many a morning, I would see him squatting on a wooden plank, lovingly fussing over a tomato, a stick of incense disintegrating before a statue of the Buddha tucked in the corner of his garden.

The humans inside 52 Mason Street are also thriving. Our guest A. no longer asks for her anti-anxiety pills after supper, which apparently were prescribed on an as-needed basis. Months of a reliable place to stay, a regular job, communal meals, and some kindness from everyone here have calmed her. She’s off looking for an apartment. No room-mates, she’s decided. Just a cat. And C. who arrived pale and weepy last Friday is looking more relaxed. “This is the first real home, I’ve been in, in years,” he told us.

As for me, I am pondering the wisdom of poet Marie Howe. Abandon metaphor, she advises. Experience life’s clang and clutter as it is. For us these days, it’s wobbly saints, an ecstasy of blossoms and burgeoning edibles, encroaching critters, and yes, the blasted knotweed. I thank God for these glories and aggravations, the stuff and substance of life. Blessed Summer, everyone. Ω

Claire



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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