

FIRST THINGS

INSTITUTE ON RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE

ANNUAL REPORT 2015



Celebrating
25 Years
(1990 - 2015)



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

R. R. Reno joined FIRST THINGS as editor in April 2011. He has been published in many academic journals, and his essays and opinion pieces on religion, public life, contemporary culture, and current events have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Commentary*, and the *Washington Post*, among other popular outlets. His recent books include *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* and *Fighting the Noonday Devil*. Reno has appeared as a guest on CNN's *Crossfire*, EWTN's *Faith & Culture*, and numerous radio shows.

“To renew freedom, we need to give people a place to stand.”

Ours is a dissolving age. Globalization has been reshaping our economy for quite a while. At the same time, progressives dismantle our moral culture. Wasn't it only yesterday that we could all agree that the girls use the girls' bathroom, and boys use the boys'? That obvious, sensible rule seems to be on its way out, just as the obvious principle that marriage is between a man and a woman was dismissed by the Supreme Court in 2015.

We should not underestimate how powerfully these two forces, our economy and our culture, interact. Fewer and fewer people feel they have a secure place to stand. My father worked for the same law firm for more than fifty years. My wife is working for her fifth. Those with lower skills often bounce from job to job to no job at all. All the while, the once secure foundations of family life have eroded. Rules about respecting elders, honoring sacrifices made for families and communities, and maintaining decency and civility—rules that were once clear—have become muddy and uncertain.

A great deal of this has been championed as part of the cause of promoting freedom. Everybody can do their own thing. But look at the results. Our supposedly “high culture” promotes a dull conformity policed by political correctness. Mass culture is crude, inventive only in its creative capacity to sell us still more sex and celebrity. Heroin addiction afflicts Middle America. Meanwhile, the therapeutic-bureaucratic state expands. What is the strident call for free pre-Kindergarten education if not a concession that we can't even raise our own children?

If this is freedom, then it's a freedom of limited horizons.

To renew freedom, we need to give people a place to stand. That may mean policies that restore economic security to those who are displaced and disoriented by the marvelous dynamism and not infrequent destructiveness of a free economy. But we are not economic animals first and foremost. We are political animals, domestic animals—and religious animals. In our dissolving age, we need to renew our communal identities, family ties, and religious loyalties.



I am struck by the degree to which patriotism has become discredited among our leadership class. Perhaps it's the consequence of multicultural ideologies, which seem to accentuate communal identities but actually tend to dissolve them. Whatever the case, we need to find a way to restore the spirit of solidarity in ways that make sense in our increasingly globalized world.

The same goes for family life. Divorce, children out of wedlock, a revolving door of live-in partners—an almost complete lack of rules for intimate life—contribute a great deal to our collective sense that nothing is secure. As a society, perhaps we can't go back to the 1950s, but we must find a way to recover the permanence of marriage. Without it, we cannot sustain a free society. Without a firm place to stand in family life, people eventually turn to government in the (false) hope that it will be a reliable companion in our lonely walk through life. The political ad “Life of Julia” says as much.

But most important of all is religious revival. St. Paul tells us that it is for freedom that Christ has set us free. This is the freedom that comes from the utter trustworthiness of his promise of redemption and new life. Other religions have different gospels. But they all direct us toward God as the one firm foundation. If we stand with God, we can stand against the world—the most perfect freedom of all.

The way forward is neither clear nor easy. I cannot provide a roadmap. But this I pledge: FIRST THINGS is committed to the truth that people are only genuinely free when they serve something higher than themselves.

For over 25 years now, FIRST THINGS has been a strong voice standing against the tides of our culture. Through our magazine, website, public events, and other programs, we are helping to strengthen a community of believers, united in this commitment to a true notion of freedom. We're in it for the long haul.

R. R. Reno

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FIRST THINGS ————— CELEBRATES 25 YEARS

Last year, 2015, marked the 25th anniversary of FIRST THINGS' founding. For a quarter century, FIRST THINGS has provided incisive and timely commentary on issues that matter to religious believers. To mark the occasion, in 2015 the Institute launched the FIRST THINGS 25 Fund, held an anniversary dinner reflecting on the legacy of Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, and republished several historical articles from its archives. The following pages contain highlights from FIRST THINGS' anniversary year.

Although much has changed in the religious, political, and cultural landscape since Fr. Richard John Neuhaus and others first published the magazine in 1990, its essential mission remains the same. Religious voices need to be heard in the public square. As faithful believers face pressure from a public increasingly hostile to religious views, they know they can continue to count on FIRST THINGS to be an articulate public witness on their behalf.

The 25 Fund

To celebrate a quarter century of promoting the idea that a thriving society needs a vibrant religious life, and to ensure FIRST THINGS' ability to continue its work in the future, we launched the 25 Fund, a year-long campaign to raise \$2 million.

With the generous donations of its supporters, which were matched by one of our board members, FIRST THINGS reached this landmark goal, raising nearly \$2,100,000.

The 25 Fund will be used to expand FIRST THINGS' national reach through lectures and seminars across the country, to establish an International Scholars Network, and to grow the newly established Senior Fellows Program. A list of donors to the 25 Fund can be found on pages 24–26.

PUTTING FIRST THINGS FIRST

BY THE FOUNDING EDITORS OF FIRST THINGS

The following editorial was written to introduce FIRST THINGS to its readers and was published in our first issue, March 1990.

“**W**hen in the course of human events ...” Thus Jefferson and his associates, evincing a “decent respect to the opinions of mankind,” began their explanation of what they were up to. To be sure, launching a new journal is not on a par with launching a new nation. Nor do we have any illusions that the whole of mankind will be paying attention to what we are up to here. But a decent respect for the opinion of those who do notice calls for a word of explanation.

This is a statement of editorial prejudices. Prejudices, rightly understood, are prior judgments. They are the considered assumptions that frame what we’re going to do and how we’re going to do it. We would be very unhappy if anyone thought us entirely open-minded. Our judgment that this or that is true and important inescapably prejudices us against judgments to the contrary.

At the same time, we do not expect that all our readers will share our prejudices. If everyone shared our prejudices, there would be neither purpose nor pleasure in launching a journal. Nor will our considered assumptions—about religion, public life, politics, economics, moral discourse, the arts, and how the world works—be evident in every article. Indeed, the purpose and pleasure of a journal is in engaging alternative assumptions.

Our prejudices will decide the arguments worth making, not the conclusions that writers reach. We fully expect that among our writers and readers will be believing Jews and Christians, agnostics, atheists, the politically liberal and conservative (with all the sub categories attending both), and people with wildly divergent views of the civilization of which we are part. One thing we expect they will have in common, however. They are people who are persuaded, or are open to being persuaded, of the importance of religion to public life, and of public life to religion. That said, we offer a brief statement of editorial prejudices.

Religion and public life. The trick is in making the right connections between the two. And making the right connections requires a measure of clarity about what we mean by “religion” and what we mean by “public life.”

Those meanings and connections have everything to do with the title of this journal. FIRST THINGS means, first, that the first thing to be said about public life is that public life is not the first thing. FIRST THINGS means, second, that there are first things, in the sense of first principles, for the right ordering of public life.

The first meaning of FIRST THINGS is that, for the sake of both religion and public life, religion must be given priority. While religion informs, enriches, and provides a moral foundation for public life, the chief purpose of religion is not to serve public life. Here we discover a necessary paradox. Religion that is captive to public life is of little public use. Indeed, such captivity produces politicized religion and religionized politics, and the result, as we know from bitter historical experience, is tragedy for both religion and public life.

Religion best serves public life by relativizing the importance of public life, especially of public life understood as politics. Authentic religion keeps the political enterprise humble by reminding it that it is not the first thing. By directing us to the ultimate, religion defines the limits of the penultimate. By illumining our highest purpose all lesser purposes are brought under transcendent judgment.

That highest purpose can be variously defined, but believing Jews and Christians might agree that it was well defined in the answer to the famous opening question of the Westminster Catechism of 1647. The question is, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer is, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever.” It is hard to improve on that. Temporal tasks are best conducted in the light of eternal destiny. Religion points us to the last things, framing the final direction that informs our decisions about life, both personal and public. The chief service of religion, then, is to teach us that the first things are the last things.

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By religion and public life we mean something like what Saint Augustine meant by the City of God and the City of Man. The twain inevitably do meet, but they must never be confused or conflated. Whether at the beginning of the fifth century or at the end of the twentieth, the particulars of their meeting are always ambiguous. At the deepest level the two cities are in conflict but, along the way toward history's end, they can be mutually helpful. The polis constituted by faith delineates the horizon, the possibilities and the limits, of the temporal polis. The first city keeps the second in its place, warning it against reaching for the possibilities that do not belong to it. At the same time, it elevates the second city, calling it to the virtue and justice that it is prone to neglect. Thus awareness of the ultimate sustains the modest dignity of the penultimate.

It is our further prejudice that public life includes much more than politics. Public life means, first of all, "culture." Our subtitle could as well be "a journal of religion and culture," except that culture has come to have a narrower meaning in popular usage, referring mainly to what is done in theaters, concert halls, and museums. We will not ignore the cultural in that narrower meaning of the term, but by culture we mean something more inclusive. Culture means the available truth claims, explanatory systems, myths, stories, memories, loyalties, dreams, and nightmares by which a society lives. Culture is the cognitive, moral, aesthetic, and emotive air that we breathe.

So we think it true to say that politics is, in largest part, an expression of culture, and at the heart of culture is religion. Politics is the effort to give just order to public life, employing the ideas made available by the culture. And the most communally binding of those ideas are by nature

religious, whether or not they bear the label "religion." Given these considered assumptions, readers should not be surprised when in these pages they come across articles and arguments that are not ostensibly "religious" in the conventional use of the term. One does not always need to talk about God to be talking about God.

But there will also be talk about God. The intellectual, spiritual, and political fonts of our civilizational story are Athens, Jerusalem, and Rome. Modern thought, especially political thought, is notoriously neglectful of Jerusalem. This poses a particular problem for public discourse in our society. In the West, and most notably in America, the civilizational story is borne by and legitimated by the language of Jerusalem. If the American experiment in representative democracy is not in conversation with biblical religion, it is not in conversation with what the overwhelming majority of Americans profess to believe is the source of morality. To the extent that our public discourse is perceived to be indifferent or hostile to the language of Jerusalem, our social and political order faces an ever deepening crisis of legitimacy.

And so another prejudice must be made explicit. Especially in our high culture, it is taken as axiomatic that ours is a secular society or is rapidly becoming such. In our judgment, that proposition has everything going for it except the empirical evidence. For more than three centuries perceptive observers have been struck by the vitality and pervasiveness of religion in American life. Americans appear to be incorrigibly religious, and the evidence suggests that they are becoming more so. However skeptical we may be about the quality of that religion, to ignore it is to ignore one of the most salient facts about American life.

FIRST THINGS FROM THE BEGINNING



Religion comes in many forms: Islam, Native American, New Age, feminist witchery, novel versions of Eastern spiritualities, and the vague national piety called civil religion, to name a few. But again, for the overwhelming majority of Americans religion is, however inarticulately, biblical religion. For most purposes relevant to our purpose, that means Christianity and Judaism. We will pay careful attention to the manifold expressions of religion in America and the world. But this journal, like the Institute that is its publisher, is essentially a Jewish-Christian enterprise. The intention of the enterprise is to advance a religiously grounded public philosophy for this and other experiments in human freedom.

In our catalogue of prejudices, a free and democratic order includes pluralism. Pluralism is a much abused term. It is often suggested that, because we are a pluralistic society, we must play down our differences, pretending that our deepest differences make no difference. That, in our judgment, is not pluralism at all. It is the opposite of pluralism. It is the monism of indifference. Pluralism is not relativism, and it is the declared enemy of nihilism. Pluralism is the civil engagement of our differences and disagreements about what is most importantly true. Against the monism that denies the variety of truth, against the relativism that denies the importance of truth, and against the nihilism that denies the existence of truth, we intend to nurture a pluralism that revives and sustains the conversation about what really matters, which is the truth.

Recognizing the difficulties in fulfilling that intention, we take comfort from this story. Once in Chelm, the mystical village of the East European Jews, a man was appointed to sit at the village gate and wait for the Messiah. He complained to the village elders that his pay was too low.

“You are right,” they said to him. “The pay is low. But consider: the work is steady.”

These, then, are some of our prejudices. There are others, of course. We do not, for instance, think that intellectual seriousness is an excuse for being dull. Articles will be scholarly, but not pedantic; thoughtful, but not boring; often unusual, but not esoteric. We hope to attract a general, but literate, readership, well knowing that literacy is not so general as we might wish.

In these pages the reader will find items that report, analyze, instruct, warn, exhort, and sometimes entertain. But the key word is conversation. A real conversation, as distinct from intellectual chatter, is marked by discipline and continuity. Gilbert Keith Chesterton observed that “tradition is the democracy of the dead.” Agreeing with that, we intend to take on the questions of today and tomorrow, but always in conversation with the best that has been thought and said in the past. At every historical moment, the contemporary is afflicted by the crippling conceit of its utter novelty. We hope FIRST THINGS will be an antidote to that intellectual and moral disease.

When in the course of human events something new is launched, a decent respect for the opinion of others calls for a word of explanation. Of course this brief statement of what we’re up to will be vindicated or falsified by this and subsequent issues of FIRST THINGS. We very much hope that you will be part of the continuing conversation, and we invite you to hold us to our word.



25TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER

FIRST THINGS' 25th Anniversary Dinner was held on May 19, 2015, at the Union League Club in New York City. Speaking to an intimate audience of approximately one hundred, panelists George Weigel, Midge Decter, Randy Boyagoda, and Timothy George discussed the life and legacy of FIRST THINGS founder Fr. Richard John Neuhaus and the relevance of his work today.

“ [Richard] found in the Catholic Church a [very distinctive] way of thinking about godliness and worldliness ... There really is nothing like it in the Christian intellectual orbit. Richard made his own contributions to that, along with John Paul II, by firmly inserting the pro-life cause and all of its dimensions into the social doctrine of the Church. It is all one comprehensive scheme of how we ought to live together. ”

— GEORGE WEIGEL, PANELIST



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“ One of Richard's great ideals was the unity of the Church. He never gave up on that. We're not there yet. We have a long way to go, but I think he would want to encourage us to look beyond some of these fault lines and find the center that we have in Jesus Christ.

— TIMOTHY GEORGE, PANELIST



FIRST THINGS EVENTS

In 2015, FIRST THINGS continued to expand its roster of events, offering lectures in Washington, D.C., Austin, Dallas, and New York; sponsoring or participating in events hosted by allied organizations around the world; holding scholarly colloquia; hosting evening events such as art exhibits and book signings at its New York offices; and organizing its first ever intellectual retreat for FIRST THINGS readers. Videos of select FIRST THINGS events, as well as listings of upcoming events, are available on *firstthings.com*.

These events enhance the organization's programming by providing a more personal forum for significant discussion and debate on issues that range from public policies on marriage to healthcare reform, from bioethics to capital punishment, from global economic reforms to poetry and science. They also serve to cultivate a visible community of people committed to the renewal of public life. In the coming years, FIRST THINGS will use contributions from the 25 Fund to organize additional events.



THE PERILS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY A FIRST THINGS Lecture in Washington, D.C.

How can people of faith promote the idea of religious liberty without resorting to the acceptance of a “naked public square”?

In a thought-provoking and encouraging lecture, Dr. Yuval Levin, Hertog Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, confronted this question head-on, relying on history, philosophy, and the American contextualization of liberty. In the heart of our nation's capital, he reminded the audience that religious liberty is a first principle of a moral and thriving society, and that it need not be divorced from actual religious practice and sincere adherence to religious principles in matters of conscience. There were over two hundred people in attendance at this public lecture presented on the campus of George Washington University in November 2015.

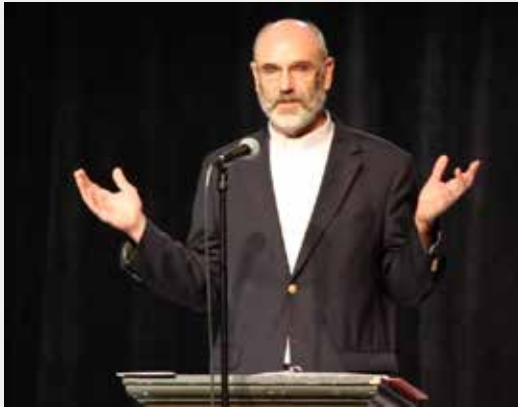
CHRISTIANITY AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM A FIRST THINGS Lecture in Austin, Texas

In September 2015, Dr. Robert Louis Wilken gave a FIRST THINGS Lecture to over two hundred and twenty five people in Austin, Texas, co-hosted by the Austin Graduate School of Theology, in which he explained the historical roots of religious freedom. Contrary to the popular belief that religious freedom was an idea of the Enlightenment inherently linked to freedom from religion, he documented the historical roots of religious conscience going back to the church fathers and the Bible. He further explained that the Reformation provided a reinvigoration of the ideas of religious conscience on both the Protestant and Catholic sides. He concluded with the injunction that we need to remember and promote the religious roots of religious freedom.

To view videos of past FIRST THINGS events, visit www.firstthings.com/media

HABIT FORMING: LITURGIES OF EDUCATION

A FIRST THINGS Lecture in Dallas, Texas



In December 2015, Dr. Peter Leithart presented a FIRST THINGS lecture in Dallas, Texas. Co-sponsored by the Covenant School, the lecture explored how education itself is a liturgical conversation between teacher and pupil, based on foundational ideas of what a human being is. Dr. Leithart commented, “In the liturgical dialogue of the teacher and student, you have a liturgical dialogue between tradition and novelty, between old and young, between the past and future.” He concluded that a healthy classroom should thus embrace conversation and habits that pass on tradition, knowledge, and discipline from the past, which will in turn shape the future. Some of these habits include focused attention, authority, delayed gratification, careful study, and understanding right and wrong. For Christians, baptism, discipleship, and chapel should also be part of educational liturgies.

THE PARADOX OF FREEDOM: HAPPINESS, HUMAN NATURE, POLITICS, AND RELIGION

FIRST THINGS’ Inaugural Intellectual Retreat

Held in August in New York City, FIRST THINGS hosted an intellectual retreat for over ninety of its readers, writers, and scholars. For three days, participants engaged with the event’s theme, “The Paradox of Freedom,” via lectures and seminar discussions of foundational texts, including selections from Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Dostoevsky, guided by faculty members from Northeast Catholic College. The retreat also featured lectures on freedom by Robert L. Wilken and R. R. Reno. A highlight of the weekend was a moving performance by faculty members of the Manhattan String Orchestra, following a talk by George Harne on the sounds of freedom. Participants left with a greater understanding of the historical, literary, musical, and theological ideas of freedom and how to interpret and apply ideas of freedom in today’s contemporary context, relying on the wisdom of those who have gone before us. Building on the impact of the 2015 retreat, FIRST THINGS plans to host another intellectual retreat in California this year on the topic “The Search for Happiness.” A second retreat in New York City is planned for the Fall of 2016.



SAVE THE DATE:
May 20–22, 2016
“The Search
for Happiness”

“ I thought this was an excellent retreat. The size of the seminars was perfect—all of us participated and we got to really know each other throughout the day. Fabulous.
— PARTICIPANT TESTIMONY ”

THE CRISIS OF CONSERVATIVE CATHOLICISM

The 2015 Erasmus Lecture

How should Catholics approach potential changes in Church doctrine?

In the 2015 Erasmus Lecture, *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat told the story of Catholic doctrinal and political developments in the twentieth century. Despite two consecutive conservative popes and the seeming triumph of conservative Catholic theology in the twentieth century, a new crisis is developing. Questions of marriage, divorce, contraception, and communion, which conservative Catholics thought had been settled, have re-emerged as great debates within the Church. This should not be surprising given the state of our culture as a whole and Catholic seminaries and colleges in general.

Douthat offers two challenges with which theologically conservative Catholics in the contemporary context must contend: 1) The future of Catholicism is still divided, and 2) the papacy is not—and has not consistently been in the past—the first bulwark of orthodoxy. To address these issues, Douthat challenges conservative Catholics to build a more robust theory of the development of doctrine, and to recognize failures of Vatican II. He notes that, “Our work is—as ever—only just begun.”

The Erasmus Lecture addresses over five hundred people annually and is now in its 28th year.

The text of the lecture is published in *FIRST THINGS*. Video of the event is available for viewing on firstthings.com/media and has been watched nearly 11,000 times.

SAVE THE DATE:

October 22, 2016

Erasmus lecture featuring Russell Moore



EVENTS IN 2015

Randy Boyagoda and Sam Tanenhaus

Richard John Neuhaus: A Life in the Public Square

Discussion of Boyagoda's book

Ross Douthat | *The Crisis of Conservative Catholicism*

28th Annual Erasmus Lecture

Christian Wiman and Danielle Chapman

1st Annual FIRST THINGS Poetry Reading

Honoring the Legacy of Fr. Richard John Neuhaus

The FIRST THINGS 25th Anniversary Dinner

The Paradox of Freedom: Happiness, Human Nature, Politics, and Religion

FIRST THINGS Intellectual Retreat

Curtis Freeman | *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists*

Book launch and signing

Sarah Lee | *Forgettable Distances*

Art opening

Peter J. Leithart | *Habit-Forming: Liturgies of Education*

FIRST THINGS lecture at The Covenant School (Dallas, TX)

Yuval Levin | *The Perils of Religious Liberty*

FIRST THINGS lecture at George Washington University (Washington, DC)

Leah Libresco | *Arriving at Amen*

Talk and book signing

David Novak | *Zionism and Judaism: A New Theory*

Talk and book signing

R. R. Reno | *Thinking Critically About Critical Thinking*

FIRST THINGS lecture at St. Mary's Catholic School (Phoenix, AZ)

R. R. Reno | Featured speaker at seminar on Faith and Freedom

Presented by Wheaton Academy (Wheaton, IL)

Christian Sahner | *Among the Ruins: Syria Past and Present*

Talk and book signing

Justin Shubow | *The Architecture of Democracy*

Lecture

Robert L. Wilken | *Christianity & Religious Freedom*

FIRST THINGS lecture at Austin Graduate School of Theology (Austin, TX)

Matt Wood | *Being Edited*

Art opening

1st Annual FIRST THINGS POETRY READING



FIRST THINGS held a poetry reading in New York City in October 2015 that featured poets Christian Wiman and Danielle Chapman. In the first of what will become an annual event, the two read selections from their work to an audience of approximately eighty-five people.

CHRISTIAN WIMAN

Christian Wiman is Senior Lecturer in Religion and Literature at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music, teaches at the Yale Divinity School, and was editor of *Poetry Magazine* from 2003 to 2013. He has published four books of poetry—*Once In the West* (FSG, 2014), which was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award; *Every Riven Thing*; *Hard Night*; and *The Long Home* (Nicholas Roerich Prize)—as well as a collection of essays, *Ambition and Survival: On Becoming a Poet*, and a memoir, *My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer* (FSG, 2013). His translations of Osip Mendelstam are found in *Stolen Air* (Ecco, 2012).



DANIELLE CHAPMAN

Danielle Chapman is a poet, essayist, and Lecturer in English at Yale University. Her poems have appeared in the *New Yorker*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, *The Nation*, and many other publications. *Delinquent Palaces*, released by Northwestern University Press in April 2015, is her debut collection of poems. For several years, Danielle served as the Director of Literary Arts and Events for the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, where she created programs to serve Chicago's writers, publishers, and literary community. She was also a consulting editor for The Poetry Foundation.



Christian Wiman and Danielle Chapman live in Hamden, CT, with their twin daughters.





A WORD FROM Francesca Murphy

My year at FIRST THINGS has been a huge learning experience. I got to fulfill my ambition of writing *Daily News* – type headlines or titles. It is a lot of fun, even if nearly all of them are rejected by the senior editors as too crass and vulgar: The occasional ‘hit’ makes up for the rejections. I have a lifelong, inherited addiction to newsprint, and have always wanted to connect with the world of journalism and news commentary. Spending the year at the FIRST THINGS office is like a dream come true. My meetings with journalists and commentators have made me the envy of my conservative friends. From the other side of the political spectrum, I am agog for overhearing the daily exchanges in the elevator amongst the hyper-hipster computer geeks with whom FIRST THINGS shares office space. I am surrounded by super-vintage artifice, embodied as nostalgia on the left and as tradition on the right. I engage in all the meetings about future articles, and it’s still a mystery to me why the magazine never looks anything like the articles I see in ‘submissions meetings.’ Press day with free pizza for all has become a fixed point of my turning world in Manhattan. I am still busy with my own creative projects: writing a theological novel called *Gnosis and the Theocrats from Mars*, researching a long historical piece about Blondel and de Lubac, editing work on my book series, *Illuminating Modernity*, and keeping my Notre Dame postdoc’s nose to the grindstone of our next French translation. So far I have written a couple of book reviews and an opinion piece for the magazine. I am currently hard at work on a longer article defending the so-called heresy of liberalism from those who want to excommunicate liberal-conservatives from the ranks of Christian orthodoxy. Once the article is finished, I hope to spend the rest of the year completing my novel, which is inspired by philosophical novels like *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. I’m having a productive year, with more space to read and write than I have had in years. I am very grateful to FIRST THINGS and the John Templeton Foundation for this creative opportunity.

FIRST THINGS

FELLOWSHIPS

SENIOR FELLOWS

In June 2015, FIRST THINGS launched its Senior Fellows Program, which brings top scholars to New York for a year of residence. As academia has become increasingly specialized over the past few decades, there now is a greater need for scholars who can speak intelligently, but accessibly, to the concerns of a broader audience of religious believers. Senior Fellows work closely with FIRST THINGS editors to better develop the link between academic research and public discourse, and to help these promising scholars develop their voice as public intellectuals. During their time in New York, Fellows also build meaningful professional networks that will contribute to greater engagement and impact in the public sphere. The inaugural Senior Fellow is Francesca Murphy, Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame.



Bianca Czaderna
Assistant Editor &
Junior Fellow Alumna

JUNIOR FELLOWS

Since 2004, the highly competitive, two-year FIRST THINGS Junior Fellows Program has provided recent college graduates with the opportunity to gain valuable experience in the worlds of publishing and public policy—and unparalleled exposure to the best of contemporary artistic and intellectual life. The FIRST THINGS Junior Fellows live in a community of daily prayer, in accommodations provided by the organization. They are involved in, and learn about, every aspect of the magazine's production, from editorial meetings to copy editing to layout to advertising. They are actively mentored by the FIRST THINGS editorial staff in the arts of editing and writing for a broad readership, preparing them to think and write about religious freedom and related issues both now and as their careers develop. One of the key goals of the Junior Fellows Program is to shape the next generation of Christian and Jewish artists, writers, and intellectuals. Many former Fellows go on to become full-time staff members at FIRST THINGS or other publications, continuing in the work of public advocacy and engaged journalism. Others become graduate students, professors, pastors, priests, or members of religious orders.



A WORD FROM

Alexi Sargeant

I'm grateful to my parents for many reasons. But one thing I'm especially grateful for these days is that they left issues of FIRST THINGS lying around our house. Even when I was a wee bit younger than the target audience, I loved reading Father Neuhaus's warm or trenchant reflections in the 'While We're At It' section he penned month-in and month-out. Neuhaus (and the other writers contributing to the magazine) became a kind of wise and prolific mentor for me as a young Anglican and, eventually, a Catholic university convert. While I studied, debated, acted, and directed at Yale as a conservative-leaning Christian, it was a boon to have FIRST THINGS on hand as a theologically serious and intellectually formidable resource.

I'm thrilled that upholding Neuhaus's legacy has fallen to such a tireless and talented crew here in New York City. It's an honor and a delight to now be part of that legacy as a Junior Fellow, especially because it affords me the opportunity to share FIRST THINGS with others.

There's never a dull moment in the FIRST THINGS office, whether we're managing the website, proofreading the print edition, or helping host exciting events. As an aspiring director and playwright, I've been especially interested by the artistic events and speakers that we've brought to FIRST THINGS. I'm also thrilled to be living with friends and staff of the magazine: The community at 338 and its life of prayer, dinner, Bible study, and song is an irreplaceable oasis in the midst of New York City.

A WORD FROM Bianca Czaderna

After spending my first year at FIRST THINGS as a Junior Fellow, I was fortunate to become the assistant editor this year. Some of my tasks have stayed the same—proofreading and fact-checking for the print magazine, for instance, and managing our social media presence—but other things have shifted. For instance, we now have some lovely, talented interns from The King's College working in our office and helping out with various tasks. I have had the privilege of training them and working alongside them. I've also been managing our Letters section for the print issue, a job that requires a surprising amount of communication with authors to attain provocative and assertive—but not overbearing—letters-to-the-editor and to garner responses from the authors being addressed. This has been a good exercise in the art of the well-crafted email and of the well-crafted letter. Finally, I've been able to take on some more editing, working with a few of our columnists on their regular web pieces and editing promising submissions that we've received in our inbox.

Staying in one place has proven to be fruitful. Over the past year and a half, I've become more comfortable with my tasks at work, which has given me more time to read and write and to think more creatively about my daily tasks. I've also gotten to know New York City a bit better—I'm more confident navigating the subway, for instance, which initially terrified me. Being able to participate for two years in the annual Erasmus lecture and the following day's discussions, as well as in various academic conferences and office events, has also given me a richer understanding of our cultural and political "moment," of the hopes and concerns of our country's intellectuals, and of the kinds of questions our readers are asking today.

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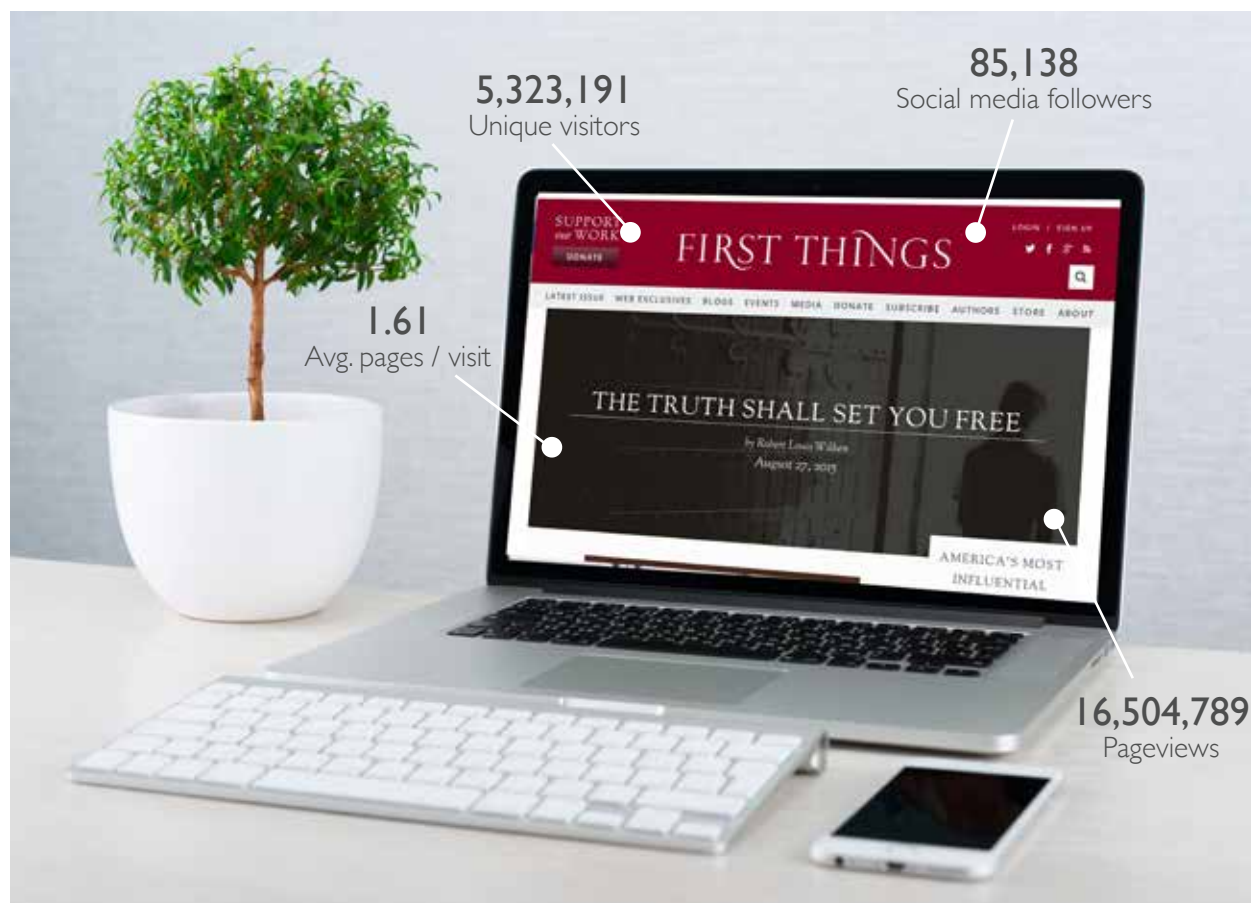
The FIRST THINGS website complements the print edition, featuring not only articles from the magazine, but also thousands of additional web-only articles and blog posts from the FIRST THINGS family of writers. FIRST THINGS extends the reach of its content through links on popular news sites and blogs, as well as through social-networking sites.

FIRST THINGS videos
were played
36,715 times
in 2015
from **145**
different countries



TOP 5 MOST-PLAYED VIDEOS IN 2015

1. The Crisis of Conservative Catholicism
2. Strangers in a Strange Land
3. On Creative Minorities
4. Celibacy and the Church
5. The New Intolerance





TOP 5

MOST-VIEWED ARTICLES IN 2015

“Surgical Sex”: **257,093 VIEWS**

“Mormonism Obsessed with Christ”: **102,336 VIEWS**

“Inventing the Crusades”: **99,109 VIEWS**

“Fiorina Was Right”: **91,969 VIEWS**

“Methodist Head of ‘Human Rights’ Mocks Pro-life Marchers”: **72,104 VIEWS**

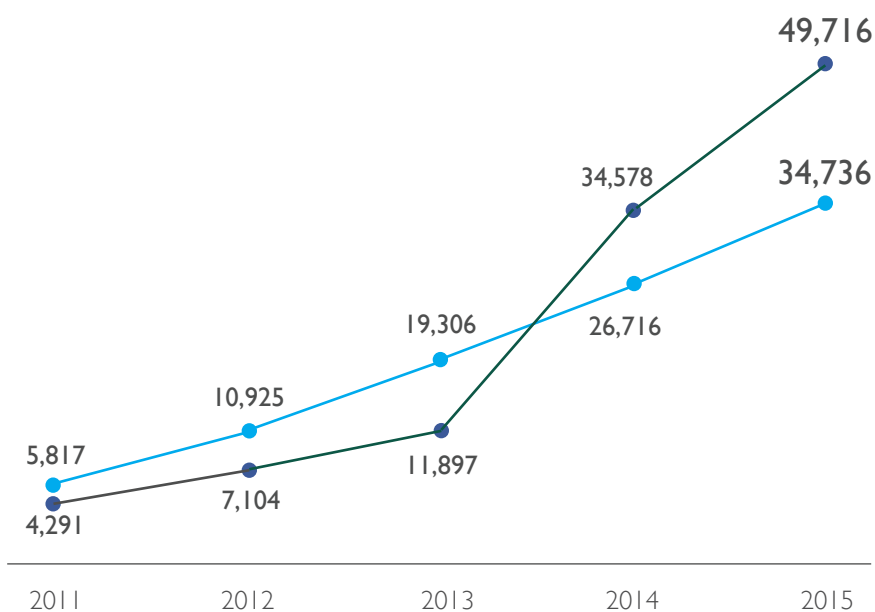
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When he died in 2009, Richard John Neuhaus, founder of the Institute on Religion and Public Life and *FIRST THINGS* magazine, left not only a great intellectual legacy, but also a generous bequest.

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— ED NOWAK, SUPPORTER OF FIRST THINGS

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FIRST THINGS YEAR IN REVIEW

The Institute on Religion and Public Life continued its strong trajectory of growth in 2015. We celebrated the 25th anniversary of the founding of FIRST THINGS, raised over \$2 million in pledges and contributions to the 25 Fund, reached over 26,000 FIRST THINGS subscribers and 5.3 million online readers, and added a number of events including our first ever intellectual retreat for FIRST THINGS readers. In 2016, we will organize additional events, build up our network of international scholars, and continue to publish thoughtful, incisive commentary in the pages of FIRST THINGS and on *firstthings.com*.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

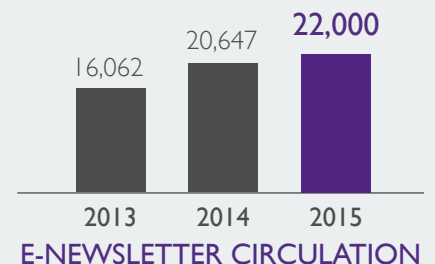
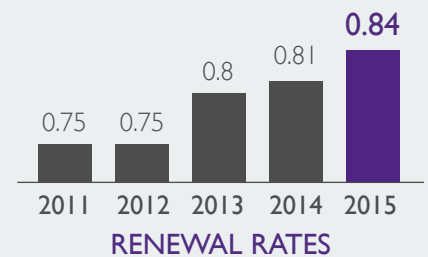
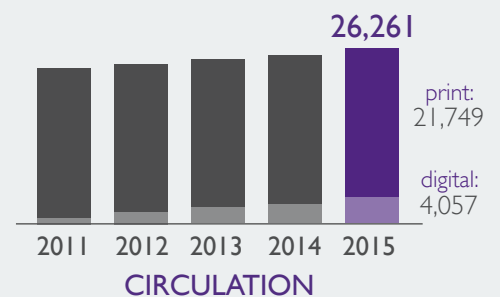
REVENUE

	ACTUAL 2015	PROJECTED 2016
Sales	\$997,109	\$1,066,350
Individual Contributions	1,423,722	1,550,000
Foundations	369,049	320,000
TOTAL REVENUE	\$2,789,880	\$2,936,350

EXPENSES

	ACTUAL 2015	PROJECTED 2016
Publication Costs	\$766,112	\$812,516
Seminars, Colloquia & Events	381,724	379,500
Author & Editor Fees	170,058	195,000
Fundraising Expenses	198,142	191,900
Salaries & Benefits	808,365	863,243
Office Expenses	239,893	271,246
Interest Expense	1,419	—
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$2,565,712	\$2,713,405

NET INCOME \$224,168 \$222,945



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We feel blessed and privileged to have the opportunity to participate in the events hosted by FIRST THINGS and happy to be part of the FIRST THINGS family. Through the efforts of FIRST THINGS, we form an ecumenical community that is encouraged to hope and act, each in our own small way, to change our families, communities, and country by putting our faith into action.

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