An aerial photograph of a city street scene. In the foreground, a large, light-colored stone church with a red-tiled roof and a tall, ornate steeple is visible. The church has multiple windows and a classical facade. Surrounding the church are various other buildings, including brick apartment buildings and modern high-rises in the background. The text "INSTITUTE ON RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE" and "Publisher of FIRST THINGS" is overlaid on a semi-transparent white banner at the top. The large number "30" and the word "TH" are prominently displayed in the center, with "ANNIVERSARY" below them.

INSTITUTE ON RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE  
*Publisher of* FIRST THINGS

30<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY

# 30

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear FIRST THINGS Readers,

More than thirty years ago, I was having lunch with Matthew Berke, a friend at Yale who was completing his graduate degree in political philosophy. “How’s the job search going,” I asked? “I’ve decided not to pursue an academic career,” he replied. “I took a job at a new magazine that’s getting started by Richard John Neuhaus. It’s going to be called FIRST THINGS. You should subscribe.”

I did, and for the next three decades FIRST THINGS played a central role in my life, as it has for so many of our readers.

FIRST THINGS is written, edited, and read by religious people speaking religiously, not just about religion, but about whatever they think is important. This is natural and fitting. As St. Thomas teaches, theology is the queen of the sciences, which means our faith illuminates everything. But today’s secularism says otherwise, which means FIRST THINGS offers a counter-cultural voice of dissent from today’s dogmas. That’s a thrilling expression of intellectual freedom—or at least it has been for me, from the very first issue I received in the mail in March, 1990.

This seems like a paradox to non-believers. How can the authority of God’s revelation be the foundation of intellectual freedom? But it’s not so hard to understand. Truth liberates us from falsehood and empowers us to be truth-tellers, even as our mainstream culture falls under the sway of a hectoring political correctness that in recent months has become ruthlessly punitive. God’s truth overcomes fear, the tool of the Adversary.



Over the last thirty years we've gotten many things right—and some wrong. We've published vital, engaging articles—and perhaps a few that are dry and dusty. There is a great deal to be proud of, even as not everything in our pages has been exemplary. Such are the ways of fallen men. But of this I am confident: **FIRST THINGS** remains true to the indomitable spirit of our founder, Richard John Neuhaus, who was not one to hide his light under a bushel.

“Though he fall, he shall not be cast down: for the Lord upholdeth his hand.” Over the last thirty years we have published **FIRST THINGS** in the confidence that the truths of our faith carry us forward, even if we are but earthen vessels. We will continue for the next thirty years with the same confidence!

Yes, there are important battles to be waged in the public square—for the sanctity of life, the dignity of marriage, the fruitful difference between men and women, the proper piety of patriotic loyalty, and more. But in these struggles let us remember to keep first things first. In the words of the Psalmist: “Take delight in the Lord, for he will give you the desires of your heart.”

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "R. R. Reno".

R. R. Reno



## AN EXCERPT FROM THE FOUNDING EDITORIAL

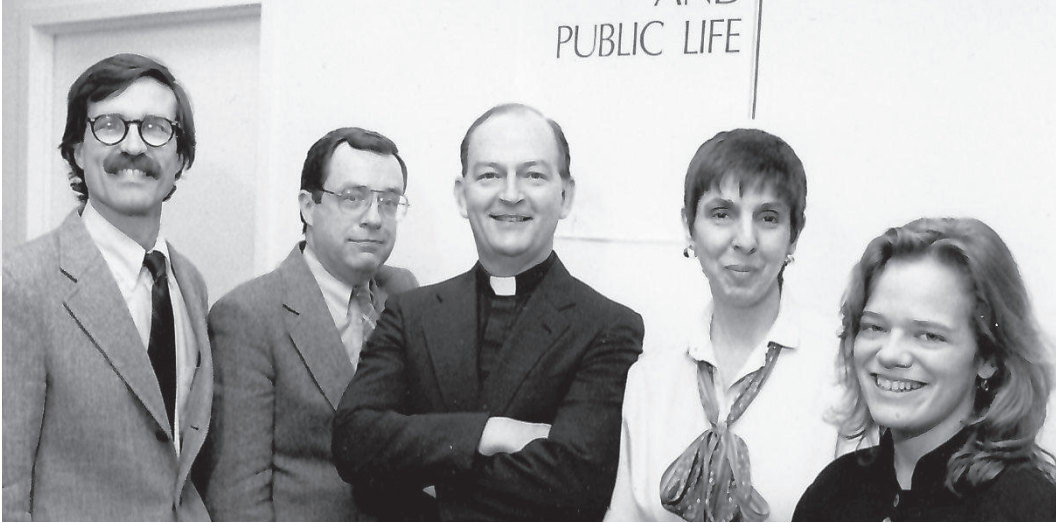
of FIRST THINGS by Father Richard John Neuhaus

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.

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.

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.



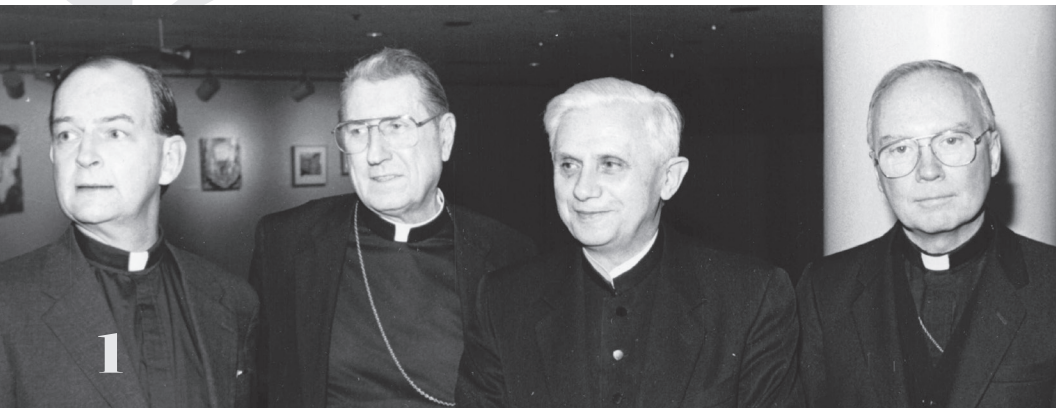
In these pages the reader will find items that report, analyze, instruct, warn, exhort, and sometimes entertain.

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.

# 30

## FIRST THINGS THROUGH THE YEARS

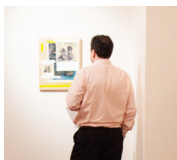


**1** Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, John Cardinal O'Connor, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, and Archbishop J. Francis Stafford gather for the 1988 Erasmus Lecture, delivered by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger.

**2** Michael Novak, Maria McFadden, Jim Nuechterlein, George Weigel, Stanley Hauerwas, and Rabbi David Novak gather for discussion during the early days of FIRST THINGS.

**3** FIRST THINGS writers gather for a colloquium following Cardinal Ratzinger's Erasmus Lecture.





**4** Listeners gather for Yuval Levin's 2015 Washington, D.C., Lecture.

**5** A. M. Juster delivers the 2017 annual Poetry Reading. **6** Avery Cardinal Dulles, Fr. Edward Oakes, Fr. Jacek Buda, and Fr. Raymond de Souza pose for a photo at the Union League Club of New York.

# 30

## FIRST THINGS THROUGH THE YEARS



**1** New York City Intellectual Retreat participants listen to remarks from art history professor Michael J. Lewis.

**2** FIRST THINGS staff pose for a photo as they prepare to record a podcast.



**3** Intellectual Retreat participants in Waco, Texas, enjoying a meal and conversation between discussion sessions.





**4** Friends and supporters of FIRST THINGS gather for dinner after the annual Erasmus Lecture. **5** FIRST THINGS readers gather for a small group seminar discussion on classical texts from the Western tradition. **6** Scholars gather at the FIRST THINGS office for a Dulles Colloquium with Professor Doug Farrow in the fall of 2017.



## TOP ARTICLES BY PAGEVIEWS

### Print Articles

- 1 “Surgical Sex” (NOVEMBER, 2004)  
Paul R. McHugh | 333,711
- 2 “Against Heterosexuality”  
(MARCH, 2014)  
Michael Hannon | 198,440
- 3 “Mormonism Obsessed With Christ” (FEBRUARY, 2012)  
Stephen Webb | 155,075
- 4 “Scientific Regress” (MAY, 2016)  
William Wilson | 148,305
- 5 “Shame Storm” (JANUARY, 2019)  
Helen Andrews | 147,427
- 6 “American Carnage” (APRIL, 2017)  
Christopher Caldwell | 127,933
- 7 “Back to the Future”  
(MARCH, 2020)  
Peter Thiel | 115,090
- 8 “Inventing the Crusades”  
(JUNE, 2009)  
Thomas F. Madden | 113,974
- 9 “Donald Trump, Man of Faith”  
(AUGUST, 2016)  
Matthew Schmitz | 104,623
- 10 “Challenging Radical Islam”  
(JANUARY, 2015)  
John A. Azumah | 78,287

### Web Exclusives

- 1 “Nikabrik’s Candidate”  
(JANUARY, 2016)  
Gina Dalfonzo | 635,653
- 2 “Coronavirus Reality Check”  
(APRIL, 2020)  
R. R. Reno | 311,266
- 3 “An Open Letter to My Liberal Friends” (JANUARY, 2017)  
Solveig Gold | 180,431
- 4 “Against David French-ism”  
(MAY, 2019)  
Sohrab Ahmari | 129,465
- 5 “Why Men Like Me Should Not Be Priests” (AUGUST, 2018)  
Daniel Mattson | 119,711
- 6 “The Bible’s Many Gods”  
(JANUARY, 2014)  
Gerald McDermott | 114,122
- 7 “Say ‘No’ to Death’s Dominion”  
(MARCH, 2020)  
R. R. Reno | 107,260
- 8 “Kissing Christianity Goodbye”  
(JULY, 2019)  
Carl R. Trueman | 97,447
- 9 “Ireland: An Obituary”  
(MAY, 2018)  
John Waters | 83,066
- 10 “The Princess Bride Syndrome”  
(SEPTEMBER, 2014)  
Ryan Shinkel | 78,310



## ENDORSEMENTS

Thirty years ago, Richard John Neuhaus sensed a need for a journal of religion and public life. There were, and are, magazines with articles about religion. There were, and are, magazines that treat public life. But the genius of Neuhaus was to take that little conjunction “and” seriously, producing in *FIRST THINGS* a magazine that aims to think them together.

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Gilbert Meilaender

As an engineer and money professional, I am not a great-books or humanities style intellectual. Nonetheless, in 2008 I walked into *Downtown Subscription* in Santa Fe, and bought and read my first copy of *FIRST THINGS*. This became a perduring spiritual experience for which I thank God.

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Cynthia Kase

I am privileged to have been present at the dawn of the creation of *FIRST THINGS* in Richard John Neuhaus’ living room in 1989 and to have been closely involved in its dedicated work ever since. When we have been faithful to Richard’s vision of our religiously informing public life, neither dictating to it nor kneeling before it, *FIRST THINGS* truly follows that inspired and inspiring vision. May God help us to persevere in this work for many years to come.

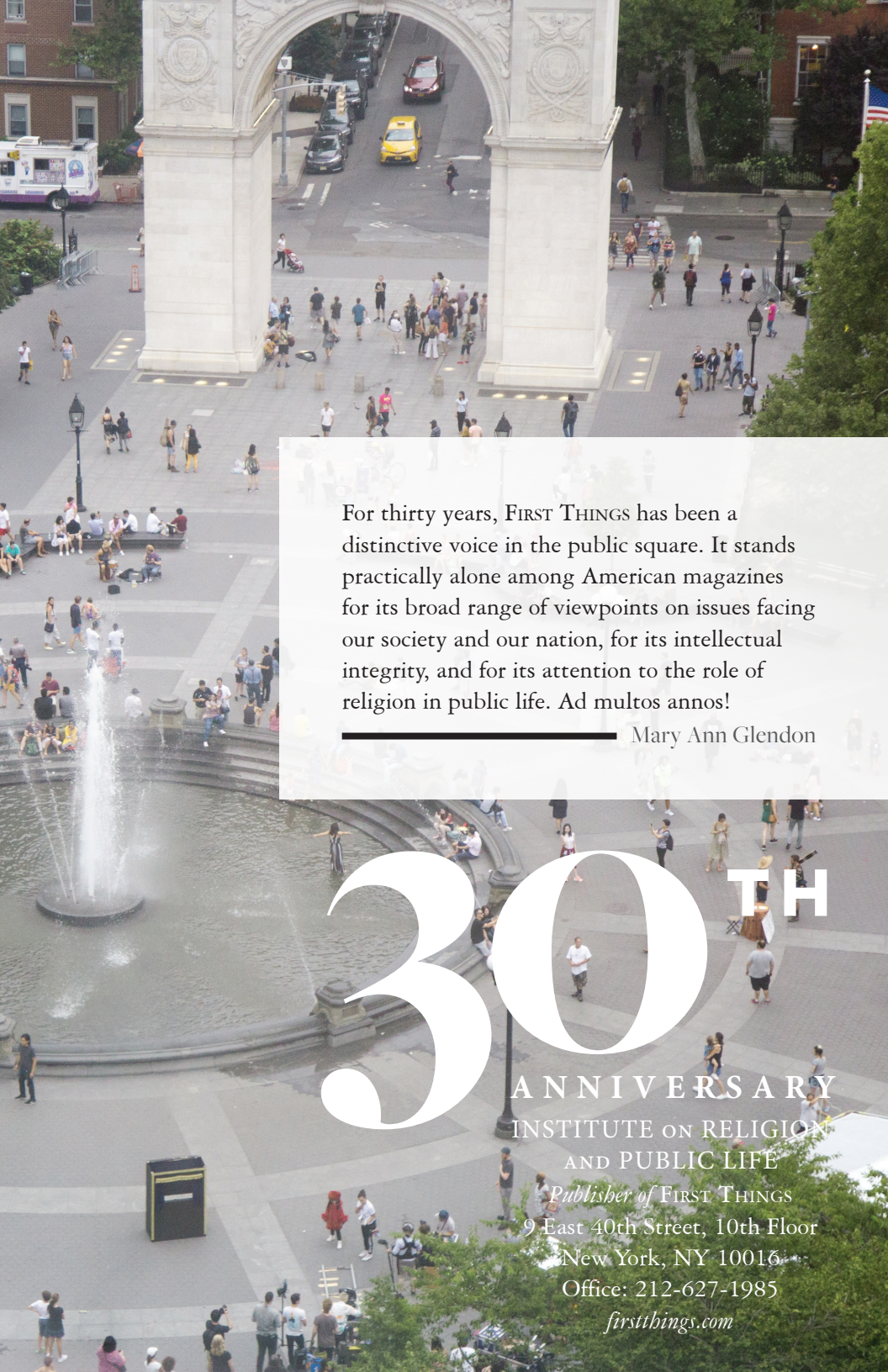
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David Novak

For thirty years now, there has been nothing like *FIRST THINGS*, anywhere in the world. The journal’s unique position at the intersection of faith and reason is a heritage to be treasured—and built upon.

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George Weigel



For thirty years, FIRST THINGS has been a distinctive voice in the public square. It stands practically alone among American magazines for its broad range of viewpoints on issues facing our society and our nation, for its intellectual integrity, and for its attention to the role of religion in public life. Ad multos annos!

Mary Ann Glendon

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