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FIRST THINGS

2020 ANNUAL REPORT



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ROBERT LOUIS WILKEN is William R. Kenan Professor Emeritus of the History of Christianity at the University of Virginia. His books include *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* and *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*. His most recent books are *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity* and *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom*.

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Letter From the Editor

Dear FIRST THINGS Readers,

2020 was quite a year. One aspect stands out: eruptions of widespread dissatisfaction, even anger. Many felt that not enough was being done to combat the pandemic, while others objected to dire measures, saying that too much was being suspended. BLM marches across the country manifested a deep dissatisfaction with the status quo, while many sat at home, simmering with rage as public health officials endorsed mass protests while prohibiting church services. Doubts about the integrity of the election festered, and then exploded. Twitter storms raged and the cancel culture intensified.

These expressions of frustration, anger, and outrage are not isolated phenomena. Recent polls indicate that once honored institutions no longer win our trust. To my mind, this trend toward mistrust plays a deeper role in our malaise than does political polarization. The latter festers because we lack institutions and authorities around which to rally. Statues of Christopher Columbus and even George Washington have become flashpoints of controversy, not symbols of civic unity.

Our fragmentation was made more extreme by the social isolation required by the pandemic. Most of us rely on our churches and synagogues to anchor our lives. Yet many were forced to close. We had to make do with more tenuous virtual connections. The same was true for family relations, friendships, and the communities of conversation we rely on for trustworthy connections.

It is my hope that FIRST THINGS bridged these gaps, at least to some degree. We addressed the pandemic and lockdowns. We commented on some of the political issues roiling the nation, especially those that pertain to the sanctity of life, dignity of marriage, integrity of God's creation of us as male or female, and religious liberty. But we also reflected on the joys of learning Latin and the musical genius of counterpoint. There were articles on William Wordsworth and Julian of Norwich. Our goal is to sustain a conversation, not about the frothy controversies of the moment, but about things that matter over the long haul.

There were many lessons to learn in 2020. The most important, perhaps, was the importance of

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patience and perseverance. We're not shy about defending our moral and religious convictions. But in the face of a contentious election and subsequent uproar, it is my hope that FIRST THINGS has clarified rather than inflamed. We seek to argue and debate rather than dismiss and disparage.

As we look forward to 2021, we can anticipate many difficult challenges. The current administration seems poised to advance the most extreme agenda of cultural progressivism—and to punish dissenters. The suspension of a great deal of social interaction will continue to erode civic life. Our religious communities will require careful repair.

But let's not be overtaken by what a young friend called “doomerism.” God never promised a happy convergence of worldly powers. In truth, we are warned that the opposite will be the case. Nor did he promise a trouble-free church, as even a cursory reading of St. Paul reminds us.

But God does give us a clear course of action: Speak the truth in season and out of season, and do so with unfailing patience. All of us at FIRST THINGS pledge to follow this course. We are honored that you are willing to join us.

Sincerely,

R. R. Reno

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*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Commentary*, and the *Washington Post*, among other popular outlets. His recent books include *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible*; *Fighting the Noonday Devil*; and *Resurrecting the Idea of a Christian Society*. His latest book, *Return of the Strong Gods*, was published in Fall 2019.

The 2020 Erasmus Lecture

Lincoln's Almost Chosen People

Delivered by **RABBI MEIR SOLOVEICHIK**

Special thanks to the Hertog Foundation and the Towne family for their support of the 2020 Erasmus Lecture.



For over thirty years, the Erasmus Lecture has brought world-renowned speakers to New York City to address an audience of FIRST THINGS friends and subscribers. The 33rd annual Erasmus Lecture was delivered by Rabbi Dr. Meir Y. Soloveichik, Orthodox rabbi at Congregation Shearith Israel. In addition to serving as a minister, he is the Director of the Zahava and Moshe Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought at Yeshiva University and the father of six children.

The following is an excerpt from Rabbi Soloveichik's Erasmus Lecture:

In his wonderful book *Land of Lincoln*, Andrew Ferguson recalls meeting an immigrant family from Thailand who ran a restaurant in Chicago just a few blocks from the Orthodox Jewish neighborhood where I grew up. This couple, Oscar Esche and his wife, had developed a passionate devotion to Abraham Lincoln, and they explain to Ferguson how it began. Esche says, "My wife sees the license plate on all the cars after we move here to Chicago. 'Land of Lincoln,' they say. She wonders, 'Who is this Lincoln?' So she gets a book from a friend to read about Lincoln. . . . My wife reads the book, and we realize, we must go pay respects to this man. He is a very great man. He helps the poor. He tells everyone that they are equal. . . . This is very important."

Esche points to a small statue in his restaurant, a reproduction of the Lincoln memorial. "We bought a statue," he says, "to show our respect . . . and ever since that time we have statue, our business never go down. Always the business goes up. . . . Lincoln does this." Esche explains that in gratitude to Lincoln, every morning he sets out a sacrifice before the statue: "It's full meal—everything, entrée, dessert, appetizer. . . . We change the meal every day. . . . We serve him everything." At this point Mrs. Esche interrupts, correcting him in Thai. "Yes," Mr. Esche says. "Everything but no pork. . . . We do not want to be disrespectful." To a puzzled Ferguson, Esche clarifies his meaning: "He is *Abraham* Lincoln, yes? . . . Jewish people, they don't eat pork."

It is an amusing story: a couple thoughtfully offering kosher sacrifices to a “Jewish statue,” overlooking that Judaism is not terribly excited about sacrifices to statues, and that Abraham Lincoln was not actually Jewish. But Ferguson’s tale is also entrancing, as it illustrates how large Lincoln’s legacy looms, how it cuts across cultures, how it is bound up with the promise of the American idea. And though Abraham Lincoln may not have been Jewish, his legacy is indeed bound up with the children of Abraham. For the covenantal imagery of the Hebrew

In Lincoln’s theology, Locke and the Bible, Enlightenment and covenantal language, are joined. Harry Jaffa reminds us that America was formed from the conjunction of two currents of conviction: Puritan religious tradition and the Enlightenment. Lincoln, he argues, achieved a synthesis, incorporating “the truths of the Declaration of Independence into a sacred and ritual canon, making them objects of faith as well as cognition.” As I would put it, the DNA of the nation conceived in liberty can be seen as



Bible, so essential to the birth of the American republic, found its fullest expression in Lincoln during the Civil War. He ultimately emerged as the theologian of the American idea.

The [Gettysburg] Address was a call to covenantal renewal, to rededication to the proposition that “all men are created equal,” to a “new birth of freedom” sanctified by the sacramental blood of the soldiers who had died. Whereas a contract binds only contemporaneous parties, a covenant in the Bible spans generations, linking, as Moses said, those here and those not here. . . . A covenant can do this because it invokes the Almighty, who is timeless, and so Lincoln, in delivering the speech, stressed that “under God” America would have a new birth of freedom, though that invocation had not been in the prepared text.

a double helix of biblical covenantal theology and Enlightenment thought.

To believe in America, to have faith in America, and to be a person of faith in America, is to hope that even as we have lost the biblical grammar of liberty, nevertheless somewhere the covenantal lessons and legacy of Abraham and Sarah still live.

And if we are to rediscover these ideas, we will find them in the vision of a man named Abraham, who may not have been Jewish, but who incorporated the imagery of the children of Abraham in his vision of America.

The 2020 FIRST THINGS Lecture in Washington, D.C.

The Secret of the Saeculum

DOUGLAS FARROW

Douglas Farrow is Professor of Theology and Ethics at McGill University's School of Religious Studies. Before starting at McGill in 1998, he taught in the United Kingdom at King's College London, after completing his doctorate there. Alongside his lecturing and graduate supervision, he pursues a broad range of interdisciplinary interests, anchored in theology, with colleagues throughout North America and Europe. On March 5, 2020, he delivered the 2020 FIRST THINGS Lecture in Washington, D.C.

The following is an excerpt from Farrow's lecture:

The heart of providence is love, the Love that is happy and makes happy. Though rational creatures often behave irrationally and indeed wickedly, God makes them with a view to their eternal felicity by way of a share in his divine felicity. He sets before them the path of life. When they turn from that path and wander into dark places, he sends messengers to tell them that they may return to the path; he creates a covenant that beats a path back to the path; he comes in person to *be* the path, to be “the way, the truth, and the life.”

Because God is providential—because his providence extends beyond the provision of a garden in the East and pursues us into the desert of sin and death—there is progress, there is history. Disasters notwithstanding, we are going somewhere, not nowhere.



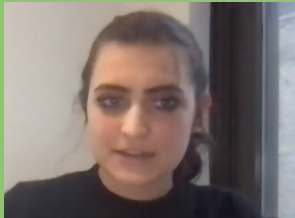
History is the theater of providence, and history is not just one damn thing after another, though in it we witness many damnable things being done.

History does not go around in circles, time itself does not go around in circles, though people may go around in circles. History, thanks be to God, has meaning and purpose. Just as it had a beginning in Eden, the garden designed by God for his cultivation of our race in the life of love, it shall come to the end that providence has devised, an end far more glorious than the beginning, and far more secure than the beginning—an end in which man, with God and like God, will love in such a way as to be *non posse peccare* and *non posse mori*. With all the holy angels, he shall continue forever in the joy of his Lord.

Intellectual Retreats

In July of 2020, FIRST THINGS collaborated with Magdalen College of the Liberal Arts to host its first web-based Intellectual Retreat. Dozens of FIRST THINGS readers gathered for a week of evening seminars on Josef Pieper's classic work on the theological virtues, *Faith, Hope, Love*. Joined by Magdalen College tutors, participants spent an evening focusing on each virtue. At the end of the

retreat, participants heard from a panel of past Junior Fellows, including Associate Editor Ramona Tausz, attorney Stefan McDaniel, and Associate Editor of the Arete Initiative at Duke University, John Rose. The panel participants reflected on their time at FIRST THINGS, answered questions from the audience, and described emerging trends in theology and politics.



FIRST THINGS Associate Editor Ramona Tausz and former FIRST THINGS Junior Fellows Stefan McDaniel and John Rose were on a concluding panel.





COVID and Religious Life

In addition to publishing content in the pages of FIRST THINGS and on www.firstthings.com, the Institute on Religion and Public Life hosts a number of educational events throughout the year, including lectures, Intellectual Retreats, symposia, panels, art exhibits, and book launches. In 2020 we had to forego much of our in-person programming due to the pandemic. The silver lining was that FIRST THINGS increased its capacity for online programming, a trend we plan to continue in 2021 and beyond. Among our most significant web-based gatherings in 2020 was a summer Zoom panel entitled “COVID and Religious Life.” FIRST THINGS Editor R. R. Reno, theologian Carl R. Trueman, and Rabbi Mark Gottlieb discussed the impact of the pandemic and suspension of religious gatherings upon Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. A video of the lively discussion is available at www.firstthings.com/medial/covid-and-religious-life.



Pictured right, top to bottom: R. R. Reno is Editor of FIRST THINGS. Carl R. Trueman is an ordained minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Professor of Biblical & Religious Studies at Grove City College. Rabbi Mark Gottlieb is Senior Director of the Tikvah Fund.

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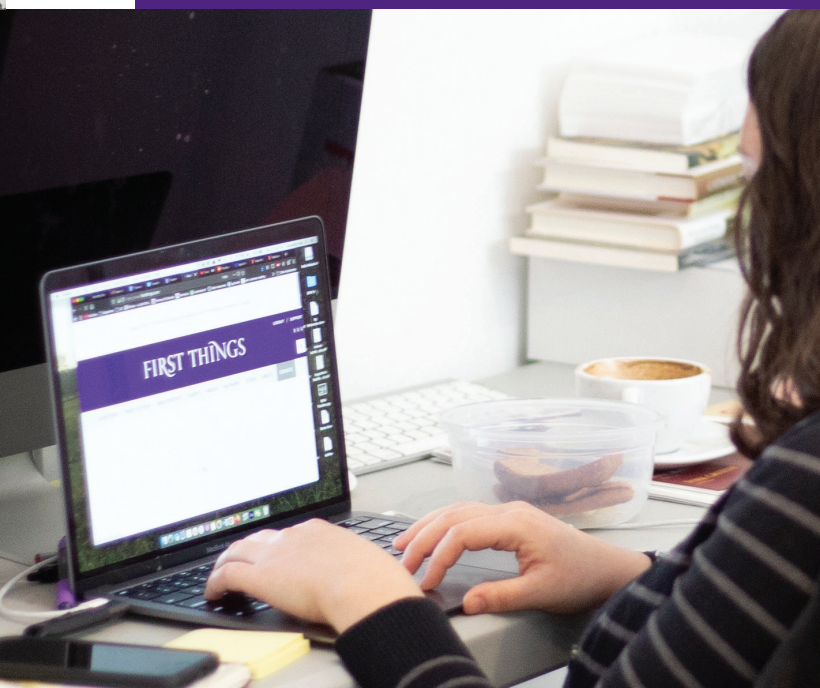
The FIRST THINGS website complements the print edition with web articles by our editors and top writers, published daily and free to all. It also hosts an online version of the print edition—with recent issues available in their entirety for subscribers, and our thirty year archive available to subscribers and non-subscribers alike.

Top 5 Podcasts

1. **A Conversation with Douglas Murray**
2. **Sweden Is on Edge**
3. **The Culture of Hate**
4. **The Case For Classical Education**
5. **The Second Secularization**

Top 5 Web Exclusives

1. **Coronavirus Reality Check**
R. R. RENO
2. **Say “No” to Death’s Dominion**
R. R. RENO
3. **Epidemic Danger and Catholic Sacraments**
THOMAS JOSEPH WHITE
4. **The Billionaires Behind the LGBT Movement**
JENNIFER BILEK
5. **Kamala Harris’s Record of Anti-Catholic Bigotry**
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JAN.–DEC. 2020
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Top 5 Print Articles

1. **Suicide of the Liberals**
GARY SAUL MORSON
2. **Back to the Future**
PETER THIEL
3. **The Fury of the Fatherless**
MARY EBERSTADT
4. **My Time in Prison**
GEORGE CARDINAL PELL
5. **Why I Am Not a Liberal**
RYSZARD LEGUTKO

Suicide of the Liberals

An excerpt from an essay by GARY SAUL MORSON in the October 2020 issue of FIRST THINGS


Between 1900 and 1917, waves of unprecedented terror struck Russia. Several parties professing incompatible ideologies competed (and cooperated) in causing havoc. Between 1905 and 1907, nearly 4,500 government officials and about as many private individuals were killed or injured. Between 1908 and 1910, authorities recorded 19,957 terrorist acts and revolutionary robberies, doubtless omitting many from remote areas. As the foremost historian of Russian terrorism, Anna Geifman, observes, “Robbery, extortion, and murder became more common than traffic accidents.”

Anyone wearing a uniform was a candidate for a bullet to the head or sulfuric acid to the face. Country estates were burnt down (“rural illuminations”) and businesses were extorted or blown up. Bombs were tossed at random into railroad carriages, restaurants, and theaters. Far from regretting the death and maiming of innocent bystanders, terrorists boasted of killing as many as possible, either because the victims were likely bourgeois or because any murder helped bring down the old order. A group of anarcho-communists threw bombs laced with nails into a café bustling with two hundred customers in order “to see how the foul bourgeois will squirm in death agony.”

Instead of the pendulum’s swinging back—a metaphor of inevitability that excuses people

from taking a stand—the killing grew and grew, both in numbers and in cruelty. Sadism replaced simple killing. As Geifman explains, “The need to inflict pain was transformed from an abnormal irrational compulsion experienced only by unbalanced personalities into a formally verbalized obligation for all committed revolutionaries.” One group threw “traitors” into vats of boiling water. Others were still more inventive. Women torturers were especially admired.

How did educated, liberal society respond to such terrorism? What was the position of the Constitutional Democratic (Kadet) Party and its deputies in the Duma (the parliament set up in 1905)? Though Kadets advocated democratic, constitutional procedures, and did not themselves engage in terrorism, they aided the terrorists in any way they could. Kadets collected money for terrorists, turned their homes into safe houses, and called for total amnesty for arrested terrorists who pledged to continue the mayhem. Kadet Party central committee member N. N. Shchepkin declared that the party did not regard terrorists as criminals at all, but as saints and martyrs. The official Kadet paper, *Herald of the Party of People’s Freedom*, never published an article condemning political assassination. The party leader, Paul Milyukov, declared that “all means are now legitimate . . . and all means should be tried.” When asked to condemn terrorism, another



Revolutions never succeed without the support of wealthy, liberal, educated society. Yet revolutionaries seldom conceal that their success entails the seizure of all wealth, the suppression of dissenting opinion, and the murder of class enemies.

liberal leader in the Duma, Ivan Petrunkevich, famously replied: “Condemn terror? That would be the moral death of the party!”

Not just lawyers, teachers, doctors, and engineers, but even industrialists and bank directors raised money for the terrorists. Doing so signaled advanced opinion and good manners. A quote attributed to Lenin—“When we are ready to kill the capitalists, they will sell us the rope”—would have been more accurately rendered as: “They will buy us the rope and hire us to use it on them.” True to their word, when the Bolsheviks gained control, their organ of terror, the Cheka, “liquidated” members of all opposing parties, beginning with the Kadets. Why didn’t the liberals and businessmen see it coming?

That question has bothered many students of revolutionary movements. Revolutions never succeed without the support of wealthy, liberal, educated society. Yet revolutionaries seldom conceal that their success entails the seizure of all wealth, the suppression of dissenting opinion, and the murder of class enemies. Lenin, after all, was by no means the only bloodthirsty Russian radical. In 1907, Ivan Pavlov—not the Nobel prize-winning scientist, but one of the brightest theoreticians of the especially violent Maximalists—published *The Purification of Mankind*, which divided humanity into ethical races. In this analysis, exploiters, vaguely and

broadly identified, constituted a race, “morally inferior to our animal predecessors,” which must be exterminated, children and all, by the morally superior race, whose best members were the terrorists themselves. Remarkably enough, this program evoked no indignation, among other Maximalists or even among other socialists, however moderate. Another prominent Maximalist, M. A. Engel’gardt, argued for a red terror that would kill at least twelve million people. As if anticipating the Khmer Rouge, one anarchist group sought to establish equality by killing all educated people.

And yet the liberals refused to use their position in the Duma to make constitutionalism work. They would not participate in determining the government budget but confined their activities to denouncing the government and defending terrorists. Even when Pyotr Stolypin, the most capable chief minister Nicholas II ever had, offered to enact the entire Kadet program, the Kadets refused to cooperate. Evidently their professed beliefs were less important than their emotional identification with radicalism, of whatever sort.

GARY SAUL MORSON is Lawrence B. Dumas Professor of the Arts and Humanities at Northwestern University.

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 Frank and Anne Palopoli
 Dr. Richard Paquette
 David and Kathy Pauls
 John and Cathy Pederson
 Anonymous
 Mr. and Mrs. Michael and
 Susan Petrik
 Mr. and Mrs. James Poole
 Mr. and Mrs. Michael C.
 Poulos
 Anonymous
 Anonymous
 Gerard J. Quinn
 Dr. Ephraim Radner
 Mr. Russ Reinsel
 Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Reitz
 Russell R. Reno, Jr.
 Anonymous
 Mr. Brian Rhame
 Dr. Barry Ritchie
 Mr. Douglas Ritter
 Martha Rochelle
 Mr. and Mrs. Kevin Roshak
 Mr. Michael Russell
 Mr. Aníbal Sabater
 Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Salladin
 Mr. Paul Sanderford
 Bill and Peggy Scheu
 Ms. Irene G. Schey
 Mr. Taylor Schmidt
 Mr. and Mrs. Mark E.
 Schneider
 Patricia Sellers
 Anonymous
 Keith L. Smith



K.J. Smith
 Phil and Julie Smith
 Mr. Kenneth L. Smith
 Nancy Burke Solomon
 Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Spence
 William and Sonja Sray
 Mr. Peter Stephens
 Dr. Richard Stevens
 Robert and Lenore Swoboda
 Anonymous
 Arnold Thackray
 Mr. Christopher Thomas
 Ward F. Tierney
 Mr. John Todd
 Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Triller
 Mr. and Mrs. Kenny Troutt
 Maj. Drew Tullson
 Anonymous
 Mr. Charles Urlacher
 Mr. and Mrs. Richard Vaughan
 Anonymous
 Mr. Paul Verderese
 Mr. Michael Volker

Gregory and Megan Walker
 Mr. and Mrs. John C. Walton
 Mr. and Mrs. Reinhold Wappler
 Michael and Kathleen Watson
 Dr. Amy L. Wax
 Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Weber
 Richard and Eileen Weicher
 Mr. George Weigel, St. Florian
 Foundation
 Mr. Joseph Weiler
 Anonymous
 The Whitman Family
 Mr. David Wildt
 Robert and Carol Wilken
 Dale G. Wilkerson
 Simon Wing
 Mr. and Mrs. John Halsey
 Wood
 Mr. David Woodcock
 Anonymous
 Anonymous
 Bernard Zablocki
 Anonymous

The Richard John Neuhaus Society



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.

The Richard John Neuhaus Society honors his memory and recognizes those who remember *FIRST THINGS* in their retirement plans or wills. Their planned gifts ensure a bright future for *FIRST THINGS*, enhancing the Institute's ability to plan and expand future programs and publications that promote the vital role of faith in the public square. Society membership is open to those who make a bequest or charitable gift annuity to the Institute on Religion and Public Life, or who designate the Institute as a beneficiary in their wills, life insurance policies, or retirement accounts.

Making a Planned Gift to *FIRST THINGS*

You can use any number of tax-advantaged financial tools to support the Institute on Religion and Public Life and advance its work, while at the same time returning benefits to you and your family:

DONATE ASSETS that you no longer need or want, such as an art collection, a second home, land, or a life insurance policy.

DONATE APPRECIATED STOCK in lieu of cash gifts to the Institute on Religion and Public Life. These gifts are not only tax-deductible at the stock's current value level, but they can also enable you to lower your capital gains liabilities.

MAKE A GIFT FROM YOUR IRA.

The IRA charitable rollover provision was made permanent at the end of 2015, so donors 70 ½ years and older can give up to \$100,000 to charities from their IRAs taxfree.

We are very grateful to acknowledge the following members of the Richard John Neuhaus Society

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| ■ Anonymous | ■ Ms. Cynthia Kase | ■ Francis and Jennifer Ruffing |
| ■ John A. and Ann C. Bushnell | ■ The Honorable Alonzo L. McDonald [†] | ■ Anonymous |
| ■ Mr. John F. Cannon | ■ Ann E. C. R. Miko | ■ Keith L. Smith |
| ■ B. G. and Kay [†] Carter | ■ Rosalind Mohnsen | ■ Keith D. Stottlemeyer |
| ■ Mr. Arnold J. Conrad | ■ Richard John Neuhaus [†] | ■ Joseph A. Swanson |
| ■ Charles R. Disque | ■ Elizabeth A. Nolan | ■ William Ronald Toth |
| ■ Robert R. Ford | ■ Mr. Edward Nowak | ■ Mr. Karl von Bock [†] |
| ■ Harry L. Hogan [†] | ■ Thomas C. Oden [†] | |
| ■ James Jereb [†] | ■ Maxine E. Poinsette [†] | |

If you have already made FIRST THINGS part of your retirement or estate plans, please let us know. If you or your adviser have any questions, contact Eduardo Andino, Director of Development, at eandino@firstthings.com or 212-627-1985 so we can welcome you as a new member of the Richard John Neuhaus Society.

REALIZE TAX ADVANTAGES by selling property to the Institute on Religion and Public Life at a charitable discount or by deeding your home to the Institute while you continue to live there.

ESTABLISH A CHARITABLE GIFT ANNUITY that benefits the Institute on Religion and Public Life. Charitable gift annuities guarantee a fixed income for life for you or up to two annuitants, and they come with several tax advantages.

MAKE THE INSTITUTE ON RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE A BENEFICIARY of your will, revocable trust, or retirement plan—costing you nothing during your lifetime. Those who remember the Institute in their wills become members of the Richard John Neuhaus Society.

It is important to obtain the advice and assistance of your financial adviser and/or attorney. Please consult with a trusted professional to work out the details and to learn about other planned giving vehicles. If you or your adviser have any questions, contact Eduardo Andino, Director of Development, at eandino@firstthings.com or 212-627-1985.

Philanthropic Partner

J. MARK MUTZ

I started reading FIRST THINGS more than 25 years ago. For the first few years, I don't think I really understood most of the articles. But I had the sense that, in those pages, faith was seeking understanding of itself and its place in our culture and politics, and I wanted to be a part of the search, if only as a reader.

As the years passed, FIRST THINGS educated me. The articles began to make more sense. They introduced me to new views and led me to new thinkers and writers and even some friends.

My faith deepened; my loves grew stronger; and light was shed on what might be their right ordering. In fact, my views grew strong enough that it became possible for me to realize that FIRST THINGS was not always right, that it got some things wrong from time to time.

This, however, has not diminished my gratitude for the role it has played in my life. Nor has it lessened my desire to express that gratitude through my giving.

Ultimately, insights about faith are matters of grace, but grace has its agents. In my life, FIRST THINGS has been one of those agents.





New Staff

DANIELLE (DANI) GREENE

The Institute on Religion and Public Life is delighted to welcome Danielle (Dani) Greene as the newest member of the FIRST THINGS team. Dani joins us after receiving her Bachelor's magna cum laude in English from the College of William & Mary. During college, she was an active member of her school's Catholic Campus Ministry and was awarded their Monsignor Charles Kelley Award for servant leadership. Dani was born and raised in Houston, Texas, and, after attending university in Virginia, was excited to move to New York City this past summer. She appreciates how welcoming the FIRST THINGS team has been and is grateful for the opportunity to learn more about the publishing industry. Her favorite aspect of her new position is getting to interact with our subscribers, donors, and authors every day.



Junior Fellows



JACQUELYN LEE

About a year ago, I was talking over future plans with a friend when she suggested I apply for the Junior Fellowship. She had recently seen the advertisement in the magazine and thought it would be a good fit. I lit up at the idea and submitted my application that afternoon. Obviously, it was meant to be. During these months at FIRST THINGS, I've learned a lot about how the magazine is made, about what it takes to hone my craft, and about myself.

I'm grateful to be working in an office which views world events in light of a transcendent good. A small, still point in the turning world.



VERONICA CLARKE

As my junior fellowship at FIRST THINGS draws to its close, I look back at my time here with gratitude. A pandemic transformed the bustling streets of New York into a ghost town; grocery store shelves were left empty; all of a sudden, we were confined to our homes, cut off from family and friends. But the wheels of FIRST THINGS kept turning, providing a public square for our readers and writers to meet and keep the conversation going. As our 1990 editorial statement declares: "A real conversation, as distinct from intellectual chatter, is marked by discipline and continuity."

At FIRST THINGS, we work to provide our readers with thoughtful commentary on our current political and religious affairs while remaining grounded in the first principles that tie us to our Creator. In times like these, our loyalty to these principles is put to the test.

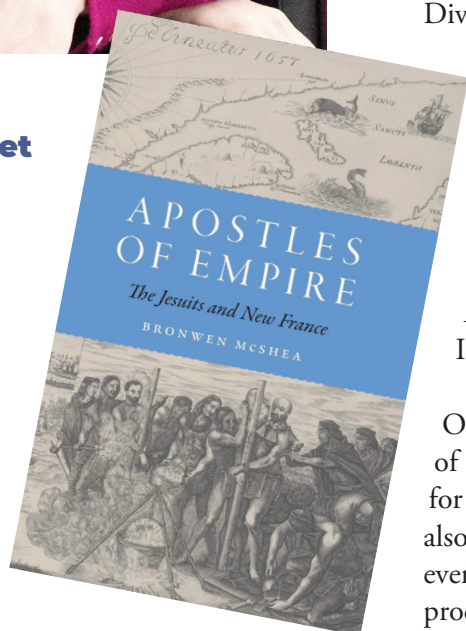
I am glad, therefore, to be surrounded by the excellent minds of FIRST THINGS as we strive toward the good, the true, and the beautiful together.

Writer in Residence

BRONWEN MCSHEA



It's especially rewarding to get to know FIRST THINGS this way, as I've been a reader since I was a teenager, in the days of Fr. Neuhaus.



In September, the Institute on Religion and Public Life welcomed Bronwen McShea as a Writer in Residence. While based at the New York offices of FIRST THINGS, McShea is completing her second book manuscript, tentatively titled *Peer of Princes: Marie de Vignerot, Duchesse d'Aiguillon, Cardinal Richelieu's Forgotten Protégée*. Under contract with Pegasus Books, it will be the first modern biography of a noblewoman whose contributions to the history of Christianity and to the political and cultural life of Golden Age France deserve to be known. Additionally, McShea contributes on occasion to FIRST THINGS.

McShea is also a Visiting Assistant Professor in History for the Augustine Institute Graduate School. She holds a Ph.D. in History from Yale University and an M.T.S. from Harvard Divinity School. Her first book, *Apostles of Empire: The Jesuits and New France*, was published in 2019 by the University of Nebraska Press. In addition, her work has appeared in a range of peer-reviewed journals. McShea is also writing a third book, provisionally titled *Women of the Church: What Every Catholic Should Know*, for Ignatius Press and the Augustine Institute.

Of her time so far with the editors and staff of FIRST THINGS, McShea says, "I'm grateful for this space and time for my writing, but also greatly enjoying the chance to get to know everyone at the magazine and to see how the production of a publication for wider audiences works from the inside. It's especially rewarding to get to know FIRST THINGS this way, as I've been a reader since I was a teenager, in the days of Father Neuhaus. I'm making some great friends here, too."

30TH FIRST THINGS

ANNIVERSARY

With the publication of the February 2020 issue of FIRST THINGS, the Institute on Religion and Public Life celebrated its three-hundredth issue and thirtieth anniversary. Little did we know that the remainder of the year would be such a tumultuous one.

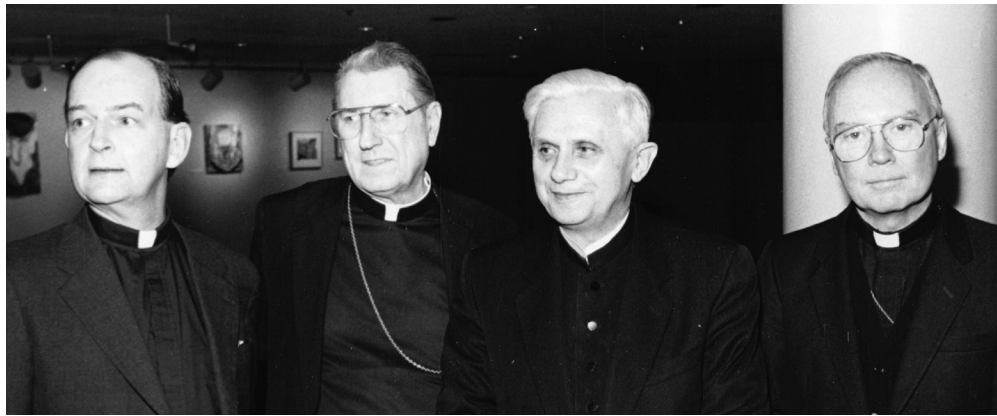
With the confidence that springs from a deep faith, Richard John Neuhaus devoted himself to the task of reminding our democratic, constitutional order of the moral and metaphysical underpinnings necessary for its thriving. FIRST THINGS brought before the American public the biblical vision of freedom, which animated the Founders.



The highest purpose of liberty is not license, but conforming one's life to the highest truths. A free people learns the art of self-governance from the Supreme Governor.

Neuhaus and his colleagues helped faithful men and women make sense of the challenges faced through the nineties and the aughts. Much has changed since the magazine's founding, and we live in a world where many of the trends begun decades ago have accelerated. Today, we attempt to steer the ship of FIRST THINGS with their same spirit of humility and responsibility. As we do so, we take an opportunity to look back at the formative memories of the last thirty years and proceed with confidence to the challenges and blessings of 2021 and beyond.





Year in Review

The Institute on Religion and Public Life continued on a strong financial trajectory in 2020, despite the uncertainties of the coronavirus economy. We carried out two highly successful fundraising campaigns. We continued to publish FIRST THINGS without skipping a beat. Despite the lockdowns, we came together through web events. In 2021, we will continue to publish thoughtful, incisive commentary in the pages of FIRST THINGS and *firstthings.com*.

Financial Summary

	2020 Actual	2021 Budget
REVENUE		
Sales & Program Revenue	\$967,046	\$1,039,242
Individual Contributions	2,092,212	1,897,413
Foundation Grants	335,288	345,300
Government Grants	89,368	10,632
Total Revenue	\$3,483,914	\$3,292,587
EXPENSES		
Magazine Publication	\$2,140,831	\$2,135,531
Seminars & Events	169,680	169,260
Fundraising	617,232	615,704
Management & General	251,375	250,753
Total Expenses	\$3,179,118	\$3,171,248
Net Income	\$304,795	\$121,338

A Word From Our Editors



MATTHEW SCHMITZ



JULIA YOST

MATTHEW SCHMITZ

Videos of protestors participating in quasi-religious rites have circulated on social media, attracting widespread mockery. They are part of a change in American mores sometimes described as “the Great Awakening.” Henri de Lubac noted something similar in the last century: “Today a new faith is rising,” he wrote. “A faith based on this evidence that ... blood represents the mystery that dispossesses and replaces the old sacraments.” De Lubac realized that it was not enough simply to refute false claims about the special power of race. One had to assert in its place a truer creed: “To faith, one must oppose faith.” In the coming year, as in every other, this is the mission of FIRST THINGS.

JULIA YOST

As the editor in charge of the Opinion section of FIRST THINGS, I seek to draw together a wide array of authors who can speak from a wealth of personal experience or profound learning. A well-written Opinion piece, such as George Cardinal Pell’s “My Time in Prison,” might invite us into the thoughts, feelings, and impressions of a person enduring an exceptional or trying event. Francis Young’s “The Myth of Medieval Paganism” debunks a bad academic argument that has made its way into the popular imagination. Whether contemporary or evergreen in its theme, an Opinion piece should provide readers with a brief, well-articulated insight that cuts across the classical themes of FIRST THINGS: religion, culture, and public life. It is with this ideal in mind that I will field and edit submissions throughout 2021.

FIRST THINGS

America is not uniquely Babylon, but it is our time and place in Babylon. We seek its peace in which we find our peace as we yearn for and eucharistically anticipate the New Jerusalem that is our pilgrim goal. It is time to think again—to think deeply, to think theologically—about the story of America and its place in the story of the world.

- FATHER RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS