

Struggling with Christian Morality

Image by [falco](#) from [Pixabay](#)

For more than thirty years, I taught political philosophy at The Catholic University of America. As part of the canon for courses on the history of ideas, Friedrich Nietzsche's book, *Genealogy of Morals*, was one I would lecture about every few years.

In the book, Nietzsche made the argument that Christianity was a slave morality. He particularly contrasted Christian morality with the moralities of the classical ages of Greece and Rome – those moralities had at their heart a celebration power, nobility, spiritedness, magnificence, fame, wealth, nobility, pride, glory, and living exuberantly. They were moralities directed toward living gloriously as a master in the world.



Nietzsche loved Greece and Rome. He mocked Christian morality because it was morality for servants and slaves. Christianity was about meekness, humility, denial of self, obedience, turning the other cheek, and doing good to those who persecute you. Christianity embraces and identifies with those in poverty and those poor in spirit. It calls us to be lambs not wolves, to give rather than take, and to overcome our own egos, and our desires and pride, to surrender to become instruments and channels of divine love.

The [readings for the Fifth Sunday in Lent](#) remind me of how my students struggled with these Nietzsche arguments. The Responsorial Psalm prays that God will cleanse our hearts from the glammers of pride and sin. The second reading, from the Epistle to the Hebrews, explains that even Christ suffered to deny himself in perfect obedience to the Father.

*In the days when Christ Jesus was in the flesh,
he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears
to the one who was able to save him from death...*

*Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered;
and when he was made perfect,
he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*

The Gospel, from the twelfth chapter of John, dramatically insists on this same denial of self, insisting that we reject living gloriously in this world, that we spurn the appeal of magnificence and power and wealth.

*Whoever loves his life loses it,
and whoever hates his life in this world
will preserve it for eternal life.*

And, John's Gospel passage continues in this vein. We are called to be not masters; we are called to be servants, even as Jesus himself served the will of the Father, choosing not to save himself from an ignoble death, sacrificing his "self" for our salvation.

No wonder Nietzsche was appalled. Nor is Nietzsche alone. Indeed, are not those with power, fame, glory, wealth, and magnificence the kind of people we too often admire in the world around us? Isn't the glorification of the self a modern American norm? We want VIP status. We post selfies. Our apps constantly invite us to self-promote.

The season of Lent reminds us, week after week, that our Christian morality is entirely different. It is ever about humbling and overcoming our individual selves in loving service to God and others. Lent is a journey to relearn the central message of Christian morality – a morality that begins and ends with being servants. It is a morality that identifies with those in poverty, the meek, the powerless, and the poor in spirit. Indeed, Christian morality is a Lenten morality wherein overcoming the self we allow ourselves to become instruments for divine purpose in this world and in preparation for the world to come.

Stephen Schneck, PhD
FAN Executive Director

Suggested Actions:

Consider how you can be humble and overcome yourself to focus on loving service to God through your fellow human beings.

Suggested Petitions:

For open hearts to humbly identify with those least among us. We pray...
For the strength to resume the journey toward you, most loving God. We pray...

Collect Prayer:

By your help, we beseech you, Lord our God,
may we walk eagerly in that same charity
with which, out of love for the world,
your Son handed himself over to death.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Refugee Advocacy Opportunities: Grassroots Webinar and Action Alert

Refugee Council USA's next [grassroots advocacy webinar](#) is scheduled for this **Friday, March 19th from 12-1pm ET (9-10am PT)**. We invite you to join in for updates on



a refugee
**For I was a stranger
and you welcomed me.**

post-inauguration actions and what is coming up over the next few weeks, including National resettlement and asylum policies/advocacy, State and local legislative efforts and Community priorities, as well as [RCUSA's Virtual Refugee Advocacy Days](#). [Click here to register](#).

Additionally, there is an [action alert developed by our friends at Church World Service](#) in **support of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Black immigrants**. Since February 1st, 18 deportation flights have gone to Haiti, expelling over 1,000 Haitians, including at least 270 children, under a Trump-era policy that uses COVID-19 as an excuse to deny immigrants access to the asylum process. Thousands of other immigrants, including people from Cameroon and Mauritania, face harm upon being deported to their home country due to violent crime and political instability.

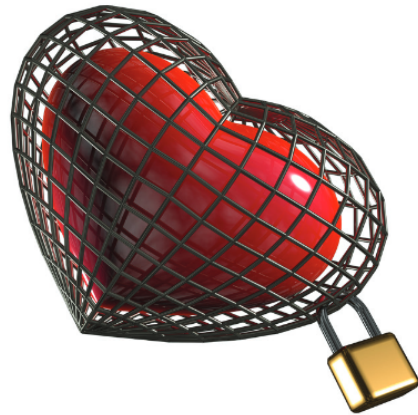
The [targeting and prioritization of Black immigrants](#) for deportation is immoral and wrong. We urge our members and friends to tell Congress and the Biden Administration to protect Black immigrants and asylum seekers from deportation and family separation. [Click here to contact your members of Congress](#).

March Stop Trafficking Newsletter: Forced Marriage is Human Trafficking

The focus of the [March Stop Trafficking Newsletter](#) is on forced marriage and child marriage and the intersection with human trafficking. This phenomenon occurs in many countries of the world, including the United States.

All types of human trafficking involve force, fraud, and coercion. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 defines forced marriage as "involuntary servitude." Forced marriage is when one or both participants are married without consent or are too young to legally give consent, and occurs due to emotional and financial threats, pressure, or coercion.

Please [click here](#) to read more about forced marriage and child marriage. Additionally, you can find archived issues of the Stop Trafficking Newsletter on [FAN's website](#).



FAN Mentioned on House Floor as HR1 Heads to the Senate

As part of our work with the [Faithful Democracy coalition](#), FAN has been at the forefront of advocating for getting big money out of politics and for expansion of voting rights for years.

On March 3rd, the House passed HR1, the For the People Act. Before the vote, Franciscan Action Network was proud to be one of several Faithful Democracy members mentioned on the House floor in support of the legislation. Watch the video by [clicking here](#).

FAN's Jason Miller was also part of an HR1 town



hall where he talked about the work of Faithful Democracy and FAN's work on democracy issues. You can watch that discussion by [clicking here](#).

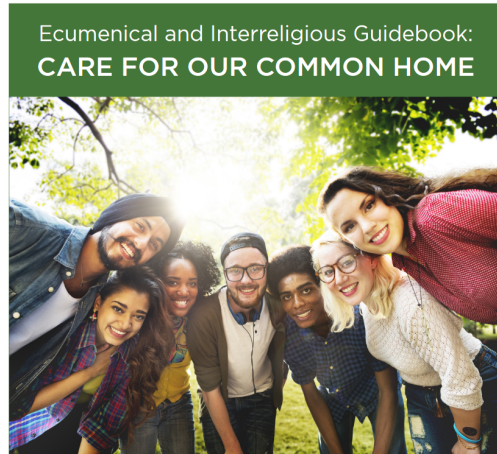
FAN released a [statement](#) when HR1 passed the House. The *For the People Act* now moves onto the Senate with a hearing scheduled for March 24th. We will continue to monitor this legislation and bring you updates.

New: Interreligious Creation Care Guidebook

Last week, the Catholic Climate Covenant [hosted](#) a conversation to explore the new [interreligious creation care guidebook](#) published jointly by the USCCB, the Catholic Association of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers, and Catholic Climate Covenant.

From the Guidebook:

"This guidebook offers diocesan ecumenical and interreligious officers, pastors, parish groups, and the faithful at large a number of theological and practical resources to put the counsels of Pope Francis and Catholic magisterial voices, along with selected interfaith voices, into practical action."



This guidebook is now available to [download by clicking here](#).

Webinar Recording: Peace Dimensions of *Fratelli Tutti*

We mentioned in last week's newsletter that Pax Christi International hosted [one-hour webinars](#) for reflection and discussion on the meaning of *Fratelli Tutti* in local contexts.

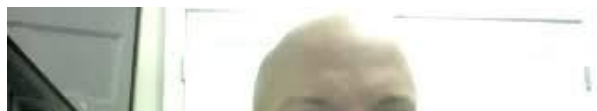
How can it be a resource for peacebuilding and impact the practice of peacebuilding? Does it change teaching on just war? How does it open dialogue on peace with Muslims? How does its Franciscan influence deepen the understanding of peacebuilding?

This webinar examined these questions and more to probe the peace dimensions of the encyclical. The recording of the event is found [online by clicking here](#).



Watch: FAN's Jason Miller presents on White Supremacy in the Catholic Church

For Black History Month, the [Franciscan Federation](#) hosted a webinar on Feb. 22nd



where they invited FAN's Jason Miller to give a talk entitled, "Where Do We Go From Here? Confronting White Supremacy with a Franciscan Heart."

With St. Francis and Pope Francis as guides, Jason challenged participants offering historical and modern-day examples of white supremacy in the Catholic Church.

If you missed the webinar you can [watch it by clicking here](#). Additional resources can be found on the [Franciscan Federation website](#).

Registration Open for Virtual Ecumenical Advocacy Days Conference

Registration for the [2021 Virtual Ecumenical Advocacy Days](#) Conference is now open!

[Join us on April 18 - 21, 2021](#) for the opportunity to advocate for climate justice and support the global movement centered and led by people and communities most vulnerable to climate impacts due to historic racial and colonial inequalities.

2021 Online Event and Theme



[Imagine! God's Earth and People Restored](#)

It was announced last week that the **Most Reverend Bishop Michael Curry will preach at the ecumenical worship service on Sunday, April 18, 2021!**

We continue to see how the historic reality of colonialism and structural racism has designed systems that live on today through environmental racism and a myriad of other injustices that grew out of the same evil roots. Throughout 2020, these systemic issues manifested themselves in the disproportionate number of racial and ethnic minorities who became sick with and died of COVID-19, as well as the continued extrajudicial killing of Black men and women. The Earth and its people are groaning. We are called to respond.

This year's #EAD2021 conference hopes to passionately advocate and reimagine a world that lives out the values of justice, equity, and beloved community. [Register before April 1st to get the early bird discount!](#)

Watch FAN Staff Members Give Upcoming Presentations

In preparation of the [Franciscan Federation Annual Conference](#) to be held virtually June 11-14, planners have been offering conversations with Federation partners to increase the value and impact of the June Conference. This week, on **Thursday, March 18th from 4p-5p ET (1p-2p PT)**, FAN's director of advocacy, Sr. Maria Orlandini, OSF will present the current and planned work of the Franciscan Action Network. We are proud of the mutual commitment we share to keeping the "voices of Francis and Clare" alive in the public square and of the high degree of



cooperation with all other Franciscan partners. [RSVP for the presentation by clicking here.](#)

Additionally, the JPIC Animator of the St. Francis Region of Secular Franciscans has invited FAN's own Nora Pfeiffer to speak about her experiences on mission in Bolivia and give testimony to the necessary witness of both FAN and Franciscans International, as part of "The Cross and JPIC: Franciscans in the World". On **Saturday, March 27th at 4pm ET (1pm PT)** participants will deepen their understanding of Franciscan work for justice, peace, and integrity of creation throughout the world by reflecting on Bolivia as a case study. **RSVP to attend by emailing Patricia Grace** at patriciaelizabethgrace7@gmail.com.