



Up Front & Personal Moving Into a Service Society

▲ by Father William J. Byron S.J.

The post-World War II GI Bill is arguably the best and biggest idea ever to find its way into law in the American experience. That legislation bore the name of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944.

Its educational provision – notably the benefit of two months of free higher education in any private or public college for every one month of military service – together with the legislation's subsidized home mortgage provision can be said to have created the American middle class.

Peter Drucker wrote that "the GI Bill of Rights – and the enthusiastic response to it on the part of America's veterans – signaled the shift to the knowledge society." And he added, "Future historians may consider it the most important event of the 20th century."

Now that the middle class is shrinking and the home ownership rate is the lowest (62.9 percent) that we have seen in the past 50 years, and now that soaring college costs are burdening students with unmanageable debt and discouraging some from going on to college, it is time to think clearly and creatively on a large scale once again and to bring higher education and home ownership within reach of more Americans.

Our two major political parties have published their platforms and held their nominating conventions, but there is little evidence that either one is thinking big enough to produce a legislative agenda capable of matching the impact of the GI Bill. This bill did not represent a "leave-it-to-government" approach to problem-solving, but it was an example of government getting out of the way and enabling students to learn, universities to teach, homebuilders to build and all citizens to enjoy a better life.

We now have what can be called a knowledge society. We would be stronger and better if we built it to become a service society – service in the form of eldercare, child care, quality education for the poor, repair of the urban infrastructure, protection of the environment, health care finance reform and universal access to health care.

For this to happen, it would be wise for the government to facilitate and support national service, especially civilian national service, and to incentivize the young to move in that direction by providing GI Bill-type benefits, especially educational benefits, in return for specified lengths of national service. Policy wonks, especially those who hope to have a place in the White House in the next administration, would do well to begin reading now about this nation's experience with the GI Bill.

For starters, I would recommend: Suzanne Mettler, "Soldiers to Citizens: The GI Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation"; Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, "The GI Bill: A New Deal for Veterans"; and Michael J. Bennett, "When Dreams Came True: The GI Bill and the Making of Modern America."

As a nation, we tend to forget to read the minutes of the last meeting and are thus condemned to repeating past errors and losing the wisdom gained through past experience. We must not permit this to happen in 2017.

Jesuit Father William J. Byron is a university professor of business and society at St. Joseph's University, Philadelphia.

THE TABLET

Published by and in the interest of
The Diocese of Brooklyn

1712 Tenth Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11215 • 7200 Douglaston Pkwy, Douglaston, NY 11362
T: 718-499-9705 • F: 1-800-683-6602 • E: ewilkinson@desalesmedia.org • W: www.thetablet.org

Publisher: Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio
Associate Publisher: Msgr. Kieran E. Harrington
Editor: Ed Wilkinson

Editorial Staff: Marie Elena Girossi, Antonina Zielinska, Maria-Pia Negro Chin, Jim Mancan
Production: Steven Ettinger

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The Tablet (USPS 53-2320) (ISSN 0039-8845) is published every Saturday, except for one week in July and one week in January, by DeSales Media Group, Inc. - 7200 Douglaston Pkwy, Douglaston, NY 11362. Periodicals postage is paid at Flushing, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to: The Tablet, 1712 Tenth Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11215. Subscription prices in U.S.A. \$28 per year in advance. Canada and foreign countries \$43 per year. Advertising rates upon request.

Bishop DiMarzio's Statement on the Fatal Shooting of Imam and Assistant

This past week, beloved Imam Maulama Akonjee and associate Thara Uddin were fatally shot on the streets of Queens.

The Catholic community, still grieving the assassination of Father Jacques Hamel in France, empathizes with our Muslim brothers and sisters. We pray for peace and respect among people of all races, religions and ethnicities.

Official Alert from The Chancery

On behalf of Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio, the Diocese of Brooklyn has issued an official alert and notified all parishes of its concerns about an individual who calls himself "Eli Angelino."

Under no circumstances is he to be given hospitality in any of the rectories of the diocese, or on any other ecclesiastical property.

Should this individual appear at any parish, contact the Chancery Office immediately by calling 718-399-5990.



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Rose of Lima

1586 - 1617
Feast: Aug. 23



Born in Lima, Peru, the infant Isabel de Flores got her more familiar name from an Indian maid who said she was "like a rose." As a child Rose was given to fasting and mortification. After her parents refused to let her enter the convent and she refused to marry, she lived at home in seclusion. At 20 she joined the Third Order of St. Dominic, using a backyard hut for prayer and caring for poor children and elderly sick in a one-room infirmary in her parents' home. She died at 31, and was declared the first saint from the Americas in 1671.