News



(Counterpoint Media/Pedro X. Molina)



by Michael Cavna

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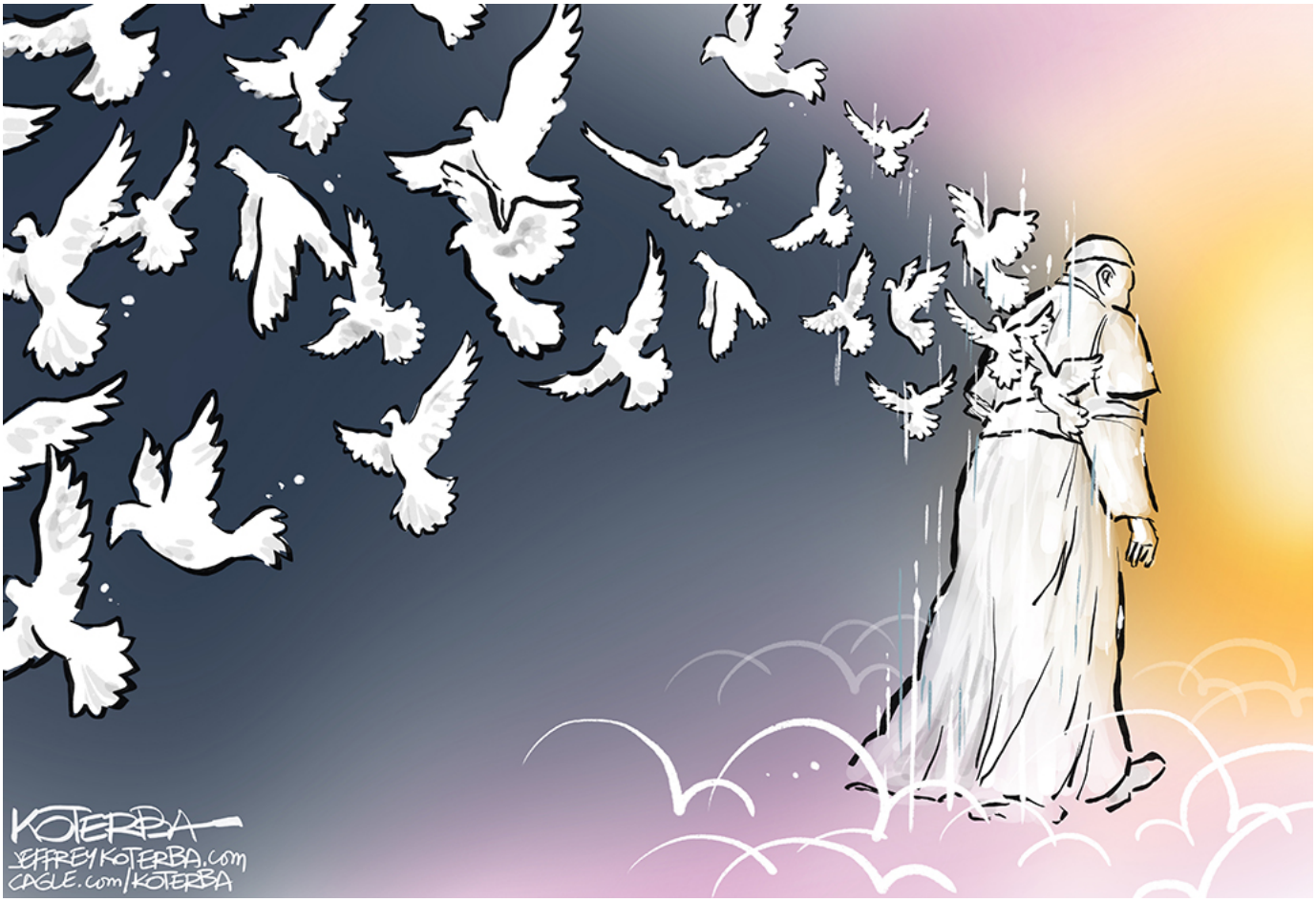
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In March of 2013, upon the fifth ballot of the conclave, as the man soon to be announced as Pope Francis received a celebratory embrace from Brazilian Cardinal Claudio Hummes, the eminence who was born in Rio Grande do Sul, said to the new supreme pontiff: "Don't forget the poor."

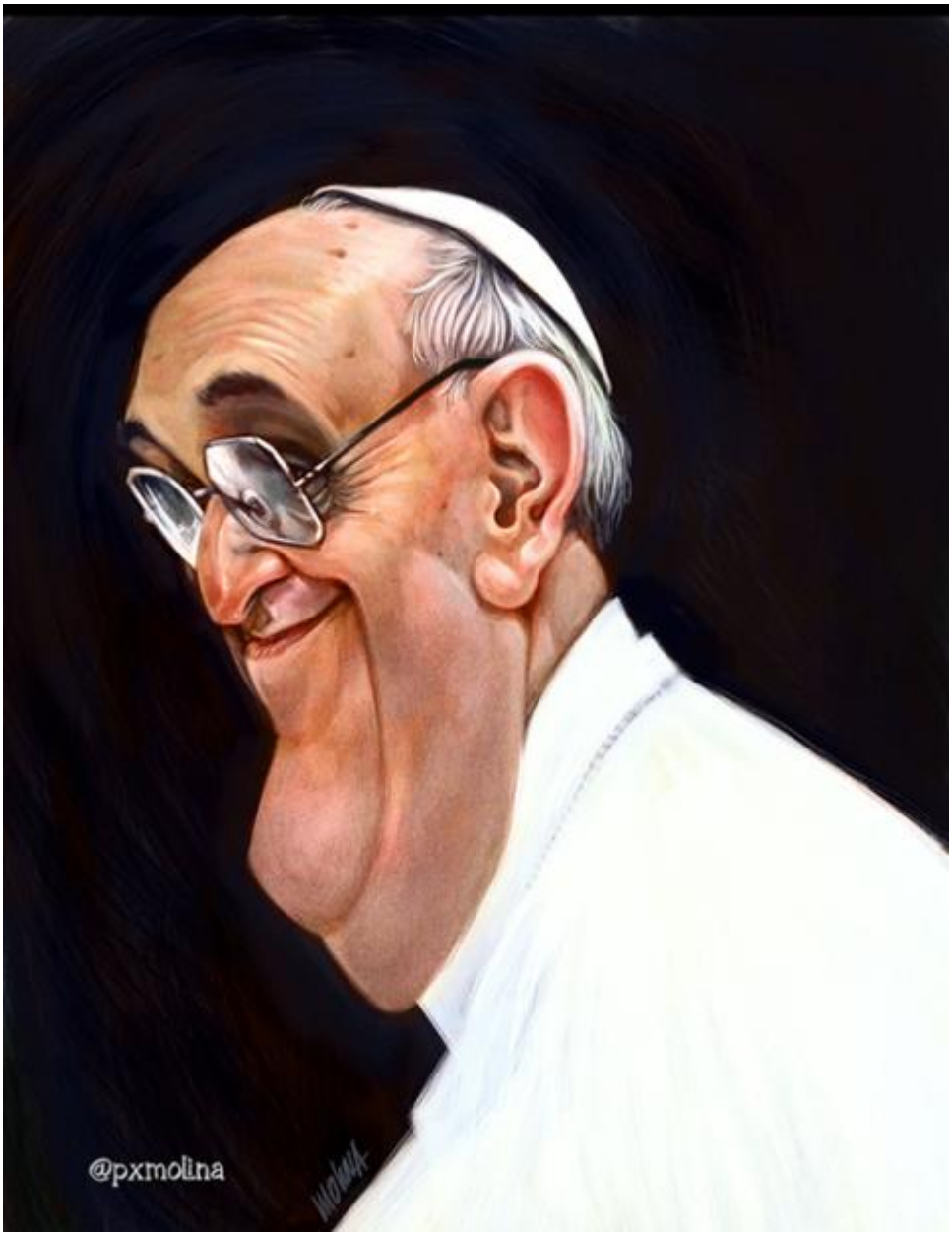
"Those words of his remained with me, I felt them in my flesh," Pope Francis wrote in his autobiography, *Hope*, published in January.

Upon the death of Pope Francis on the day after Easter, editorial artists began drawing tributes to the spiritual leader of many firsts: the first Latino pope, the first Jesuit pope and the first pope from the Western Hemisphere. And many artists decided to memorialize the fact that, indeed, he did not forget the poor, as he championed the marginalized throughout his 12-year papacy, heralded as "the people's pope."



(Cagle Cartoons/Jeffrey Koterba)

"As someone born in Latin America and also a Catholic, the election of a Latin American as pope was a pleasant surprise," said Pedro X. Molina, a U.S.-based, Nicaraguan-born editorial cartoonist for the Counterpoint Media Syndicate. "Even better was the realization that the new Pope Francis shared many of the concerns that many of the inhabitants of this planet have in terms of equality, justice, transparency, empathy and concern for the environment and the sociopolitical situation of this world."



(Counterpoint Media/Pedro X. Molina)

For years, Molina has created cartoons commenting on this papacy. Last week (April 24), he created a Spanish-language social media thread sharing some of those cartoons. In his tribute cartoon, Molina rendered a celestial setting in which the pope is remembered as a spiritual leader of love, truth, hope and light.

Molina did not view Pope Francis as without fault. "His comments after the massacre of Charlie Hebdo cartoonists left much to be desired, and certain silences on the actions of some totalitarian regimes, which some defend as a 'diplomatic strategy,' were not well-received at the time," the artist said.

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Yet factoring into account "his courageous determination to fight the problem of sexual abuse within the church, through his defense of the environmental issue to the social, we can conclude that his legacy was mostly positive," Molina said. "And it is that empathy and sensitivity that I decided to highlight in my farewell cartoon, in which I also decided to include the saint from whom [Jorge Mario] Bergoglio decided to adopt his papal name, St. Francis of Assisi."



(Chicago Tribune/Scott Stantis)

Scott Stantis, the political cartoonist for the Chicago Tribune, said distilling any life into an obituary cartoon is a tall order, let alone someone whose life was "as complex" as that of Pope Francis.

"I faced this challenge as both an admirer of the Holy Father and a practicing Catholic," Stantis said.

In creating his artistic tribute, Stantis decided that the pope's deep humility and sense of duty to the marginalized were best demonstrated by his response to a question about gay priests: "Who am I to judge?" It was a "shocking statement from the Holy See," the cartoonist said.



(Chicago Tribune/Scott Stantis)

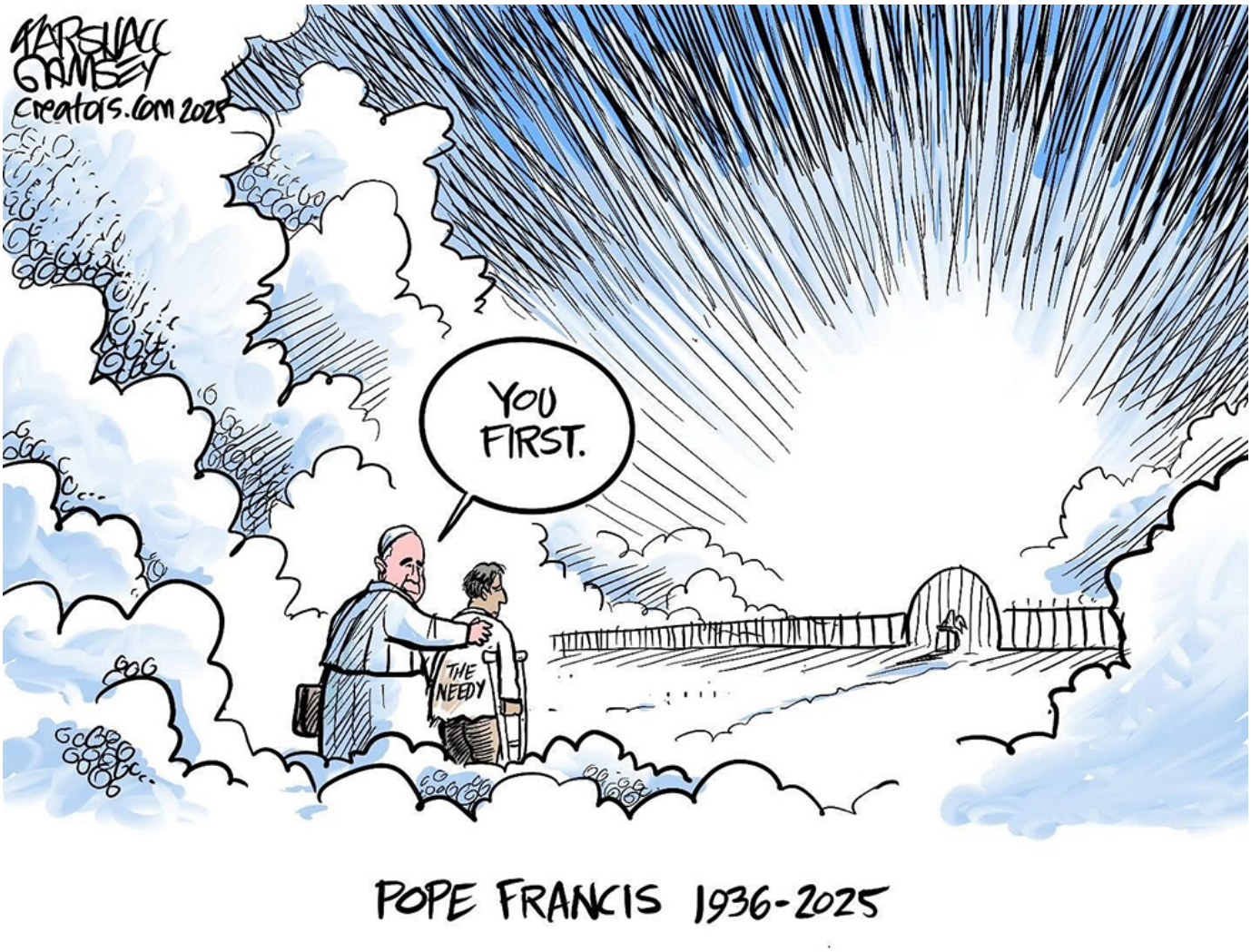
Stantis was dismayed to hear from his more conservative Catholic peers that they disliked Pope Francis and his "woke" teachings. "Of the many reasons I love my faith, the teachings of Jesus of compassion, love and forgiveness are primary among them," Stantis said. "Pope Francis articulated these in so many ways. The fact that these [teachings] were met with anger makes me believe they were the exact right thing to say."

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Marshall Ramsey, who is syndicated by Creators, also rendered Pope Francis in a heavenly setting, saying to a figure who represents the needy: "You first."

"I had a different caption initially," Ramsey said. "But as I titled the cartoon, I thought, 'You first' — two simple words that sum up a lifetime commitment to

showing compassion to those in need.



(Creators/Marshall Ramsey)

"In such a selfish time, 'You first' is a beacon that cuts through the darkness of hatred and fear," Ramsey added. "His example showed us a better path."

Lalo Alcaraz of CALÓ News drew the pope silhouetted amid celestial clouds: "I wanted to emphasize that Francis was the first Latin American pope, and that he was a fan of the Virgin of Guadalupe."



(CALÓ News/Lalo Alcaraz)

Some cartoonists eschewed pearly gates for other imagery that happened to spark their editorial imagination.

Steve Breen of inewsource.org and Creators sought a way to symbolize the pope's advocacy for the poor, which he admired. "The pope is the leader of the church, a model of Christ, and in that sense, Francis did a good job reminding us about charity, humility, austerity," says Breen, who is Catholic. "I tried to depict a diverse array of poor people forming the papal miter and, because the story was so big and the figure so well known, I didn't feel a need for any words or labels."



(inewsource.org/Steve Breen)

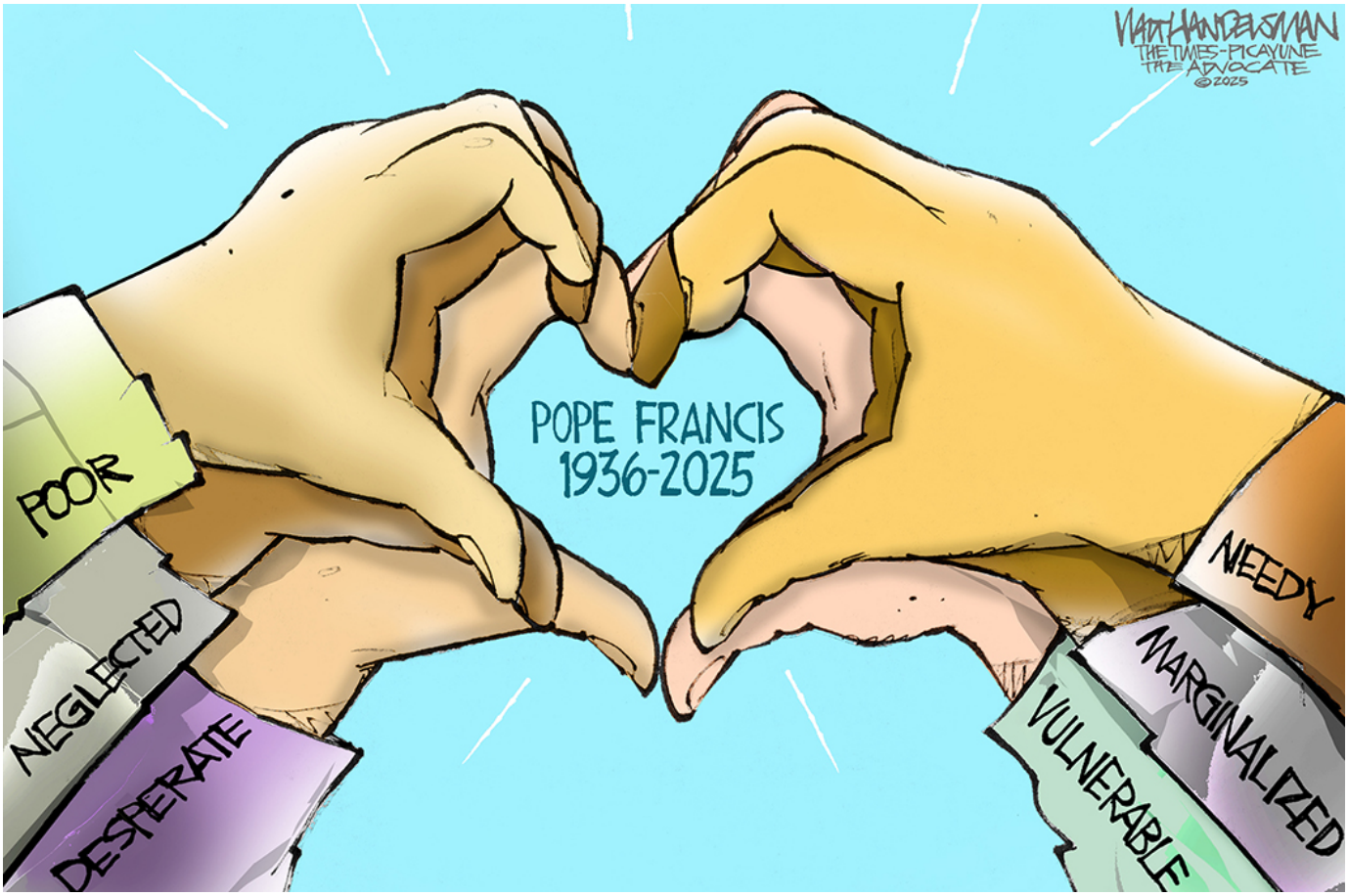
Clay Bennett of the Chattanooga Times Free Press was drawn to how the sovereign pontiff lived by example. "Francis was my kind of pope. Devoted to service, spirituality and joy, he shunned extravagance, avoided luxury and tried his best to live a life of simplicity and virtue."

"No matter the issue, Pope Francis seemed to be guided by a heart filled with compassion and love," Bennett said. "So when I sat down to draw this cartoon, a simple heart was the image I kept coming back to. Once I brought the rosary into the visual mix, the cartoon pretty much drew itself."



(Counterpoint Media/Chattanooga Times Free Press/Clay Bennett)

Walt Handelsman of The Times-Picayune and The Advocate in New Orleans focused on the positive connections that the pope engendered: "I wanted to use a simple image that conveyed the universal respect for Pope Francis. Drawing several hands making the heart symbol gave me the opportunity to highlight some of the specific groups that he lifted up."



(The Times-Picayune/The Advocate/Walt Handelsman)

And Jeffrey Koterba of Cagle Cartoons sought to surprise his readers by telling "a little story, even if that story lasts a mere seven seconds" — an image to invite viewers to consider the pope's legacy.

"He may have left this earthly existence, but flowing from him, a flock of doves. Are those doves flowing from his heart, or his soul? Perhaps. But it's a question I didn't need to answer," Koterba said. "This didn't need to be anything too on the nose or obvious — there could exist a sense of the mystical. After all, there is, indeed, a mystical element to the teachings of the church."

More than anything, Koterba wanted to express how he and others were feeling: "Sorrow for his passing, yes, but also touched and moved by his legacy: his countless beautiful messages of peace and hope and love."

Related: 'After you': A Pope Francis cartoon
This story appears in the **The Legacy of Pope Francis** feature series. View the full series.