

# America



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## Civil Society and a Public Argument

“Civilization,” wrote John Courtney Murray, S.J., “is formed by men locked together in argument. From this dialogue, the community becomes a political community.” Father Murray was quoting the Dominican Thomas Gilby, a fact that was sometimes ignored by my predecessors in this column, who were so very fond of this quotation. Regardless of who said it, however, the point is that the use of reason in argument is the specifying note of a civil society. Yet while civil society is characteristically rational, says Murray, “it is a need of human nature before it becomes the object of human choice.” For Murray, civil society is the flowering of the human person as *homo politicus*. We are not radically autonomous individuals, but rational social animals. We need reasoned debate, not simply because it is better than a bare-knuckle brawl, and not simply because the manners of polite society require it, but because it belongs to our human nature to reason and to argue in civility.

I can see why my predecessors as editor in chief liked this idea, for it furnishes the warrant for this journal of opinion. But more than that, they saw, as Murray did, that this insight was a fundamental component of the American founding. “It was the force of a great tradition that launched our republic,” Murray said in 1960. “And I suppose one of the problems...is how does this tradition fare today?” Were Father Murray asking this question in 2017, I think he would quickly answer, “Not well.” Public argument, much like the American proposition Murray described with such eloquence, is col-

lapsing. A quick glance at Twitter and the mobocracy that presently occupies our commons and campuses tells us as much. This crisis in the public discourse poses such a clear and present danger to the body politic that Catholics must fundamentally reassess our public engagement, asking how we have been complicit in the demise of the public discourse. And recent events indicate that the church in the United States is afflicted by many of the same problems that beset civil society.

On Sept. 15, 2017, Theological College in Washington, D.C., the national seminary under the auspices of The Catholic University of America, announced their decision to rescind an invitation to James Martin, S.J., longtime editor at large of this magazine, to address the faculty and students during their upcoming Alumni Days celebration. According to a statement issued by Catholic University, the seminary’s decision to rescind the invitation was contrary to “the specific counsel” that the college had “received from the university and its leadership.” Theological College’s decision followed the recent cancellation of Father Martin’s scheduled appearances before two other prominent Catholic groups.

Father Martin had been invited to deliver remarks on Jesus and Ignatian spirituality in each of these forums. Yet the sponsors of the events felt compelled to rescind their invitations in light of the public controversy surrounding Father Martin’s recent book *Building a Bridge: How the Catholic Church and the LGBT Community Can Enter Into a Relationship of Re-*

*spect, Compassion, and Sensitivity*. After being reviewed by the *ensor librorum*, the book received the required *imprimi potest* from Father Martin’s Jesuit superior, the Very Reverend John J. Cecero, S.J. *Building a Bridge* has received public endorsements from two cardinals, an archbishop and several bishops.

Most readers and commentators have welcomed the book, while some have raised questions about its thesis. For the most part, the criticism has been intelligent and charitable. Some elements in the U.S. church, however, have taken it upon themselves to organize a campaign, not only against the contents of the book but against Father Martin himself. In recent weeks, Father Martin has been subjected to repeated, calumnious attacks in social media and in print, involving invective that is as appalling as it is toxic. It is one thing to engage in spirited debate. It is another thing to seek to stymie such debate through fear, misinformation or blunt censorship.

In response to these events, John Garvey, the president of The Catholic University of America, released a statement: “Universities and their related entities should be places for the free, civil exchange of ideas. Our culture is increasingly hostile to this idea. It is problematic that individuals and groups within our Church demonstrate this same inability to make distinctions and to exercise charity.”

John Courtney Murray would almost certainly agree.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Matt Malone, S.J., editor in chief;  
Twitter: @Americaeditor



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The Hill of Crosses near Siauliai, Lithuania. Tens of thousands of crosses have been placed there to mark the sufferings caused by deportation, imprisonment and persecution. St. John Paul visited the site in 1993. (CNS photo/Ints Kalnins, Reuters)

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# How do you rate the quality of liturgy in your parish?

When asked to rate the quality of their parish liturgy, the majority of respondents told **America** that it was either high (29 percent) or very high (27 percent). Juanita, of Florida, rated the quality of liturgy at her parish as very high, writing, “We have a priest who makes everyone feel welcome, says Mass with great reverence and gives meaningful homilies.”

Readers who judged their parish liturgy to be of high quality were more likely than others to call for better lay engagement at their parish. Sheila, of Minnesota, explained, “We are a welcoming parish, with well-done liturgies, but we want all present to be actively involved and feel they belong.”

Other respondents told us that liturgy was of neither low nor high quality in their parish (22 percent). Only 21

percent of readers rated their parish liturgy as low (16 percent) or very low (5 percent). Kelly, also of Minnesota, told **America**: “I always have high hopes. The congregation seems responsive, but a sense of togetherness is missing. Our parish has been suffering for a number of years. I appreciate our pastor; his homilies just usually lose me.”

Readers who were dissatisfied with the quality of liturgy at their parish repeatedly cited preaching as most in need of improvement. Daniel, of Arkansas, described the preaching at his parish. “We have a very small parish and do the best we can. If enthusiasm were the criterion, we’d have great homilies,” he said. “But lack of preparation, disorganization, questionable (when not simply incorrect) theology, and verbosity don’t equal good preaching.”

## HOW DO YOU RATE THE QUALITY OF LITURGY IN YOUR PARISH?

### VERY HIGH QUALITY

*Love radiates to all in our parish family during our beautiful liturgies. The outstanding music adds to and lifts our hearts in prayerful joy.*  
**Mary, Ill.**

*We are blessed with a pastor who is faithful and faith-filled. His homilies are always relevant for all parishioners. He leads and encourages leadership within the laity.*  
**Mary, W.Va.**

### VERY LOW QUALITY

### HIGH QUALITY

*The liturgy is beautiful and grace-filled, rhythmic in liturgical order without being rigid.*  
**Thomas, La.**

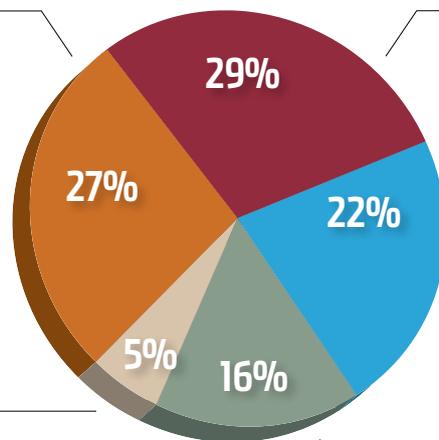
### NEITHER LOW NOR HIGH QUALITY

*We have lost quality because the laity have been pulled out of the equation. We are subject to the pastor’s tastes and it is no longer the work of the community.... There is no dynamism. We just follow the rules.*  
**John, Ohio**

### LOW QUALITY

*Attendance seems low, congregation participation is low, and music is performed rather than participated in. We have talented musicians, but they are so operatic that it is almost impossible to sing along.*  
**Robert, N.Y.**

*“The priest is not in touch with the congregation.... Most homilies are way too long. I don’t like being talked to —I want to engage with someone.”*  
**Elizabeth, N.Y.**



## OF THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS, WHICH MOST NEEDS IMPROVEMENT IN YOUR PARISH’S LITURGY?

Preaching	23%
Music	16%
Lay Engagement	24%
Pastoral Engagement	9%
Aesthetics/beauty (e.g. flowers, incense, lighting)	12%
Hospitality	16%

These results are based on reader responses to a poll promoted on Facebook, Twitter and in our email newsletter. Because of rounding, percentages may not add up to 100.

### True Reconciliation

Re “Protecting the Confessional Seal” (Our Take, 9/18): I take issue with this editorial, which makes a number of questionable and incomplete assertions. The editorial makes a facile argument that any violation of the confessional seal will lead down a slippery slope to further violations.

In my work as a psychiatrist, confidentiality is of utmost importance, but the law mandates exceptions for disclosures of child abuse and homicidal intent toward a specific party. These laws do not lead to confusion or further erosions of confidentiality because they are clear, specific and harmonious with natural law, which indicates that the privilege of confidentiality does not override the safety of innocent and helpless persons.

The editorial correctly states that the purpose of confession is “to communicate God’s forgiveness and free the penitent of the burden of sin,” but fails to further specify that forgiveness is not overlooking or excusing serious sin; rather, true reconciliation involves restoration of justice, a process which may involve civil authorities in cases of grave crime.

**Tracey Hoelzle**

Online Comment

### Full Disclosure

Re “After Harvey’s Rage Across Texas, Catholic Charities Ramps Up Its Response,” by Kevin Clarke (9/18): Many thanks for the extensive list of aid routes, with some explanation of where the aid is going. I hope the national U.S.C.C.B. collection will supply figures of where the donations came from and where it is going. There must be transparency.

**Joe McMahon**

Online Comment

### Property and the Common Good

Re “How Communists and Catholics Built a Commonwealth,” by Nathan Schneider (9/18): Mr. Schneider’s article brings us squarely to the dilemma faced by St. Thomas Aquinas and every pope and commentator on economic justice. If the ultimate destination of property is the promotion of the common good, then there must be some method for allocating some portion of today’s property toward the promotion of the common good.

The downfall of communist, collectivist, socialist societies lies in their focus on allocating goods among members, citizens or participants. There can even be economic growth, which can be achieved by simply increasing the

population and raising production apace.

But that is not the same as promoting—improving—the common good. For this, someone must allocate some of today’s product (wealth) to development of new products and services. That involves risk and possible failure. Committees are inherently risk-averse.

For those content with the status quo, collectivism is fine. But for those who hope for tomorrow’s new medicine, a more efficient energy system, better building materials, more drought-resistant grains or better education tools—for some promotion of the common good—capitalism at least provides a method of saving, investing and allocating for risky experiments, for covering the cost of the inevitable failures and flops and for bringing new products and services to humankind.

**Joseph J. Dunn**

Online Comment

### Solutions for Today

Re “Did the Erie Canal Help Put an End to Slavery?” by S. Brent Rodriguez Plate (9/18): How interesting that technology brought with it a religious group that was both intense yet open to diversity. Jobs, human dignity and close communities seem to have won the day back then. Are these the answers today?

**Tom Corrigan**

Online Comment

### Root Causes of Sin

Re “The Road to Mercy,” by Sonja Livingston (9/4): It occurs to me that a major reason for the decline of Catholics’ use of the confessional has to do with practices around the sacrament. Most Catholics were taught to confess a laundry list of sinful actions, which were often repeated each time a person took advantage of the sacrament.

This approach primarily dealt with the symptoms of evil behavior rather than with its true causes. How many Catholics have ever accused themselves of being bigoted or racist? How many admit to being selfish, narcissistic or misogynistic? Do we admit that jealousy, envy or revenge are the true sources of our sinful behavior?

**Thomas Severin**

Online Comment

## The Perils of Brinkmanship

President Trump's recent spending deal with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi may or may not represent a breakthrough in bipartisanship. On Sept. 6, Mr. Trump shocked lawmakers gathered in the Oval Office when he quickly sided with "Chuck and Nancy," as the president later referred to his new friends, on a three-month debt ceiling increase, budget and hurricane relief package—against the wishes of the president's own party and cabinet, who were seeking a longer-term deal. A week later, he invited the Democratic leaders back to the White House for dinner to discuss both sides' legislative priorities for the fall: tax reform and the protection of so-called Dreamers.

With compromise essentially nonexistent on Capitol Hill, any willingness to cooperate across party lines is praiseworthy. Unfortunately, brinkmanship remains the preferred legislative strategy. The Democrats were not only celebrating an end run around the Republican majority but also the fact that the deal scheduled another debt showdown for December, preserving their leverage in future negotiations. This may be tactically defensible, but it makes for dismal politics.

For now, the federal government will not be forced to shut down; the United States will not default on its loans; and aid will flow to Texas and other storm-affected areas. It is worth noting, however, that the president decided to side with the Democrats only after one disaster (Hurricane Harvey) and the anticipation of two more (a government shutdown and the debt ceiling cliff).

Crisis governing comes with costs. Some are tangible. According to the Government Accountability Office, even delays in raising the debt ceiling have a price tag: The stand-off between Republicans and the Obama administration in 2011-12 created \$1.3 billion in additional borrowing costs for the Treasury. Actually defaulting on the country's bills would probably send the country into recession, according to most economists.

Other costs are more difficult to quantify. Take, for example, the Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals program, Congress's latest partisan bargaining chip. After the president set a six-month deadline to end the program that shields immigrants brought here as children from deportation, lawmakers on both sides expressed their sincere wish to keep these young people in the country.

Ironically, the president's expiration date for DACA, March 2018, might be the social policy disaster that finally prompts Congress to pass some version of the Dream Act—which was first introduced in 2001. But this too comes at a human cost: 800,000 immigrants will wait in fear of deportation as each side sees what the other will get or give up in exchange for protecting the Dreamers.

As Republican Senator John McCain of Arizona wrote in an op-ed for *The Washington Post*, Congress is "proving inadequate not only to our most difficult problems but also to routine duties." He has been around Washington long enough to know that it should not take the threat of crashing into the debt ceiling to pay this country's bills, a major bridge collapse to fix infrastructure or cat-

astrophic storms to fortify our cities against the threat of violent weather. The solution is not simply to eliminate the debt ceiling. We must change the conditions that make the debt limit a perennial time bomb: lawmakers so enthralled to partisan power plays that they would rather go over the cliff than give an inch in the direction of compromise.

## Pope Bashing

What a shiner! Jake LaMotta himself would have been proud of the black eye Pope Francis was sporting at the end of his visit to Colombia in early September. The pope had banged his head on the popemobile's plexiglass shielding when his driver stopped short. "I got bashed," Francis told reporters, but he proceeded with his normal schedule, bloodstained cassock and all. It made for quite a visual in the following days. It also provided a powerful metaphor for Pope Francis' ecclesial and personal style.

The pope and his retinue made no attempt to cover up the accident or its evidence, in sharp contrast to the secrecy of some previous pontificates, when even life-threatening illnesses were covered up for years. And the matter-of-fact way Francis dealt with his injury seemed only to add to people's deep affection for him as the "Average Joe" of popes, someone who might joke "you shoulda seen the other guy."

That bluntness of style has extended to Francis' demands for greater transparency on questions beyond his own health. The meeting of the Synod of Bishops on the family in 2014 and 2015 showed an extraordinary degree of openness compared with its

predecessors; so, too, did Francis at the opening of the consistory of 150 Catholic cardinals in 2015 to discuss reform of the Vatican bureaucracy, when he asked for “absolute transparency that builds authentic synodality and collegiality.” And of course the Vatican press corps has long come to treasure Francis’ refreshingly candid airplane interviews on the way home from his overseas trips.

It is safe to say that transparency has not always been a hallmark of Vatican operations, and no doubt reforms in this area are halting and slow. But they are happening, even at the cost of exposing to the world the flaws of the institution, a consequence that Francis has seemed to embrace without significant unease.

This seems to be the church Francis wants—a little bruised, a little bloodied, and better for both.

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## The redemption of ex-prisoners is a duty of the church

*I was in prison and you came to me.... Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.*

—Mt 25:35-46.

During his trip to the United States in 2015, Pope Francis visited inmates at the Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility in Philadelphia. “[Christ] teaches us to see the world through his eyes,” he said, “eyes which are not scandalized by the dust picked up along the way but want to cleanse, heal and restore.”

Pope Francis suggested in Philadelphia that mercy requires not only an end to suffering but an ongoing commitment to human dignity. He said we must accept the lost and the sinner as our own and give them the aid they need to “cleanse, heal and restore” their lives. Those in prison and returning to the community have, to be sure, done wrong—sometimes the unthinkable wrong—but there is no wrong that cannot be forgiven and no life that cannot be saved. The work of prisoner re-entry is the work of forgiveness and as such is the Catholic’s duty.

Every year over 650,000 men and women are released from state and federal prisons. (Over 75 percent—487,500 individuals—are re-arrested within five years.) They have great difficulty finding employment and housing, and many are dealing with alcohol or drug addiction. Most re-entering persons do not immediately obtain health insurance and thus do not have access to medical or behavioral health care. Prison may be punishment by design, but people who are re-entering civic society ought not

be punished anew by neglect, indifference or, worse, contempt.

From its creation, the Catholic Church has accepted the role of punishment only in the context of facilitating redemption. In his *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas Aquinas says that in all things God is both perfectly just and perfectly merciful. Punishment is just only insofar as it contributes to the ultimate happiness of all involved—including the punished. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* echoes Aquinas’s logic. It says that “punishment, in addition to preserving public order and the safety of persons, has a medicinal scope: as far as possible it should contribute to the correction of the offender” (No. 2266). In other words, punishment should be in accordance with its three purposes: protection of the common good, restoration of public order and the conversion or rehabilitation of the offender.

But the “scarlet F,” for felon, now effectively precludes re-entering individuals from most public and private employment, as well as housing. A law signed by President Clinton in 1996, for example, imposes a lifetime ban on welfare benefits and food stamps for those convicted of distributing drugs. Returning persons who have this conviction are also ineligible for many forms of housing assistance.

Re-entry efforts are by nature efforts at redemption, and redemption is the calling card of the Christian. Zachariah Presutti, S.J., has exemplified this commitment through the establishment of Thrive for Life, a re-entry initiative in New York City that aims to work collaboratively with Jesuit education institutions. The New Jer-

sey Reentry Corporation (of which I am chairman) likewise aims to remain consistent with the principles of redemption through a wraparound service model and focus on the whole person. We offer a broad array of services in a rigorous program that has yielded a 62 percent employment rate.

The storyline of man’s existence has been from fall to salvation. Our failure in Eden is echoed in every act of sin and our redemption at Calvary in every act of absolution. Pope Francis said in Philadelphia, “[God] wants to help us set out again, to resume our journey, to recover our hope, to restore our trust. He wants us to keep walking along the paths of life, to realize that we have a mission, and that confinement is never the same thing as exclusion.”

Those coming back into the community from prison are not disqualified from salvation, nor are they undeserving of the mercy the rest of us so often enjoy. They are representatives of all of us: the Zacchaeuses, prodigal sons and adulterous widows of the world, who are the least worthy but most loved. Christ came for the sinner, and it is the church’s imperative to give the sinner a second chance at salvation. “Re-entry” is a Christian idea, and that means assisting returning persons to restore their lives to a healthy and virtuous place. Its time has come.

---

*Jim McGreevey is executive director of the Jersey City Employment and Training Program and chairman of the New Jersey Reentry Corporation. He is a former governor of New Jersey. Katie Forkey provided research assistance for this essay.*



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# AS HISPANIC CATHOLIC NUMBERS GROW, CENTER OF GRAVITY FOR U.S. CHURCH SHIFTS TO SOUTH AND WEST

By Michael J. O'Loughlin

A new survey of the religious composition of the United States shows that white non-Hispanic Christians are increasingly less dominant in American society. Fewer than half of all the states now have white non-Hispanic Christian majorities, down from 39 states in 2007, according to a report published by the Public Religion Research Institute in September. For the Catholic Church in the United States that means a shift from a predominantly white church concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest to a church influenced by Latin American immigration and located in the South and West. About 20 percent of all Americans identify as Catholic, the report found.

“There is a major demographic shift that is tilting the cultural understanding of Catholic life in the United States,” Hosffman Ospino, an associate professor of His-

panic ministry and religious education at Boston College, told **America**. “These migrations are remapping the entire American Catholic experience. That’s very significant because in many ways we are venturing into a world or a way of being Catholic in this country that we have not experienced as a whole.”

The report, based on a sample of 101,000 Americans from all 50 states, contains several takeaways about the state of the Catholic Church in the United States, which is seeing a radical transformation from the historical European enclaves in the Northeast and Midwest toward a church heavily influenced by immigration from Mexico and Latin America.

Here are some of the findings.

1. ***The U.S. Catholic Church is increasingly diverse.***



Five Hispanic men, accompanied by their wives, are ordained by Cardinal Blase Cupich to the permanent diaconate at St. Philomena Church in Chicago in May 2016.

Back in 1991, close to nine in 10 Catholics in the United States were white, using a definition that excludes Hispanics. But today, with changes in immigration patterns, that number is under six in 10, and white Catholic numbers will continue to drop. A majority (52 percent) of Catholics under 30 are Hispanic, and Hispanic Catholics have larger families with younger children than their white counterparts. Since 2006 the percentage of Americans who identify as white and Catholic declined from 16 percent to 11 percent.

Yet when it comes to church leadership, Hispanics are underrepresented. According to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, there are 284 active bishops in the United States, about 10 percent of whom are Hispanic. And among the six cardinals leading U.S. archdioceses,

all but one live in the Northeast or Midwest.

Mr. Ospino said increasing vocations among Hispanic, Asian and African immigrant Catholics in the United States will eventually help alleviate this disparity.

Noting the differences in educational opportunities and even Catholic schools, he said, “We don’t yet have the traditional pathways that American Catholics [of European descent] had to get to leadership positions.”

**2. *The geographic center of U.S. Catholicism has shifted.*** Waves of Italian, Irish and German immigrants to the Northeast and Midwest in the 19th and early 20th centuries led to large Catholic communities in those areas. While those regions continue to be heavily Catholic, with Rhode Island the most Catholic state in the nation, the report found that a majority of U.S. Catholics (54 percent) now live in the South and West. Compare that to 1972, when nearly seven in 10 U.S. Catholics lived in the Northeast and Midwest.

This trend is set to continue as well, with Catholics in the South and West younger than their counterparts in the Northeast and Midwest.

Mr. Ospino said one of the challenges with this geographic shift is the need to build more infrastructure, which he said is “very exciting because that requires new strategies of evangelization, new ways of understanding Catholic education, new ways of understanding Catholic higher education.”

“Most of the Catholic universities, schools, hospitals, seminaries, parishes—these were all built in the Northeast and Midwest,” he said. “We are at a point in which we are ready to enter a process of building a new set of structures in the South and the West to serve the new population.”

**3. *There is a big educational gap between white and Hispanic Catholics.*** White Catholics have attained some of the highest levels of education among religious groups in the United States, with 63 percent having at least some college education. On the other hand, just 28 percent of Hispanic Catholics have some college education, the lowest number for a major religious group in the United States.

**4. *About one in 10 L.G.B.T. Americans identifies as Catholic.*** Members of the L.G.B.T. community are far less likely to identify as religious than the general public;

46 percent of them report no religious affiliation. When it comes to Catholics, just 6 percent of L.G.B.T. Americans are white and Catholic, compared with 11 percent of the general population. Hispanic Catholics are more evenly distributed, with 5 percent of the L.G.B.T. community identifying as Hispanic Catholic, compared with 7 percent overall.

**5. White Catholics lean Republican; Hispanic Catholics lean Democratic.** Among white Catholics, 34 percent identify as Republican and 26 percent as Democrat. But Democrats have a problem on their hands when it

comes to young white Catholics, with just 21 percent of them identifying with the party.

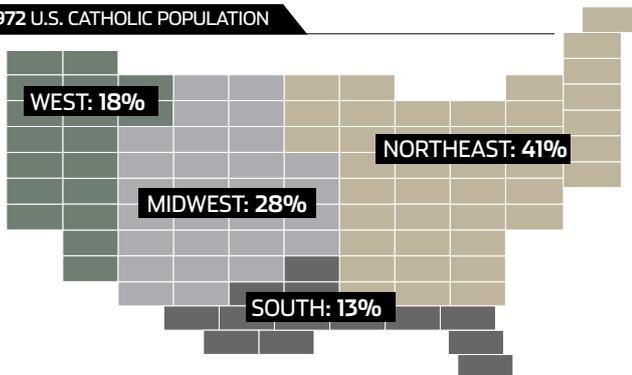
Among Hispanic Catholics, 40 percent identify as Democrats and just 9 percent as Republicans. But here, too, there is a generational gap that spells trouble for Democrats. More than half of Hispanic Catholic senior citizens, 56 percent, identify as Democrats, but only 35 percent of young Hispanic Catholics identify with that party.

Michael J. O’Loughlin, *national correspondent.*  
*Twitter: @MikeOLoughlin.*

**U.S. CATHOLIC POPULATION**

**55%** OF U.S. CATHOLICS ARE WHITE AND NON-HISPANIC, DOWN FROM **87% IN 1991**

**1972 U.S. CATHOLIC POPULATION**



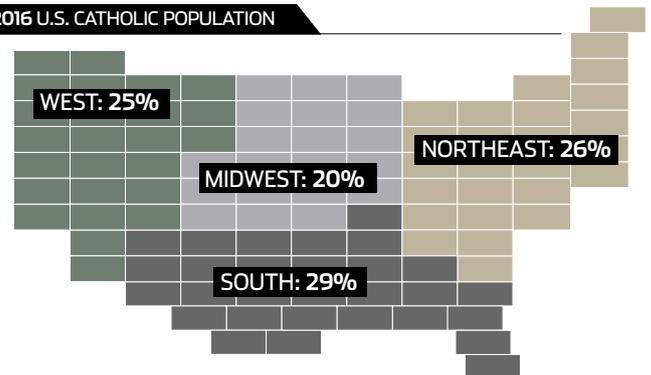
**U.S. CATHOLICS OVER 65**

WHITE	76%
HISPANIC	17%

**U.S. CATHOLICS UNDER 30**

WHITE	35%
HISPANIC	52%

**2016 U.S. CATHOLIC POPULATION**



**PERCENTAGE WITH COLLEGE DEGREES**

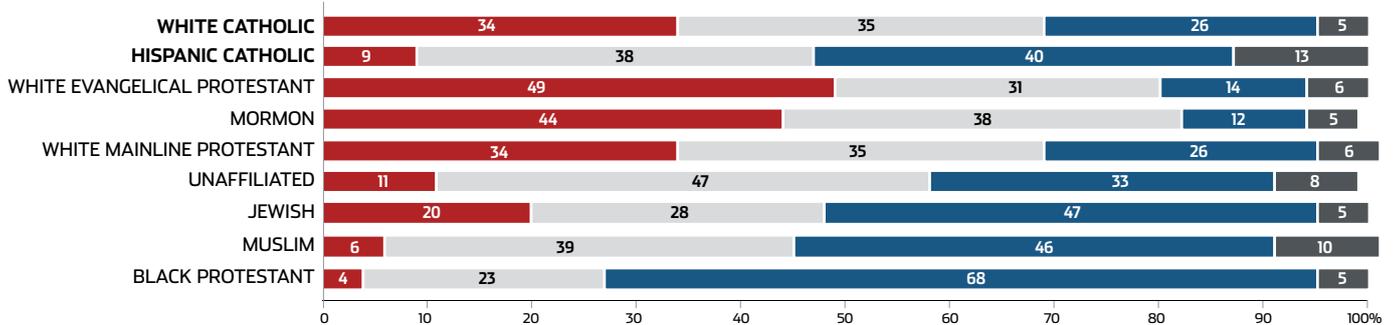
WHITE CATHOLIC	39%
HISPANIC CATHOLIC	12%

**PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS WITH CHILDREN UNDER 18**

WHITE CATHOLIC	16%
HISPANIC CATHOLIC	30%

**POLITICAL AFFILIATION**

Republican Independent Democrat Other/Don't Know



Source: "America's Changing Religious Identity," Daniel Cox and Robert P. Jones, PRRI (prri.org). The PRRI report defines "white Catholic" as being exclusive of "Hispanic Catholic"; neither category includes "other nonwhite Catholics." In the political affiliation chart, numbers may not add up to 100 because of rounding.



# Pope Francis tells Colombians, 'Be slaves of peace'

Pope Francis arrives at the Shrine of St. Peter Claver in Cartagena, Colombia, on Sept. 10.

As he concluded his five-day visit to Colombia, Pope Francis made a final, passionate appeal during a Mass attended by 800,000 people. “Be slaves of peace, forever!” he told the crowd, which included the country’s president, Juan Manuel Santos, and other civil and political authorities.

Francis formulated his appeal on Sept. 10 in the port city of Cartagena by reframing the motto of the 16th-century Jesuit, St. Peter Claver, who described himself as “the slave of the slaves, forever.”

The motto for Francis’ visit was “Let us take the first step.” As he prepared to leave this country of 49 million people—of whom four million attended his Masses, with many others coming out to the streets—he did not want that dynamic to be lost.

“Let us not be content with ‘taking the first step,’” he said. Instead, “let us continue our journey anew each day, going forth to encounter others and to encourage concord and fraternity. We cannot just stand still.”

He recalled that St. Peter Claver, who died here on Sept. 8, 1654, “after 40 years of voluntary slavery, of tireless work on behalf of the poor, did not stand still.” His first step inspired others to reach out to their neighbors, and it should do so today, the pope said, “because your brothers and sisters need you.”

It was a powerful farewell message for a nation that must grapple with the painful legacy of 54 years of civil conflict. “History shows that these ways of making peace, of placing reason above revenge, of the delicate harmony between politics and law,” Pope Francis said, “cannot ignore the involvement of the people.” A public consensus must be developed, he may have been suggesting, something that has yet to happen in Colombia but which his visit may help make possible.

Another remark seemed a recommendation to create a truth and reconciliation commission in Colombia. Francis

said that “deep, historic wounds necessarily require moments where justice is done, where victims are given the opportunity to know the truth, where damage is adequately repaired and clear commitments are made to avoid repeating those crimes.”

On the flight back to Rome, Pope Francis addressed two questions much discussed in the United States that day as Hurricane Irma hurtled across the Caribbean toward Florida: the situation of the 800,000 so-called Dreamers who could face deportation and the moral responsibility of governments that deny climate change.

While acknowledging that he had not been able to study the Trump administration’s suspension of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program in detail, Pope Francis said that “to take away young people from their families is not something that bears fruit, neither for the young people nor for their families.” Referring to the current negotiations over a legislative solution, the pope expressed the “hope that it can be rethought a little.”

Pope Francis added, “I have heard it said that the president of the United States presents himself as a man who is pro-life, and if he is a good pro-life [man] then he will understand that the family is the cradle of life and that it must be defended as a unit.”

The pope also addressed questions about climate change, emphasizing that “all of us have a responsibility” to respond, “and I believe we must take it seriously.” Addressing the moral responsibility of politicians who deny climate change, Francis said: “If one thinks it is not so true, then let that person go and ask the scientists. They are most clear.... Then let the person decide, and history will judge the decisions.”

Gerard O’Connell, *Vatican correspondent*. *Twitter: @gerryorome*.



## A drive to thrive: energy and innovation in the Catholic schools of Los Angeles

Early on a gray Friday morning, the 266 schools of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles just starting their day, Kevin Baxter, superintendent of Catholic schools for the archdiocese, radiates a restless energy.

“Our vision is growth,” he says. “We’re the largest archdiocese in the country, largest Catholic school system in the country, about 80,000 kids, and we still feel like we’re underserving our population. We firmly believe that we can grow significantly.”

It is not the story we have grown accustomed to hearing about Catholic schools. In 2016-17, enrollment in the United States was slightly under 1.9 million, a drop of 17.6 percent from 10 years ago and the lowest in a century. Over the same 10 years, nearly 20 percent of U.S. Catholic schools were closed or consolidated, 1,511 institutions in total.

But those years also saw 314 new Catholic schools opened. And in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, where numbers have been mostly steady since 2010, the Catholic population is growing.

Mr. Baxter estimates the archdiocese is currently serving just 8 percent of the Catholic school-age population, or less than one in 10. “Can we get to one and a half? Or two?” he asks. “People here don’t feel like that’s a Pollyannish goal. That’s something we could actually accomplish.”

One striking aspect of the archdiocese’s strategy is its openness to novel approaches. Seeing local interest in a public school’s dual-language immersion program, in 2012 the archdiocese started its own, offering not only Span-

ish-English but also one of the only two Mandarin-English programs in the country.

Today it has six language-immersion schools and plans to open 14 more. The first dual-language programs began at elementary schools that had recently been closed, highlighting the archdiocese’s unique approach to struggling schools. “If a school has to cease operations, our question always is: Can we restart it at some point?” says Mr. Baxter. “Does it take a reset—do some infrastructure work and reopen it in a new model?”

Mr. Baxter also wonders if a modernized vocational program might serve some archdiocesan high schools. “All of our schools are college prep, which they should be; we would never advocate for them not to be,” he explains. “But only 30 to 40 percent of the adult population have a college degree, meaning 60 to 70 percent do not. Are we open to serving those people, too, in our Catholic schools?” He imagines a Catholic school in Hollywood that could offer training in the many technical jobs of the entertainment industry or one that provides a pipeline to work at the nearby spacecraft startup Space-X.

Again and again, Mr. Baxter comes back to the same question: “How do we get more innovative and more creative?” The need for creativity is clear. The traditional Catholic school reliance on tuition grows more difficult to sustain, Mr. Baxter says. “We have to think of ways to provide support for parents.

“Catholic schools are, especially in urban environ-



Students at Our Lady of Loretto school in Los Angeles during an “Aid for Ecuador” event on April 21, 2016, organized by the Los Angeles Mission Childhood Association.

## Swazi Catholics march against human trafficking and gender-based violence

The Catholic Church in the small African nation of Swaziland has taken a lead role in southern Africa in raising awareness on two important issues: gender-based violence and human trafficking. On Aug. 26, the diocesan bishop, José Luis Ponce de León (a Consolata missionary from Argentina), led Catholics from across the country as they marched against human trafficking in the capital city, Mbabane.

In his address, Bishop Ponce de León referred to the parable of the good Samaritan but said victims of trafficking are “invisible”: “We all talk about it. We all read and hear about it in our media, but no one sees it, and therefore the victims risk not having any good Samaritan.”

In July, the Justice and Peace Commission of the nation’s only diocese, in Manzini, organized a march against gender-based violence. High rates of gender-based violence plague this small monarchical kingdom, as well as neighboring South Africa. It is, for the most part, an unreported crime.

Speaking at the march, the interim mayor of the town of Hlatikulu, Maduduza Zwane, described gender-based violence as “one of the most pervasive violations of human rights in the world, one of the least prosecuted crimes and one of the greatest threats to lasting peace and development in Swaziland and the entire world.”

The relatively small Catholic community in Swaziland is at the forefront on several social issues. Swaziland, for example, is critically affected by H.I.V./AIDS and has the highest infection rate in the world—25.8 percent of all adults are reported to be H.I.V.-positive. Because the health care system is centralized in cities where only 20 percent of the country’s population resides, the church often provides care for those who do not have easy access to it.

Russell Pollitt, S.J., *Johannesburg correspondent.*  
Twitter: @rpollittsj.



Marching in Mbabane, Swaziland.

Photo: Bishop José Luis Ponce de León

ments, serving a population that almost exactly mirrors the public schools as far as income and ethnicity. That’s how we’ve always existed, and that’s how we need to be.” But for many such families, paying for Catholic elementary school can be as challenging as university tuition. “I would love to see some type of justice as regards parent choice.”

But perhaps the biggest challenge faced by many students and staff in the archdiocese right now is the federal government. Recent moves on immigration by the Trump administration seem calculated to heighten anxiety in the city’s Hispanic community. In September President Trump announced that the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program would be rescinded in six months. A quarter of the people affected live in California.

After a year of disturbing campaign rhetoric, the day after Mr. Trump’s election “kids were terrified about their *abuelas* [grandmothers] getting deported, or their parents,” says Mr. Baxter.

And frightened children, he explains, “can’t really learn effectively.”

Jim McDermott, S.J., *Los Angeles correspondent.*  
Twitter: @PopCulturPriest.

# CATHOLICS AT A CROSSROADS

By Ian Johnson



The shrine and cathedral at the Our Lady of Seven Sorrows Mountain Church, built in Chinese style in Dongergou, Shanxi.



## An on-the-ground report on the church in China

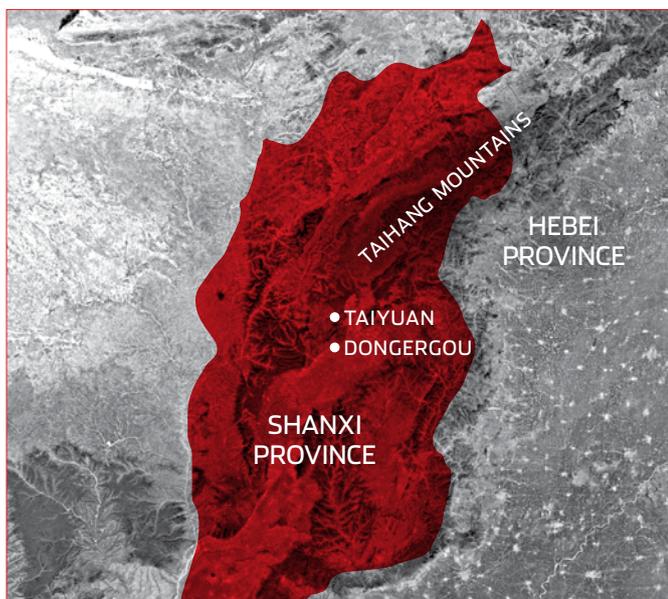
The Taihang Mountains run south from Beijing through the heartland of China like a primordial scar. For centuries, the range has been famed as the birthplace of Nüwa, the matriarchal creator of humans according to Chinese mythology. Military strategists have cast a colder eye, finding value in narrow passes that could be easily defended. Nowadays, industrialists covet its vast deposits of ore and coal that have turned it into a world center of steelmaking.

But for the past 400 years the Taihang range has also been the Catholic Church's *axis mundi* in China, a focal point of its history and growth. Beijing is where Christianity found a permanent foothold in the early 17th century, allowing the faith to radiate down through the country on either side of the range. To the east lies the province of Hebei, with important centers like the National Shrine to Our Lady of China. To the west lies the province of Shanxi, home to the pilgrimage site of Bansishan. Clinging to the Taihang Mountains a bit farther south is a less famous but perhaps more telling center of Catholicism: Dongergou.

Early one bright, windswept morning in May, this dusty village (pronounced DOHNG-are-go) is the picture of rural piety. The bell of the local church tolls for morning prayers. A family prepares a giant feast for a traditional wedding. Tour buses begin arriving with pilgrims visiting a mountaintop shrine. Devotional flags snap, rosary beads click and prayers rise up to heaven.

Watching the day unfold is Liu Wenxia, a short, energetic 42-year-old dressed fashionably in black tights, a colorful skirt and a billowing blouse over the wiry physique of a migrant laborer. Like many locals, Ms. Liu left Dongergou for the provincial capital of Taiyuan because local farms are too small and the climate too dry to support more than subsistence farming. For 20 years in Taiyuan, she cleaned homes, sold bedding and hawked medicine to patients in hospitals—a common

Photo: Sim Chi Yin



practice in China’s do-it-yourself medical system. “I’ve done it all!” she says, laughing, but then she turns serious. “And now I have the chance to come back home and help revive Catholicism.” (Note: All quotations from interviews have been translated from the Chinese.)

Two years ago, she and her husband returned to Dongergou to meld their hard-won entrepreneurial skills with the village’s growing reputation as a pilgrimage site. They sublet an empty restaurant at the base of the mountain and refurbished it as “The Home of Pilgrims”—a way station for the tens of thousands who journey to Dongergou each year to the Our Lady of Seven Sorrows Catholic Church.

The couple has also helped organize a massive donation campaign to expand the pilgrimage path up the Mountain of Seven Sorrows, or Qikushan in Chinese. New stations of the cross have been built, along with an enlarged ceremonial gate atop the mountain. Behind it is the distinctive church, which resembles the emperor’s palace in Beijing. Tour operators have posted online drone footage of the spectacular ascent, helping fuel a boom in pious Chinese travelers.

Dongergou is symptomatic of many challenges facing Catholicism in today’s China. The religion is still predominantly rural, but Dongergou and much of rural China are emptying out, with faith sometimes not making the leap to the big city.

And although this village and many religious centers across China are benefiting from a boom in religious tour-



ism, it is not clear that the underlying number of believers is growing. Indeed, some reliable estimates show that China’s Catholic population may be shrinking because of low birth rates, a failure to evangelize and the longstanding rift between Beijing’s Communist rulers and the Vatican.

This failure to grow—estimates have the current Catholic population in China at not much above 10 million in a nation of 1.4 billion—has led many members of the church to see recent negotiations between the Holy See and the country’s Communist Party as especially important. Although talks have slowed in the past few months, locals are hopeful that better ties will inject a new sense of dynamism into the church. They even hope that the pope can visit one day, an event they believe will revive enthusiasm for the faith.

But many also caution that improved, or even normalized ties between Beijing and Rome would be only a partial solution. That is because what tests the church in China most is not so much the challenges of worshiping under Communism, but the difficulty of speaking to people who are living through an era of upheaval.

In some ways, this is a problem facing established religions in many parts of the world. But it is especially



pronounced in China because of the rapid urbanization occurring here.

For people like Ms. Liu, these hopes and difficulties manifest themselves each day in the crowds that trek up the mountain to venerate the Virgin Mary. Many of the Chinese visitors, she says, come from Catholic families but lost their faith during the decades of hardline Communist opposition to religion. Pilgrimages can inspire these people, she says, helping them see the beauty and power of the Catholic Church. “They lost their faith, but now the Lord has brought them back,” Ms. Liu says to me as the first pilgrims of the day begin walking toward the stations of the cross. “But when they leave the mountain today, will they come back tomorrow?”

### **Survival Over the Centuries**

Christianity first came to China in the seventh century, when the Church of the East—or the so-called Nestorian church—arrived. Like Buddhism six centuries earlier, it traveled east via the Silk Road, the great trading route across Central Asia. But neither the Nestorians nor a subsequent Franciscan mission in the 13th century lasted.

Both closed when wars shut off links back to the West.

It was only in the 16th century that Christianity gained a permanent foothold in China. In 1552 the Jesuit Francis Xavier landed on Chinese soil, arriving on a Portuguese trade ship at an island off the southern coast of Guangdong Province. He soon died but was succeeded by another Jesuit, Matteo Ricci, a remarkably gifted scholar, linguist and diplomat who landed in China in 1582 and slowly moved northward until, in 1598, he reached his goal: the imperial capital of Beijing. While trying to convert senior officials there, he probably also spread the word to traveling merchants from provinces like Shanxi, helping plant the seed in villages like Dongergou.

In the context of China’s more than 3,000 years of recorded history, Christianity’s permanent presence of 400 years might seem short. But its survival is still remarkable. For the first time since Buddhism’s arrival two millennia ago, a new religion has gained a permanent foothold among the Han Chinese majority, outliving the fall of dynasties and warlords, and waves of state-sanctioned persecution, to become a permanent part of China’s religious landscape.

This success is partly due to one of the Catholic



Each year tens of thousands of Catholics visit the Our Lady of Seven Sorrows Catholic Church, which features both traditional Chinese architecture and Catholic iconography.

Church's greatest strengths: its global reach and resources. Until the mid-20th century, the church channeled money and sent missionaries across the vast land. Schools, hospitals and orphanages soon followed. Besides the provinces around the Taihang Mountains, Catholic missionaries penetrated the hills in the southern part of Yunnan Province—vividly captured by the Chinese writer Liao Yiwu in his book *God Is Red*. They also created important centers of faith in the country's most international city, Shanghai, and many other towns and hamlets across the country.

Despite these successes, the church was slow to localize. The Vatican did not approve an independent hierarchy for the Chinese church until 1946. When the Communists took power three years later, most Catholic-run hospitals, schools, orphanages and other institutions were still run by foreigners. Of the 137 religious regions in China, only 28 were run by Chinese (21 bishops and seven prelates). The other 109 bishops and prelates were born elsewhere.

So when the Communists expelled almost all foreigners from China in the early 1950s and cut ties with the Vatican, the church was decapitated and struggled to survive. Evangelization essentially stopped, and conversions rare-

ly happened outside marriages into Catholic families.

This trauma is reflected in the sluggish growth in the number of Catholic believers. In 1949 China had an estimated three million Catholics. Today's highest estimate, 12 million, suggests that the number of Catholics did no more than track the country's overall population rise, from 400 million in 1949 to nearly 1.4 billion today.

This stagnation is especially vexing, given the explosion of religiosity in China over the past few decades. Under the rule of Communist China's founding leader, Mao Zedong, religion was heavily persecuted. But since Mao's death and the adoption of capitalist-style reforms in the late 1970s, religion has taken off, part of a broader search for values in a society that has otherwise emphasized economic growth and materialism.

Across China, the number of Buddhists and Taoists has risen quickly and is now in the hundreds of millions. The comparison with Protestantism is even more striking. In 1949, China had one million Protestants. Today, the figure is estimated at 50 million to 60 million, with Protestant congregations especially strong where Catholicism is weakest—in China's rapidly growing cities and among

well-educated white-collar professionals. (Islam, the other main religion in China, is confined to 10 non-ethnic-Chinese minority groups and numbers just 23 million. Like Catholicism, its growth is mainly due to natural population increases and not conversions.)

A key reason for this divergence goes back to the issue of localization. The church's reluctance to indigenize until the mid-20th century contrasts with the explosive growth in the number of indigenous Protestant leaders as early as the 1920s and '30s. Many were jailed by the Communists, but their followers formed the basis of today's huge Protestant "house church" movement. For better or worse, Protestantism in China travels lightly, with self-taught pastors forming churches and attracting large congregations in only a few years.

This sort of spontaneous institution-building is harder to realize in a more formally structured faith like Catholicism. This is especially true because of China's state control over religion. In the 1950s, the Communist government set up patriotic associations to control all five religious groups in China—Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism and Taoism. These committees now manage mosques, temples and churches, appoint key clergy, and run seminaries.

For groups like Protestants, government control is a burden, but they are more decentralized, so they can ignore hierarchies and flexibly respond to demand. Put simply, any pious believer can form a Protestant church and declare himself or herself head of it.

That is harder for Catholics to do. After the Communists set up the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association in 1957, state officials began appointing their own bishops. Many Catholics began to feel uncomfortable about attending churches under government control and some stopped going. Others set up an underground Catholic Church in certain parts of China. This church does not recognize the "patriotic" church's legitimacy. But even the underground church has a fairly rigid hierarchy, with appointments requiring approval by higher-ups in China.

Over the years, the split between the "open" and the underground church has become less pronounced, especially after Benedict XVI's letter to the church in China in 2007. In it the pope essentially said the underground church should not be a permanent institution ("the clandestine condition is not a normal feature of the Church's life") and that Catholics can participate in services offered by the state-recognized church.

But state control over religion is still problematic, hampering growth and regularly spilling into public view. In 2012, for example, the government appointed Thaddeus Ma Daqin auxiliary bishop of Shanghai. But Bishop Ma announced his resignation from the Patriotic Catholic Association at his episcopal ordination Mass—apparently a protest against the government's regulation of religion. He was put under house arrest at the Sheshan Seminary, where he largely remains today, a situation that shut down one of the country's most important seminaries for over a year.

In another case, seminarians in Beijing boycotted their graduation ceremony in 2014 when they discovered that a bishop who was consecrated without Rome's approval would conduct graduation Mass. The students were expelled without graduating. Along with the events at Sheshan Seminary, that meant that in just two years, two graduating classes of seminarians were lost. "The abnormal relations between Beijing and Rome precipitated these events," says Anthony Clark, a Whitworth University professor of Chinese history who has written extensively on the church in China. "The Catholics in the pews do pay attention. It is unsettling."

### The Double Edge of Prosperity

On one level, the name of the church in Dongergou, Holy Mother of Seven Sorrows, refers to the Virgin Mary and the seven trials she endured as the mother of Jesus. But it also refers to a local story. In 1912 a Franciscan monk was ordered to leave Dongergou and took with him a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes that had been brought to the parish in 1901. When villagers objected, believing the statue itself possessed numinous power, he left town in anger, shaking his shoe at the village and cursing them as Judeans.

The story is recounted in *The Missionary's Curse and Other Tales From a Chinese Catholic Village*, a slim but powerful book by the Oxford historian Henrietta Harrison. According to the story, Dongergou suffered seven years of bad harvests, alleviated only when villagers built the shrine to the Holy Mother at the top of the mountain.

Since then, Dongergou has been a pilgrimage site, especially for those who feel that fate has dealt them a bad hand. One I encountered there was Zhao Miaoling, a pilgrim from Gansu, who had traveled with 40 other pilgrims on an overnight bus to visit the shrine. The group made their way up the hill praying the Stations of the Cross, stopping at each bend in the path to recite chants in their local dialects.

Ms. Zhao is 52 and, like many women of her age in

China, unemployed. She was given early retirement as an accountant from a state enterprise. Wondering what more there was to life, she dabbled in Buddhism and later came to Catholicism.

“We’ve come according to the heart of Holy Mother,” she tells me. “We have our own problems. Many of us have a lot of pressure, a lot of frustration. We can’t solve it on our own. We can only rely on God. We hope that after requesting it, it can be fulfilled.”

After a Mass in the church at the peak, Ms. Zhao and I walk around the plateau at the top of the mountain, and she tells me why she converted. “Society isn’t just lacking faith; it is completely devoid of faith,” Ms. Zhao says, but she then adds, “All my friends are interested in religion.” Most, she says, are drawn to Buddhism because it is more present in daily life and feels more familiar culturally. For herself, Catholicism was attractive because her mother-in-law is Catholic. “Most people haven’t heard of it,” she says. “But I married in, so through family I learned about it.”

That is not an unusual story—in fact, it is probably how most conversions to Catholicism happen. Compared with Protestant churches, Catholic churches set up relatively few Bible study groups at universities and rarely invite curious strangers to their churches on days like Christmas, which is gaining in popularity as a secular holiday.

Some in the church bemoan this lack of evangelization. Ren Jin, a local priest in Dongergou, says Catholicism was strongest in China in the Mao era. Then it was under attack and people banded together. Villages like Dongergou were often entirely Catholic. With residents not allowed to leave their villages, local ties and faith deepened, even if public worship was banned.

When these restrictions were lifted, Catholicism initially came out of hibernation. Churches were rebuilt, young people joined seminaries, and evangelists who had survived the persecution spread the word with fervor.

But then came prosperity. People left village life to work in the cities. Few were like Ms. Liu, with her restaurant at the base of the mountain, returning home to reconnect with their faith.

“Village life and everything about it began to seem backward,” Father Ren tells me. “Catholicism seemed part of that old way of life that people were casting off.”

### The Vatican Seeks a Thaw

It is in this context that some wonder if the number of Catholics here is actually declining. One of the most

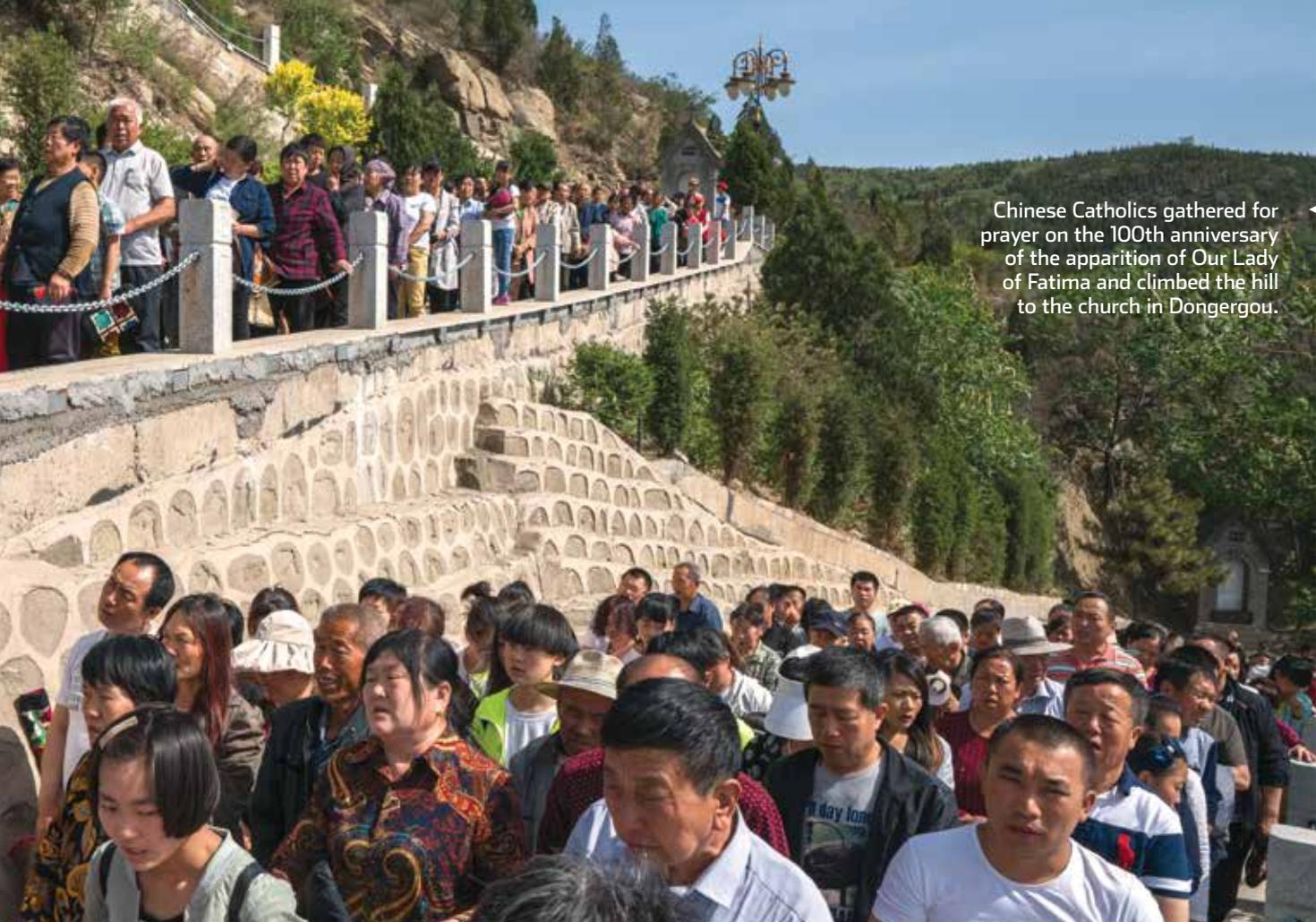


respected observers of the church today, Anthony Lam of the Holy Spirit Study Center in Hong Kong, has extensively mined public data and paired that with interviews with people in the underground church. His conclusion: The number of Catholics in China peaked at 12 million in about 2005, plateaued for a few years and now is in decline.

In a report published last spring, Dr. Lam estimates that the Catholic community in China would need 210,000 baptisms per year to cover natural losses, but in fact baptisms are no more than 35,000. He believes that the total Catholic population is now about 10.5 million.

This is reflected in the number of vocations in the open and in the underground church. Between 1996 and 2014, according to Dr. Lam’s estimates, the number of male vocations has dropped from 2,300 to 1,260, while the number of female vocations has plummeted from 2,500 to 156. He also writes that the number of ordinations dropped from 134 in 2000 to 78 in 2014.

Many Chinese Catholics hope that renewed ties with the Vatican will lead to better times. Starting last year, it became known that negotiations between the two sides had resumed, and some observers predicted a speedy res-



Chinese Catholics gathered for prayer on the 100th anniversary of the apparition of Our Lady of Fatima and climbed the hill to the church in Dongergou.

olution. But Bishop Michael Yeung Ming-cheung of Hong Kong, the diocese where the Vatican has based its negotiations with mainland China, voiced caution in an interview with the Catholic News Agency. “A healthy realism,” said Bishop Yeung, who succeeded Cardinal John Tong Hon on Aug. 1, “is indeed required to guard against false hopes and unrealistic expectations on the one hand and premature closing of doors to further dialogue on the other.”

One of the key sticking points has been how to choose candidates to become bishops—a problem that led to the Vatican’s not recognizing and even excommunicating bishops appointed by the Chinese government. According to people familiar with the negotiations, a likely deal is that Beijing authorities will pick candidates, with the Vatican holding veto power. Apparently still unresolved is how to deal with the bishops not recognized by the other side. In addition, Beijing has sent mixed signals, for example by detaining a bishop in Wenzhou.

More generally, the government under President Xi Jinping has followed a harder line against independent associations of any kind. Nongovernmental organizations have been shut down or forced to register. Last year,

the party held a rare conference on religion, calling on all faiths in China to “Sinicize”—meaning that religion must be controlled by the state. (In his interview with CNS, Bishop Yeung noted that the Chinese government seems concerned about the “patriotism” of Catholic leaders.)

At the very least, negotiations seem to be on hold until a once-in-five-years Communist Party congress is held this October or November (as of this writing, a date had not been set).

“I would think that nothing will happen until after the party congress,” says Richard Madsen, a sociologist at the University of California in San Diego who has written about the church for decades. “But it’s hard to know if there will be a resolution and when.”

Even if a deal is reached, some are doubtful that it will help the church. They suspect that Beijing sees an agreement as a way to increase control over Catholicism and not as a way for Chinese Catholics to gain more leeway or closer ties to Rome. Father Ren says that Catholics should spend less time worrying about high-level negotiations and focus more on their own actions—especially evangelization and engagement with the faith. “People have a thirst

and a need,” Father Ren says. “If Christianity can slake it, then they’ll convert to Christianity. If Buddhism can, then they’ll become Buddhists. But we have to go out and evangelize.”

### Keeping Faith in the City

One day in Dongergou I chance upon a wedding. Two 29-year-olds, Duan Yuqiang and Jia Xiaoru, are getting married after a matchmaker introduced them to each other last year. Mr. Duan is a local lad, a long-distance truck driver whose Catholic ancestry goes back six generations. His bride, Ms. Jia, is also Catholic, from the neighboring village of Yao. Their first criterion for a mate: that the other be Catholic. “My family wouldn’t have it any other way,” says Ms. Jia, slender and smiling in a red silk Chinese *qipao*, while her new husband stands by, nodding. “I feel I can only really understand someone who shares my faith.”

The wedding is low-key. They have carried out the legal ceremony a few months earlier and today simply bow in front of each other’s parents, who take turns sitting in massive redwood chairs to receive the young couple’s respects. This arrangement means the couple are paying obeisance to their elders—a typically Chinese action—but in an acknowledgement of the couple’s Catholicism there is also a giant picture of Jesus on a table between the chairs.

The event is powerful and moving, but in some ways a throwback. Like many of his friends, Mr. Duan has come back to the village for his wedding, but he and most of his friends are rarely here. Indeed, the only people present at the morning and evening Masses in Dongergou are older people. Even on Sundays the church is dominated by the elderly—because almost no young people are left in the village.

In the big cities, faith is hard to preserve and harder to spread. One young Catholic facing this challenge is Du Xiaodong, a 25-year-old who moved to Beijing two years ago to work in tech support at an internet company. A native of a small village in the Taihang Mountains, he struggles to keep his faith while in the new city. “When I first came to Beijing I felt quite lost,” he says. “I didn’t know what to do with my faith and where to go.”

Things changed when he married Jing Anqi, a vivacious 27-year-old from a nearby village who had also moved to Beijing. Now they go to Mass together and are expecting a child. But even so, the level of engagement with Catholicism is not as great as back in their hometowns. “When we were in Handan, there are a dozen of us [Catholics] who always get together on the weekend and share ideas,” Ms.

Jing says. “Now we still try to keep this going, but the frequency is every two weeks or once a month.”

Both say they want to do more to evangelize, but as Catholics they want to focus more on deeds than words. In her hometown, Ms. Jing says, local Catholics offered foot massage to people suffering paralysis from a stroke. That practice reportedly led to 30 baptisms, but she doubts that this sort of activity would work in a city like Beijing. “We do feel that in terms of expansion, we are not as ambitious and bold as Protestants,” she said. “They can preach more confidently. But what we focus on now is trying to influence people with our deeds, not with our lips.”

### A Friend of the Family

Most mornings in Dongergou, I ascend the mountain with Xing Fu’ai, a 42-year-old brother in the Order of the Divine Word, or the Steyler Missionaries. We pass the newly refurbished stations of the cross, stopping to pray and encountering few people as the sun rises over the far mountains and illuminates the path.

Long before the pilgrims arrive, we are at the top, looking down at the dusty bowl formed by two branches of the Taihang Mountains. In the middle of it, a smoggy blotch 20 miles to the north of us, is the provincial capital of Taiyuan, one of the largest dioceses in China. We walk to the enormous Chinese-style church on the summit, with its curved eaves and columns, pray and walk back down the mountain for breakfast.

Religious orders are banned in China, so Mr. Xing has no official role in the church. And if he did, he should by now have been transferred to another diocese. But he remains because of an injury that left him crippled. Fifteen years ago Mr. Xing fell down a mountain ravine and almost died from the fall. He now drags his right leg and speaks only with difficulty—a slowness of speech that is not due to any impediment in his thinking, just in his reaction time. This makes it easy to think he has nothing to say, when in fact he can see Dongergou and all of its problems more clearly than anyone else I have met.

I come to realize that in the rapidly changing world of Dongergou, he is part of the thin membrane of faith that holds it together. I think of him as an example of the church’s hidden strengths: deep, stubborn and lasting—qualities hidden by his self-deprecating words. “I guess you could call me a kind of counselor,” he says. “Even though I’m not trained as one. Sometimes I just sit with families and cry with them.”

There are many reasons to cry in Dongergou, as anywhere in the world. One is the birth of a child with a severe handicap. This happened to Giuseppe Wu Jinwen and Maria Qin Fulan, seventh-generation Catholics. I meet them one quiet afternoon in their living room. Next to their sofa on proud display is a certificate of apostolic blessing from Pope Francis, a trophy that a friend brought back from Rome earlier this year. “Us go to Rome?” Giuseppe says. “It’s a dream, but one I can’t afford.”

Now 61, Giuseppe just retired as principal of a nearby high school. A former physical education teacher, he has a thick neck and broad arms. “Wrestling,” he says, when asked his sport. “People asked me to join the Communist Party,” Giuseppe says. “It’s important if you want to get ahead, but for me as a Catholic it was impossible. You have to be atheist to join. But it’s O.K. I just refused.”

While we speak, their daughter quietly stands in the back of the room. She cannot read or speak very clearly and is frightened by most people. For years the couple have despaired of her fate: What will happen to their daughter when they die, if she cannot not find a husband and establish her own family? Their sons have left Dongergou to work in the city. One day the young woman will be on her own.

Over many visits Brother Xing has sat with them and listened to their troubles. They have read the Bible together. He prays for them in his small chapel. Slowly, they have come to trust that God will find a way to provide for their daughter in old age. “He is a good soul,” Giuseppe says of Brother Xing. “He’s a friend of the family. He is always there. Reliable.”

### Walking the Path

One morning I wake up late. Dawn has already broken and Brother Xing has already left for the mountain. I catch up with him only on the back side, on a crude road cut into the rocky inclines and ravines with explosives. Huge chunks of rocks line the way. Even with hiking boots I have to pick my way down, careful to avoid the jagged edges. Then I come upon him.

I figure I have caught up to Brother Xing because of his limp until I notice his feet: bare and bloody. He sees my gaze and laughs. “I don’t do this every day. Just some days. A few times a year. To remember.”

Remember what? I ask. He says that a few years ago he had a vision. “I saw Jesus and he was carrying the cross. And then I noticed he wasn’t wearing shoes when he was carrying the cross. Of course, I knew that before. But at



A group of pilgrims from Gansu Province prayed together en route to the shrine in Dongergou.

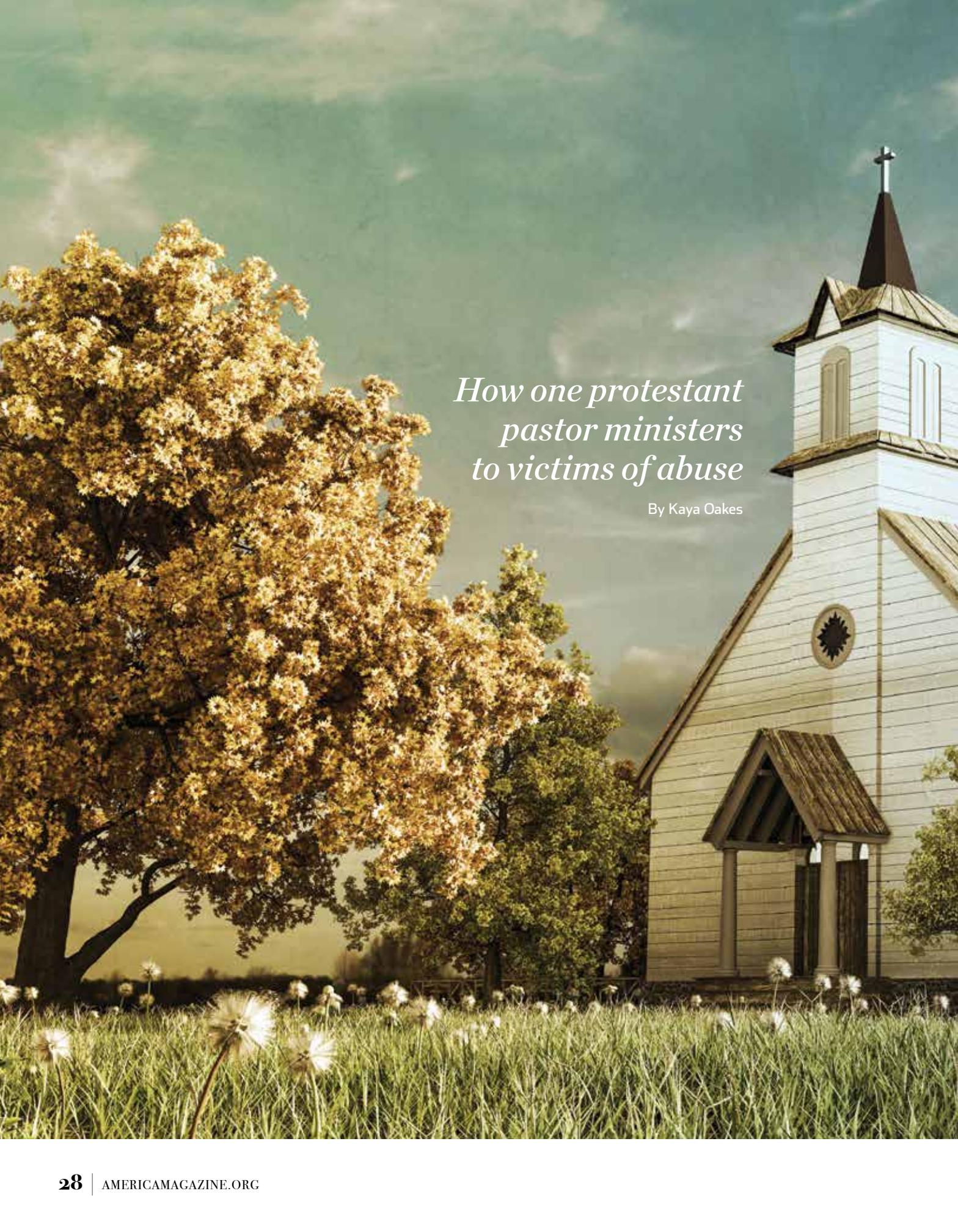
that moment I thought of it and how he was carrying the cross. I thought: He isn’t carrying it alone. Along the way someone stopped to help him.

“I can’t compare what I’m doing to that, but by walking barefoot I feel I’m filling that role, walking the path for him.” I offer my arm, but he smiles and turns away. “If I accept help, the sacrifice won’t be worth it. It will be without meaning.”

Ian Johnson is a Beijing-based writer and a teacher at the Beijing Center for Chinese Studies. His most recent book is *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao*.



Watch a short documentary online about the church in China produced by America Films. at [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org).



*How one protestant  
pastor ministers  
to victims of abuse*

By Kaya Oakes

# IN SEARCH OF SPIRITUAL HEALING



Photo: iStockphoto.com/homeworks255

A young girl sits in her room as the sounds of physical violence echo down the hall. Her father regularly erupts, a volcano whose rage is fed by the notion that he is the head of a “good Christian family” and that his wife and children must submit to his will. The girl also knows that their church pastor is a pedophile who preys on her sister, but her church has turned inward to protect the pastor instead of reaching out to help her sister. The girl is terrified for her mother, her sister, herself. So she prays, and this offers her peace in the midst of the violence. That peace will sustain her for years to come.

This snapshot from the tumultuous childhood of the Rev. Carol Howard Merritt often leads people to question why she entered ordained ministry. The Southern Baptist Church of her childhood colluded in the violence that surrounded her growing up. In her book *Healing Spiritual Wounds*, she writes that religion was “complicit in the violence” of her home and church, but she still found hope. Misguided interpretations of Christian teaching, she writes, were “part of the problem,” but the teachings of Christ were also her “cure, solace, and center.” Over time, she came to understand that abusive patterns in religion “did not really represent God,” and after attending Moody Bible Institute, she left the Southern Baptist Church to join the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), where she was ordained and where she began a ministry that focuses on the wounds that can be caused by organized religion and on the spiritual healing that must follow.

For Catholics, the topic of abuse remains a painful one. The recent charges of “sexual offenses” faced by Cardinal George Pell have once again stirred up the debate about the church’s failure to rectify its abusive history, which has caused harm not only to the people abused and their families but to the church as a whole and has resulted in the attrition of many Catholics. A survey by the Public Religion Research Institute in 2015 revealed that half of former Catholics point to the abuse crisis as a primary reason they left the church. Informal conversations with still practicing Catholics often reveal unresolved feelings of betrayal and anger about the abuse crisis. More significantly, abuse has also left a trail of traumatized victims, many of whom are still suffering from physical, psychological and spiritual damage. Spiritual damage, which often means damage to a person’s religious faith or relationship with God, is probably the least discussed and least well understood of these issues, but as Rev. Merritt points out, it can have dramatic effects, especially on deeply re-

ligious victims like herself. Yet this damage to one’s faith also offers a unique opportunity for healing.

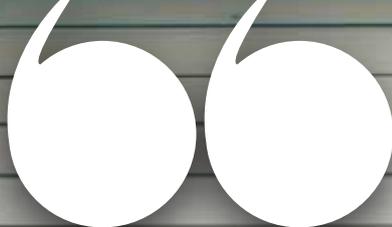
Abuse cases, however, are not restricted to the Catholic Church, and the wounds left by abuse are not uniquely Catholic. Recent accounts of abuse in the Anglican Church and in fundamentalist and evangelical churches reinforce the notion that abuse is often tied up in power structures that marginalize, shame and doubt the testimonies of victims. The wounds of abuse are complex and can indeed push people away from church, if not away from religion altogether. But understanding the spiritual dimensions of abuse entails not only understanding how institutions collude in and cover up abuse, but how individuals might recover from it and still maintain a relationship with God. This places Rev. Merritt in a unique position both as a former victim and as a pastor to the abused.

### THE PAIN OF SPIRITUAL WOUNDS

Rev. Merritt explained in an interview that spiritual abuse is typically “different from physical or psychological abuse. It usually happens when a person isn’t able to love or be loved by God.” It is not that God is unwilling to love an individual, but rather that an individual feels incapable of accepting that love. Sometimes that can be an after effect or side effect of physical abuse, but at other times it occurs when a misunderstanding of Scripture or theology creates isolation or suffering. In many cases, spiritual abuse is rooted in a misunderstanding of God as “vengeful, angry or judgmental.” Spiritual abuse can also come from authoritarian churches in which the emphasis is on sin and depravity, which produces the feeling of not being able to love oneself or one’s neighbor.

Rev. Merritt explains that churches that teach the notion that God is vengeful can be damaging to people in the pews. “What happens when we have been taught to focus on our depravity,” for example, by a relentless emphasis on our personal sinfulness, “so that we forget our own goodness? And what happens when we have been taught to judge our neighbors rather than love them? We can often end up with beliefs that damage us and keep us from abundant life.”

In her book, Rev. Merritt uses a pastoral approach to talk about individuals she has encountered who have suffered from spiritual abuse. Sometimes this will take the form of spiritual direction with a victim, but at other times it is simply a parishioner coming to her for conversation and advice. She has served as a pastor for two de-



*Victims need to be heard, acknowledged and understood. ●●*



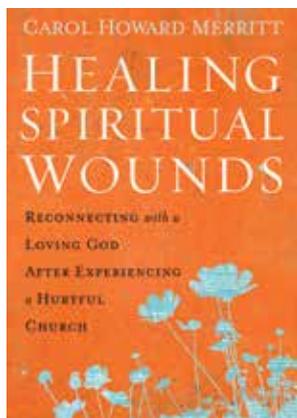
cedes, so this approach of focusing on her flock is natural, but her ministry also extends to writing a column for *The Christian Century* as well as writing books, speaking, running conferences and workshops and podcasting.

She often leads workshops for pastors and spiritual directors (many of whom, she says, suffer from spiritual wounds themselves), helping them to understand “how they can connect with a more life-giving theology.” These workshop sessions often open with a problem or story, analyzing the thinking behind the problem, imagining a more life-giving theology rooted in the Christian tradition versus one that teaches people that God was behind what wounded them, and practicing disciplines that embody healing, including prayer, writing and conversation. Each chapter in *Healing Spiritual Wounds* follows this same strategy.

The aftermath experience of many victims “happens internally,” she said in an interview, so telling the stories of people she has pastored has helped her to frame the experience of spiritual abuse “to think about it more

practically.” As she writes in the book, the more she worked with abuse victims, the more she saw “patterns in the ways we found healing,” which helped her to realize “God was calling me to help people to separate religious wounds from their positive experiences with God and to restore the latter.”

Complicating the notion of healing or recovery from abuse is the notion that abuse can occur both on an individual and an institutional level. Rev. Merritt experienced this personally from her abusive father and through her sister’s experience of an abusive pastor. In the case of the pastor, she told me in an interview that “the covering up was a whole other realm of hurt.” Some of the process toward healing she describes is “understanding the urge to protect the organization because it serves a higher good.” However, that protective urge often arises because of fear that the abused person “might destroy the institution.” And, Rev. Merritt says, covering up abuse “goes against how we should be as Christians” because of the value of confession and reconciliation and our commitment to them.



◀ The Rev. Carol Howard Merritt

## STRUCTURES OF SIN

According to Kathryn Joyce, who has written about fundamentalist and evangelical Christian churches for many years and recently wrote about large-scale cover-ups of abuse in evangelical missionary communities for *The New Republic*, hiding abuse is often tied into notions of authoritarianism. In churches “where there’s a heavy emphasis on obedience” and “unquestioning respect toward leaders,” there is a pattern of “subsuming the interests of the individual to protect the mission,” she wrote.

But the coverup of abuse in some churches is also complicated by patriarchal structures in which women and children in particular have little agency. According to Ms. Joyce, in communities like Quiverfull, the extreme focus on female modesty as a source of temptation to men results in situations like that of a young girl she encountered who was being abused by an older man, “but people were talking about whether or not she was boy crazy and had brought that on.”

Sarah Jones, who grew up in a fundamentalist, homeschooling family and has written about her experiences of abuse at the Baptist-run Cedarville College, says this notion of women as tempters was taught to her from a young age: “You are told God designed you to be submissive, and that your body is a stumbling block to men. These doctrines are not particularly conducive to creating a culture that takes sexual abuse seriously. They instead encourage shame and silence.”

The Rev. Merritt explained in our conversation that this second-guessing of abuse victims is related to the concept of gaslighting, which occurs when a victim is told that what she or he is experiencing is all in the imagination. “One way in which the church powerfully protects itself,” she says, “is by diminishing testimony of victims.” Examples of this might include telling the person “they must have misunderstood” the abuse, questioning their story or telling them in subtle ways that they are lying. All of these actions serve to protect the institution, but at the expense of the victims. Rev.

Merritt explains that this becomes spiritual abuse because the church itself can be so closely associated with God that “the person is beginning to believe that God doesn’t believe them,” and ultimately, the victims may come to see themselves and their lived experience as untrustworthy. Our image of God is often based on God’s role as “protector and provider, which is sound theology,” Rev. Merritt said, but when abuse occurs, “something breaks down” in the victim’s understanding of God.

Abuse can also be magnified by sexism, which can be built into church structures, Rev. Merritt said. In her book, she writes that to call a church patriarchal does not specifically blame men; rather it is a term that can be applied to any system that promotes unearned advantages that are available only to men. When this extends to a church’s theology, it makes women and children more vulnerable to spiritual abuse. Patriarchal theology, which is theology that promotes these unearned advantages, can result in women feeling that “their understanding of doctrine can’t be trusted or they have to submit to male authority,” which can lead to a crisis of women questioning their own “internal authority.”

In families that rely on literal interpretation of Scripture, abuse by a husband, father or male pastor is often brushed off as part of a Biblical understanding that the father, even if he is abusive, is always the head of the family and his behavior cannot be questioned. Kathryn Joyce adds that spiritual abuse can have profoundly alienating effects on women and children brought up in very strict religious environments. She cites the work of Boz Tchividjian, the grandson of the evangelical superstar Billy Graham, who began his career as a legal prosecutor working on sex abuses cases and now runs GRACE, an organization that works with abuse victims in Protestant and evangelical churches. Mr. Tchividjian says that abuse is most likely to occur in church settings where there is an unhealthy emphasis on obedience, which makes it less likely for victims to speak up.

Ms. Joyce explains that for devout people, “having their faith perverted” by abuse “is extraordinarily painful and can take away one of the most important parts of their lives when they most need it.” Organizations like GRACE often find that churches use their religious authority to “coerce victims and survivors” by telling them not to speak up because they will hurt the church or by convincing them that they have been complicit in the sin. Christians who work on this issue, she says, find this spiritual abuse one

of the most harmful aspects of abusive patterns. And Sarah Jones adds that “fundamentalist churches often teach that psychology is a sinful, atheistic profession,” and this becomes another obstacle to victims seeking help.

While examples of abuse are more common in fundamentalist and traditionalist churches with a dominant leader, they occur in other settings as well. In Boston, some of the Catholic priests who abused victims were known as forward-thinking, friendly, down-to-earth priests. And yet, what they had in common with these other abusers was the ability to take advantage of a deeply religious person’s vulnerability. A clergy member who abuses always begins that abuse in a place of trust. And for the religious victim, the breaking of that trust often leads to the breaking of their faith.

### FINDING FREEDOM IN FAITH

Rev. Merritt said in our interview that the image of a God who suffers with us can play a role in helping people recover from a broken understanding of God after abuse. The image of a God who “suffers with us” can offer more consolation to the abused, because that parental God is present to our suffering. Devotions by women to Our Lady of Sorrows, for example, allow abused women to imagine a God who feels the same pain they do. This suffering God helps a victim of spiritual abuse to be “more resilient,” because they now have a “suffering parent walking with us and suffering with us.” Throughout her book, Rev. Merritt emphasizes that the pastoral approach to dealing with spiritual abuse must occur at both a community level and the individual level. Victims need to be heard, acknowledged and understood.

But at what point is a religious institution so broken by abuse that it can never be mended? In *Healing Spiritual Wounds*, Rev. Merritt tells the story of a gay man who confessed to her that he hated the church he grew up in, where he frequently heard sermons that preached against people who identified as gay or lesbian. This went on for years and caused his family to reject him when he came out. Yet the man told Rev. Merritt that until he made peace with Christianity, he would never feel peace. “Even though the church caused much of the suffering and violence in his soul,” she writes, “he could not simply walk away from his beliefs.”

The solution she proposed in our interview is one of “a lot of apologizing, listening and understanding.” Christianity, she says, remains a “life-giving stream,” and the Catholic Church has, in spite of being repeatedly broken by abuse, also brought “life and healing.” We need to keep

“acknowledging and confessing that toxicity” while understanding that healing from abuse is “intentional hard work and process.” All churches can learn from a theology of suffering, feminist theology and “the chorus of voices from around the world” that represent the same marginalized parts of the church Pope Francis so often reminds Catholics to listen to. And who are more marginalized than victims of abuse?

Listening to the victims of abuse and understanding the structures and beliefs that make it possible is a painful and ongoing process in every Christian denomination, but any possible healing begins with an understanding of what Henri Nouwen wrote about the transformative moment of compassion in *The Wounded Healer*: “Who can take away suffering without entering it?” This is what Christ, of all people, understood.

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Kaya Oakes teaches writing at the University of California, Berkeley, and is the author of *The Nones Are Alright*. She lives in her hometown of Oakland, Calif.

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# NO PLACE LIKE N(☺☺☺)OME

*A trip to the country's oldest  
Catholic radio station*

By Pauline Hovey

In an exceptionally isolated corner of western Alaska, where most people travel by snowmobile or dogsled, four recent college graduates from the lower 48 are tucked inside a small house known as KNOM, the oldest Catholic radio station in the country. Outside, the thermometer registers minus 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Broadcasting news, local weather, music and lessons in the Inupiaq language, capped off with the nightly rosary, these volunteers provide a lifeline to approximately 20,000 listeners spread throughout the town of Nome and surrounding villages. It is early March, and I have come to celebrate the birthday of my only

son, Davis. He is one of these KNOM volunteers.

Each year, several 20-somethings make a commitment to a one-year internship in Nome. They undergo an extensive application and interview process to determine whether they have what it takes to thrive in an area where daylight dwindles to three and a half hours in December and the landscape remains frozen and white for about seven months of the year. Being Catholic or having an active faith life is not a requirement. Having an open mind and willingness to grow while serving the poor and marginalized in a culturally rich and challenging area is.

Photos courtesy of the author



KNOM reporters land in a remote village of western Alaska to cover a news story.

### ☞ VOICES IN THE WILDERNESS

Every morning since arriving in Nome I have walked out onto the frozen Bering Sea to greet the sunrise. Markers dot the landscape where crab pots have been lowered into holes dug into 40 feet of solid ice. Tiny shacks appear, evidence that miners dredge here in hopes of striking gold. In the late 1800s the Gold Rush put Nome on the map and

increased its population to about 20,000. But as gold prospects dwindled so did the population; today there are fewer than 4,000 residents.

Along Front Street, one of only three roads leading out of town, I count several bars. With its harsh climate, limited job prospects and extravagant cost of food and necessities (groceries I purchased cost three times what I pay back home), it is easy to understand why the area deals with

high rates of poverty and alcoholism. Domestic abuse also plagues some families. Despite these challenges, Nome boasts an immense sense of community.

“Life is incredibly hard here compared to the lower 48,” says Ric Schmidt, the recently retired general manager of KNOM. “People need to pull together just to survive.”

Mr. Schmidt worked at KNOM for 24 years and raised his six children here. He met his future wife, Lynette, when they were both KNOM volunteers in 1984-85. Although they returned to Oregon for several years, the Schmidts eventually made their way back to Nome.

“The kindness I’ve experienced, the closeness to nature, the people showing up for each other...if you want to have a very enhanced life, you put yourself in a situation that matters,” Mr. Schmidt says. “And this is it. I wanted my children to have that.”

Covering an area of about 100,000 square miles from the Yukon Delta to the Bering Strait, KNOM’s signal reaches the most rural stretches of the Alaskan bush, where no roads lead. “A bit of a North Star,” is how Mr. Schmidt describes the station, which provides many listeners their only access to news and often their only communication with the outside world.

Through the years, heavy snowstorms; debilitating, dense fog; even volcanic eruptions have stranded residents, shut down the airport and stopped the delivery of mail and groceries to the town. In 2004 and again in 2005, Nome experienced back-to-back, once-in-100-years storms that knocked out electricity for as many as 134 hours in 2005 alone. Using backup generators, KNOM remained on the air, providing updates and emotional and spiritual support.

With its inspirational spots, marine forecast and Village Hotline program, which broadcasts messages sent in by listeners, KNOM has quite literally saved lives, Mr. Schmidt says. “Sometimes it’s a mom needing to hear a kind voice on the radio when she’s alone and trying to reduce her child’s 102-degree fever. Or a fisherman deciding not to take his boat out after hearing a storm is coming. And sometimes it’s an alcoholic ready to kill himself and, in listening to the station, hears that God loves him and it turns his life around.... What we’re doing is making a difference.”

Seeing the impact of the station on the lives of listeners helped Margaret DeMaioribus discern she was being called back to fulfill KNOM’s mission. Like Ric Schmidt, Ms. DeMaioribus started out as a volunteer. She served from 2012 to 2013 and then returned to her native Pennsylvania. Two years later she accepted a position as KNOM’s

outreach coordinator and news director. This June she took over Mr. Schmidt’s role as general manager.

Ms. DeMaioribus said that as a Catholic radio station, KNOM’s mission is to serve by being a “respectful companion” to Alaskan native peoples. More than 200 tribes of indigenous people live in the state, and western Alaska is home to several of them. “Historically, native Alaskans feel they have not been heard or cared about in the lower 48. Our job is to make sure their voices are heard,” she said.

KNOM broadcasts traditional music, cultural events, storytelling and lessons in the Inupiaq language while also reporting on issues like climate change and opioid addiction, both of which are tangible threats to native lives. In the process, KNOM stays faithful to Catholic ideals by recognizing the dignity of the human person in how they report a story, promoting care for the earth and encouraging respect for elders—values shared by indigenous culture.

Roy Ashenfelter, a native Alaskan and lifelong Nome resident, has been listening to KNOM since it first aired. As a hunter and fisherman who relies on nature’s resources for sustenance, he says KNOM’s weather advisories are “vital.” Beyond that, he is grateful for the traditional chanting and music KNOM plays.

“We’ve grown up listening to and learning from our culture,” Mr. Ashenfelter explains. “When I hear certain Eskimo songs on the radio, they help me remember, and they connect me to that moment when I was out there hunting and the seal gave itself to me to be able to feed my family.”

After a successful hunt, Mr. Ashenfelter says he always invites “as many people to eat with us as possible. When you share, you give back to the resources. And KNOM keeps you in touch with that tradition.”

When possible, KNOM flies the volunteers to remote villages to cover the impact of environmental issues on the Alaskan way of life. My son, Davis, reported on a village that had to vote on whether they would relocate before erosion caused their land to disappear. He has visited villages that lack basic infrastructure and access to potable water. He has learned to use a honey bucket and met people living in conditions even more trying than in Nome, all of which have made him reset his priorities.

“Each time I speak to one of these native Alaskans, I am struck by the wisdom they have about their natural environment,” he told me. “The sense of respect they have for each other and the land and animals is at the root of their lifestyle, and there is a general sense of welcome and generosity to anyone who is coming to live here, even if only temporarily.”



Davis Hovey reports the news at the recently refurbished KNOM studios.

## 📻 FROM THE GROUND UP

Although the idea for a radio station had surfaced in Nome in the 1960s, it did not materialize until Tom Busch, a young broadcast engineer and graduate of Boston College, moved to Alaska in 1970 to build the station. Mr. Busch found the land for the transmitter tower and, together with dozens of volunteers, dug into the frozen ground for months, using their own equipment to get the tower planted and operational. He worked 12 to 15 hours a day to build the tower and get the paperwork for the Federal Communications Commission completed.

On July 14, 1971, Robert Whelan, S.J., the bishop of the Diocese of Fairbanks, Alaska, pressed “play” to transmit the station’s very first program. That Sunday, Alaskans could tune in for Mass, broadcast live from St. Joseph’s Church in Nome.

In its early years, KNOM had a unique partnership with the local hospital and the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. KNOM provided the hospital with much-needed doctors and nurses, who came to Nome as J.V.C. volunteers and donated their entire pay to keep the station running. In exchange, the volunteers received room and board at KNOM’s community complex. That relationship ended in the early 1990s, and today KNOM is supported entirely by donors, many of whom live in the lower 48. Local fundraising is not an option, given the area’s subsistence lifestyle.

“We have a very strong story to tell,” Mr. Schmidt says, “and these donors feel that KNOM is a good investment.”

Still, paying the salaries of six staff members and stipends for several volunteers every year, plus the day-to-day costs of running and maintaining the studio and community house, makes every day a financial struggle. “Sometimes, like earlier this year, we wonder how we are going to keep the doors open and stay on the air,” Mr. Schmidt says.

Despite operating with a small staff and limited budget, KNOM has garnered numerous awards, including some from the Alaska Broadcasters Association, the Alaska Press Club and the Gabriel Award for Radio Station of the Year from the Catholic Academy for Communication Arts Professionals—an award they have received 19 times.

## 📻 A TIME FOR GROWTH

Coming to KNOM, with its impressive reputation and offer of exciting new experiences, might be considered a positive career move and, at the very least, an adventure. Volunteers get to cover the Iditarod—the annual 1,000-mile dogsled race that culminates in Nome—meet visitors from all over the world and view the breathtaking aurora borealis.

“Alaska is a unique place, and I think it takes a unique person to want to come up here,” Ms. DeMaioribus says. In choosing the volunteers, she says she looks for “who is called” to dedicate a year to serving this region “in more ca-



Katie Clark, an early KNOM volunteer, reports from the Iditarod trail.

Photo courtesy of KNOM

pacities than they can imagine while being stretched in so many ways.”

Living in community—both in the KNOM volunteer house as well as in the community at large—is one way volunteers are stretched. In this age of addictive social media, they must live with limited bandwidth and no cable TV, finding other options for entertainment during the long, dark winter.

I was impressed by how adaptable Davis and his fellow volunteers have been in the face of these challenges. Davis immersed himself in the culture, taking classes on sewing animal skins, learning to fillet salmon and joining local indoor soccer and basketball teams.

Karen Trop, who arrived from a small town in Pennsylvania, says she has been stretched well beyond her comfortable boundaries while maturing in her ability to understand and handle the world. “Seeing the people’s subsistence lifestyle and intentional thought behind their hunting, collecting berries and firewood, their intentional ways of respecting nature and taking from its bounty have impacted me deeply,” she says—so deeply, she has already committed to another year with KNOM.

In addition to housing, room and board, personal days and a stipend, KNOM provides three annual retreats off campus. No matter their religious affiliation, Ms. DeMaioribus asks the volunteers to take this time to reflect on the bigger questions: Where are you called to be? What is your pur-

pose? Why are you here? How can you find solidarity with the people who live here and experience these challenges year after year?

Without realizing it, these volunteers are being exposed to Catholic ideals concerning the respect and dignity of life, as well as the need for discernment and reflection, for looking within oneself in the midst of darkness. They have benefited from this experience in ways they could not have imagined when they signed on. They have seen, up close and personal, the effects of climate change, the spirituality of the wilderness and the generosity and simplicity of impoverished indigenous people, all while remaining in the United States.

“For every year the volunteers spend here, I would compare it to three to five years of experience anywhere else because they are exposed to so much,” Mr. Schmidt told me. “I always like to tell the volunteers, ‘You’ll be unpacking this experience for the rest of your lives.’”

Ten months into his commitment, my son, Davis, decided he could still use more experience. He has accepted the position of news director, which means he will be staying for at least another year. It looks like I will be returning to Nome.

---

*Pauline Hovey is a freelance writer in El Paso, Tex., where she volunteers with Catholic and Christian communities to accompany migrants and refugees.*

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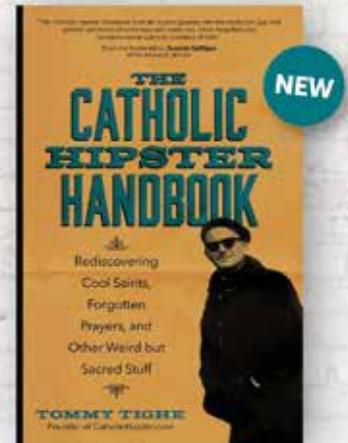
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# *Death & Life in the Afternoon: A meditation on bullfighting*

By Angela Alaimo O'Donnell



There are six bulls killed in the course of a bullfight, each one chosen for his strength, agility and intelligence.

across Spain, but for him, Pamplona was ground zero. He immortalized his passion for the experience in *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), his encyclopedic paean to bullfighting that chronicles its history, ceremony and traditions.

I have been to only two bullfights in my life. My first was when I was a 17-year old student visiting Madrid. Like most of the *jovenes* who lacked funds, I sat up in the nosebleed section, where the party was lively but the action was so distant the bull and matador looked like toy figures. My second one was this past July when I found myself in Pamplona during the San Fermin festival. In a month of traveling through Spain and Basque country, with each new town and city I visited, Hemingway seemed to be there. So it seemed apropos and inevitable that my accidental shadowing of him should culminate here, sitting in the same bullring he once sat in, the year of the 85th anniversary of the publication of *Death in the Afternoon*.

This second bullfight would prove a very different experience from my first. No longer one of the *jovenes* (alas), I had an excellent seat, *sombra* (in the shade), and four rows back from the action. I had traded, along with my youth, too far away for too, too close. I was able to see everything: the matadors in their impossibly tight pants, the pink-and-yellow capes they tossed about with a flourish, the long swords they would brandish and jam into the bull's neck, and, of course, the cen-

tral focus for the 20,000 spectators in the ring—the bull.

The bull enters the ring running. The first impression the spectator gets is what a gorgeous beast he is. There are six bulls killed in the course of a bullfight, each one chosen for his strength, agility, intelligence and temperament. (Hemingway claims they are bred to be “vicious.” Whether this is true or not is unclear. What is clear is that no matador wants to fight a placid bull.) Each enters the ring young, beautiful, magnificent, at the height of his powers, and at the end of the 20-minute bullfight, each leaves the ring dead, his bloodied body drawn across the dusty ring and out the main gate by a team of horses. This is the tragedy whereof Hemingway speaks. The creature explodes onto the stage, full of passion and purpose, and meets his death in the form of the aptly named *matador* (“killer”)—gradually, painfully, inexorably. As with any tragedy, it is hard to watch. We feel compassion for the bull—in part because we understand that the bull is us. The bullfight enacts the human drama each of us participates in. We all enter the arena of life unspeakably beautiful, and none of us gets out alive.

Bullfighting is not a sport—it is a tragedy. It is also a form of wish fulfillment. As the bull is enacting his drama, so is the matador. It is chilling, thrilling, terrifying to watch a thousand pounds of muscled animal run full bore at the slim, impeccably dressed man who stands before him defending himself with nothing but a

“Bullfighting is not a sport—it is a tragedy,” Ernest Hemingway once wrote. And he ought to know. Having traveled to Pamplona nine times for the annual festival of San Fermin, a nine-day celebration that features the infamous running of the bulls in addition to a bullfight every night of the *fiesta*, Hemingway had become an aficionado of the art. He also witnessed bullfights in other cities



In a bullfight, death is brought to its knees. The matador lives to fight another day.

cloth cape. It is an absurdity. The bull is death on four legs. Who among us would not take refuge in running (as hundreds of people did earlier in the day at the running of the bulls)? But the matador stands his ground. He taunts death. He prods death, poking him with *banderillas*. And he dances with death, arching and turning his body, making the most graceful of arabesques, his cape accentuating the arc of his movements, while the big, dumb beast that is death tries to catch him, to trip him up, to run him through

with his terrible horns. This time it is not the bull that is us, it is the matador, doing what we all seek to do—evade our inevitable mortality.

Bullfighting is wish fulfillment because, unless something goes terribly wrong, the matador wins. After keeping death at bay, making it bend to his will, treating it with respect but also making it look like a fool—this tiny man and this great big bull—the matador kills him with a single sword inserted in the hump behind the creature's head, aimed at the massive heart

that beats beneath. It is a graceful, artful, consummately dangerous endeavor—as apt a description of life as of a bullfight. Only in the end, life wins. Death is brought to its knees, dispatched and dragged out of the ring. The matador lives to fight another day.

Bullfighting is alien to our sensibilities. It is, undoubtedly, cruel to the animal. It is a dreadful thing to behold a team of picadors, banderilleros and matadors conspiring to goad a fellow creature to anger and then kill him for purposes of entertainment. Sitting in

Photo: Stockphoto.com/Christian Martínez Kempin

the stands, watching the ritual unfold, we become complicit in the killing. We have come of our own free will to witness it. Our euros pay the salaries of the bullfighters and provide the fodder for the bulls. How can a person of conscience participate in such a brutal endeavor? Animal activists across Spain have been trying to ban the practice for years, and sitting in the stands four rows back in *sombra*, one can see why. I could have wept for the suffering creature. And yet, I watched. Watched with a level of attention I have rarely experienced. It was undeniably terrible. And it was strangely, savagely, beautiful.

“Anything capable of arousing passion in its favor will surely raise as much passion against it,” Hemingway wrote. Bullfighting aficionados oppose the claims of cruelty. They will tell you that the fighting bull lives wild in the forest for five years, eating and breeding, and dies after fighting for 20 minutes in the ring. His meat cow cousins live a scant 18 months in close captivity and meet their death in a slaughterhouse, standing in line, watching and smelling their fellows die helpless before them. There is nothing powerful or graceful about their deaths. They are never feared or revered. Their lives are not sacrificed, bull by bull. They die nameless and en masse. This I know because it has been told to me. I have never witnessed animals dying in a slaughterhouse, and I pray I never will. Yet I am complicit in this, too. I eat meat. I wear leather shoes.

Bullfighting has been taking place in Pamplona for over 500 years. Its roots are as much pagan as they are Christian, both of which traditions place great value on blood sacrifice. It

## This, a Gospel

By Devin Kelly

In the beginning my beginning hummed  
with the sound of a thousand other beginnings.  
Now, when I say *light*, I stare away from sun  
& into your body. If I am to be in possession  
of anything, I want it to be my state of witness.  
How difficult to see the consanguinity of rivers,  
one leading toward one, the air the blown kiss  
swims & the kiss itself, its fist & fever.  
We are born of word & the word travels.  
You hear it at night, the train's rattling moan,  
dust's physicality, a country of mothers unraveling  
& your heart beating out of you a mountain.  
See this flesh of words, this song, yes, see this  
dying. Who can live through it without crying.

Devin Kelly co-hosts the *Dead Rabbits Reading Series* in New York City. He is the author of the books *Blood on Blood* (Unknown Press) and *In This Quiet Church of Night, I Say Amen* (forthcoming 2017, CCM Press).



Bullfighting has been taking place in Pamplona for over 500 years. Its roots are as much pagan as they are Christian.

Festival of San Fermin. Photo: iStockphoto.com/Bonilla1879

is noteworthy that at the festival of San Fermin, men and women traditionally dress in white and wear red kerchiefs around their necks and red sashes around their waists. This symbolic clothing commemorates the death of San Fermin, patron saint of Navarre, who was martyred for his faith. The red garments recall his sacrifice, each man and woman at the *fiesta* enacting his beheading.

“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church,” Tertullian once wrote. Without blood there is no faith, no resurrection, no salvation. The death of the bull is somehow part of this tradition. The animal is sacrificed. Its meat is eaten. Its death gives life. The killing is lamentable and necessary. It is a telling fact that the word *blessing* in English comes from the Old English word, *blud*. There is no blessing without blood. What I did not expect to discover during my two hours at the bullring is the deeply Catholic nature of bullfighting, the

way the ritual echoes the sacrifice of the Mass. For, weirdly, the bull is Jesus, too—the beautiful god who must die, whose flesh is eaten and whose blood is drunk. This is not such a stretch as it might seem. In ancient times, among some cultures, the bull was regarded as a sacred creature and was thought to be divine. Bullfighting (as in Pamplona) took place in the context of a larger religious celebration. This might help to account for its irresistible appeal to the Catholic convert, Hemingway, as well as its appeal to the people of Spain, a country where Catholicism has taken bloody forms for centuries.

Bullfighting is not a sport—it is a tragedy. I watched six bulls die in Pamplona. I was moved by their deaths. I was moved by the respect the matadors paid to the bulls, as worthy opponents, by the way they spoke to them as they eased them toward their demise. I was moved by the fact that the ritual killing was carried out in the

same way it has been carried out for centuries with the same denouement. No modern technology intervenes in the elemental encounter—no machinery, no high-powered weapons, no armor, no safety net. I watched a drama unfold in the same way it has unfolded for 500 years and more. I felt pity and I felt fear: for the bull, for the bullfighter, for us. I have been to only two bullfights in my life, but twice was enough. I have been marked indelibly by what I saw. Unlike Hemingway, I do not need to return to the bullring. After our month of travel together, we parted ways. For better or for worse, I carry the bullring inside me.

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Angela Alaimo O'Donnell teaches English literature, American Catholic studies and creative writing at Fordham University in New York City and serves as associate director of the Curran Center for American Catholic Studies.

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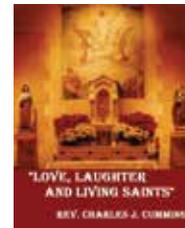
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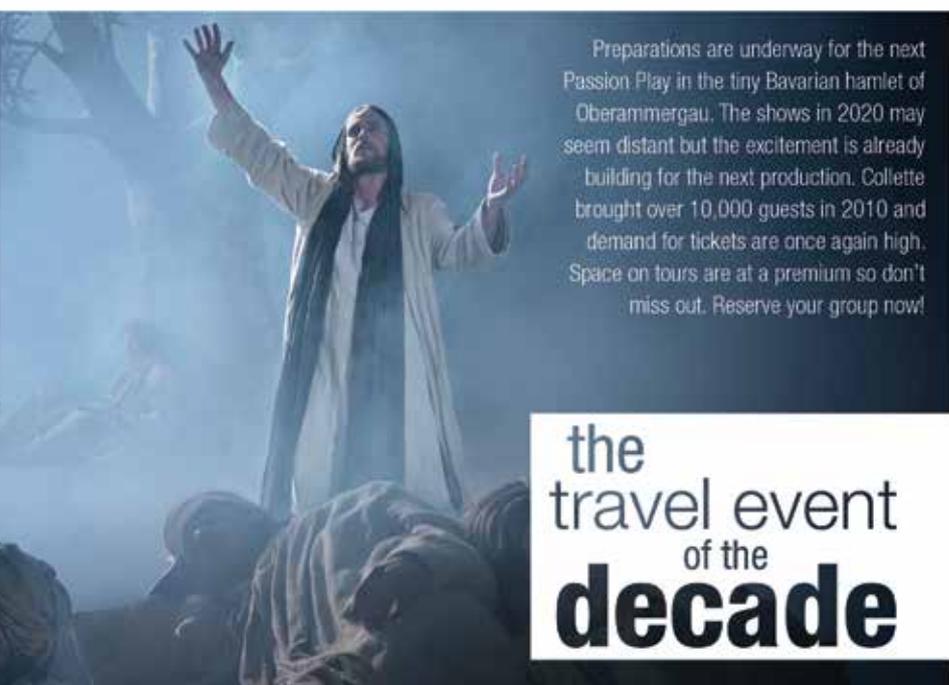
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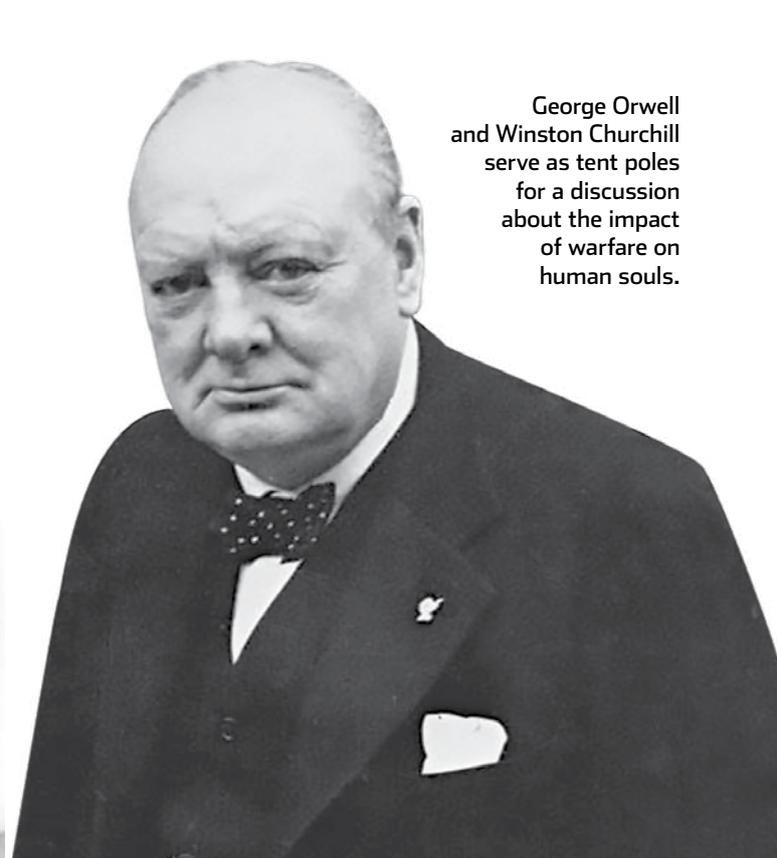
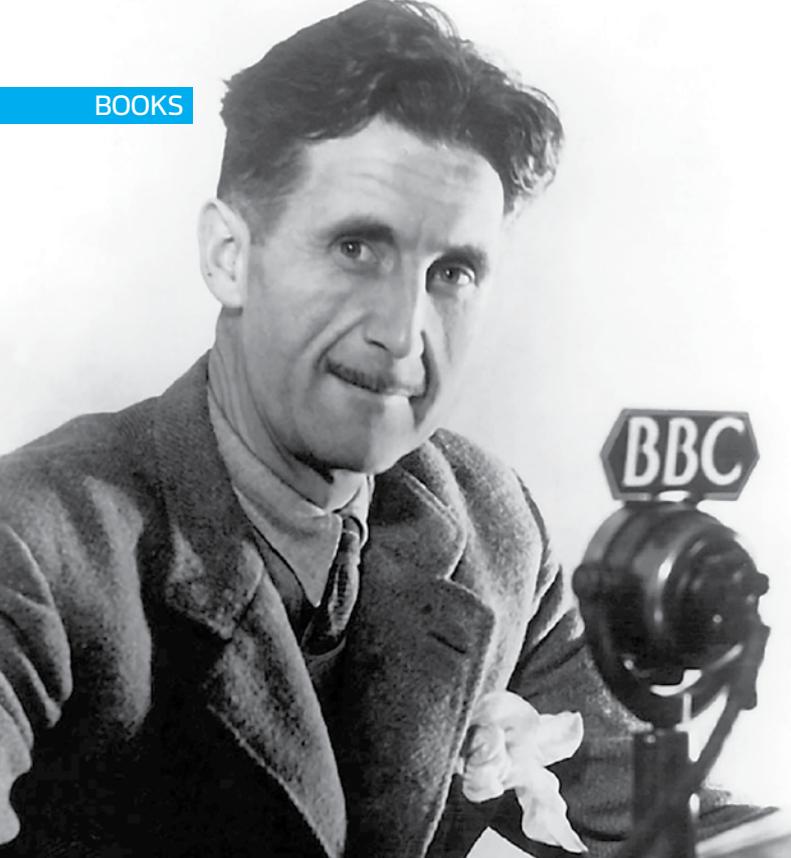
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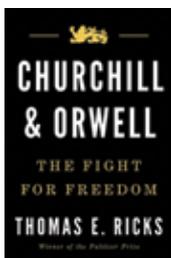
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George Orwell and Winston Churchill serve as tent poles for a discussion about the impact of warfare on human souls.

## Writers and truth tellers, defined by war

By Thomas Maier



**Churchill and Orwell**  
The Fight for Freedom  
By Thomas E. Ricks  
Penguin Press  
352p \$28

As a refreshing tonic for our arid, “fake news”-filled political wilderness, Thomas E. Ricks reminds us of the virtues of intellectual honesty and moral courage with his dual biography *Churchill and Orwell: The Fight for Freedom*. This book holds a particular value these days for those who may need a reminder about the evils of autocratic rule and how quickly modern society can deprive individuals of their basic human liberties.

In an engaging style, Ricks, an author and former prize-winning journalist for *The Washington Post*, re-

calls the highs and lows of both men’s prodigious lives with a reporter’s precision and brevity. It is also a mark of a gifted historian like Ricks to find tidbits that delight even the most knowledgeable of Churchillians and weave them into a narrative that still seems fresh and new.

At first glance, the premise of this book seems preposterous. The men never met and their career paths barely intersected in pre-war Britain. Though both men suffered difficult childhoods with severe and disapproving fathers, Churchill and Orwell became very different types as adults. One (Churchill) was an extrovert, a man of the people esteemed by millions for his stirring speeches and leadership during World War II; the other (Orwell) a cranky, inward-looking writer whose best work—notably *Animal Farm* and *1984*, both allegorical novels about the misuse of power

and language—didn’t emerge until he experienced the cauldron of war.

Yet Ricks skillfully uses the men as tent poles for a broader discussion about the impact of perpetual warfare on human souls, how governments lie through euphemisms and manicured deceits, and how even peacetime can lower our defenses to the loss of liberty. As a reader, I enjoyed this mix-and-match comparison of two iconic figures in which the total effect is more than the sum of their biographies. That Ricks is able to pull together these very disparate lives into a coherent analysis, with a surprise finale, is his great triumph.

Despite their differences, Orwell and Churchill shared an uncommon felicity with language and a healthy respect for truth-telling. Both were fundamentally writers at heart. Orwell often wrote for the *Observer* newspaper run by wealthy owner David Astor,

*“Despite their differences, Orwell and Churchill shared an uncommon felicity with language.”*

while Churchill’s published articles appeared in newspapers owned by his longtime confidant, Lord Beaverbrook, and other conservative-minded friends.

War helped define each of them. Ricks describes Orwell as a mediocre novelist who was a socialist until his journalistic experiences in the Spanish Civil War awoke him to the corrosive impact of Soviet-style communism and its far-left adherents in the press. “In Spain for the first time I saw a newspaper reports which did not bear any relation to the facts,” he recalled.

While in the trenches in 1937, Orwell was struck in the neck by a sniper from the fascist side. Though he managed to survive, his health would never be the same. As the bullet passed through him, Orwell recalled, “I felt a tremendous shock—no pain, only a violent shock, such as you get from an electrical terminal; with it a sense of other weakness, a feeling of being stricken and shriveled up to nothing.”

Churchill, who won the 1953 Nobel Prize in Literature, also relied on book-writing and journalism for his basic income. His earliest dispatches made him famous as a young man. He wrote about witnessing soldiers die bravely in battle in places like Afghanistan and India. During the Boer War in South Africa, his account of being shot at and taken prisoner had all the comic derring-do of an Indiana Jones movie. “Nothing in life is so exhilarating as to be shot at without result,” he remarked.

With prodigious writing, Churchill subsidized his family’s lifestyle at their Chartwell mansion and helped to educate himself about the world, especially the looming menace of Hitler in the early 1930s. When Prime Minis-

ter Neville Chamberlain’s attempts at appeasing the Nazis failed, Churchill took charge in 1940 and quickly put his powerful, soaring rhetoric to work. “I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat,” he said in his first address as prime minister, echoing a poem by Lord Byron.

Soon after, Churchill used language to rally the British people after one of its most embarrassing military fiascos—the massive evacuation of Allied forces at Dunkirk. “We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender,” he intoned. Unlike lesser politicians, Ricks points out, Churchill remained candid about the near capture of the British army by the Germans. “We must be very careful not to assign to this deliverance the attributes of a victory,” he said, adding to his credibility and trust by the public.

While Churchill, the British Empire’s most faithful disciple, and Orwell didn’t agree on the merits of imperialism, they did view this world war as vital to saving the essential freedoms of Western civilization. “If this war is about anything at all,” Orwell declared, “it was a war in favor of freedom of thought.” When Hitler bombed London and seemed ready to invade, these two men remained resolute while others predicted defeat. “Many people around them expected evil to triumph and sought to make their peace with it,” Ricks describes. “These two did not. They responded with courage and clear sightedness.”

As social observers, generally from opposite ends of the political spectrum, both men were keenly aware of En-

gland’s long-held class divisions. “It is a land of snobbery and privilege, ruled largely by the old and silly,” Orwell lambasted. Churchill, whose mother was American-born, insisted to Navy leaders that promotions be based on merit rather than lineage.

Orwell, like many, admired Churchill for his moral courage in standing up to the Nazi threat. But in his memorable postwar novels, *Animal Farm* and then *1984*, Orwell provided a lasting critique of the subtle dangers of a totalitarian rule. Phrases from his books—including “Big Brother,” “doublethink” and the unforgettable line “All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others”—speak to us today in a world of increasing state surveillance, where being “safe” for many is more important than being free.

Although Churchill was often lauded as the most important person of the 20th century, Orwell might well be the true clarion for this one. After assessing both men’s lives from the vantage of history, Ricks concludes: “All told, in terms of contemporary influence, Orwell arguably has surpassed Churchill.”

---

Thomas Maier is the author of five books, including *When Lions Roar: The Churchills and the Kennedys* (Crown, 2015).

## A housing policy built on sand

*The Color of Law* is the sort of book that gets cited in briefs to the U.S. Supreme Court, and sometimes in court opinions themselves. And briefs there should be, on cases yet to be brought, to overturn the U.S. Supreme Court's stunningly obtuse decision in the 2007 case *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, 551 U.S. 701. The case struck down public school desegregation plans. In his decision, Chief Justice Roberts wrote, "Where [racial imbalance] is a product not of state action but of private choices, it does not have constitutional implications."

Rothstein's book takes the factual stuffing out of Roberts's diktat. The

author makes it indisputably clear that the existence of African-American housing concentrations in the poorest parts of U.S. cities and towns, served by inadequate public schools, is not a result of blacks choosing to live there, but rather, it is a result of blacks being compelled to move into these areas by government action.

Rothstein relates how the Federal Housing Administration refused to guarantee housing loans in integrated developments (the origin of red-lining), how courts enforced racial covenants on property, how police forces failed to protect African-American buyers in white neighborhoods from violence and how highways and urban redevelopment zones were routed through African-American neighborhoods near city centers to get blacks

out of the way. This is all state action, not private, and it has given us the brutish situation that we have today of a nation divided into housing zones by skin color.

So Chief Justice Roberts got it exactly wrong in the PICS case. Government action at every level has caused segregated housing in the United States. How long will it take to get it right, and how long can justice wait? But when that day comes, and it will come, I am betting that the court's decision will cite Rothstein's *The Color of Law*.

---

Nicholas Cafardi is the former dean of Duquesne Law School, Pittsburgh, Pa.

## Facts on the ground

In *A Land Without Borders*, the Israeli journalist and novelist Nir Baram travels through the West Bank and East Jerusalem to "examine, as frankly as possible, the connection between [his] own political views and the West Bank reality." Baram contends that even most Israelis do not understand the reality in the West Bank. Baram's journey becomes our journey and Baram our guide. He introduces the reader to disparate voices in the seemingly unending debate about Israel and Palestine coexistence.

Some interview subjects are extremely close to the conflict, having lost family members, their livelihood and a sense of identity. Others are removed, rarely if ever interacting with those on the other side. We are forced

to question the notions of home, land and nation. Baram allows the words of his subjects to shed light on the injustices imposed on the Palestinian people, including lack of voting rights, property ownership and the freedom of movement. The Israeli state builds walls straight through the middle of neighborhoods. The walls divide families. Israeli settlements prohibit Palestinians from tending to their land. Israeli checkpoints restrict Palestinians from accessing their job sites. When Baram prods certain Jewish subjects about Palestinian rights, it becomes apparent that a sense of ethnic heritage blinds some into believing that land is more important than people.

After reading *A Land Without Borders*, I know more about the reality in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, but I am no less confused than before.

And maybe that is the lesson. Baram walks us through a complex reality, not to simplify or explain it, but to experience it. He delivers a more complete picture, which is a good starting place. "It's difficult to talk about a solution when you have no idea what the problem you are discussing looks like," he writes.

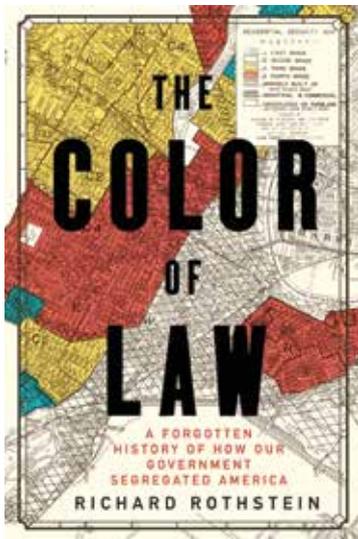
Principally, the reader questions the concept of "the other." And this examination should appeal to all people, not only those in Israel and Palestine.

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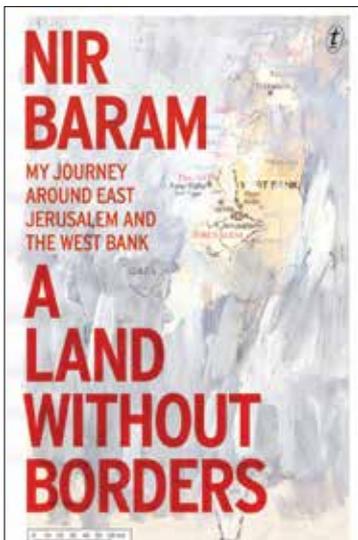
Elizabeth Webb is a senior intelligence analyst at iJET International in Annapolis, Md.



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**The Color of Law**  
A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America  
By Richard Rothstein  
Liveright. 368p \$27.95



**A Land Without Borders**  
My Journey Around East Jerusalem and the West Bank  
By Nir Baram  
Text Publishing Company. 200p  
\$16.95 [paperback]

## Witness to suffering

Researchers have made tremendous gains in understanding how trauma lodges in our brains and our bodies, stuck there as unprocessed sensory experiences we are cursed to relive, as if these experiences are not memories but are happening right now. Elizabeth Strout's excellent new short story collection, *Anything Is Possible*, offers an array of harrowing and poignant case studies portraying this legacy of trauma through the lived experience of the inhabitants of a small rural town in Illinois, most of whom have been suffering from physical and emotional abuse for most of their lives. As Strout describes their predicament, "They had grown up on shame; it was the nutrient in their soil."

*Anything Is Possible* is a kind of sequel to Strout's last work, her superb short novel, *My Name Is Lucy Barton*, about an accomplished writer who fled this same town many years ago. Indeed, much of the action in Strout's new stories hinges on Lucy Barton's publication of a memoir with the same title. The fact that Lucy Barton beat the odds to leave the town and somehow transcend the poverty and abuse of her childhood spurs other characters to confront their own legacies.

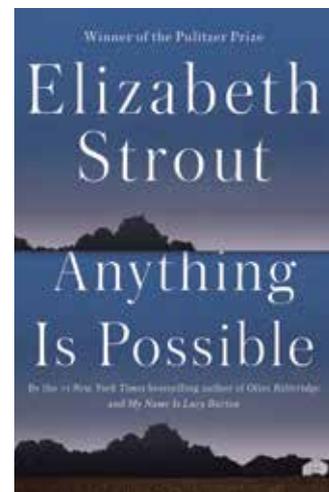
By intertwining these stories as she did in her Pulitzer Prize-winning collection, *Olive Kitteridge*, Strout brilliantly illuminates each character from varying points of view. The interplay with *My Name Is Lucy Barton* adds yet another dimension, bringing even more depth and clarity to the ruinous impact of abuse

on so many lives. This layered intertextuality also magnifies our delight as readers in meeting characters we have already heard about, whom we feel we already know.

In the act of telling these stories—writing the truth, which is "exactly that bad"—Strout pays witness to our universal suffering, showing us with a warm exactness that, in the end, it is our adversities that forge the essence of our humanity, giving hope, indeed, that "anything is possible for everyone."

---

J. Greg Phelan is co-founder and board chair of Project Write Now ([projectwritenow.org](http://projectwritenow.org)). He has written for *The New York Times*, *The Millions* and other publications.



**Anything Is Possible**  
A Novel  
By Elizabeth Strout  
Random House. 254p \$27



## Ken Burns revisits the division and bloodshed wrought by ‘a barbaric war’

How could this happen? In the years between the fall of the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and the collapse of South Vietnam in 1975, the United States was severely divided by race, war and a generational split, a state of polarization not seen since the Civil War.

A member of a military family, I entered the Jesuits after serving two years in the antiaircraft artillery in Germany, where we had been advised that the Russians might attack at any time. Theology, just war ethics, the influence of fellow Jesuits, summer internships at **America**, the march against the Pentagon led by intellectuals like Norman Mailer, the riots in Detroit and New Jersey and, especially, the violence at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, which I witnessed—all of these taught me that something was wrong with the U.S. value system expressed in our foreign policy.

Now, more than four decades later, Ken Burns’s “The Vietnam War,” tries to answer what went wrong in

Vietnam and what lessons are to be learned. Burns offers the testimony of 80 witnesses, including U.S. and Vietnamese participants on both sides—like the New York Times correspondent Neil Sheehan and the soldier-turned-novelist Tim O’Brien, author of *The Things They Carried*.

It all begins with the two-month battle of Dien Bien Phu, in which the French had fortified their position so as to draw the Vietnamese Army into an attack where they would all be killed. But the Vietnamese outsmarted the French, pounding them with artillery from higher slopes and shooting down planes delivering food and ammunition. The French artillery commander shot himself in his despair.

From then on the United States gradually replaced the French as a colonial occupying army, not realizing that as the French were hated, so would we be. President John F. Kennedy’s inaugural commitment to “pay any price” to protect liberty led him and his

successors, step by step, to replace the French in what they considered a “limited war.”

U.S. helicopters dropped napalm bombs and Agent Orange to kill the forests that hid the Vietcong and North Vietnamese soldiers, but these eventually also killed U.S. soldiers. We uprooted farming communities and forced the inhabitants into strategic hamlets, where we thought they would be safe from enemy influence. While we policed them, we sometimes killed the wrong people, and every person killed would lead to 10 more Vietnamese willing to fight the U.S. intruders.

President Lyndon Johnson was constantly overwhelmed by the job: “What the hell is Vietnam worth to me? To the country?” He tells the leaders of South Vietnam to “get off their butts and leave me alone.” Still, the Republican presidential candidate Senator Barry Goldwater claims Johnson is not tough enough. So to flex a muscle, the United States charges, without



After the battle at Dien Bien Phu, the United States gradually replaced the French as a colonial occupying army in Vietnam.

evidence, that North Vietnam has attacked a U.S. destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin, and our war expands its scope with our bombing of North Vietnam.

Burns interrupts the combat narrative with personal stories. In one narrative, we meet Dinton Crocker, 17, known as Mogie, who loves his country and wants to serve it. Crocker's parents resist; he is still too young. At 19, in the 101st Airborne, he takes part in an attack on an enemy-occupied hill. He is up front, the point man; a machine gun cuts him down.

Two scenes linger. We see again, in more detail, napalm landing on a family as they race out of their homes and down the road toward a group of cameras. The moment produces the infamous shot of the naked young girl running down the road crying, 30 percent of her body burned with napalm. The reporters embrace and clothe her and get her to a hospital. Another scene is from the Tet offensive: A policeman has captured one of the ene-

my and, in front of a camera, blows his brains out.

Dead bodies clutter scene after scene of "The Vietnam War." We do not get close enough to examine them, but they are in shambles, body parts scattered, limbs gone, chests crushed. Among both the Americans and the Vietnamese friends and enemies, the corpses are sacred, and both sides risk lives to collect them.

Both Presidents Johnson and Nixon must keep offering assurances that the United States is winning the war, providing the public with shabby statistics of a "body count" that show we always kill more of them than they kill of us. They know the war cannot be won, but they pretend it can be by adding more troops. In the 1968 Tet offensive, 84,000 North Vietnamese systematically move south, penetrating Saigon itself. Over the course of 26 days, 6,000 civilians die in battle. Walter Cronkite reports the war to be in a stalemate.

On the home front, on Oct. 15, 1969, millions of U.S. citizens protest against the war. In response, President Nixon goes on TV to argue for "patience" and unity. But the reporter Seymour Hersh breaks the story of the massacre at My Lai, where, led by Lt. William L. Calley Jr., U.S. troops had systematically murdered 557 civilians in a little village. Asked why he participated in the atrocity, a soldier replies, "I was ordered to."

Missing from the documentary is Daniel Berrigan, S.J., and the role of religion in opposing the war. Senator John Kerry, a hero and a Catholic, helps fill that void. Testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he opposes the "glorification of

body counts" and asks why we cannot admit a mistake. People must die lest Nixon be known as the "first president to lose a war." Kerry asks, "Where are the leaders of the country?" He dares to open his talk with testimony of fellow soldiers of their own crimes, especially rapes and mutilations.

The war's horrible climax is Nixon's resumed bombing of the North, the "Christmas Bombing" of Hanoi and Haiphong, in which B-52s sweep in every 15 minutes over 24 hours, leaving 1,600 civilians dead. On March 29, 1973, the troops leave. There is no bloodbath when the North eventually marches into Saigon. Over one million Vietnamese refugees leave, 400,000 to the United States.

Burns hesitates to say that anyone won or lost the war. My visit to Vietnam in 1995 made it clear to me. The victors had built a War Crimes Museum in Saigon. A photo on the wall showed smiling U.S. soldiers, posing like a group of fishermen, displaying the shredded and blackened corpse of a Vietnamese young man. A hotel where U.S. correspondents once stayed featured pictures of two soldiers ready for battle: One was loaded down with ammunition, weapons, a helmet and grenades; the other was slight, shirtless, with nothing but his rifle. His side had won.

John Kerry deserves the last words: His last mission, he told Congress, is "to search out and destroy the last vestige of this barbaric war, to pacify our own hearts, to conquer the hate and fear that have driven this country these last 10 years and more." Amen.

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# Truth to Power

Readings: Is 5:1-7, Ps 80, Phil 4:6-9, Mt 21:33-43

Today's Gospel builds on last Sunday's. In the parable of the two sons, Jesus accused Israel's leaders of faithlessness. They had promised to serve God, but instead they pursued their own agenda. In this week's "Parable of the Tenants," Jesus pushes his polemic further. Israel's leaders had not only failed to keep their promises; they had in fact obstructed God's plan with violence.

In the coming chapters of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus speaks some strong words against Sadducees, Pharisees and scribes. These texts are significant in the history of Christian anti-Semitism. One ought to remember that at their inception, these were not anti-Jewish texts. On the contrary, Jesus was a Jew speaking to other Jews with the goal of reforming Israel's religious culture. Commentators note that Matthew uses the Greek word *ethnos* in 21:43 not to say that the kingdom will be given to a different "people" but to a different "group, multitude, host." Matthew here refers to the restored Judaism of the coming age. English speakers might hear a word that has "ethnic" and national connotations, but one should not read these into the parable.

Our Gospel reading today is tied to the first reading. In Isaiah's allegory, the vineyard Israel, which was meant to produce the "good grapes" of justice and righteousness, instead produced "wild grapes" of bloodshed and outcry. In Isaiah's prophecy, God threatens to abandon the vineyard to drought, weeds and marauding animals unless Israel starts to yield good fruit.

Jesus modifies this imagery in his remarks against the chief priests and elders. As in Isaiah's prophecy, the vineyard is Israel, and the vines are the people. Jesus introduces a group of "tenants" who represent Israel's leadership. They are the ones who produce "wild grapes," not the nation as a whole. These tenants have attempted to seize the vineyard from its rightful owner and use it for their own ends. This is in fact legally impossible, but they act as if no consequence will befall them. In reality, their selfish and cruel behavior simply sets them up for future retribution.

Matthew makes this parable part of the "Temple ser-

*'He will lease his vineyard to other tenants, who will give him the produce at the proper times.'* (Mt 21:41)

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

What work has God called you to do in his vineyard?

How do you remember that the vineyard is God's, not yours?

mon," which Jesus delivered in the days after his entry into Jerusalem. Jesus knew what happened to John the Baptist and many prophets before him, and he knew the knives were out. Israel's leadership was looking for ways to arrest Jesus, but they feared the crowds (Mt 21:46).

Jesus was the cornerstone that Israel's leaders rejected. Though their calculations were cynical, they saw in Jesus someone who could unite a fractured Israel. His teachings, however, subverted their power, so they scorned him and his Gospel. Writing decades later, Matthew recognizes the outcome. In their efforts to eliminate Jesus, Israel's leaders had fatally weakened the nation.

This parable challenges anyone today with a position of leadership in the church. It does not matter if one embezzles millions from an archdiocese or simply bullies parish volunteers, the temptation is ever present to seize God's vineyard for one's own ends. Today's parable reminds us that such actions are self-destructive and futile. Better instead to remember that our talents, livelihood, resources and vocation are gifts from God, to whom everything shall one day return.

# Clothing Ourselves in Love

Readings: Is 25:6-10, Ps 23, Phil 4:12-20, Mt 22:1-14

The early Christian movement attracted fallen-away Jews and Gentiles but not Israel's leadership. This was a great mystery to Matthew, who develops this theme of invitation and response throughout his Gospel. The Gospel passage this week finds Jesus still in the Temple, warning the chief priests and elders that their time is running out. God summoned them to the kingdom, but in their rejection of the Son, they have rejected God's invitation. This parable gives a clear insight on Matthew's conundrum: Israel's leaders received the invitation first, but they rejected it. Only then did God turn to sinners and Gentiles to populate his kingdom.

This parable has a surprise ending. A guest shows up without the proper wedding garment and is thrown out into the night. This action is difficult to square with the king's generosity in the first part of the parable. The church, mercifully, offers a shorter version of the Gospel this week that omits the second part of the parable. This omission has good historical grounds. Versions of this parable also appear in Luke (14:15-24) and the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas (64:1-5). In neither case does the parable of the bridal garment appear. It is not likely that the writers of Luke and Thomas independently left out the

same passage. It is more likely that Matthew put together two previously unrelated parables to develop his theme of invitation and response.

Biblical scholars have not reached consensus over the meaning of the wedding garment. It helps to remember that Jesus lived in a highly ritualized culture. Wedding celebrations especially were ceremonial events involving the appropriate participation of the guests. The invitation issued by the servants was indiscriminate but not compulsory. Anyone who said yes to it would have known that they were going to an affair that required appropriate dress and courteous interaction. The etiquette added to the joy; dancing, drinking and feasting each had their own ritual action and these added to the memorable qualities of the day (similarly today, the ritual of the best man's toast can be one of the most memorable parts of a wedding celebration).

Jesus' culture was hierarchical as well. Guests at a wedding owed their host a debt of gratitude that they repaid with tokens of respect. A close reading of today's Gospel shows that the crisis peaked not over the man's attire (which the host may have felt compelled to lend him), but over his failure to respond to the king. This lack of courtesy was the grave insult that led to his ejection from the feast.

Patristic authors found the wedding garment to be a symbol of Christian love. They derived this from literary cues like the king's generosity, the wedding and the tokens of respect due a host. They also taught that the wedding garment makes us resemble Christ, the divine bridegroom. Gregory the Great, for instance, argued that the wedding garment was not baptism, which was symbolized simply by entering the feasting hall. To participate in the feast, one must be clothed like the bridegroom in compassion, generosity, forgiveness and love. Similarly today, many call themselves Christians. Only those attired with a love like Christ's will experience the joy of God's feast.

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*'Many are invited, but few are chosen.'* (Mt 22:14)

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

In what ways has God invited you?  
How have you responded?

How do you understand Christ's "wedding garment" of love? How are you crafting one like it?

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# When Politics Get Personal

*Why Washington needs more lawmakers like Joe Biden*

By Scott Detrow



There is a moment I keep thinking about from last year. It was December, and Vice President Joe Biden was making one of his final visits to the Senate floor. Democrats and Republicans came up to him, and whether it was a handshake, an embrace or a full-blown hug, Joe Biden reached out to each and every one of them.

The Senate was voting on a bill named after Mr. Biden's son, Beau, who died of cancer in 2015, and had just finished paying tribute to the outgoing vice president. The speeches all kept coming back to the same point: While he hardly ever wavered from his strongly liberal view of the world, Joe Biden rarely made debates or negotiations personal. "Obviously I don't always agree with him," said Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, "but I do trust him."

It is a scene I have thought about a lot in 2017 as trust has eroded, confrontations have ratcheted up and it has become increasingly clear that the bile of the last presidential election is not leaving the U.S. political scene anytime soon.

There don't seem to be many Joe Bidens right now—people respected by both Republicans and Democrats willing to engage with members of both parties from a position of respect and empathy. The increased personalization of politics has been catalyzed by President Trump, whose prime political instinct is to go for the

jugular of anyone who disagrees with or criticizes him.

But it is not just Donald Trump. Social media is increasingly the prime battleground for partisans to fight it out in increasingly personal attacks. This trend was never more clear to me than this June, in the hours after a gunman assaulted Republican lawmakers on a northern Virginia baseball field. Standing in the Capitol hallways, I could see the shock, confusion and fear on the faces of men who earlier that day had to dive for cover from the shots of an assault rifle.

Then, between interviews, I would check my phone and see Twitter filled with takes that boiled down to this: Because the men on the field opposed gun control or were at the time pushing to scale back Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act, somehow the shooting was poetic justice.

This was not just one or two tweets. It was a steady stream over the course of the day.

Two years ago, Joe Biden explained to a group of Yale students why he tried to avoid personal vilification. Early on in his first Senate term, he said, he unloaded on then-Majority Leader Mike Mansfield about how another senator, the arch-conservative Jesse Helms, "had no redeeming social value." It was in the midst of a debate over a bill about disabilities.

Mr. Biden told the students that Senator Mansfield then informed him

that the North Carolina Republican, in fact, had recently adopted a teenager with special needs. "I felt like a fool," Mr. Biden said. "He then went on to say, 'Joe, it is always appropriate to question another man's judgment, but never appropriate to question his motives, because you simply don't know his motives.'"

Mr. Biden said he made it a point to shun personal attacks: "Because when you question a man's motive, when you say they're acting out of greed, they're in the pocket of an interest group, et cetera, it's awful hard to reach consensus."

The debates we are having in 2017 are serious and consequential: the role the government should play in providing reliable and affordable health care, the state of race relations, what to do about the millions of people living in the United States illegally. I am not suggesting they can all be solved by lukewarm, down-the-middle compromises made for the sake of playing nice. But perhaps we can all take a page from Vice President Biden and, at least in that moment when our fingers are hovering above our keyboards to compose the next tweet or Facebook post, avoid assumptions about another person's motives and keep personal attacks out of it.

**Scott Detrow covers Congress for National Public Radio and hosts the NPR Politics podcast.**

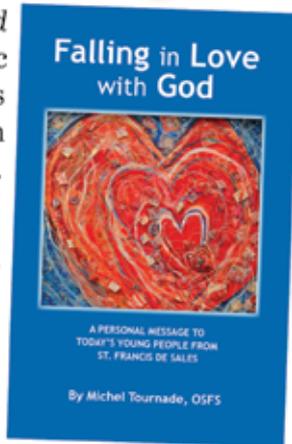


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