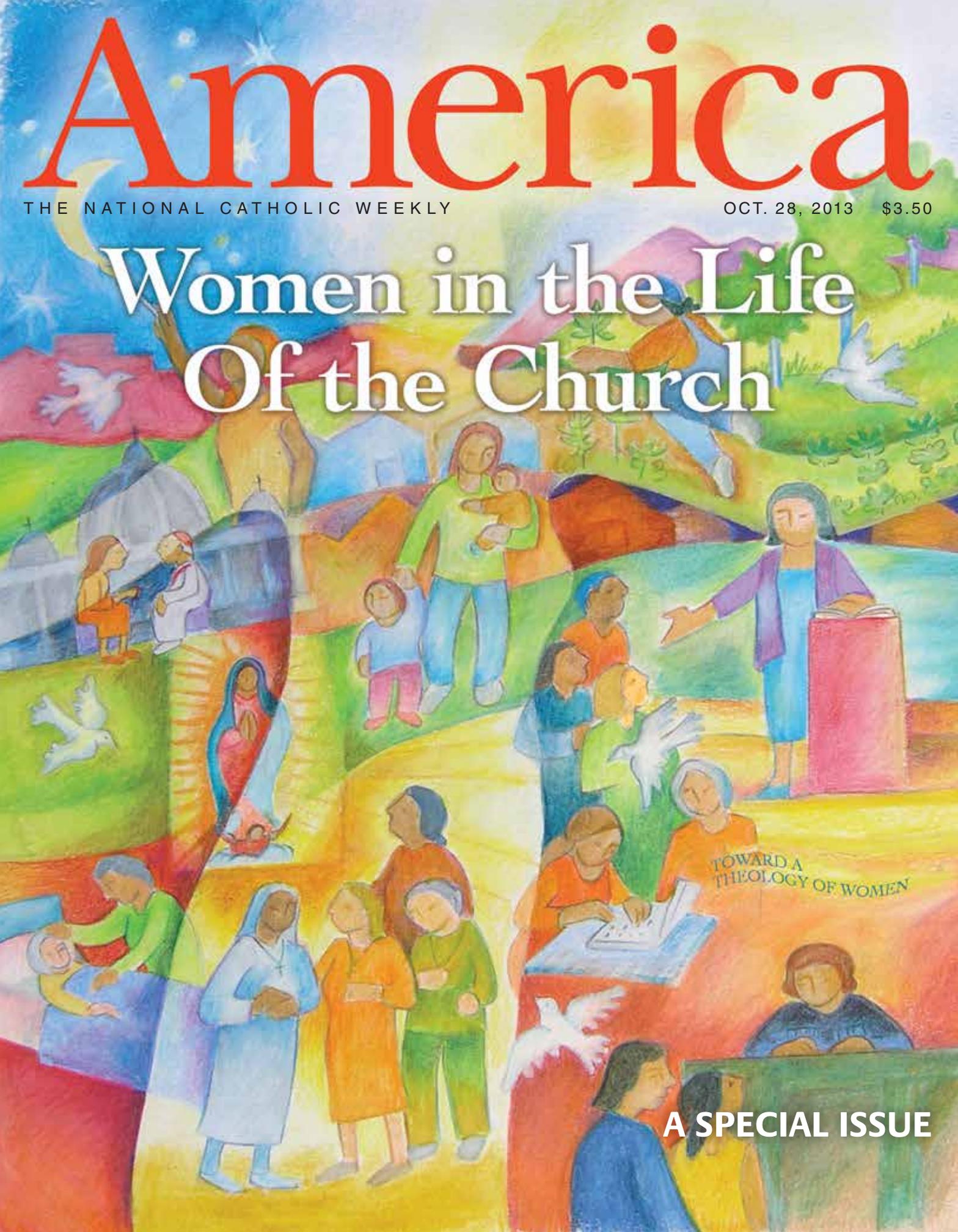


America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

OCT. 28, 2013 \$3.50

Women in the Life Of the Church



TOWARD A
THEOLOGY OF WOMEN

A SPECIAL ISSUE

OF MANY THINGS

In this issue **America** examines some of the personal, political, liturgical and social-justice issues that are most relevant to Catholic women today. We have asked several writers to consider those aspects of faith and church that sustain them, as well as those aspects that challenge. These articles provide a glimpse into the ways in which the experience of women in our church and our world continues to evolve. We hope the conversations spurred by this issue will help our Catholic community to consider the ways in which the church succeeds in addressing issues that affect women and the ways the church might better provide support for women who are striving to live out their rich faith in a society that does not always back such efforts.

Readers will note that all the principal articles in this issue were written by women. But the prominence of female authors here does not mean that we intend to limit female writers, scholars and theologians to special issues like this. One goal of our Catholic media ministry is to make sure that the voices and diverse perspectives of Catholic women are featured year-round and on a range of topics. This issue is one more step toward that goal. The process of assembling the issue has already produced more ideas than can fit within its pages, and thus has provided additional content that can be found on our Web site and in future issues.

We understand that many Catholics feel passionately about the topic of priestly ordination of women—some in favor of it and some opposed. Our authors do not address that topic here. Kathleen Sprows Cummings points out in her article on a theology of women (p. 20) that in trying to focus attention on or divert attention from this “closed” topic, Catholics have frequently sidelined many other issues of import. In this issue, we have tried to think broadly, creatively and positively about some of these other issues, ones

that we hope represent a wide variety of experiences and concerns of Catholic women.

Too often Catholic women are labeled by a single stereotype—progressive protesters or demure wives, for example—a habit that ignores the depth and reality of their experiences. Although the lives of Catholic women may include those roles, their lives are broader and richer than either of them. Catholic women from all backgrounds strive to embody the church they believe in and, like all Catholics, have at times struggled to find the most honest ways to live out the fullness of the church’s teachings.

The editors present this issue with the recognition that the voices it includes represent just a few of the many worthy perspectives within a longstanding and ongoing discussion about women in the life of the church. We hope our readers find in this issue articles that are timely, interesting and challenging, not only to women or to Catholics but to all people of good will who seek a greater understanding of our beloved church.

The women featured in this issue may not agree with one another on every political or social issue, nor would we expect them to do so. But as Catholics they share the belief that all of us—whether male or female—are called to build up the reign of God and called to unity in Christ’s love. Love often begins when we seek a truer understanding of one another; and understanding comes from a place of sincere listening; and listening begins when we allow others the space to speak. We hope **America** provides a space for dialogue and discussion about our church and our society. And we hope this issue highlights the need for our church to provide women not only with more opportunities to speak up, but to consider new platforms from which these voices can be heard.

KERRY WEBER

America

PUBLISHED BY JESUITS OF THE UNITED STATES

106 West 56th Street
New York, NY 10019-3803
Ph: 282-581-4640; Fax: 282-399-3596
Subscriptions: 1-800-627-9533
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ON THE WEB

Joan Dawber, S.C., right, talks on our podcast about her work against **human trafficking** at LifeWay Network. Plus, samples from the work of **Catholic women artists** and additional articles on **women in today's church**. All at americamagazine.org/women-church.



Handshake Diplomacy

A handshake may never have taken place between the presidents of Iran and the United States, but another odd couple did manage to press the flesh during the annual meeting of the U.N. General Assembly in New York. Pakistan's new prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, met for the first time with his counterpart in India, Manmohan Singh. The heads of state pledged to work together to settle violence in the disputed region of Kashmir.

The two powers have fought three wars over Kashmir, and tensions have been escalating again over the last several weeks. The region had been relatively stable since 2003, when a cease-fire helped bring rare peace to the "line of control," the border dividing Kashmir between Pakistani and Indian forces. Yet tensions reignited in 2008, when the bombing of a hotel in Mumbai was blamed on Pakistani militants. And this year has seen a spate of violence: in September separatists attacked Indian security forces, killing 13 people.

It is tempting to abandon all hope for a lasting peace in Kashmir, a region where much blood has been shed since the original partition of India in 1947. But the stakes are higher now than perhaps ever before. The fact that India and Pakistan are nuclear powers is reason enough for concern. And as the United States plans its withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014, a stable relationship between Pakistan and India is essential to long-term peace in the region. The two countries should recommit themselves to a strict cease-fire in Kashmir. A permanent solution, however, may have to wait for a more propitious time.

Swimming Upstream

A record run of Chinook salmon has escaped hungry sea lions, gulls and pelicans at the mouth of the Columbia River and made their way 146 miles upriver and through the fish ladders of Bonneville Dam. By official count, over one million salmon charged through the gauntlet—400,000 more than average. Fishing boats crowded the river so thickly at the Hanford Reach, another 200 miles up-river, that "you could practically walk from boat to boat across the river," as one man said.

Thirteen distinct populations of salmon are listed as threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act. The strong resurgence of the Chinook has increased calls to remove some wild salmon populations from endangered-species lists, but it is too early to determine whether this year's run is evidence of a permanent trend or a unique blip.

Multiple, often competing interests contributed to this turnabout: tribal cultures, commercial and recreational fisherman, ecology advocates and hydroelectric power operators who modified the dam's turbines to allow juvenile fish to pass through at safer depths. The tribes have spurred development of hatcheries and cleared spawning areas of debris and invasive species. Further, ocean conditions have been favorable in recent years, with abundant food for the salmon's survival. This seemingly rare piece of good news offers a model for promoting complex ecological, economic and cultural values by using the best scientific data available, encouraging dialogue and compromise and supporting unified, concerted efforts by multiple parties.

Save Our Seas

Climate-change prognosticators frequently issue gloomy warnings about rising sea levels swallowing coastlines. Those predictions are scary enough, but what is going on beneath the surface of the global ocean may be just as frightening. Scientists associated with the International Program on the State of the Ocean report that cumulative effects from anthropogenic (human-related) activity are seriously degrading the ocean's ability to perform its role as the earth's giant carbon sink. Earth's oceans are choking on the carbon humankind is throwing off, whether from fossil fuel-burning or from agricultural and sewage run-off.

We already know about vast ocean deserts where oxygen levels are too low to sustain aquatic life. They may soon grow larger. According to the report, the oceans' oxygen inventory could decline as much as 7 percent by 2100. Global oceans are also troubled by warming and acidification that can devastate reef ecosystems. I.P.S.O. researchers refer to these stressors—deoxygenation, acidification and warming—as the "deadly trio." In the near future, these scientists say, much ocean life, including the plankton at the base of the oceanic food chain, will find itself in "unsuitable environments." They predict "cascading consequences," including a breakdown in food webs and a global increase in oceanographic pathogens.

According to the report, there is still time to mitigate some of the worst possible outcomes. Any meaningful effort to respond to global warming should improve oceanic conditions. And most coastal states are already capable of limiting sewage and agricultural pollution more effectively; they just have to muster the political will to do so. The overall message of the I.P.S.O. report is clear: Humankind can no longer treat the global ocean as its open sewer.

Conscience of ‘America’

For many months the editors of *America*, with the contributions of a talented cadre of writers, worked to prepare this special issue dedicated to women in the life of the church. To our delight, recent statements by Pope Francis have only increased attention to urgent questions concerning this topic. In his interview with Jesuit journals (*Am.* 9/30), Pope Francis expressed his conviction that it is “necessary to broaden the opportunities” for women in the church, and to “think about the specific place of women also in those places where the authority of the church is exercised.”

Francis is challenging all of us to ask deep questions and develop new ways of thinking and acting. We need to examine our conscience. In what ways has the church received and been enriched by the gifts of women? In what ways has the church neglected, ignored or even outright denied the voices and gifts of women? And, perhaps most significant, how is the Spirit inviting the church to move forward? What are new opportunities for women to serve in places of authority in the church? The gifts of women have always been needed in these places.

When this journal was founded in 1909, seminary faculties and theology departments—like all clerical positions in the church—were the exclusive dominion of men. The same was true of *America’s* editorial board, comprised solely of Jesuits. This undoubtedly influenced our editorial position on a number of issues, including the 19th Amendment. After it was ratified in 1920, the Jesuit editors expressed “deep concern” about the “moral and social effects” of extending suffrage to women.

Dorothy Day wrote several articles for *America* in the 1930s, and Moira Walsh and Mary McGrory became regular contributors in the 1960s and ’70s. In those years there were two male lay editors on the staff, but it was not until quite recently that a lay person took a seat at the editorial table. Patricia A. Kossmann, the first female editor of *America*, joined the editorial board in 1999 and served as literary editor for 13 years. After her arrival, additional lay editors, male and female, joined her in leadership. This journal has benefited greatly from the professional acumen of these dedicated lay women and men.

Our examination of conscience continues: While *America* identifies itself as a journal of opinion for all Catholics, even today Catholic women are underrepresented in our pages. It is not surprising, and perhaps unavoidable,

that as a Jesuit journal, most of our editors are men. But it is also the case that most of our non-Jesuit contributors are men and that achieving a greater balance in our pages is both a worthy and challenging endeavor.

The challenge is not unique to this journal; it is present in the culture at large and in the field of journalism. According to a study released in June by Media Matters for America, women comprise only 38 percent of newsroom staff in the United States, a figure that has not changed in 14 years. This is a structural injustice, the result of many individual decisions with a cumulative effect.

We all participate in it and must take responsibility for it. And *America* cannot be satisfied with simply approaching parity with the larger culture. We are called to be a prophetic witness for the full participation of women in the church and society.

Eighteen years ago, the Society of Jesus called for a conversion of all its members “to listen carefully and courageously to the experience of women” and to address the systemic injustices that women experience in all areas of life (34th General Congregation, 1995).

America needs the voices and gifts of women to fulfill our mission of “interpreting the church for the world and the world for the church.” As increasing numbers of women lead Catholic institutions and serve in parish leadership and theology departments, for example, we invite these women to share with us their thoughts and ideas on all topics, and we pledge to seek out their perspectives. It is important for *America* to add more women to its roster of contributors and to increase our coverage of issues that affect women in the church. *America* also takes up the challenge of Pope Francis to help develop a more profound theology of women, which includes drawing attention to the significant theological work already completed in this area.

This special issue of *America* does not represent a seismic shift in our thinking and acting, but we hope it is a further small step in the right direction, a meaningful investment in the long haul. We are reminded of what Dorothy Day said to those who wondered about the “small effort” of Catholic Workers. “They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time,” she wrote. “No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless. There is too much work to do.” The entire church, including *America*, must get busy.



REPLY ALL

A Lay Interview

Re “A Big Heart Open to God,” by Antonio Spadaro, S.J. (9/30): It is one thing for two Jesuits to share their discussion around matters of faith, laity and the future of the church and put it out there for the world to analyze. How would it be for Pope Francis to have a conversation with a lay Roman Catholic who is not so well-versed in the language of church and theology? What might the reader then glean from the dialogue between Pope Francis and the lay person? Would it be an interview or an epiphany, or both?

FRANK BEAZLEY
Nashua, N.H.

Returning Catholic

To describe the interview with Pope Francis, “powerful” is the only word that comes to mind. As a returning Catholic (after a 25-year absence), I see the interview as confirmation of the direction of the church. Thank you.

BOB KILLELEA
Canton, Miss.

Seeing the Pope

I worked for four years in Rome as Vatican director of the documentation, information and press office of

Caritas Internationalis. I have one minor observation about Pope Francis’ image of an “inverted funnel” to explain his personal dislike about living in the papal apartment. What prevented people from seeing the pope was never the “really tight” physical entrance to the papal apartment, but the legal and protocol difficulty of obtaining formal permission to see His Holiness.

LARRY N. LORENZONI, S.D.B.
San Francisco, Calif.

What About Sexual Abuse?

We realize that the Jesuit journals determined the questions for the interview, thus perhaps restricting the comments made by Pope Francis. Yet, we say: while we warmly welcome Pope Francis’ refreshing spirit of understanding and compassion, we note with profound disappointment the absence of any comment in this interview about the clerical sexual abuse crisis and scandal that plagues the Catholic Church. Indeed, the sexual abuse issue challenges the church at its core: a commitment to a love that truly protects children and to a sense of justice that truly holds the culpable accountable. Where does Pope Francis stand on this major crisis and scandal?

We call upon the pope for three immediate actions: 1) personally initiate

ongoing dialogue with victim/survivors of sexual abuse by members of the clergy because no one knows their plight better than they themselves; 2) hold accountable bishops who have deliberately frustrated or ignored the cause of truth and justice in this issue; and 3) publicly support efforts to alter church and civil laws, retroactively and proactively, to protect children and foster justice.

(REV.) JAMES CONNELL
Sheboygan, Wis.

The writer is on the steering committee for Catholic Whistleblowers.

Words and Deeds

Kudos on getting the pope to give you so much time for a substantive interview. “Waiting for Good Deeds,” by James T. Keane (9/16), offers an important caution to all those who care about the church. “Remain leery of words alone,” he writes, and “wait with hope for him and the church as a whole to follow those words with deeds.”

Personally, I hope to be alive for at least one or all of the following: women priests, optional celibacy, full and complete financial and administrative transparency for all dioceses and religious orders, and the selection of pastors by parish search committees.

GENE ROMAN
Riverdale, N.Y.

Remarkable Candor

Thanks for your correction (State of the Question, 10/14) about the sentence omitted from Pope Francis’ interview. Such candor is remarkable in a publishing world bent on amassing subscriptions by exploiting and/or encouraging ideological loyalties regardless of where truth may be. Pope Francis’ point calls for a deeper understanding of the feminine and masculine. That deeper understanding will only belong to a mind that is changed, corrected, new and improved by the grace of God.

JEROME KNIES, O.S.A.
Racine, Wis.



Chance for Humility

About the missing sentence: Such things happen and keep us humble. The interview is excellent. I am grateful and inspired for this new day in the church.

RUTH MARIE NICKERSON, C.S.C.
Notre Dame, Ind.

What Politics Has Done

I would like to commend *America* for the integrity it has shown in publishing “Murray’s Mistake” (9/23), Michael Baxter’s splendid critical assessment of John Courtney Murray, S.J., an intellectual in whom Jesuits in the United States have reason to take pride.

Brilliant as Murray was, he entered the Jesuits at 16 and as a consequence had no experience of what politicians and politics—not to mention generals and the military—were really like. When he finally began to associate with politicians and generals, they treated this renowned intellectual with utmost deference. Hence his benign view of those who walked the corridors of American power.

As the late Walter F. Murray, the distinguished constitutional lawyer and author of *Vicar of Christ*, once observed, “We like to think that Christianity has civilized politics, but what has politics done to Christianity in the meantime?” Does anything, for example, that John Boehner or Paul Ryan has said or done resonate with the spirit of “*Rerum Novarum*” or “*Quadragesimo Anno*”?

MICHAEL GALLAGHER
Shaker Heights, Ohio

Revolution of the Heart

For years I have thought that the bishops in the United States were spending too much time, energy and money on trying to change the law, when they should be putting their efforts into changing their people’s hearts. Professor Baxter’s excellent article on John Courtney Murray, S.J., and the influence of his thinking helped me understand how they got entangled in that web of politics.

As Professor Baxter writes, Dorothy Day did understand what we need. She wrote, “The greatest challenge of the day is this: How to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us?”

CECILIA MCGOWAN
Crestone, Col.

Catholic Responses

Professor Baxter tells us that John Courtney Murray, S.J., presumed consensus; Father Murray would have trouble with politics when people hate each other or when they disagree profoundly, as we do, about what Christian discipleship and responsible citizenship require.

Professor Baxter’s option is to turn away from historical responsibility and turn Gospel imperatives into personal commitments, hospitable communities and resistance to the state and all those things Christians dislike about the American world. Father Murray, in contrast, thought the American world was now ours, and his far-from-uncritical disciples, like the Rev. J. Bryan Hehir and David Hollenbach, S.J., work hard

to connect Father Murray’s natural law realism with Gospel imperatives of peacemaking and justice seeking.

If we are Catholic, we will talk about our serious differences and then find ways to embrace one another in the solidarity of our church—a sacrament, somehow, of the unity we desire and God intends.

DAVID J. O’BRIEN
Jefferson, Mass.

Editor’s Note: This is a brief excerpt from a longer response on America’s In All Things blog (10/8). Visit the blog post to continue the conversation.

Christmas Keepsakes

I wish to add my name to those thanking James S. Torrens, S.J., for the pleasure he has given us through the years as poetry editor of *America*. I thank him for the poems that he selected for our enjoyment and for his beautiful Christmas poems, two of which are framed on my wall. May his days of retirement be filled with peace and happiness.

PATRICIA HAID
Los Angeles, Calif.

BLOG TALK

The following is an excerpt from “A Jesuit Challenge to Winston Churchill,” by Mark Tooley, in The American Spectator (10/7). Mr. Tooley is responding to “Churchill’s Choice,” by the Rev. Terrance W. Klein (The Good Word blog, 10/3).

Father Klein warns that “violence breeds violence,” with “those who turn to it always [believing] that a little more violence will put an end to the cycle, but they only forge the chain.” So were Churchill and Britain only feeding the “cycle” of violence by resisting Nazi domination of Europe and much

of the world? Should they instead have allowed German access to the French fleet with all its global repercussions? Without suggesting loftier alternatives, Father Klein implies so....

Rejecting all violence as equally abhorrent ignores any distinctions between self-defense and aggression, or between murdering the innocent versus punishing the guilty. Rulers in authority cannot afford such obtuse, distorted idealism. Mr. Churchill, in fighting for the life and liberty of his people, chose survival against aggressive evil.

MARK TOOLEY
Spectator.org

Letters to the editor may be sent to *America*’s editorial office (address on page 2) or letters@americamagazine.org. They should be brief and include the writer’s name, postal address and daytime contact phone number. *America* will also consider the following for print publication: comments posted below articles on *America*’s Web site (americamagazine.org) and posts on Twitter and public Facebook pages. All correspondence may be edited for length and clarity.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

Progress on Poverty, But 1.2 Billion Still Live on the Extremes

The number of people living in extreme poverty around the world has sharply declined over the past three decades, but in 2010 it still included roughly 400 million children, according to a new World Bank analysis that for the first time gives an in-depth profile of the poorest people in the world.

The report, released on Oct. 10, found that 721 million fewer people lived in extreme poverty—defined as under \$1.25 a day—in 2010 compared with 1981. But it also concluded that a disproportionate number of children were among them. Children accounted for one in three of the 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty around the world. In low-income countries, the percentages were even worse, with half of all children living in extreme poverty.

“We have witnessed a historic movement of people lifting themselves out of poverty over the past three decades, but the number of children living in poverty alone should leave no doubt that there remains much work to do,” said Jim Yong Kim, president of the World Bank Group. “We can reach our goals of ending poverty and boosting shared prosperity, including sharing that prosperity with future generations, but only if we work together with new urgency. Children should not be cruelly condemned to a life without hope, without good education and without access to quality health care. We must do better for them.”

World Bank analysts also found that the poor in 2010 were as badly off as they were in 1981, with the exception of poor people in India and China. The “average” poor person in a low-income country lived on 78 cents a day in 2010, compared with 74 cents a day in 1981.

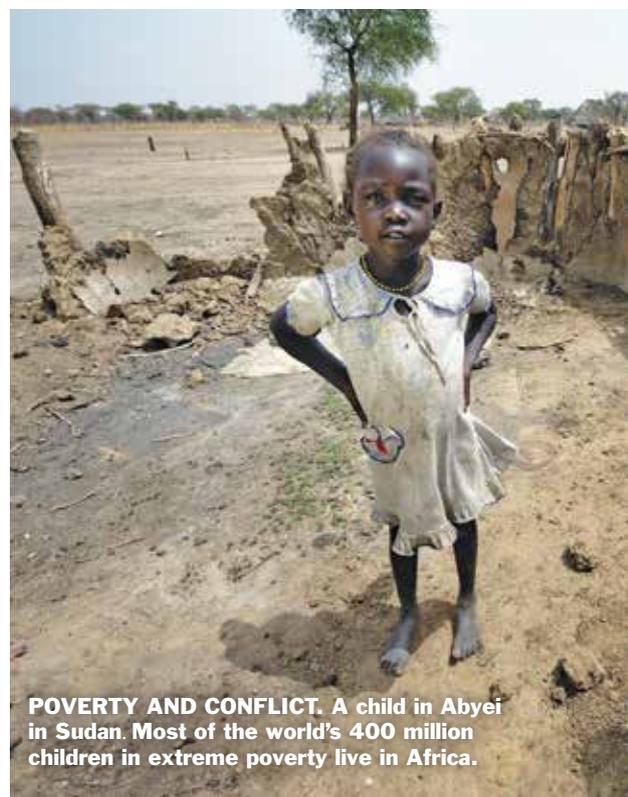
The report, said William O’Keefe, vice president for advocacy at Catholic Relief Services, “documents the success of the global fight against poverty to date and the challenge ahead.” As in the United States, he said, “Poverty around the world is increasingly a blight on children.

“Catholic Relief Services is expanding successful and innovative agriculture, nutrition and health efforts that

will help poorer children in poor countries reach their potential. But we can’t help 400 million children on our own.

“The Holy Father is calling Catholics to confront global poverty, and that means in part pushing our government here to do more,” O’Keefe added. “The cynical politics of shutdown are an unworthy distraction from helping poor children around the world and here.”

The World Bank’s analysis underscores the difficulty of reaching its goal to end extreme poverty by 2030. While poverty reduction in recent years moved significantly in middle-income countries like China and India, low-income countries showed much slower progress. Overall extreme poverty has declined, but the world’s 35 low-income countries—26 of which are in Africa—registered 100 million more extremely poor people than three decades ago. In 2010, 33 percent of



POVERTY AND CONFLICT. A child in Abyei in Sudan. Most of the world’s 400 million children in extreme poverty live in Africa.

the extreme poor lived in low-income countries, compared to 13 percent in 1981.

The report also calculated that the amount of money needed every year to lift more than a billion people out of extreme poverty would be \$169 billion in 2005 dollars—half the projected cost in 1981.

The extreme poor, who are concentrated in rural areas, also continue to lag significantly behind in access to basic services. Only 26 percent of the poor had access to clean water in 2010, compared with 56 percent among those living above the \$1.25 poverty line. Meanwhile, fewer than half—49 percent—of the extreme poor had access to electricity. And while 61 percent of those above the poverty line of \$1.25 had access to basic sanitation, just 20 percent of the extreme poor had access to similar services, the report showed.



PHOTO: PAUL JEFFREY/OARITAS

U.S. CHURCH

Growth in Multicultural Parishes

The percentage of multicultural parishes in the United States is on the increase, according to research by the Georgetown University-based Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (C.A.R.A.). C.A.R.A. estimates there are approximately 6,700 multicultural parishes in the United States, many located in the South and West. The Official Catholic Directory lists more than 17,400 parishes in the country.

Membership of Hispanics in the Catholic Church is growing, reaching 38 percent, according to the report, though Non-Hispanic whites are still the majority at 54 percent of the na-

tional Catholic population. The report found that some 29.7 million U.S. residents who self-identify as Hispanic or Latino are estimated to be Catholic, representing about 59 percent of the 50.5 million Hispanic people in the United States. C.A.R.A. reports that 40 percent of all growth in parishioners in U.S. parishes from 2005 to 2010 was among Hispanics and Latinos.

According to the study, 4 percent of all parishes celebrate Masses in three or more different languages (including English) at least once a month. Most of the Masses celebrated in a language other than English are in Spanish (81 percent). About 6 percent of all Masses in the United States are now celebrated in Spanish. Parishes that only celebrate Mass in English are significantly less racially and ethnically diverse than other parishes. On average, 88 percent of parishioners in these parishes are non-Hispanic white and no other average for any other race or ethnicity group attains 5 percent within them.

Nationally, CARA estimates that:

- Approximately 42.5 million U.S. residents who self-identify as non-Hispanic white are Catholic, which represents 22 percent of people in the nation of this race and ethnicity.
- Approximately 3.6 million U.S. residents who self-identify as Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander are estimated to be Catholic, representing about 20 percent of this race and ethnicity in this country.
- Approximately 2.9 million U.S. residents who self-identify as black, African American, African or Afro-Caribbean are estimated to be Catholic, representing about 8 percent of the 38.9 million people of this race and ethnicity in the United States.
- Some 535,500 U.S. residents who self-identify as American Indian

or Alaskan Native are estimated to be Catholic, representing about 18 percent of the 2.9 million people of this race and ethnicity in this country.

C.A.R.A.'s research on multicultural parishes has found these to be, on average, larger than parishes in general. Multicultural parishes average 1,445 registered households, compared to 1,168 for parishes in general. Overall, about three in 10 U.S. parishes (29 percent or 5,000) celebrate at least one Mass a month in a language other than English or Latin.

The study asked pastors about changes in their parish from 2005 to 2010. On average nationally, parishes reported fewer non-Hispanic white parishioners in 2010 than they had in 2005, a decline of 1.5 percentage points. On average, pastors reported growth in the number of Hispanic or Latino parishioners (1.3 percentage points) and Asian, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander parishioners (0.5 percentage points) during this period. These trends are even more evident in multicultural parishes.



OUR MULTICULTURAL CHURCH. The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Dec. 12, 2012, at the Cathedral Basilica of SS. Peter and Paul in Philadelphia.

Salvadorans Protest Legal Aid Closing

Social organizations in El Salvador demonstrated outside the Metropolitan Cathedral on Oct. 6 to demand that Archbishop José Escobar Alas clarify the fate of thousands of documents containing information on human rights violations. The documents have been in limbo since the archbishop's decision on Sept. 30 to close Tutela Legal, the archdiocesan legal aid office, after he allegedly found cases of embezzlement and corruption. The archbishop did not offer any evidence of such offenses to the press. Tutela Legal investigated war crimes during the 1980-92 civil war in El Salvador. Protesters believe that it houses about 50,000 files containing evidence of war crimes. Protesters fear that the documents have been altered or lost, especially now that the Supreme Court is going to study whether the Amnesty Law, passed by Congress in 1993, is unconstitutional.

Synod to Discuss Families

The predicament of divorced and remarried Catholics will be a major topic of discussion when bishops from around the world meet at the Vatican in October 2014. The Vatican announced on Oct. 8 that an extraordinary session of the Synod of Bishops will convene from Oct. 5 through Oct. 19, 2014, to discuss the "pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelization." The pope had told reporters accompanying him on his return from Rio de Janeiro in July that the next synod would explore a "somewhat deeper pastoral care of marriage," including the question of the eligibility of divorced and remar-

NEWS BRIEFS

A class action lawsuit was filed on Oct. 9 in a New York State court against the United Nations on behalf of victims of a **cholera epidemic** in Haiti that has infected 650,000 and killed more than 8,300 people since October 2010. + **Paolo Dall'Oglio**, a Jesuit priest and peace activist kidnapped by Syrian rebels on July 28, is "alive and being treated well" by members of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, sources told a Syrian journalist in mid-October. + The death toll from the **sinking of a boat** overloaded with North African migrants off the Italian island of Lampedusa reached 296 on Oct. 9, and it was expected that the bodies of more victims will be found inside the sunken vessel. + With the adoption of a **new law on financial transparency**, vigilance and information, the Vatican has almost completely revamped its finance laws, said Federico Lombardi, S.J., the Vatican spokesperson, on Oct. 9.



Cholera in Haiti

ried Catholics to receive Communion. Pope Francis added at the time that church law governing marriage annulments also "has to be reviewed, because ecclesiastical tribunals are not sufficient for this." The announcement of the synod came amid news that the Archdiocese of Freiburg, Germany, had issued new guidelines making it easier for divorced and remarried Catholics to receive Communion. The Vatican spokesman, Federico Lombardi, S.J., said that such matters were more properly dealt with at a church-wide level, "under the guidance of the pope and the bishops."

Palestinians Need Access

More than half the land in the West Bank, much of it agricultural and resource rich, is inaccessible to Palestinians, because of Israeli security restrictions. The first comprehen-

sive study of the potential economic impact of this "restricted land," released by the World Bank on Oct. 8, sets the current loss to the Palestinian economy at about \$3.4 billion. With growth of approximately 6 percent annually needed to absorb new entrants to the labor market, let alone make a dent in the soaring rate of youth unemployment, urgent attention is needed to find ways to grow the West Bank economy and create jobs, according to the World Bank.

The Palestinian economy, which currently relies on donor-financed consumption and suffers from ongoing stagnation of the private sector, is unsustainable, World Bank analysts argue. The report estimates that if businesses and farms were permitted to develop in Area C, under Israeli control, this would add as much as 35 percent to the Palestinian gross domestic product.

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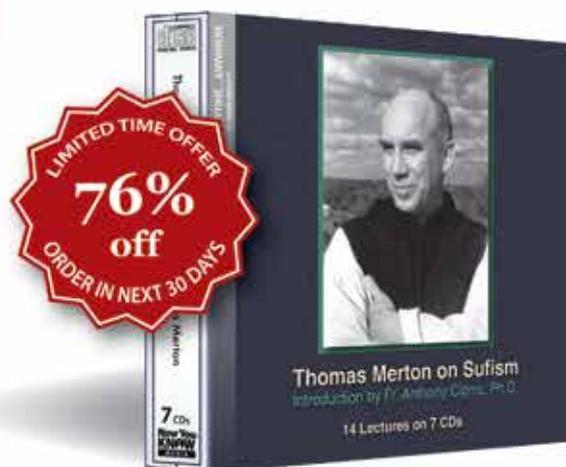
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Matt Malone, S.J.
Editor in Chief

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WOMEN IN DIALOGUE
WITH THE VATICAN

Opening Doors

BY KERRY ALYS ROBINSON

In Brazil for World Youth Day, Pope Francis met with the national bishops on July 28 and described challenges facing the church there: “Let us not reduce the involvement of women in the church, but instead promote their active role in the ecclesial community.” By losing women, Francis said, the church “risks becoming sterile.” We could not have said it better ourselves.

Five women colleagues in Catholic philanthropy and I have had the rare privilege to meet privately with prefects of pontifical congregations and presidents of pontifical councils. The purpose of our meetings with the cardinals in Rome, the highest ranking leaders in the Catholic Church, is specific in its simplicity: to discuss the role of women in the church and opportunities to elevate women to positions of meaningful leadership in the Roman Curia.

We are professional women who care deeply about the church and represent families with decades of service to the global church. We have studied Catholic theology at the master’s and doctoral levels, immersed ourselves in ecclesiology and canon law, raised our children in our faith and dedicated our lives to serving the church philanthropically. We have seen the church at its best: women and men, ordained, religious and lay, living lives of breathtaking holiness, championing justice, alleviating suffering,

KERRY ALYS ROBINSON is executive director of the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management.

providing catechesis, education and health care, extending mercy and hope and promoting peace. These women and men are Christ-like, and through them the world is made aware of God's presence. And because we are radically dedicated to helping the church thrive, we pay particular attention when the church fails to live up to its potential or manifests ignoble qualities: arrogance, exclusivity, fear, control, clericalism or poor management. When these qualities fracture trust, alienate people hungry for the Gospel, compromise sacramental life and result disproportionately in women and young adults turning away from the church, we are heartbroken.

A Conversation Begins

Chantal Götz, the effective and visionary president of the Fidel Götz Foundation based in Liechtenstein, has continued her family's tradition of cultivating relationships with Vatican leaders to better inform the impact of their philanthropy. The Götz family sagely observed that it would be of mutual benefit for young women representing their family's Catholic foundations and cardinals representing the Roman Curia to meet and to form relationships to better serve the church. In October 2007 we embarked on our first weeklong series of private meetings with cardinals in Rome to advocate for women.

It was fortuitous that earlier in his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI lamented the dearth of women in senior-level positions in the Roman Curia. We were eager to respond to his dismay and to promote concrete examples of his subsequent prophetic call for laity to be co-responsible for the church.

My colleagues and I learned a long time ago that to do nothing is to be complicit, so we welcomed the opportunity to go to Rome to promote the role of women. Our passion for this goal comes, in part, from the belief that women deserve to be equally valued, to experience being equally valued and to be entrusted with leadership and decision-making responsibilities in the church. The dignity of the human person, equally accorded, is at the heart of Christianity. Yet our

passion for these conversations is also deeply rooted in our conviction that valued female leadership is what the church deserves and needs in order to grow in its potential and to be more effective in its mission. By failing to attend properly to the leadership of women, the church misses out on the talent of half of the people made in the image and likeness of God to further its mission. Women bring unique experiences and alternative approaches to challenges. When companies and governments augment the percentage of women in leadership, prosperity increases. The church would likewise benefit, in terms of spiritual riches.

As evidence of the cardinals' receptivity, we have been invited back on several occasions. The most recent meeting took place this month. We have been received with genuine warmth and interest in our analysis of the challenges and concomitant recommendations. We met each

Without the contributions of highly-talented, accomplished women, the whole church is impoverished.



Representatives of Catholic foundations met with Cardinal Walter Kasper, then president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

president at his dicastery, and often had an opportunity to meet his senior staff. We were admitted to the papal palace and celebrated the Eucharist in the crypt of St. Peter's Basilica, and we were most grateful for the sincerity with which the cardinals listened and took seriously these discussions.

We have met with the secretaries of state, including the newly appointed Archbishop Pietro Parolin; the prefects of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Congregation for Bishops; the presidents of the Council for Justice and Peace; the Council for Promoting Christian Unity; the Council for Interreligious Dialogue; the Council for Culture; and the Council for Social Communications; as well as the president of Caritas Internationalis; the secretary

of the Congregation for Divine Worship; the general director of Vatican Radio and the director of the Press Office of the Holy See, among others.

Our thesis is this: When a young Catholic woman, particularly from the West, looks at the landscape of her professional life, she knows that she can reach high levels of leadership in any sector or industry. But when that same woman discerns a vocation of service to the church she loves, she is more often met with limitations on her leadership. She finds she cannot bring her full complement of competencies to bear on serving the church. So she turns her attention instead to the secular world, where she can excel, be promoted, be appreciated, lead and serve fully. The church becomes less and less relevant to her and by extension becomes increasingly less relevant to her children, both boys and girls. Without these highly talented, accomplished women, the whole church is impoverished.

Practical Solutions

During our visits practical solutions are proffered in earnest and discussed in detail: Expand the number of women in professional roles in each dicastery. Increase the number of women who serve on advisory councils to each pontifical congregation and council, and expand the pool of candidates who are called to serve in such advisory roles. Restore women to diaconal ministry. Appoint women to the diplomatic corps and to the communications apostolate. Ensure in the selection of bishops that criteria include a candidate's ability to relate well to women. Review the current Lectionary and reclaim the many Scriptural passages with women as protagonists that have been left out of the readings heard at Mass. Ponder the effect and impact such exclusion has had over time in the catechesis and participation of women and girls in the life of the church.

We also address the perceptions many have of the church with regard to its treatment of women. One suggestion is to consider as a theme for the pope's next celebration of the World Day of Peace on Jan. 1, "The Church in Solidarity with Women and Girls." Perceptions matter. If many perceive that the church leans toward exclusion, then the church should address and correct that perception head on. We fell in love with the church in large part because of its profound witness to the dignity of the human person and its advocacy for those in need. Women and children are disproportionately affected by poverty, disease, war and famine. They, the most vulnerable, are the face of humankind for whom the church extends the preferential option. We discussed providing resources for journalists at Vatican Radio and other media to cover life-giving initiatives being made by women all over the globe to alleviate poverty, eradicate human trafficking and educate the poor—like the heroic women religious in Syria, who at great personal risk

remain in the country to care for orphans. These are the stories of faith in action, stories of mercy and courage that inspire us to be better people.

In our meetings with Vatican officials we have been impassioned advocates for women religious. Over the decades of our collective families' philanthropy, it is women religious who have been center stage as part of the most compelling, courageous and effective ministries globally. Promoting, celebrating and expressing gratitude for their lives, leadership and example is right and just.

Our discussions and recommendations include the aspirational and practical. We offer simple, immediate steps that can be taken and more detailed projects requiring hard work and perseverance. A practical proposal we have championed is providing day care at the Vatican so that parents and especially mothers of young children who work there have safe, reliable and convenient child care. Likewise we have recommended that a network of women working in the Vatican be formed to support and promote one another.

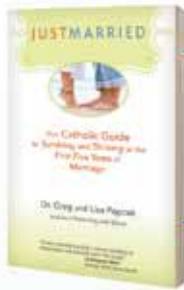
We recognize that there are far more ideas worthy of consideration and action, and we encourage a global discussion among the faithful. What are the obstacles that might be removed in order to appoint lay women to the College of Cardinals? Perhaps Pope Francis could invite women to join his committee of advisors on reforming the Curia. Perhaps he could establish a Council for the Promotion of Women in the Church, and recruit women (and men) from every continent to serve.

The church should make use of the expertise of women religious who have served in congregational leadership at the international level. Must leadership in each and every instance require ordination? For symbolic reasons alone these appointments would be stunning, but also the decisions would reflect how much the church stands to benefit from such perspective and expertise. Strategies for evangelization would be significantly strengthened by the input of women. Women can help our beloved church be holier, more effective, more relevant, more welcoming and more faithful in its mission.

We point to successful efforts that promote the active participation of women in the church. Often we have been made aware of these examples through our philanthropy. We note the growing number of women who serve as chancellors and other senior diocesan leaders as a positive development. A fundamental precept is that it matters who is invited to sit at the table of responsibility and decision-making. Diversity of perspective and experience is advantageous. We are haunted by the conviction that had parents, especially mothers, been at the table when decisions were being made during the sexual abuse crisis of the church, outcomes would have been different.

In the United States the National Leadership Roundtable

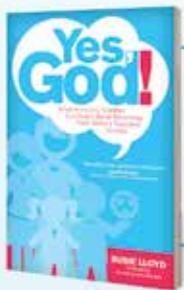
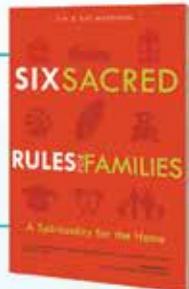
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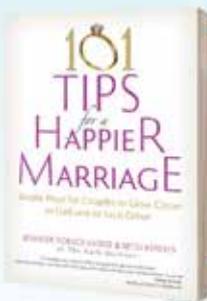
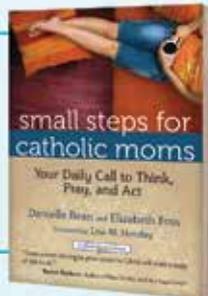
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on Church Management, of which I serve as executive director, advocates for the role of laity, particularly senior executive leaders from the secular world whose financial acumen, managerial expertise, human resource experience and communications skill could benefit the church. Complex, temporal challenges facing church leaders are solved with the assistance of these experienced and committed leaders. In the decade since the roundtable was formed, we have been acutely aware of a byproduct of this involvement by the laity: evangelization. This is an important lesson. When a professional woman is recognized for the skill, expertise and competencies she possesses and is invited to share those talents in service to the church, she is far more likely to be invested and committed.

Eager for Leadership

It is not just senior-level executive women the church risks losing. There are many well-educated young women who are capable of and eager for leadership in the church. Many young adults have a positive experience of church while at college, but upon graduation drift away from the church. For years it has been argued that they will come back when they marry, have children or experience a crisis. Never mind what a poor strategic plan this is. The fact is: It is not working. To address this challenge directly, Saint Thomas More Catholic Chapel and Center at Yale University, along with the Leadership Roundtable, created Esteem (Engaging Students to Enliven the Ecclesial Mission), a young adult leadership formation program currently on 12 campuses in the United States. Guided by a year-long curriculum and matched with mentors in their vocational fields of interest, the best and brightest Catholic students are prepared for leadership on parish pastoral councils, diocesan finance councils and boards of trustees of Catholic nonprofits immediately upon graduation. Preparing and inviting young adults to lend what they do best in service to the church in leadership roles keeps them engaged in the church more deeply and for much longer, and their visibility in turn communicates to other young adults that they are valued. And the church benefits.

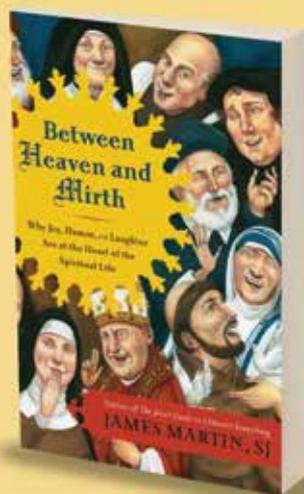
We want to encourage all who have the best interest of the church at heart to join in contributing to this wider conversation, begun by generations preceding us, and offer creative ideas, practical solutions and diverse perspectives. We encourage sons, fathers, husbands, deacons and pastors to lift up their mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, nieces and women colleagues in ministry and be a part of this dialogue and advocacy. Let us turn our deliberations into action and hold ourselves accountable. Let us give faithful, articulate and prophetic voice to the importance of baptismal rights and responsibilities of every member of the church, and be part of the global transformation of consciousness that celebrates, invites, affirms and encourages the leadership of women in service to the church's mission.



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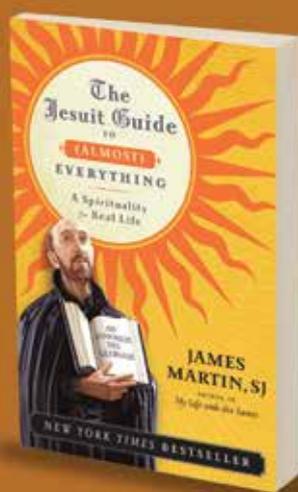
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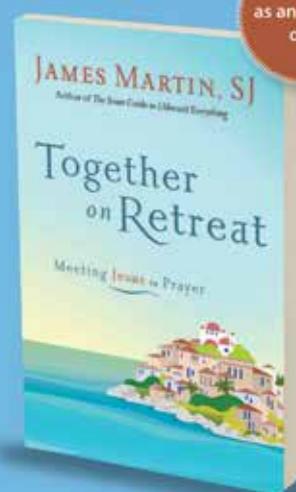
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A Promising Path

Building 'a profound theology of womanhood' for the 21st century

BY KATHLEEN SPROWS CUMMINGS

The frustration and ambivalence a growing number of women feel toward their church springs from a tension that has long been at the heart of the American Catholic experience—namely, the lack of connection between life in a society that adapts easily and quickly, and faith in a church that measures change in centuries. In no aspect of Catholic life over the last half-century has American innovation collided more spectacularly with church tradition than in regard to the changing roles of women.

Between the early 19th century and the late 1960s, the average Catholic woman in the United States could envision far more opportunities within church structures than outside of them. Religious life offered Catholic women access to education, meaningful work and leadership in ways that were inconceivable in secular circles. In the last half-century we have witnessed a historic reversal of this pattern. Transformations for women in American society have far outpaced transformations for women within the church. While religious life still offers many opportunities, Catholic women increasingly accustomed to wide-open doors in American life grow progressively discontented when they see their church roles as limited.

During a press conference on his flight from Rio de Janeiro to Rome in July, Pope Francis told reporters, "That door is closed," when asked about women's ordination. He was echoing a statement made by Pope John Paul II in 1994. For many, the prohibition on discussing women's ordination is troubling. But to my mind, in terms of advancing conversation about women and the church, the door that Pope Francis is keeping closed may, in the long run, turn out to be far less significant than the window he has opened. Just before his statement on women's ordination, the pope observed: "[W]e have not yet come up with a profound theology of womanhood.... All we say is: they can do this, they can do that, now they are altar servers, now they do the readings, they are in charge of Caritas.... But there is more! We need to develop a profound theology of womanhood."

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With those words, Francis may well have restarted a conversation that has been stalled for almost five decades. As it happened, in the process of trying to reopen or seal shut or avoid altogether a conversation on the subject of women's ordination, the church in the United States has let fall by the wayside many other valuable topics with regard to women and the church. In 1983, for example, U.S. bishops set out to write a pastoral letter in response to concerns of women. They were acting on a recommendation of the National Council of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Women in Society and in the Church, which was formed in 1972 amid concerns about sexism in the church and culture and in response to women's desire for fuller participation in the church.

Over the following nine years, four drafts of the document were submitted, all of which were voted down. Eventually, the bishops gave up, farming out a few topics to subcommittees but ultimately letting the project slip away. This was far from the only attempt to launch a sustained conversation about women and the church that never completely got off the ground. In parishes, in dioceses, in Catholic universities, discussions about women in the life of the church either stumble over the obstacle of ordination or founder amid fear of criticism or controversy.

In his recent interview with Jesuit journals worldwide, including **America**, Pope Francis made his point even more strongly, insisting that "[i]t is necessary to broaden the opportunities for a stronger presence of women in the church." He is suggesting that it is not simply permissible, but in fact essential, for Catholics to engage in a multi-faceted conversation about what it means to be a woman in the church. I agree. In response to an earlier question on that Rome-bound flight, the pope explained why he had not discussed church teaching about abortion and same-sex marriage at World Youth Day. He had decided, he said, to focus on "positive things that open up the path to young people.... Besides, young people know perfectly well what the church's position is."

If a "positive path" is indeed the goal, a more nuanced conversation about women and the church stands to open one up to young Catholics. I teach a course at the University of Notre Dame called "Women and American Catholicism." On the first day of class a few years ago one student informed me that she had enrolled merely out of curiosity:

ON THE WEB

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“How,” she wondered, “could a course on this topic last any longer than two weeks? Considering that women are unable to be priests, what could we possibly have to talk about for an entire semester?”

This student was a senior who had attended Catholic schools all her life, yet she viewed the complex history of women and the church through a single lens. This same student privately confided that she was having a crisis of faith as she considered her options beyond graduation. Like many of her classmates, she combined prodigious talent with a deep sense of vocation, and the astonishing range of professional opportunities that awaited her stood in stark contrast to what she saw as her sharply circumscribed options within the church. I have lost touch with this student, but I hope she and many of her peers heard Francis when he insisted that “the role of women in the church must not be limited to being mothers, workers, a limited role....”

Women’s Work

In mentioning women’s roles as “mothers” and “workers” Francis unwittingly supplied two excellent points of departure for thinking about what a “profound theology of womanhood” might include. My thoughts on both subjects are by no means intended to be comprehensive, and I offer them as a historian of American women, a mother of three and a Catholic whose faith has been shaped by a half-century’s worth of feminist theology—a body of literature too often misunderstood or overlooked, and one with which any credible new theology of womanhood must engage.

I often hear the Catholic Church celebrated for all it does to affirm mothers in their vocation. I might quibble that what we read in official documents or hear in pulpits about motherhood could be more accurately characterized as “glorification” rather than “affirmation,” but I accept the larger point. Still, what I crave most from the church is an embodied theology of motherhood that attends explicitly



to what it means to shelter another human being within one’s own body, to give birth to and to sustain that person and to remain indelibly connected with him or her for a lifetime.

I call to mind, for example, the visceral reaction I had a few years ago when I went to an Advent prayer service in a campus chapel, and noticed that the rector had replaced the matched-set statue of Mary in the Nativity scene with a simple, wooden figurine of a pregnant woman. Until that moment—hard to

believe—I had never imagined Mary as a pregnant woman, and seeing her as such deepened my devotion to her. In the same vein, a profound theology of womanhood might encourage more use of scriptural metaphors comparing God to a woman in labor or a nursing mother. What comforting access to the divine that would provide for women struggling with the pain of childbirth or the exhaustion of new motherhood; what powerful reminders to all believers that God’s love for us is so fierce and unrelenting that we will never be abandoned, no matter how often we behave like needy infants, petulant toddlers or self-absorbed teenagers.

Acknowledging the sheer physicality inherent in motherhood is not the same as defining a woman by motherhood or, for that matter, by any other physical relationship. This arena provides ample room to rethink Catholic teachings about womanhood, which often appear to define women exclusively through their connections to other human beings—to identify them, in other words, only as mothers, wives or virgins. Not only does this persistent tendency do a grave injustice to the many Catholic women who are neither mothers nor wives, either by design or by default, but it also does all women a disservice by intimating that their relationship to their creator must be mediated through others.

Considering the category of women as “workers” also opens up a rich field for re-imagining their role in the church, quite apart from any discussion of holy orders. A

good start might be to develop a theological framework that would recognize and reward women—on this earth—for the often invisible and un- or under-compensated labor that has long sustained the church and will do so long into the future. This would almost certainly lead to a less adversarial relationship between the hierarchy and some women religious, whose communities have served for decades as an ecclesiastical work force in this country and who continue to do much of Christ’s grittiest work in the world.

A profound theology of womanhood must also incorporate the legions of women who are not vowed religious but who make up most of the pastoral work force in parishes and dioceses. What would it mean, practically and symbolically, for church leaders to allocate as many resources to lay ministry training programs as they do to diaconate formation? What would it mean for church leaders to commit to creative visioning about female leadership in the church, to appoint the most competent women to visible positions of power in nonsacramental roles at every level, in parishes, in dioceses and even the Vatican?

To that end, perhaps it is worthwhile to urge our new pope to take another page from his namesake. Francis of Assisi listened to, collaborated with and learned from a woman of deep faith. There are plenty of modern-day Clares who would welcome the opportunity to be encouraged and supported by this Francis, as they minister and lead out of the same spirit and call. ▲



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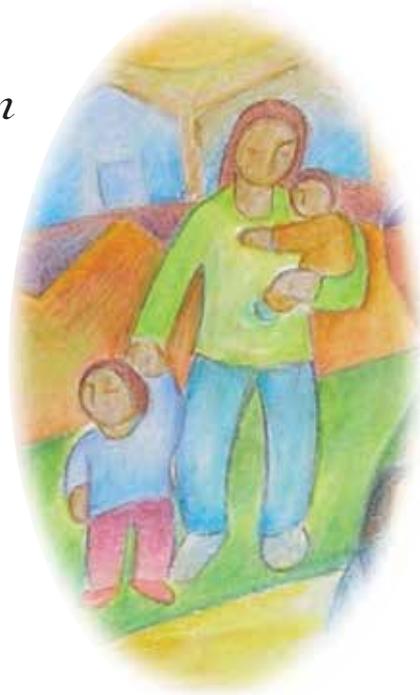
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Growth Opportunity

The importance of supporting women in developing nations

BY CAROLYN Y. WOO

Bibi is illiterate, and she expected Nisa, her 9-year-old daughter to always be illiterate, too. In the Herat province of Afghanistan where they live, there is little reason to learn to read and write. There is always other work to be done.

But when an education team from Catholic Relief Services came to their village, Nisa's father signed her up for school. "Why are you going to school?" Bibi asked her daughter. "Education is useless for a girl."

Many Afghan parents do not want their girls traveling long distances to school. But because the school was built in the village, many girls could now get an education. And Nisa's father insisted the family had a responsibility to educate their children.

Nisa wanted to go to school so much that she cried, pleading with her mother to allow it. She promised to help with household chores. Reluctantly, Bibi watched as her daughter went off to the classes.

The role of women can be limited by the traditions and expectations of society. This confinement is nothing new, but it is certainly something I learned growing up in Hong Kong. We were a generation or more removed from the Chinese practice of binding feet, but there were still many things that bound women, limiting our prospects.

Like Nisa, I was able to take advantage of the education offered by Catholics, in my case the Maryknoll sisters. The sisters who taught me had left their lives in the United States to come to China to educate young girls. When they were told to leave after the Communist takeover, they came to Hong Kong to continue their mission. I learned my school lessons from these sisters, but I also learned self-agency, the importance of dreams and confidence. I learned that I could stand with anyone.

Now, as president of Catholic Relief Services, I have the opportunity to close the circle, to be part of an organization that helps women around the world realize their potential just as the Maryknoll sisters helped me. We try to help women to free themselves from the many things that bind them, whether it is poverty or hunger or illiteracy, restricted access to health care or absence of clean water.

CAROLYN Y. WOO is president & C.E.O. of Catholic Relief Services.



WELCOME CHANGE. A savings and internal lending group meets in Rwanda.

Such a mission comes directly from the principles of Catholic social teaching. At its core is integral human development. For decades, we have realized that economic development, while important, is not enough. We have worked to make sure that all parts of the person are nourished in a way that allows them to lead lives of fulfillment.

We know not to attack the traditions of a society in the name of helping women. Such a neocolonial approach would only create resentment. Nisa's story shows that such resentment does not necessarily come from men, but from many women as well. What we must do is find ways to give women and girls the resources, training, support and space they need to grow. We understand that no society will flourish if the women within it are not healthy and happy.

Saving and Supporting

One of our programs, Savings and Internal Lending Communities, essentially creates savings clubs for those with little or no access to formal financial institutions, even to micro-lenders. Loans they could access sometimes come with interest rates of 12 percent per month. Any unforeseen circumstance can send a family into perpetual debt.

A SILC group comes together, and its members decide

among themselves how much each will save every week. They pool that money and lend it out to individual members. The group decides interest rates and payment schedules. At the end of a cycle, usually about a year, they split up the proceeds. And often they begin again.

We lend our expertise to help groups get the SILC going—teaching them the basics of bookkeeping, if needed—



We understand that no society will flourish if the women within it are not healthy and happy.

and then soon back away and let the members take over. Last year, we celebrated one million members of C.R.S. SILC groups. And three-quarters of them were women.

SILC groups often serve several purposes. In Rwanda they might bring together families who were on different sides of the genocide two decades ago, getting to know one another in a way that otherwise might have been impossible.

One SILC group in Ethiopia was created for people affected by H.I.V. It gave them a place where they could talk about their problems, their fears, their concerns, where they could support each other, free from any stigmatization.

And it gave them a place to save money. One woman in the group—let's call her Sara—whose husband had died, borrowed money to buy a steer, fattened it up and sold it at profit. Sara paid back the loan, bought another steer and did the same thing again.

When I saw her, Sara proudly displayed her third steer that would soon be sold. And she pointed to the front of her housing compound where, with her profits, she had opened a small beauty salon for her eldest child, a daughter, to operate. Sara had other children. Future profits

would take care of them.

The SILC group was at once a health education club, a therapy group and a means of economic empowerment. Sara had found a way to do what mothers everywhere hope to do—take care of their children so they could grow up and become happy, fulfilled, productive members of their society. She had also contributed to the economy of her society by developing a non-agricultural livelihood, something so important for development. And she had gained independence and confidence that would affect her whole life and her family. Frequently the women also gain new respect from their husbands and in-laws. They are treated better and consulted more often in family decisions.

Health and Wellness

Gladys lives in the village of Nungu in northern Ghana. Not too long ago, this thin 21-year-old might have given birth in a small, hot, unsanitary room, her delivery in the hands of traditional birth attendants.

These traditional attendants were important people in their communities. Their role gave them status, but their knowledge of the medical issues around childbirth was limited. C.R.S. hoped to improve the birthing conditions for these women. Instead of trying to reduce the attendants' status, we worked with health officials in Ghana to give the attendants training, so they became the link between pregnant women and the health care system. Their pre-existing respect added importance to the message of getting childbirth care. They are now entrusted with aiding the birth of their community's babies in a new and healthier way. When Gladys gave birth, she had already had prenatal checkups at the local health center and she was instructed in infant care.

We know that the most effective and efficient way to affect the future of a community is to reach women like Nisa, Sara and Gladys. If we take care of women, they will take care of the children. If we ensure that women are healthy, we are taking a vital step toward ensuring the health of their children. The future for all will be brighter.

So throughout the world for the last decade, C.R.S. has formed mothers' groups, care and support groups that provide a space where women can talk to other women, working through problems together, reinforcing knowledge, practices and understanding that experience has taught each of the participants in many different ways.

In Haiti where we formed these groups, the rate of malnutrition among children in the target communities has been reduced from 14 percent to 8 percent. Throughout these communities, people have improved their health and prevented needless deaths. One thing mothers' groups and

ON THE WEB
Samples from the work
of Catholic women artists.
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many of our other programs do is link the generations. Older women have a role in the lives of the younger ones, so the wisdom of the grandmothers is brought into the lives of new mothers. Messages about properly raising healthy children will be heard if they come in this fashion. Reach the women in any society, and the results will ripple through every part of every community for generations.

New Life

As the story of Gladys shows, nowhere is this more apparent than in the first 1,000 days of life, starting with how that life begins. We know that if births are properly spaced, both the mother and child will have better health and nutrition. To help in that process, we instruct people on natural family planning, using “cycle beads” to count the days to determine the time of ovulation. We found that this method is gaining acceptance in both Catholic and non-Catholic communities, as it is culturally sensitive, affordable and not dependent on an advanced health care infrastructure. We know that it works and that it encourages a dialogue between husbands and wives, which advances the stature of women.

From conception through those crucial 1,000 days after birth, our nutrition programs support mother and child. We advise healthy mothers to try to give their babies breast milk for the first six months and good food after that. If young children do not get this nutrition, they are in danger of having

stunted growth and being short in stature, having a greater chance of learning difficulties and dropping out of school, and having all sorts of health difficulties that follow them into adulthood. Right now in Burundi, C.R.S. is looking at 50,000 mother-child units and analyzing the best nutrition for those first 1,000 days to reach the best health outcomes.

While some of our programs do not seem to be aimed at women, they still have a great impact on the lives of women and girls. Fetching water is often the work of young girls. Drill a well and, instead of spending hours walking to the nearest river and back, girls can go to school. In areas where security is difficult, sexual attacks often occur when women and girls leave their villages to gather firewood. Provide better fuel sources, and you protect these vulnerable women.

We also help victims of gender-based violence by supporting doctors and clinics that treat their traumas, both physical and psychological, as well as protection programs and SILC groups that provide spaces for victims to come together and heal. We do similar work with victims of sexual trafficking.

It is such a joy to be able to work with this agency that affects women around the world, as the Maryknoll sisters traveled halfway around the world and affected me. There is another lesson I learned from those Maryknoll sisters: that God is real. I saw the faith that had taken them so far from home. I saw the impact they had on so many lives. What

better demonstration of the power and truth of the Holy Spirit?

I see that impact on people like Nisa in Afghanistan.

Every day, Nisa brought home a book from the “libraries in a box” that C.R.S. provides to the schools, and she read it to her brothers and sisters. But her mother still wasn’t happy about her studies. One day she brought home a new book. “Read it for us,” her father said. The book was called *Respect Your Mothers*. As Nisa was reading, her elder brother told their mother, “Education is very good. If my brother was not illiterate, he wouldn’t need to go to Iran to work as a laborer to make his money. If I was educated, I wouldn’t be forced to work gathering firewood. I would have the ability to do more.”

As she listened, Bibi had a change of heart.

“I used to think that education is not good, but now I know it is useful for everyone,” Bibi said, happy that her daughter would have opportunities that she did not. ▲



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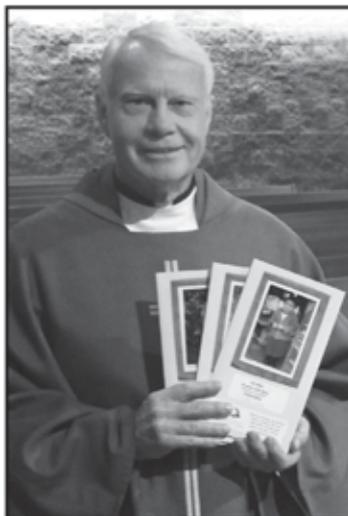
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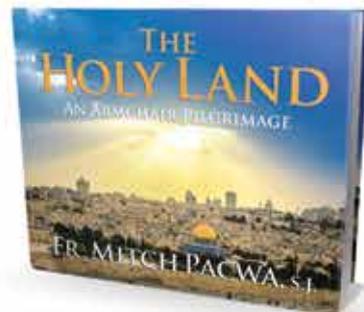
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About the Author

FR. MITCH PACWA, S.J., was ordained a priest in 1976. He is best known for his appearances on EWTN, where he hosts two programs, *Threshold of Hope* and *EWTN Live*. Fr. Pacwa also serves as the weekly host of EWTN Radio's *Open Line* program.

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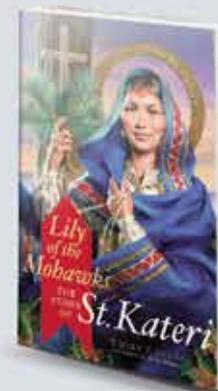
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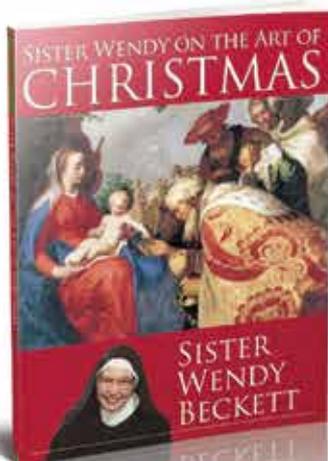
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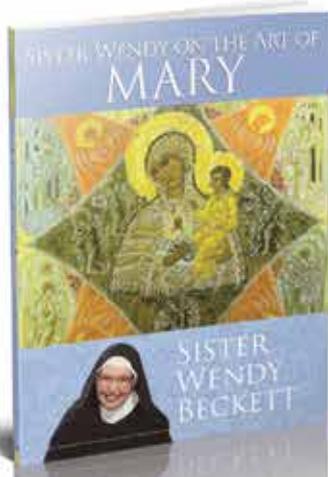


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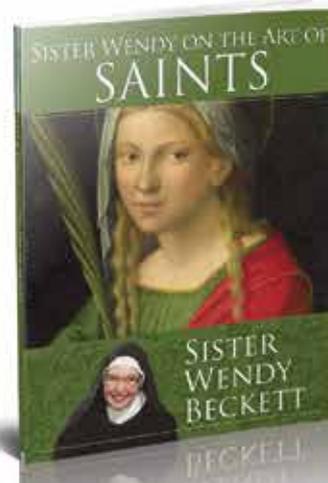


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About the Author

SISTER WENDY BECKETT is an English hermit and art expert. In the 1990s, she was featured in a BBC documentary series on art history. Beckett entered the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in 1946 and graduated from Oxford University in 1953. She now lives under the protection of the Carmelite nuns at their monastery at Quidenham, Norfolk, where she leads a life of solitude and prayer, allotting two hours of work each day to earn her living.

Domestic Policy

Can the church help women achieve a better work-life balance?

BY HELEN M. ALVARÉ

As one of the early entrants into the “women can have it all” sweepstakes during the 1970s and ’80s, I am shocked both by how much has changed with regard to motherhood over the last 40 years and how little. Mothering in the modern world is still a charged topic. The media stories run the gamut: Motherhood is maligned in principle (e.g., Time magazine: “Having It All Without Having Children,” 8/13), celebrated as charming (e.g., Duchess Kate) and hyped as cool (e.g., the pop-singer Pink, who recently pronounced on motherhood: “[I]t’s like, ‘F—,’ this is so rad. It’s more important than anything we’ve done”).

As for the church, Pope John Paul II advanced Catholic reflection on mothers with his trifecta—the *Theology of the Body*, “On the Dignity and Vocation of Women” and the “Letter to Women”—as did then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger with his letter to the bishops “On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World.” These documents resoundingly affirmed the equality of the sexes while acknowledging their differences, including the obvious matter that only women can bear new life; highlighted women’s unique capacities to manifest primordially the very “meaning of life” for both sexes—love for the other; and insisted upon the obligations of men, civil society, the church and the state to support mothers in their various modern situations. This last message was closely related to several of the documents’ groundbreaking recognitions that every social arena and task would benefit from the presence of women but that mothers require and deserve assistance harmonizing their primary vocation (family) with their work outside the home. Also, since John Paul II called on women in 1995 to shape a new feminism, women at both scholarly and grass-roots levels have diligently reflected on motherhood and related questions.

But time does not stand still, and the question remains: what can Catholicism offer today in light of new situations facing mothers around the world? Before turning to this precise question, it is prudent to consider the nature of motherhood itself, lest we forget its essence in the midst of a conversation about change.

HELEN M. ALVARÉ is a law professor at George Mason University School of Law in Arlington, Va.

The Meaning of Motherhood

From the moment a woman learns that she is pregnant, she begins living in this world within a kind of enclosure containing herself and the child within her. I remember what can only be called a sense of magical realism: “Yesterday, it was just me; today it’s me and the child inside; tomorrow, a new person I don’t even know is coming to live at my house.” Ultrasounds become the most exciting films ever, providing for every woman a Marian “How can this be?” moment. The whole “life is a miracle” cliché becomes a reality, giving rise to new affection for the creator God.

There is also the dark side of visits to the doctor: the ultrasound showing that the child has died in the womb or indicating a sick child. Instantly the doctor is transformed from the host of the party to a kind of enemy, uttering words like “genetic counseling” or “termination.” I will never forget my husband’s whispering in my ear after an intense physician in a dark ultrasound room encouraged me, after a series of bad test results, to consider aborting my third child: “Doesn’t he know who the hell you are? You’re the woman getting ready to write *The Type-A Mother’s Guide to Raising a Seriously Ill Child*.”

As if this were not enough drama, there is childbirth. Then childrearing! Then there is the wondering whether it is a sin even to consider working outside the home after this helpless infant comes into your life, followed (for most women) by the struggle to figure out a work schedule allowing you to do justice at home first and still pay the bills. There is also the work of caring deeply, to the point where your own happiness is permanently on the line. In other words, you cannot stop yourself from trying to assure the impossible: your child’s goodness and wisdom and freedom from serious pain—forever.

Today more than ever, this entire roller-coaster ride is a choice. Sure, “surprise pregnancies” still occur, but between contraception and legal abortion, virtually any woman can “just say no.” She can also say “yes,” “how many” and “when,” thanks to the science of fertility, assisted reproductive technologies and even the vanishing stigma against nonmarital births. In this context, Catholic thinking about motherhood appears to me attentive to reality, while also revolutionary and ultimately, like all good revolutions, freeing. It continues full-throatedly to celebrate the miracle of gestation and

ON THE WEB

Anna Nussbaum Keating writes about the “hook-up” culture. americamagazine.org/women-church



HOME WORK. Meghan Hackett works on a home-schooling assignment with her daughter Kathleen, 8.

the role of mothers. Take Pope Francis' recent words: "The Madonna is more important than the apostles, and the church herself is feminine, the spouse of Christ and a mother." John Paul II referred often to women's "prior" understanding of the gift of life and of the meaning of life as loving because she, and not the man, becomes pregnant, gives birth and feeds the child from her own body. Women's "capacity for the other," too, is held up by Catholic teaching as a model for the human race.

At the same time, the church in the later 20th century began to affirm women's right to access to the public square, in roles formerly reserved to men, first in the Second Vatican Council's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," then in later documents addressed specifically to women. There, and in the Holy See's interventions at the United Nations, the church demanded also that laws and social policies take into account the gift of women's lives—by way of policies that grant social benefits for the care-work women contribute and policies that ensure women's ability to care for their families as their first priority while they also work outside the home.

Women at Work

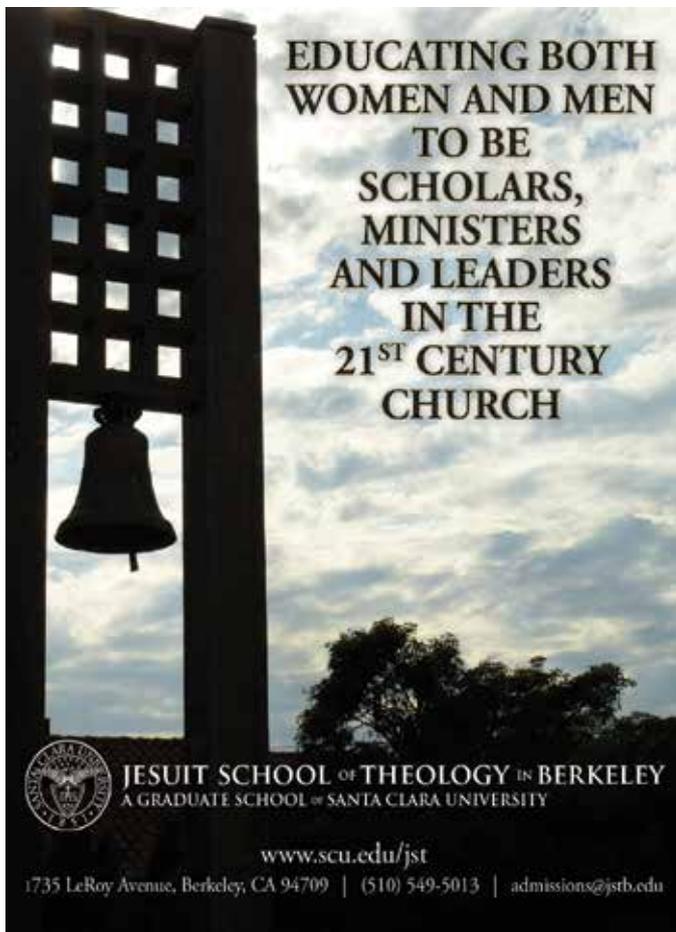
At first blush, the church's recommendations might have seemed to overemphasize the domestic in women's lives. But history has shown otherwise. After decades during which the "official" women's movement maligned marriage and motherhood—and worked rather to help women avoid mothering, in favor of the workplace—surveys show again

and again that while women are intent upon qualifying for every social role previously available only to men, most mothers still prefer to work part time or stay home full time, at least for some of their children's growing years. Surveys also show that women working outside the home are happiest when their workplace offers flexible terms so that they can indeed put their family first.

But "working mothers" are not the only ones in the headlines about mothering. The church (leaders, lay experts, mothers) needs to reflect today upon a few more developments. First, for example, there is the "great divorce" of sex from parenting, as women cooperate more and more with an ethic of casual sex leading to abortion or single mothering, both of which reject a child's right to be conceived and born as human dignity demands—in love, with both a mother and a father.

Second, the powers that be disregard the deep desires (and rights, in my view) of many of the most vulnerable women to marry, stay married and bear marital children. A close look at the wide array of current laws and policies affecting these decisions and states in life bears this out. These policies vigorously promote economically self-sufficient parenting and involved fathers, but only weakly support parenting within marriage. And they discount or dismiss biological parent-child ties in favor of individual adults' choices about parenting. The most prominent federal and state government policies, in fact, are all about "self-empowerment" and birth control, not about stable marital and parenting communities.

Third, corporate culture has only marginally deferred to women's (and some men's) desires for a combination of flex-



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ibility and job security. Most new mothers, or parents taking care of aged grandparents, are consigned instead to the tender mercies of limited, unpaid leave.

Fourth, neither federal nor state lawmakers have acknowledged the huge social gift represented by women's care-work. Were the state to care for children and the elderly, the costs would be unimaginable. But women who do it every day receive extraordinarily small tax breaks and no credit toward future retirement benefits.

The church needs to urge public and private actors to give motherhood its due in all of these arenas. It could call for a church-wide and society-wide reflection on what a half-century of consciousness about women has delivered for mothers and what it has not. It could point out how the prevailing feminisms, to the extent they have delivered advantages, have benefitted privileged mothers disproportionately and vastly more than women in poor circumstances. It could make its teachings about marriage and motherhood more accessible, teachings that, after all, the church holds to have cosmic and anthropological significance, given its insistence that marriage provides a glimpse of God and of the meaning of life as faithful, permanent loving. Of course, there are many important social institutions. The Catholic Church is not alone in possessing wisdom and resources concerning motherhood. There is no doubt, however, that it has unique intellectual and pastoral gifts that women, children, families and society urgently require. 



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Everything Is Yours

Self-gift as a framework for ministry

BY ANNIE SELAK

Breyan Tornifolio approached the Mass with a full yet heavy heart. It was her last time worshipping at Ryan Hall, where she served as a minister for students at the University of Notre Dame since the building's opening in 2009. At the end of Mass, after Tornifolio blessed the graduating seniors, the presider surprised Tornifolio by inviting her to come to the center of the chapel and sit, looking out at the community she had given so much to, yet also received so much from in return. The community of 110 women stretched out their hands and joined in the blessing, saying, "You have given your life to us; we now return it to you." This simple blessing highlighted the *kenosis*, the self-gift, at the heart of ministry.

Countless blog posts, articles and pundits have opined about how women might find the perfect work-life balance. Yet this dichotomy unfairly separates "work" and "life," as though work is not a meaningful part of one's real life. It is perhaps even more troubling that this approach reduces women to three categories: professional, mother and wife. Anyone lacking any of these titles is deemed insufficient, and for many, anything more seems impossible.

We need a new framework for this discussion, one that allows for the reality and spirituality of work itself. Fortunately, we need look no further than the Incarnation. Jesus, fully human and fully divine, gave of himself throughout his life. Theologically, this is called *kenosis*, the Greek word for "self-emptying." Through *kenosis* we empty ourselves of our will and become filled with God's will. Simply speaking, this is self-gift.

ANNIE SELAK, a graduate of the Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University in Berkeley, Calif., is a residence hall minister at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Ind.

If we are to truly give of ourselves, we must first recognize that all aspects of our lives are inherently integrated. To give of oneself is the deepest, most profound thing one can offer. It requires a vulnerability that opens the door for transformation, both for the person giving and the person receiving. It is raw, authentic, integrated, transformative and, most important, grounded in a relationship with God.

Any form of self-gift is predicated upon a relationship



The Spirit guides us to
give of God and ourselves.

with God. From this, giving of oneself becomes giving of God. It is not about me as a person with incredible gifts, but rather about God working through my experience and gifts. In this way, we are earthen vessels that hold and share the greatness of God. As a vessel, we are not called to empty ourselves in such a way that we lose ourselves. Rather, we must have an intimate relationship with God such that when we give of ourselves, we also give of God. This *kenosis* is a strong calling that takes effort, intentionality and ultimately grace.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/OPIC-IMAGES

An Integrated Life

No areas of our lives are off-limits to God. The Ignatian idea of finding God in all things is not just a simple way of viewing our lives. Rather, it makes strong demands on us to respond accordingly. My friend Katie Bignell, a book editor, described it this way: "Saint Ignatius encourages us to find God in all things. I believe that in return, we are called to give God in all things, whether that be the way we listen to a friend who needs to talk, interact with colleagues, or approach a project at work." Living an integrated life is demanding. It is tempting to limit self-gift to areas of spirituality or intimate relationships, yet we are called to practice this in all aspects of our lives, especially those we resist most. When we lead integrated lives, we can see the kingdom of God as the source and summit of our lives: it is the font from which all flows as well as the point to which all our energy and efforts is directed.

One might mistakenly assume that self-gift does not require boundaries. As a person formed in ministry in the wake of the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church, I value boundaries and understand the urgent need for them. Furthermore, as someone who works in an all-consuming, live-in ministry as a residence hall minister, I recognize the potential for burnout without proper boundaries and self-

care. The call for self-gift is not a call away from boundaries; instead, it leads one to ask about the purpose of boundaries. Boundaries are not about shutting others out but about giving of oneself in a healthy way.

Issues of boundaries and self-care can quickly devolve into self-centered questions. Self-care often plays upon society's fascination with overachievement by framing the goal as, "Take care of yourself so that you can do more." *Kenosis* shifts the emphasis away from an I-centered approach to focus upon the presence of God in my life. Questions like "How am I going to do all this?" become "How is God calling me?"

Even in fields where it is advisable to leave work at the door, one can still benefit from a nuanced understanding of self-gift. Jennifer Anderson, an occupational therapist in New York, contrasted the experience of giving out of obligation with giving out of God: "When I have given of myself most freely, and most deeply, it was hard. But the 'yes' to give was so easy. I left those circumstances weary, but not depleted, not 'less than.'" Authentic *kenosis* calls us to remain in God when we feel ourselves being pulled away and attempting to do things apart from God. This highlights that even in fields where self-gift may take a different shape, *kenosis* reaps untold rewards.

ON THE WEB

Joan Dawber, S.C., discusses her work against human trafficking. americamagazine.org/podcast

An Ecclesial Tradition

Catholic heritage reveals a rich legacy of self-gift. This is especially true of Ignatian spirituality. In the "Suscipe," St. Ignatius prays: "You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will." This prayer perfectly captures the spirit of *kenosis*. It calls me to intentionally set aside my own will for that of God.

A foundational element of *kenosis* is the involvement of the Holy Spirit. In a homily at the Casa Santa Marta on July 6, Pope Francis proclaimed, "Being Christian ultimately means, not doing things, but allowing oneself to be renewed by the Holy Spirit." Once again, the emphasis switches from me completing acts to being transformed by the Spirit—a kenotic process. The Spirit guides us to give of God and ourselves, and this renews us, others and ultimately the church.

Approaching our lives through the lens of *kenosis* has the potential to revolutionize the church. *Kenosis* creates a symbiotic relationship between the people of God and the church. Every act of self-gift becomes an act of bringing God into the world. As a result, the faithful are continually giving to the world and building the kingdom of God, renewing the church. *Kenosis* is a path to actualizing the vision of St. Bede the Venerable that "every day the church gives birth to the church." Every day the church as the faithful gives by *kenosis*, and God, working through us, transforms the church and the world. 

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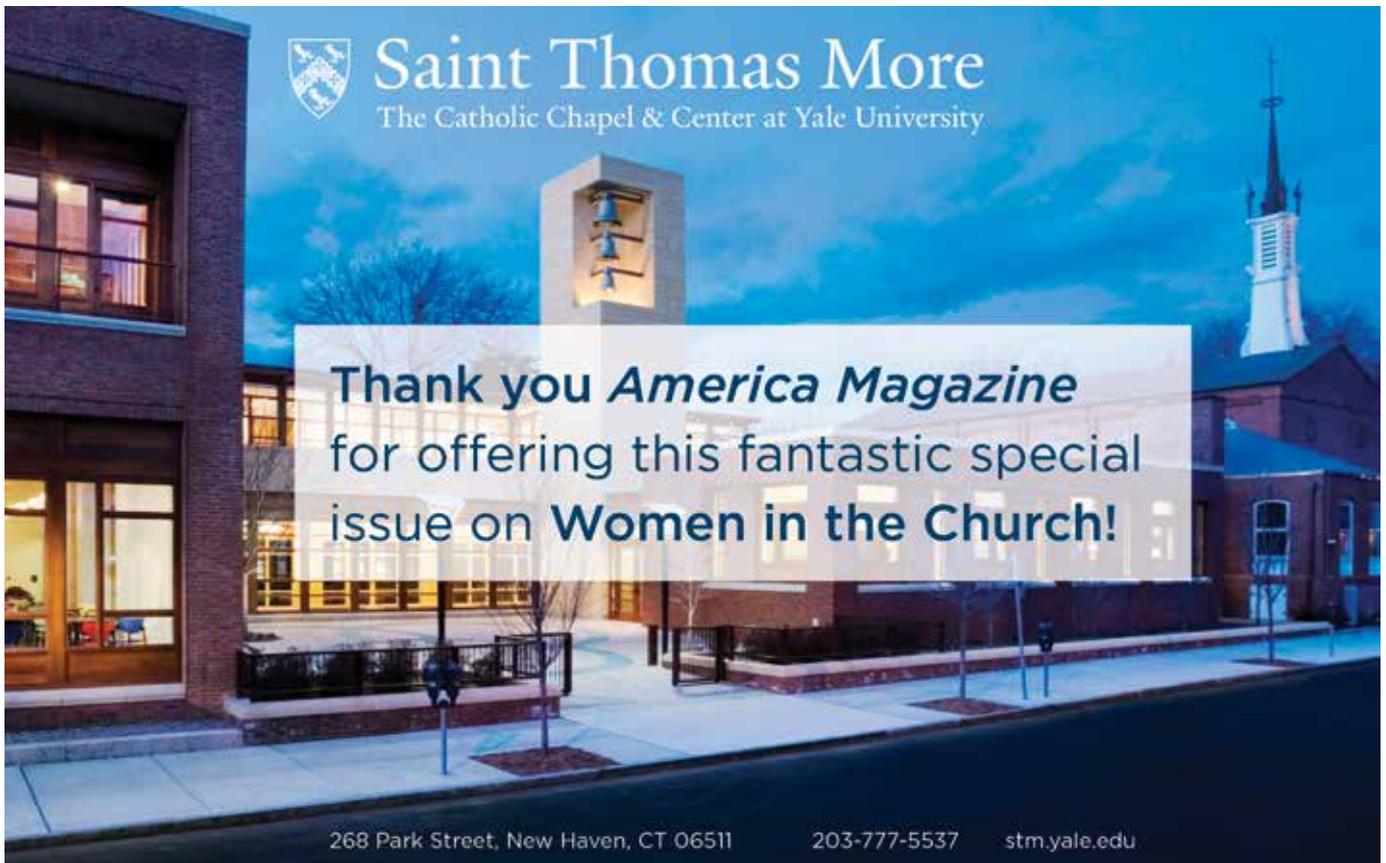
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Leading by Example

An interview on ministry, machismo and meaningful leadership

BY KERRY WEBER

Since moving to the United States from Mexico in 1979, Carmen M. Cervantes has earned a doctorate in education, served as a researcher and pastoral minister and become an author. Today, Ms. Cervantes's work and leadership in Hispanic ministry has been widely recognized and honored. Her success has come in part, she said, from the ability to learn from her mistakes. She still recalls how an early attempt at a cross-cultural exchange at one parish ended with hurt feelings on both sides. "Some of my mistakes in my ministry really were just a lack of knowledge about the culture, but they ended up being considered insults," she said. Yet she believes that when given the chance to gain insight from her mistakes, she was able to grow. "If you are not allowed to make mistakes and learn from them you are never going to be empowered," she said.

Since 1994, Ms. Cervantes has served as executive director of the Instituto Fe y Vida, a national nonprofit institute that helps empower young Latinos for leadership in the church and society through formation programs, research and advocacy. She works to ensure that young Latino Catholics have a chance to grow in their faith, offer their many gifts to the church and, when necessary, to learn from their mistakes. Ms. Cervantes spoke with *America* by phone about her work. This interview has been condensed and edited.

What do you think it means to be empowered within the Catholic Church?

It is the recognition of the gifts that God has given you by people who are in power and who then allow those gifts to develop and to be put in the service of the community. I still appreciate the different people that recognized something in me. Somebody in a position of power needs to recognize you and value you and give you the opportunity to develop your gifts and to serve.

Sometimes you can try to do these things from a prophetic stance, from the margins. But too often you end up—this has been the case in my life on many occasions—considered a troublemaker. And sometimes you achieve what you want, and sometimes you burn yourself out. At those times, the

power that you have may even disappear if you don't deal with it in an appropriate way. It is like we say: How do you take up the cross without being crucified?

You learn to be more diplomatic in your prophecies, so that you are not alienated. One of the difficulties many Hispanic women face is that for years they have been obedient or diminished by men, by people in power. So when a Hispanic woman wants to be up front, people don't know how to deal with it. It can be men; it can be Anglos; it can be Latinos; many times it's the priest. They don't see women as equals. So you have to really jump, and sometimes that becomes an awakening for the other side. But sometimes it is alienating.

That emphasizes the importance of the work you are doing to create those leadership roles. Ideally, you're helping put more people in leadership who will understand what other people are trying to do who don't yet have the power.

Yes. And over the years I've seen changes on the side of the women who are developing in their own ways and are continuing to grow, and I've seen changes from the perception of the people who are giving these Latino women more opportunities than in the past. So it is a two-way street. You cannot be empowered if there are not people who already are empowered who allow you to put your power in service.

Some of the structures in the church are impediments for Latino women, but in some cases it's for Latinos, period. Racism is real, and so is ethnocentrism. People in power think: what we do and what we have been doing, that's the only way it goes. For example, many times Catholics ask for alternative models of ministry, to do something that responds to the signs of the times. Often suggestions from a person from the mainstream culture are welcome. But sometimes when we respond creatively to serve our community with our own needs, it is interpreted by others as dividing the church. So there are macro issues that still must be dealt with in the church in relation to the presence of a very significant number and proportion of Latinos in the Catholic Church.



Carmen M. Cervantes

KERRY WEBER is the managing editor of *America*.



GENNEXT. Fe y Vida prepares young adults with advanced pastoral/theological formation to advise parishes.

In what ways does your work help empower Hispanic women in the church in particular?

In many of our youth ministries we work with equal numbers of men and women, which is in contrast to much of the catechetical environment, where women most often outnumber the men. Because of this gender balance, we can work on the relationship between men and women. And because of the age level at which we focus our ministries (20s and 30s) and for which we train other ministers, our work for the church also serves as a really good effort to balance the roles at home, to eliminate the traditional machismo and to help families form a healthy way and to educate their children in different ways.

What are some lessons that come from the experiences of Hispanic women in the church that the church at large could learn from?

I would say their model of commitment. Many come from a very strong faith and a very strong conviction that God is calling them—an awareness of vocation and of the mission, the awareness is that they have been called by God to do X, Y, Z—even when they don't have too much space and they need to try to open the spaces. I think that's the most important part, and that has been the struggle of the immi-

grant church. For many years immigrant groups struggled to have a Mass in their language in the main church, to move the Mass from the additional room or from the basement into the main church, and then to start something for the religious education of their children.

From the perspective of the immigrant, you arrive thinking that the church is your mother. That's our belief, and for us the church is universal. But when you arrive in this country, many times the church is not universal. It often feels like the church doesn't want you or doesn't allow you to be, and so you struggle just to be church, just to be considered as equals. This feeling has been strong in Hispanic women. But a similar feeling has also grown in the Mexican-American community. Many of their voices have not been heard, and so many of those personalities ended up becoming extremely introverted and often very much hurt inside, or very passive or even very angry.

In Latin America or in other countries, people are dying because people are killing them, but here it's a psychological killing, a spiritual killing. You destroy the person if the person cannot be himself or herself. And I think that has been the experience of the Latino community, but that recently has changed for the better. I can see that in the

30 years that I have been in this country that in some environments, like here in California and many other places, that has changed. But in places where the presence of the Latino is just beginning, what we experienced here 30 years ago they are experiencing now. Culture shock is still a problem. I think that the effort of the Cultural Diversity Secretariat in the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to try and foster skills for intercultural relationships is very, very important because in certain ways you become hypersensitive and sometimes even though the other person doesn't want to hurt you, you are hurt.

How do you see the role of Latinos in the church continuing to grow and change in years to come? And how, in particular, might women play a role in that?

In the Latino community many of the people who work in ministry and have advanced studies are men who went to the seminaries for some time. They didn't finish their course work or they didn't get ordained, but they got all the formation in the seminary. So formation at the professional level is uneven in women and men in the Latino community. More women are studying, but it is very different than in the United States, where the religious sisters really pushed themselves in their training after Vatican II.

In our programs, young people work to empower other young people, which provides interesting challenges. The work often involves weekends or overnight trips. It's

a heavy load. So what happens is that many women, when they have the second child, disappear from leadership positions.

It is very difficult to have young women with children succeed in positions where they work with their peers. Many choose catechetical or liturgical roles at that point. It's easier to balance the home and children in those roles. When they are older adults, they have more time, but at that point it's difficult to return to ministry with young people.

As more women continue their studies and more positions are open that allow women to work for the church and balance that with their home situation, their presence will be higher. In some areas, like small faith communities, social action, visiting the sick, a lot of women are participating, so it really depends on the areas.

One of the very important things, and that people continuously say to us women who are teaching courses or who have a leadership role, is, "We really appreciate that you are in front of us." Just the presence of somebody that has similar challenges and has children and has been in a similar situation and that continues to be in a position of power allows other women to see that and say, "Okay, I can do it." And if they cannot do it at a certain time, they can say, "I can return." I think that is very important, and that's why we try hard to maintain gender balance among our trainers. It's not always easy.



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United in Christ

Appreciating the diversity of women's spiritualities

BY DIANA L. HAYES



CNS PHOTO/OWEN SWEENEY III, CATHOLIC REVIEW

Our world is increasingly diverse in terms of understandings, ideas and beliefs. In what can be called a global repositioning, countries once colonized by Western powers have begun to chart their own courses. Alongside this trend, women and persons of color have worked to distinguish themselves and, in many ways, have benefited from the emergence of a more globalized world, in which all people are encouraged to participate.

This global shift has also influenced the spiritual realm. In light of the Second Vatican Council's call for reading and responding to the "signs of the times," the Catholic Church has worked to react to the changes of this era. Historically, the tradition and practices of spirituality were understood within the context of specific religions and specific groups within those religions. Thus, in Christianity, especially Roman Catholicism, there have been divisions between active and contemplative

practice, as well as along the lines of state of life and vocation.

Today, these rigid categories are becoming more fluid as spiritual seekers, especially women and persons of color, develop and promote practices and understandings that are rooted in their particular cultures and lived experiences. This is done in recognition of the fact that all spirituality is embedded in the particular culture of its time and place. The dominant cultures of the past are still viable and valued, but most people today long for a spirituality that speaks to them personally both as individuals and in community and allows them to reinterpret and understand their faith as a source of spirituality.

There are many definitions of spirituality today both within and outside the church that reflect our era's growing diversity. Joann Wolski Conn notes that for some, "spirituality refers to the experience of life energized by a desire for self-transcendence in love, in free commitment to goodness and truth without any connection to the divine or holy. For others it means a desire activated by Holy Mystery as understood in a person's particular religious faith."

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Among the most significant religious spiritualities emerging today are those of women of every race and ethnicity. This sense of spirituality is both individual and communal; it is deeply rooted in women's lives but varies from culture to culture. Contemporary women's spirituality differs greatly from what has been historically understood as women's spirituality, which was defined, generally by men, as a passive, emotional and nurturing perspective. Today, there cannot be said to be a singular women's spirituality as such.

These spiritualities differ, as women differ, but they also have commonalities that can be built upon by women in the Catholic Church in order to forge spiritual solidarity, not only with other women, but with men as well. These spiritualities are supported in several ways. Women, singly and in groups, have worked to develop self-knowledge and to discern who they are in relationship to a God who created both male and female in God's own image.

Women have sought out and built up theologies that affirm and empower them. These theologies have emerged as a result of women looking back into their particular histories and recovering that which is empowering, liberating, sustaining and nurturing. Women bring a critical hermeneutical lens to this endeavor as they interpret sacred Scripture, history and church tradition from their particular perspective in order to construct new understandings of the Catholic faith within the context of its teachings. By working with these understandings of self and God, women create new structures of church and society that are a critique of and in opposition to enduring racism, sexism, classism, homophobia and other sinful structures that alienate, oppress and destroy humanity.

The fruits of these efforts can be seen in Womanist spirituality, which is based in a theology of, by and for women of African descent who have developed a critique of church and society with regard to race, class and gender and their multiplicative impact on black women. Latina feminist/*mujerista* spirituality has also focused on race, class and gender as these affect Latinas in particular. Asian American women's spirituality and that of Native American women have also evolved. All of these spiritualities are self-defined, rooted in the Catholic faith (although they also have Protestant branches) and liberating for all. The focus of these spiritualities varies according to the particular women engaged in retrieving and reconstructing the traditions of their particular cultures, yet they also share commonalities as they present, often for the first time, the stories, songs, prayers, music and rituals of their particular people. They reveal that women are very often truly the bearers of their cultures, passing down and advancing that which is self-defining and freeing in each.

Women of every culture, and men as well, have much to learn from these diverse spiritualities that continue to develop. Neither they nor their theologies are contradictory; such spiritualities, in their critiques of church and society's role in the oppression of women and persons of color over the course of history, do not seek to oppress or deny the humanity of others or the validity of others' experience.

As women of every race and nation continue to work with one another, as well as apart, to reclaim and rename themselves, the church as a whole gains from their insights and participation. Diversity is a gift to the church when we recognize that we all have our own lived experiences to discern and share, and it is understood that this diversity is to be welcomed. It is our responsibility to work out the spiritualities within our church both individually and in community.

For those who are members of the Catholic Church there is much that unites women of various backgrounds and ethnicities; but while we share commonalities, it is important to recognize and affirm our differences as well. It is especially critical that we do not attempt to claim another's story, traditions or rituals as our own but instead work diligently to uncover and recover our own and then share what we have learned and listen to others. In this way we all, male and female, will be engaged in the liberating mission of Christ Jesus. ▲

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The Invisible Woman

Seeing migrant women through the eyes of Christ

BY NICHOLE M. FLORES

Sexual harassment is an epidemic in the fields of the food we eat. On June 25, PBS and Univision debuted a documentary in the series “Frontline” entitled “Rape in the Fields.” This report exposed the hidden reality of sexual abuse of women who supply American tables with apples, almonds, lettuce and eggs—untold numbers of women and girls subject to sexual abuse and rape by their male bosses and co-workers.

Since harassment is commonplace and takes place in the isolation of the vast agricultural fields, migrant women often refer to camps as the “fields of panties” or the “green motel.” Rendered invisible in U.S. society by a broken immigration system that simultaneously demands cheap migrant labor and criminalizes undocumented persons, migrant women evade contact with the legal authorities responsible for responding to these crimes. Sexual perpetrators exploit this legal and social invisibility to take sexual advantage of them.

Like sexual violence in general, abuse in the fields is severely underreported. In 1995, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission began investigating sexual abuse cases. This work yielded several lawsuits against agricultural companies in which victims pursued damages for the harm inflicted upon them. The courageous actions of the victims and the E.E.O.C.’s legal efforts encouraged more women to come forward with their stories and enter the difficult process of investigation and prosecution. These cases are hindered, however, by a supposed lack of evidence to support the testimonies of dozens of abused women. To date, no cases pursued by the E.E.O.C. have resulted in criminal investigations.

The pursuit of justice is also hindered by the threat of detention, deportation and loss of livelihood that destroys

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migrant families. Paul Shultz, the former sheriff of Wright County, Iowa, explains that his office was obligated both to apprehend undocumented persons and to respond to cases of sexual abuse. This double-edged sword resulted in distrust of local authorities among migrant women in the community. Despite overwhelming numbers of suspected abuse cases, migrant women never turned to Sheriff Shultz and



SOJOURN'S END. Two detained migrant women at a Border Patrol station in Imperial Beach, Calif., in April this year.

CNS PHOTO/DAVID MAUNG

his police force for help. On May 12, 2008, Agriprocessors Inc., a kosher slaughterhouse and meatpacking facility in the Wright County town of Postville, was the site of the largest Immigration and Customs Enforcement raid in U.S. history, resulting in the arrest of nearly 400 undocumented persons. Enforcement agents did not ask the detainees whether they had been victims of crime; both victims and perpetrators were arrested and deported back to their countries of origin. Any unreported crimes involved will never be brought to justice in the United States.

The rape of migrant women is but one violation of workers’ rights and human dignity common in U.S. agricultural fields. Undocumented women and men are subject to human trafficking and modern day slavery, wage theft, exposure to hazardous pesticides, family separation and other violations of economic, human and legal rights. Equally disturbing is

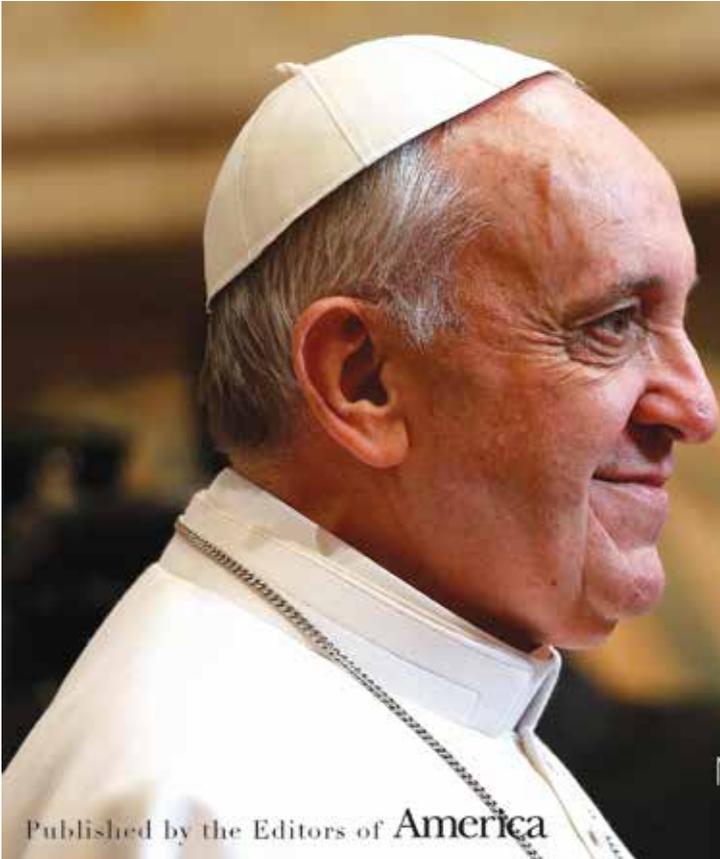
the public ignorance about these abuses. Invisibility perpetuates a cycle of exploitation of those whose labor sustains people in the United States. The horror and scope of migrant exploitation presents a dilemma for Christian social ethics: how can Catholics respond to a problem hidden from our sight?

If the sexual abuse of migrant women is a crime that feeds on invisibility, then the church ought to respond by making this suffering visible. Pope Francis' first encyclical, "The Light of Faith," offers theological insight into the relationship between vision and faith. The encyclical invites believers to see with the eyes of Christ, where seeing "becomes a form of following Christ, and faith appears as a process of gazing, in which our eyes grow accustomed to peering into the depths." Rather than simply gazing upon Jesus as an object of adoration, the believer is invited to participate in Jesus' way of seeing the social, economic and political "signs of the times." This way of seeing looks beyond the horizon of one's own daily context toward recognizing another's suffering. It demands that the believer peer beneath the surface of economic arrangements to recognize the anti-sacramental abuses connected with the agricultural economy in this country. This transformed gaze brings to light the fundamental human dignity of workers who have been cast into the shadows of the global economy.

Not all forms of seeing affirm human dignity. As the

theologian Laurie Cassidy argues, some portrayals of human anguish transform suffering into a commodity without recognizing the humanity of the one who suffers. It is easy to view the anguish of others at a distance without true compassion. For Catholics, however, seeing with the eyes of Christ calls us to see suffering in conjunction with the fundamental human dignity of the one who suffers. It calls us to foreground the *imago dei*—the image of God—present in every person. This new sight resists the exploitative leer that fosters pity more than solidarity; it searches for a response to human suffering grounded in human dignity.

Catholics must therefore encounter through the eyes of Christ the faces and narratives of women resisting sexual abuse in the fields. This new way of seeing moves Catholics to respond to migrant exploitation in concrete ways that recognize and foster human dignity. This new vision reveals the necessity for broader education on the conditions faced by undocumented migrant women and men living in the United States. It uncovers the urgent need for immigration policies that acknowledge and uphold the value of human life. It makes plain the responsibility of consumers to support migrant-led efforts to develop and implement human rights standards for agriculture and other businesses that employ vulnerable workers. Seeing migrant women through the eyes of Christ enables the church to align itself more clearly with the cause of human dignity. ▲



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Bolt From the Blue

Encounters with everyday annunciations

BY HELEN C. PREJEAN

She probably never wore blue in her life. Indigo and purple and blue were the colors wealthy people wore. Not young Miriam of Nazareth, just one more brown-skinned Palestinian girl.

If the angel had not visited, we would never have heard of her—impossible to imagine, now that our lives have been so changed by her son.

We need a flesh-and-blood Mary because that is who we are. We need to touch the holy fire she touched and to recognize divine invitations when they come our way—even when what we are summoned to do seems crazily impossible. “Nothing is impossible for God,” the angelic messenger sweetly pointed out, having dispatched his thunderbolt of an invitation to the young Galilean girl.

It is helpful to remember, as we read the Gospel stories of annunciations and the response they elicit, that they were written after years of meditation by a believing community. After the thunderbolt, the tranquil account sits there on the page, and we know well the outcome: yes, of course, Mary said yes. It sounds so predictable, so inevitable.

Then there’s ordinary us, just muddling around trying to wend our way through all the angst and anxiety and uncertainty. I get it. I know about muddling around in this ever-unfurling life of mine.

St. Basil said in the fourth century, “Annunciations are frequent; incarna-

tions are rare.” So, Lord knows how many “annunciations” I’ve missed, but there has been one big one that I rec-

that come to me—a flood since my book, *Dead Man Walking*, was published in 1993.

I see each request as an annunciation: invitations to speak or do a media interview or write a letter to a governor or pardon board or, most sacred of all, accompany as spiritual advisor a person condemned to death. The stream of little annunciations emanates from the Big Annunciation in my life, a cluster of revelatory experiences that took place in the 1980s: In 1980 I awakened to the Gospel call to work for justice; in 1982 I responded to an invitation to write to Patrick Sonnier on death row; in 1984 I witnessed his death at the hands of the state.

A Summons Delivered

This, in summary, is the story I told in *Dead Man Walking*, the writing of which was itself a delayed response to many invitations that at last I heard. It was from this trifecta of grace that I received the sacred summons to work toward awakening the nation to abolish state killing. That may sound a bit grandiose, but, believe me, when the summons came, it came there in the dark outside the prison gates right after I had seen a man electrocuted to death. I was shaken and vomiting and wondering how I had let myself get caught up in this weird, bizarre, surreal situation, and it was then that the annunciation happened and the summons came. I am putting it down in a coherent



ognized, where the invitation of grace took hold and radically altered the trajectory of my life.

There is a corner in our little office that we call Annunciation Corner. Sister Margaret Maggio, my fellow C.S.J., who has worked for 20 years at my side to end the death penalty, knows this corner well. On the wall hangs Fra Angelico’s “Annunciation,” with Mary sitting, hands in lap, head bowed, listening to the angel. On the desk sits a telephone and computer and fax machine. Sister Margaret sits at the desk and fields the invitations

way for you now, but then it came all in a jumble, though deep down it was clear as crystal. The commitment took root in my heart and is with me still. I thought:

What I have just witnessed, most people are never going to see. They'll hear the news about the execution and hear about the crime and be satisfied that justice was done. But from a distance. The people are good, not inherently vengeful, and I've got to tell this story and bring them close to the suffering, and they will be moved to reject the death penalty.

In 1984, when Patrick was killed, popular support for the death penalty was strong—according to some surveys, as high as 70 percent. It enjoyed the support of a solid majority of Catholics.

Abolish the death penalty? Impossible. Who was I to do such a task? I, who had only recently awakened to the heart of the Gospel to do justice; I, who with all my wispy plans to “convert the world to Christ” was known in my congregation as “Helen—with her feet firmly planted in mid-air”? There was no *Dead Man Walking* to tell the story, no film, no opera, no stage play, no musical album, no nothing. Just me, me beginning to talk about the death penalty to anyone who

would listen. One voice. Impossible.

Which brings me back to Mary and her “who, me?” to the angel: “You will conceive in your womb and bear the messiah....” “How can this be since I have no relations with a man?”

I know we usually interpret Mary’s “How can this be?” around the issue of Mary’s virginity, and that is surely an appropriate way of coming to the core spiritual message that it is divine power bringing Jesus to birth. But I wonder if perhaps Mary’s incredulity might have come from an even more foundational source. Maybe it came from the fact that she knew she lived in a society in which a woman without a man as patron or advocate or husband was zilch, nothing, powerless—a nobody. Maybe Mary’s true sentiment was more along the lines of: “Who me? I’m a nobody.”

It is a common theme in the Bible: Abraham saying he and Sarah are too old to have progeny. And then there’s the runt of the litter, David, being chosen over his strong, stalwart brothers to be king; and Gideon’s protest to the angel calling him to save Israel from the Midianites: “Please, my lord.... My family is the lowliest in Manasseh, and I am the most insignificant in my father’s house.”

Okay, so God prefers to work with nobodies.

Which brings me back to the experience of the annunciation in my life, which, when you see the results, you

know has to be, absolutely must be, cannot but be an example of a divine “spark in the clod” of me. Just look at what is happening: death as a criminal penalty is dramatically losing the support of the people. The death penalty is dying in the United States—although far, far too slowly.

I continue to serve as a spiritual advisor to people condemned to die. I see the suffering. I feel the anguish, the torture of life and spirit slowly eking away as human beings await death. But it is still very much hidden. The majority of us cannot hear the cries or feel the pain or see the anguish, and so the death penalty drags on and we keep on killing. That is why I stay on the road, telling the story to all who will listen, ever trying to stay alert to new annunciations.

I know that my Congregation of Saint Joseph and I, along with many other hard-working people in this country, are doing our part to end state killing, but we still have much to do. So we press on, praying with Mary as we go, our spirits rejoicing, proclaiming God’s greatness. In truth, our God looks with compassion on our lowliness and in us—even in *us*—continues to do great things.

HELEN C. PREJEAN, C.S.J., is the author of *Dead Man Walking* and *The Death of Innocents* (both Vintage Books). The 20th anniversary edition of *Dead Man Walking* was issued by Random House in June 2013.

Love, Naturally

Reflections on natural family planning

BY REGINA BAMBRICK-RUST

When I first learned in college about natural family planning, I was surprised by how exotic and marginalized it was as a family planning method. There was a stereotype that NFP is only for

the most devout Catholics who were willing to have big families. There was also a common belief among those in the women’s movement that fertility awareness and NFP did not allow adequate sexual freedom for women, and

was thus seen as outdated and limiting compared with “modern” and “simple” methods like the pill. Many others simply dismissed NFP as ineffective and impossible. So why did I pay any attention to it?

My professor at the time, Andrea Bertotti Metoyer, an NFP researcher and user, introduced it to me with such clarity. From that moment, natural family planning seemed like a no-brainer. It fits well with the values of care for creation and honoring natural cycles—charisms sacred to me. I couldn't help wondering: Why subjugate our bodies to medical, economic and chemical control when God created our bodies with all the wisdom and workings we need?

John and I married in September 2011 and have been using NFP for almost two years as a family planning method. So far we have used it to prevent pregnancy. If, however, we decide to pursue creating a new life together, NFP will be the method we use to help achieve pregnancy.

For us, natural family planning reflects five particular values inherent to our marriage vows and mutual commitment:

Faith. Our call to faithful lives leads us to trust that God will take care of us as we commit ourselves to lives of love. We seek to honor and praise God by celebrating the lives and bodies God made for us.

Simplicity. We use the Billings Ovulation Method, which requires only observation of the changes in cervical fluid. I like the simplicity of a method that does not require buying any tools or medical devices; it hinges on my ability to interpret my body.

Care for creation. How I listen to, care for and respond to my body is integrated into a holistic lifestyle of care for creation. Sometimes it is easy to forget that our bodies are part of creation.

Nonviolence. Part of a nonviolent

lifestyle for me is not forcing my desires, or manipulating conditions to make things happen only when I want, but being mindful of the needs of others around me.



Community. I cannot practice NFP alone. I choose to live in community and in partnership, practicing interdependence. We are able to face the challenges of our broken selves and world only by being together with others. The practice of NFP is conducive to a mutually loving and supporting relationship.

Shared Practice

Even with these wonderful ideals, John and I had fears going into it. At first, John was wary. Would it stifle the spontaneity of our intimacy? I, too, was a bit fearful that the lived experience would not match my excitement about the idea of practicing NFP—even though I had studied and presented on it.

NFP has its challenges, but I have never wondered why I am not manipulating my body with hormones or tools so my cycle works like a clock, which is what happens with the pill. In fact, it has been a joyful experience to feel so

connected to the rhythm of my body. I understand when I am physically or emotionally stressed and ovulation is delayed, when I feel really motivated and productive as I am approaching ovulation, when I feel the need for more introspection and a slower pace prior to menstruation or a sense of relief and peace when I begin menstruation.

John is well aware of this cyclical rhythm. He notes, around the time of ovulation, a change in my touch and manner. Indeed, when this time is identified, John often jumps in as the responsible party and firm one in reminding me when we are not available—meaning, for those trying to avoid pregnancy, we are potentially fertile. This is when teamwork really comes into play—when it is most challenging

for me. John and I interpret the signs and decide our actions together. Some say this is what makes NFP “unnatural”: the very time you most desire sex, you are forbidden it. For me, this is the crux of the method: a spiritual practice in detachment from physical desires. It is an opportunity to explore sexual expression more widely and share affection in ways not limited to sexual intercourse. Periods of abstinence become normal and even remind us what it means to care for and love each other.

Nature Lessons

One life lesson I have garnered from the practice of natural family planning is that the best things in life, including life itself, are freely given and received as gifts. As a farmer and a person who is increasingly living on the land, I am blessed with an invitation to remember our interwovenness with creation daily. I cannot help but draw the connection between our own bodies' rhythms with the body of the earth we live on

and its rhythms.

Natural family planning honors the power of the created body—like many other parts of nature—to miraculously create a new life at times, and to not do so at others. John and I practice abstinence by recognizing that power and respecting it. The method calls on us to wait for the proper time, just as there is a time of waiting from when we plant a seed to when we harvest the fruits. To receive the gifts of the moment is a miracle because we do not have control over it. To me, it is a beautiful experience to share in this connection together as a couple, on a journey.

Abstinence has been a practice used throughout the history of the Catholic Church as a way of spiritual opening and selflessness—for example, through fasting, almsgiving,

vigils or giving things up for Lent. Abstinence can be seen as an act of resistance in our culture of instant gratification that tells us we can have whatever we want whenever we want it. The sometimes challenging moments of abstinence for me serve as reminders that our bodies, like nature, are not predictable machines. For example, we cannot always predict the weather; we can only observe it, appreciate it with detachment for what it is and respond accordingly.

In the philosophy of permaculture, a practice of sustainable agriculture based on natural systems, there is a principle that “limitations create abundance.” In general, I have found that the limitations of natural family planning have created abundance for my relationship with John. NFP encourages a

deeper bond beyond physical intimacy, and physical intimacy becomes more special. Also, neither of us is putting chemicals in our bodies or using synthetic materials. I also have more energy; I am not experiencing weight gain or depression from my birth control method. I have increased body awareness as I listen to and observe my body. It is received as a gift. Practicing NFP certainly limits my control and manipulation over my body and sexuality, but the abundance I experience from following this natural rhythm reminds me what W. H. Auden once wrote: “As it is, plenty.” Just as God created all of life, the invitation is to come and simply enjoy, as it is.

REGINA BAMBRICK-RUST and her husband, John, live and work on the White Rose Catholic Worker Farm in Monee, Ill.

Life on the Margins

Charismatic principles for modern religious

BY MARY PELLEGRINO

“Choose charisms and let go of works. ...To whom do we let them go? To the church community, to other charisms, so as not to lose these good works that have been going on. The works came after the founders, but not the charisms. Charisms came with the founder. ...Going out to the periphery. This is fundamental, even for us here at the Vatican.”

— Cardinal João Braz de Aviz

I cannot escape the impact that these words have had on me since returning from the International Union of Superiors General plenary assembly in Rome this past spring, where I heard them spoken by Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, prefect of the Congregation of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Living. The impact is two-fold. First, that a

Vatican official of this stature would understand and articulate in such a direct, simple and impassioned way an essential nuance of apostolic religious life—that works are secondary to charism—is of great significance to me. And second, I wonder where my community or any community would find itself if we were to go to the periphery, the margins of our charism today.

What do the outskirts of union look like? Where is the margin of Mercy? Or the periphery of Providence? Each of these and more are charisms in the church, revealed through the particularity of a single life form—that of religious life—at a particular time in history, but fundamentally present in people across history and cultures. Charisms are gifts from God to the

church and the world. It helps me to think of them as particular facets of the likeness of God that people or groups reflect in particular ways.

The word *charism* is not widely used outside of religious life and is easily misunderstood or misinterpreted. For religious communities, *charism* means the founding inspiration or impulse initiated by the Spirit and active at the community's origins through the life and experience of the founder. Charism is what distinguishes one religious community from another. And charism—not works—focuses our mission and directs our planning, discernment and decision-making.

Fully Present

I believe that what is said here of women's communities is equally relevant to

and reflective of religious communities of men. We have been on the same Spirit-led path of renewal for nearly 50 years, and both men and women religious have come to embrace, cherish and honor our charisms as gifts given by God through us to the church and the world. Along that path we have discovered that we honor our founders and all who have gone before us, not by replicating the works or conditions of the past but by gleaning the essence of the charisma that shaped that past, discerning its presence in this time and place and applying its character to today's needs and realities.

We honor those who discerned the presence of the charisma in the women who made up our early communities by acknowledging that the charisms of our institutes are fully present in the people of God. We are stewards of the charisma, not owners. We know now that our charisms are not confined to vowed, religious life. They are found and flourish among single and married persons and clergy, as well.

We honor the original inspirations of our congregations by acknowledging that religious life is a marginal life in the church precisely because of its charismatic nature—a nature both given and driven by the Spirit to witness to a dimension of the mystery of God. Apostolic religious life further embodies this marginal mystery by living out its essence in the midst of those persons and places who, though far from the centers of knowledge, influence or opportunity, are no less beloved of God.

Historically and culturally, women's apostolic religious life is a further embodiment of this charismatically inspired marginality. Self-organizing and self-governing groups of women were not emanating from the centers of ecclesial or civil power when most communities were founded. Our communities, however, grew and flourished alongside religious communities of men, among the most vulnerable and marginalized

people of God, where their apostolic energies were most needed in the past and still are today.

The works that we undertook—nursing the sick and impoverished; caring for orphans; teaching children, including girls; rehabilitating prostitutes—took place at the margins of both the church and the culture, where survival was precarious. There was little



other than God's promise that the sister could both follow and find her Beloved on the margins of morality that could entice a woman to this life. We remain ec-centric still today.

Honor the Past, Shape the Future

We honor our past and shape our future when we face our economic challenges with the same realism, courage and creativity with which our founders faced the challenges of their times through the lens of the congregational missions derived from our charisms. We do this first by acknowledging that fewer numbers and resources may create an economic crisis, but they constitute a vocation crisis or a crisis of meaning only for those within religious life—and those observing from the outside—who mistakenly identify money and numbers as the essence of apostolic religious life.

Lastly we honor our past and shape our future when we acknowledge that the credibility and influence that we hold today is a direct result of the courageous, faithful and humble service that so many of our sisters rendered tirelessly among the people of God for decades and even centuries. Realistic and reliable projections indicate that the number of people living consecrated religious life will continue to decline from the historical anomaly of its post-war high in this country. That is no surprise. At the same time, a reliable survey of church history reveals that religious life has evolved and will continue to evolve over time. That same survey reveals that evolution takes place at the margins and not in the center.

I will not even venture a guess as to what women's religious life will look like in the future. I believe, however, that whatever form it takes, it will be shaped by the creative tension of God's grace given and received in equal measure to those in the church who flourish on a precarious periphery and to those in the church who flourish at the center.

Religious life will be evolved by those who are comfortable with chaos and whose preservation of the essential is marked by a humble appreciation and firm grasp of the unmistakable grace of charisma as the Spirit's first, cherished gift to religious life. I believe that one of the most compelling works of religious life today is to discern through the lens of our charisms the moral use of our influence, credibility and resources and

to place those gifts in service to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which has always been a guide for communities living on the margins.

ON THE WEB

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IDEAS | EVE TUSHNET

WOUNDED BEAUTY

Confessions of a horror fan

I love horror movies because they show me the sublime. I love them for a lot of other reasons too, I admit, depending on my mood. I don't believe in a grand, unified theory of horror, or of any other genre of film; most genres are a welter of traditions and counter-traditions. Sometimes you want to see evil defeated by the triumphant "final girl"; at other times, by contrast, you want to see that even the most competent and loving heroines can't win. You root for them anyway, knowing that their lives weren't rendered worthless by their defeat.

Sometimes you need to know that other people have seen the world as a helpless nightmare factory of hurting and being hurt, and they decided to make a movie about it. Almost all

of us at some point wonder if despair is the truest reaction to the world we see. Responding to that 2 a.m. question by making art (or shlock, I'm not too picky) can itself be a form of commiseration, a kind of gallows comfort that lets you know that at least you're not the only one who's worried.

There are even elements of wish fulfillment: I may be useless now, but in the apocalypse I'll totally step up my game, just as in "Shaun of the Dead." Or, as Luke Burbank put it on NPR's "Wait Wait... Don't Tell Me!"; "There really is a sort of change in the season of your life when you realize that you'd be sort of O.K. with [the apocalypse]. And when I think about the world ending... I think: that gets me out of a couple of jams."

But beyond these pleasures, horror

can also provoke an encounter with something beyond and greater than the self, an overwhelming and unmasterable mystery. The horror blogger Sean T. Collins argues that the key to horror is the "monumental horror image," "the things that should not be":

[T]wo types of related imagery occur in virtually every effective horror film. The first is the sudden—yet curiously static—appearance of a being in a place where no one ought to be, in defiance of what character and audience know to be "possible" the second is the sight of a monumental, monolithic, or literally statuesque object, serving as a testament to the presence of evil, madness, sickness, or irrationality.

He gives as examples the Wicker Man or the twin girls in "The Shining."

This monumental horror image is one form of the horror sublime. Confronting this unfathomable image shatters our belief in our own sufficiency. We are not adequate to the world as it presents itself to us. Horror thrills and shakes us because it is a piano played with both hands, the right hand on the high keys of fear and the left on the low keys of longing.

Danger Ahead

The sublime differs from the beautiful in that it evokes fear. It may be wistful—autumn leaves blowing through quiet streets—but there's always a hint of something genuinely dangerous. Dead leaves blown helplessly by the wind suggest the uncontrollable approach of autumn in our own lives. It's later than you think.

Many of the moments I remember best from horror movies are moments of sublimity. The first, shattering look

on the face of the newborn-adult bride of Frankenstein, her damaged beauty encountering a damaged world; the churning black sea in "The Ring," mirroring the anchorless sea of the unpeaceful soul; a frightened woman in "Nosferatu," staring out to sea on a white beach studded with crosses.

One reason I loved "The Descent" (2005) is that its well-drawn, convincingly acted characters were themselves seekers of the sublime. "The Descent" follows a group of athletic female friends who try to help one of their number heal after a family tragedy by exploring a massive cave system together. This doesn't go well, of course. Hidden tensions within the group are drawn out after the cave entrance collapses, and they need to hunt for an alternative exit route. Much of the movie's success came from its ability to make audiences care about and root for all of these women.

The character called Juno (Natalie Mendoza) spearheads the cave plan, and within the first 15 minutes of the movie, audiences have guessed that she was sleeping with Sarah's (Shauna Macdonald) late husband and that she's hiding something about the spelunking adventure from the other cavers. A lesser movie might have cast her as the villain. But the movie plays her sympathetically, shading her with guilt, foolhardiness and determination. When she stands for the first time in the opening to the cave system—a place the DVD scene listing calls a cathedral—she lifts her eyes to the sky, watches water pouring down through the light above into the darkness where she stands and exclaims, "It's beautiful!" What she means is that it's sublime.

As "The Descent" suggests, pursuing the sublime may cost you. Francis J. Spufford, in his terrific polar-exploration history, *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination*, suggests that English polar explorers were less likely than explorers of other national-

ities to prepare well for their encounters with extreme conditions, in part because they sought a conflict with sublime nature more than a practical plan for ice travel. The sublime overwhelms reason, dismisses the pursuit of comfort or happiness, disrupts the extremely worthwhile work and plans and rules that keep the machinery of ordinary human life chugging along. And yet we long for it. A horror fan is like a moth who spends her free time watching the Yule Log channel.

Discussions of beauty versus sublimity tend to pick sides. Beauty is portrayed as mere cuteness, or sublimity as just melodramatic romanticism. Horror films can be divisive along similar lines: "I like horror because I'm not afraid to get in touch with the dark side of our natures!" is just as self-righteous as, "You only like wallowing in pretend pain and fear because your real life is so privileged." For what it's worth, I haven't noticed

any correlation between the amount of suffering in a person's life and her affinity for horror movies—even though both horror fans and foes often seem convinced that there is such a connection.

Our encounter with the world as it is requires us to see both beauty and sublimity. There is the sweetness of Eden, which we were given to cultivate and tame—and the wildness of God and the distortions and blankness of sin. The beauty of horror is a threatened and wounded beauty. Even the gentlest or most triumphant scenes in a horror movie, because of the genre and narrative in which they're embedded, take on some of the frightening and poignant elements of the sublime. In this respect horror may be the genre most like real life.

EVE TUSHNET, a writer in Washington D.C., blogs at the Patheos Catholic portal and is working on a book about vocational discernment for gay Christians.

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THE COUNTRY OF MERCY

Had Sylvia Plath survived her suicide attempt 50 years ago, she would be 81 years young on Oct. 27. It is possible to imagine her as healthy, sound of body and mind, composing poems as heartbreaking and breathtaking as those in her final book, *Ariel*.

Had Flannery O'Connor survived lupus, the disease that took her life 49 years ago, she would have turned 88 last March. I like to imagine her alive, too—writing her tales of horror and hilarity, catastrophe and consolation—residing, perhaps, in the same assisted living facility as Sylvia—the two women exchanging poems and stories on summer afternoons on the screened porch, rocking in their chairs, sipping sweet tea. Sylvia reads her favorite Flannery tales aloud, mimicking O'Connor's Georgia drawl; Flannery, in turn, recites Plath's heady verse in a terse New England accent.

This vision came to me recently as I walked out of my contemporary poetry class and stepped across the hall into my American Catholic fiction seminar. Nestled inside my leather satchel was a copy of Plath's *Ariel* and O'Connor's *Collected Stories*, side by side. The two women had been keeping company for weeks, and they were getting along rather well. Both were committed artists whose vocations defined their lives. Both were painfully aware of the demands of their craft and made sacrifices to meet them. Both created work of beauty and power that changed the face of literature. Finally, both died young, each at the peak of her powers, leaving their readers to mourn them and their unwrit-

ten words.

Plath wrote the *Ariel* poems in a white heat during the freezing English winter of 1962–63. Abandoned by her husband, serving as sole caretaker of her young daughter and infant son, Plath endured frequent power outages in her London flat, writing her poems in the cold and the dark late into the night. Despite her exhaustion and the desolation that haunts the poems, her work energized and consoled her: "I am a writer. I am a genius of a writer," she wrote to her mother in the United States. "I am writing the best poems of my life; they will make my name." A young poet coming into her own under intolerable circumstances, she knew her skill was hard won. "I am full of plans, but do need help. I am fighting now against hard odds and alone." Four months later, on Feb. 11, 1963, she would surrender. Having left cups of milk beside her children's beds and sealed their doors with towels and tape, Sylvia Plath knelt before her oven, turned on the gas and died.

O'Connor wrote her stories on a manual typewriter. Her illness had sent her back to Georgia to live in her mother's farmhouse, far from her New York literary friends, when she was just 26. For the next 13 years, she would write for two hours each morning, work that took all the strength she could muster. After attending week-day Mass, she would eat lunch with her mother. Occasionally, they would

receive guests, but mostly her life was as solitary as Plath's. When her disease flared up, O'Connor would take her work with her to the hospital. She finished her last story, "Parker's Back," just days before she died. It tells the story of a man full of physical vigor who cannot see the limits or the grandeur of his own flesh.

"Sickness is a place, more instructive than a long trip to Europe, and it's always a place where there's no company," O'Connor wrote. Both women experienced the radical loneliness that mental and physical illness imposes on the soul. Both longed for the place Plath called the "country far away as health," but were denied entrance.

Plath and O'Connor died with their boots on. They kept death at bay until they finished their work. Plath stacked the pages of *Ariel* neatly on her writing desk. O'Connor lived just long enough to finish "Parker's Back" and afford her hero the chance for rebirth. Their poems and stories gave them the courage to look into the abyss, to take their portion of human suffering and transmute it into beauty. "Out of the ash/ I rise with my red hair," says Sylvia. "We go to the Father of Souls," Flannery writes, quoting St. Cyril of Jerusalem, but first we must "pass by the dragon."

Well past the dragon, they have arrived in the Country of Mercy. On the screened porch, drinking sweet summer tea, they have much to talk about.

Both
Plath and
O'Connor
experienced
radical
loneliness.



ANGELA ALAIMO O'DONNELL is a poet, professor and associate director of the Curran Center for American Catholic Studies at Fordham University in New York City.

AFTER ECSTASY

ILLUMINATIONS

A Novel of Hildegard von Bingen

By Mary Sharratt

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 288p \$25

THE MAID

A Novel of Joan of Arc

By Kimberly Cutter

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 304p \$26

THE MIRRORED WORLD

A Novel

By Debra Dean

Harper Perennial. 272p \$14.99

The enthusiastic reaction to Jorge Mario Bergoglio's choice of the name Francis underscores the ongoing power of the saints in shaping the Catholic sacramental imagination. The new pope implicitly suggests that the things that mattered to St. Francis—concern for the poor, care of creation, a commitment to pacificism and the reform of religious life—may also matter to him and therefore to millions of Catholics.

But getting a sense of saints as real people can be difficult, since joining the cloud of witnesses tends to both smooth over the sharp edges of their personalities and over-polish the tarnished ordinariness of their day-to-day lives. The cloud quickly becomes a disorienting fog when it comes to saintly women in the church, who not only faced the challenge of living authentic responses to the countercultural call of the Gospel in the midst of narrow social and religious ideals of femininity, but also mediated their relationship with the sacred in the midst of far more profane relationships, voluntary and involuntary. Perhaps Dorothy Day was thinking of Joni Mitchell when she resisted sainthood—*It's cloud's illusions, I recall, I really don't know clouds at all.*

Three new novels imaginatively at-

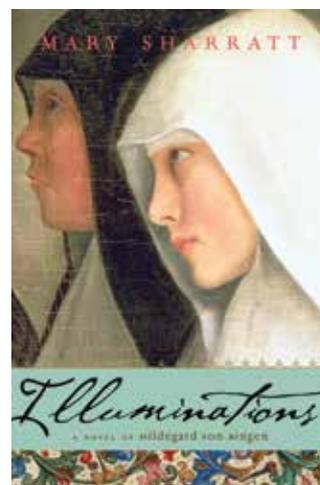
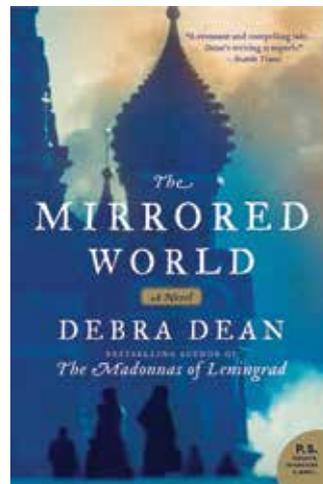
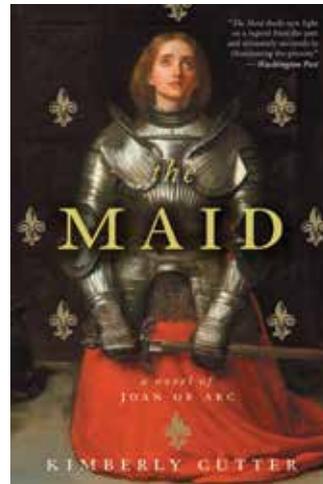
tempt to bring three women saints—Hildegard von Bingen (canonized and made a doctor of the church in 2012), Joan of Arc (burned as a heretic in 1431 but made a saint in 1920) and Xenia of St. Petersburg (canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1988)—into focus for the 21st century by exploring the gaps in the historical and hagiographical record. The authors blend the factual drama of each women's historical context and mundane details of their daily lives with more fictitious accounts by named and anonymous people affected by their holiness—biological and religious family members, lovers and comrades, friends and bystanders.

In portraying actual women shaped by a variety of circumstances beyond their control and haunted by multiple personal longings, the novels suggest that the power of the saints rests not so much in what they did but rather how they wrestled with the demons that arose from their need for relationships with other people—Hildegard's loneliness in a vocation not of her choosing, Joan's fear of disappointing the men she led, Xenia's grief at the loss of the love of her life.

In *Illuminations: A Novel of Hildegard von Bingen* Mary Sharratt debunks the romantic myth of the medieval anchorage by invoking the terrifying perspective of a child of 8 years entombed in two tiny rooms with a mentally unstable woman whose relentless narcissistic asceticism could

only be described as psychologically and physically abusive. We observe Hildegard finding solace year after year for three decades, growing plants in a walled outdoor cell warmed by the sun for a handful of moments each day or in brief encounters across the screen with her confessor. Sharratt contrasts the suffocating demands of solitary confinement with Hildegard's free ranging spaces of internal freedom—in her writings, her music, her cosmic sensibility and her deep prayer life. She also captures the anchorite's balancing act as she came into her own—carefully not surpassing the literal outsiders' sense of the glory of her *magistra*, Jutta, as she herself begins to attract devotees; judiciously not overstepping hierarchical authority in forming her own community; piously not allowing herself to favor any women in her community or to allow her love of them to surpass her love of God.

Kimberly Cutter opens *The Maid* with Jehanne, a “magical virgin,” imprisoned and on trial for heresy, a climactic scene she inter-



sperses throughout the novel. But she quickly rewinds to the early adolescence of her protagonist, Jehennette, who is constantly making sense of religious fervor in a time of scarcity in a family with strong male personalities and in a village terrorized by violent skirmishes with the English. Cutter's detailed descriptions of Jehanne's internal encounters with Michael the archangel and Sts. Catherine and Margaret, as well as her external dealings with men of the world drawn to her vision of glory for France and to her daring nature, allow us to empathize with this complex woman. We can appreciate how she had to be tougher and more pious than the soldiers she led, more persuasive in her "Godvoice" than the others who had the ear of the Dauphin, more beautiful than her rumored beauty, resolutely virginal despite a deep love for at least one of the men who rode by her side and defiantly pure in the midst of the vices of hand to hand combat and struggles for power.

Debra Dean's narrator, Dashenka, tells a somewhat predictable tale of her cousin and dearest friend, Xenia, a fanciful and deeply sensitive St. Petersburg socialite "bequeathed every worldly advantage of wit, modesty, and riches" and guided by conventional longings for a husband, family and the trappings of a socially mobile life. This lasts until Xenia's unpredictable and inconsolable grief at the death of her child and husband hijacks Dasha and the reader in a rarely told story of what happens to the people left behind by "holy fools." The second half of *The Mirrored World* unfolds as a kind of feminist midrash on the Prodigal Daughter. Cutter pulls us into the confusion of a cousin and best friend who mourns the loss of the woman she loves to a consumptive grief, her anger at being pillaged along with all of her cousin's finery in Xenia's seemingly mad attempt to die to her former self and live on the

streets. Finally we witness her eventual resolution to support her cousin's prophetically prodigal ways, albeit while grieving her own loss of Xenia's companionship.

While engaging in their creative details, the novels lack deep theological insights, and the authors' engagements with feminist frontlines in Catholicism are not particularly new. Here we have historical biographies of three women succumbing to the demands of an intervening and masculine God, navigating the confines of sexuality and holiness and confronting patriarchy even in the micro-matriarchal contexts of an anchorage.

Each author clears the hagiographical fog swirling about these saintly women, however, by refusing to romanticize their religious ecstasy. We learn that mysticism is not necessarily beautiful in the traditional sense of the word—as pleasing or arresting or even sublimely transcendent. The interpersonal drama of life in a hyper-cloistered religious community of

two, the violence of religious visions in the midst of 15th-century insurgencies in France and the indignities of extreme poverty in St. Petersburg are ugly places in which these women experienced unmediated connections to God. As Dasha notes of her cousin, Xenia, "I should still choose for her the easier blessings." But these authors do give us a sense that the weird, the ugly and the crazy do in fact allure us with their disruptive contrariness. We come to know three women turning away from conventional expectations, stepping out to public arenas in ways that confound, commanding the attention of those they encounter and being too easily dismissed by those who could not understand their Christly foolishness as spectacles, lunatics and witches. These are not docile and ephemeral witnesses from the cloud but touchstones of the weighty messiness of human experience.

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BRENNA MOORE

THE JEWISH MARTYR

BEYOND THE WALLS Abraham Joshua Heschel and Edith Stein on the Significance of Empathy for Jewish-Christian Dialogue

By Joseph Redfield Palmisano, S.J.
Oxford University Press. 208p \$74

In the opening paragraph of *Beyond the Walls*, Joseph Palmisano, S.J., advances a startling claim: Edith Stein's forced removal from her Carmelite monastery in 1942 and her subsequent murder at Auschwitz stand before us as "a 'prophetic sign of our times'" and a model for "interreligious dialogue." He sees in Stein a courageous "movement from the familiar to the foreign" as she "goes to

Auschwitz with her Jewish people." In subsequent pages, Palmisano describes Stein's life and death as a "kenotic self emptying," a communion with others—especially with the "six million holy witnesses" (victims) of the Shoah.

By Chapter 7, the reader is relieved to hear Palmisano take up some of the serious controversies that come with presenting Stein as a model of Christian sanctity. Since 1983, when the cause for Stein's canonization was promoted, many Jews and some Catholics have raised questions: Why would Catholics see her as a Christian martyr when she solely died like so many millions of others—because of her Jewish blood? Why would her story be held up as a

model of interreligious dialogue, rather than a horrendous tragedy? Seeing how Palmisano still reads Stein—her life and ghastly death—in terms of Christological kenosis, courage and Jewish-Christian relations is one important impetus for reading *Beyond the Walls*.

At the center of Palmisano's deeply affecting portrait of Stein as a model of sanctity is Abraham Joshua Heschel's "interreligiously attuned philosophy of empathy." Astutely, Palmisano perceives fundamental similarities between Heschel and Stein. Outside of Catholic circles, Stein is mainly known as a philosopher of empathy. Indeed, Palmisano is at his best in showing Stein and Heschel as a part of a shared intellectual culture in mid 20th-century Europe that pushed against the prevailing idealisms of their time in an effort to turn instead toward the givenness of the world, its grit and reality.

These intellectuals accused older systems of thought of evading "the real," especially concrete persons in their otherness and need. They forged a powerful language to describe what others occluded. In Palmisano's best pages, you can hear Heschel, for example, straining to articulate the evils of the 20th century as thoroughly and spectacularly as possible. Heschel's sense of 1938 is when "Fellowmen turned out to be evil ghosts, monstrous and weird," and one of Heschel's parables of the modern world is about a group of climbers in the forest suddenly "set upon by a swarm of angry snakes. Every crevice became alive with fanged, hissing things. For each snake the desperate men slew, ten more seemed to lash out in its place." For Heschel, empathy in reality had the power to subdue the snake pit.

Palmisano's portrait of Stein comes alive as an equally vivid witness to em-

pathy when he describes her continued allegiance to Judaism after her 1922 conversion to Christianity, and especially her empathy with Jewish suffering and her early critique of Christian anti-Semitism. He reproduces Stein's powerful letter of 1933 to Pope Pius XI, a prescient document. Responsibility for the escalating violence against Jews in Germany, Stein tells the pope, "also falls on those who keep silent in the face of such happenings.... For weeks not only Jews but also thousands of faithful Catholics in Germany and, I believe, all over the world, have been waiting and

hoping for the Church of Christ to raise its voice to put a stop to this abuse of Christ's name." Stein also describes herself in this letter as a "child of the Jewish people" and also "by the grace of God...a child of the Catholic Church." Much like Stein's fellow convert and acquaintance Raïssa Maritain, Stein took up writing on

Judaism after her conversion to Christianity, penning a deeply humane portrait of Jewish household piety in her autobiography, *Life in a Jewish Family*.

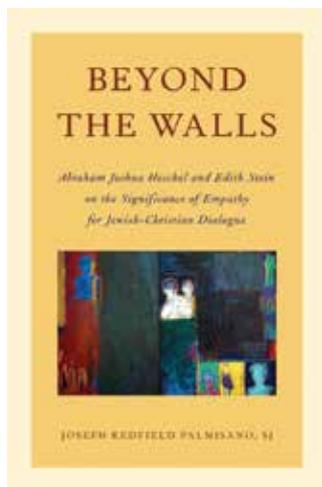
Palmisano laces his narrative with detailed elements like these from Heschel's and Stein's lives and writings, and they make the book compelling. But elsewhere he falls victim to the temptation to offer a too quick theological reading of Stein as an overwhelmingly positive model for the contemporary present. The redemption in some places seems too quickly won. A few important difficulties are glossed over. While Stein's own writings on empathy are moving and her critique of anti-Semitism laudatory, it is less clear how the "death of Stein (ital orig.), vis-à-vis her receptivity for the suffering of her people, is a lesson in kenotic witnessing for the entire

Christian church," as Palmisano writes.

German officers came to Holland in 1942 explicitly looking for all converted Jews, knocked at the door of the monastery for Stein and arrested her and her sister Rosa. A week later, they were sent to the gas chambers in Auschwitz. Palmisano's interpretation of her death as a free act of self-donation, an expression of solidarity and love, is more asserted than argued. He beautifully depicts Stein's grace and calm in the midst of violence and highlights the fact that she never fled, but it is not clear that she could have. Likewise, by seeing her as a "model for interreligious dialogue" that "bridges sameness and otherness," we hear too little reflection on why for Stein (and countless other converts like her) this dual allegiance to both Christianity and Judaism required conversion. Well-known facts, like Stein's final written will and testament, in which she asked God to accept her life "for the atonement of the unbelief of the Jewish people," never emerge.

Details like these render Stein a more complicated model for interreligious dialogue today. But they are precisely the details that offer a fascinating window into the complex, extraordinarily rich self-understanding of Jewish-Catholic converts in mid 20th-century Europe. There were many like Stein—French, German and émigré Jews—for whom solid religious (and national) identity was less than stable. This is not to make Stein and those like her less worthy of study—far from it. But we must do so from their own multivalent and often changing perspectives. Much in the book does this beautifully. But *Beyond the Wall's* assertion that they speak to us straightforwardly as models for emulation today can evade the chasm that exists between their world—a world full of personal losses and the horrendous cataclysms that caused them—and our own.

BRENNIA MOORE is an assistant professor of theology at Fordham University in New York City.



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America (ISSN 0002-7049) is published weekly (except for 13 combined issues: Jan. 7-28, 28-28, April 8-15, June 3-10, 17-24, July 1-8, 15-22, July 29-Aug. 5, Aug. 12-19, Aug. 26-Sept. 2, Sept. 28, Dec. 28, 23-30) by America Press, Inc., 106 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019. Periodical postage is paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices. Business Manager: Lisa Pope. Circulation: (800) 627-9533. Subscriptions: United States, \$56 per year; add U.S. \$30 postage and GST (#131870719) for Canada; or add U.S. \$56 per year for international priority airmail. Postmaster: Send address changes to: America, P.O. Box 293059, Kettering, OH 45429.

The Small Matter of Sin

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), NOV. 3, 2013

Readings: Wis 11:22–12:2; Ps 145:1–14; 2 Thes 1:11–2:2; Lk 19:1–10

“You overlook people’s sins so that they may repent” (Wis 11:23)

The passage from the Book of Wisdom about God “overlooking” sins has a wry humor when juxtaposed with little Zacchaeus, too small in stature to be seen. That is not true, of course, for no matter where Zacchaeus was standing, hidden among the crowd or walking away from Jesus, God “sees” our sins. From the story of Adam and Eve, to Cain and Abel, Moses and the Egyptian slave driver, and David and Bathsheba, all of whom try to carry out their acts of disobedience clandestinely, the truth is that sin cannot be hidden from God. Sin needs a solution other than human concealment. Zacchaeus’ climbing a tree to see Jesus is simply a sign that he wants to be found by Jesus, that he is seeking the solution.

The solution must be able to coax those who are afraid, scarred and marred by rejection out from the shadows, comforting them with the assurance that God can be trusted. In Wisdom we read the reason for trust: that God is “merciful to all, for you can do all things, and you overlook people’s sins, so that they may repent. For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made, for you would not have made anything if you had hated it.... You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you who love the living.”

As David Winston explains in his Anchor Bible commentary on this book, “Earlier in Wisdom we read that God could have crushed the Egyptians with

one fell swoop if that was God’s wish,” but “God...never acts arbitrarily, but always according to the laws of his own being. His omnipotence guarantees the unbiased character of his all-embracing love. The act of creation is itself a manifestation of this love, and precludes the possibility of divine hatred to any of his creatures. The deity therefore compassionately overlooks the sins of men with a constant view to their repentance.”

When Jesus looks at Zacchaeus, God incarnate does not see his sins, as numerous and major, or as few and petty, as they may be, but the person of Zacchaeus, a person scarred by life and his or her sins, as we all are to various degrees, but a person made in the image of God and loved by God. By climbing the tree, Zacchaeus has made it clear that he wants also to know God, to love God; the act of seeking Jesus out is itself an act of spiritual awareness and repentance.

The first thing Jesus tells Zacchaeus in Luke’s account is that he wants to spend time with him: “Hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” Now that Zacchaeus is out from the shadows, Jesus’ goal is not to scold him back into a dark corner, but to reveal to him the light. Zacchaeus “was happy to welcome him,” but everyone else “began to grumble and said, ‘He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.’” This is true, but God could not dwell with anyone if God did not “overlook people’s sins.”



While human judgment can be harsh, God, who knows his creation through and through, accepts us as we are. By accepting Zacchaeus and his step toward him and inviting himself into his home, Jesus creates a relationship of intimacy, ignoring the petty grumbling of those who considered themselves more righteous than Zacchaeus. In this way, as the author of Wisdom says, “you correct little by little those who trespass, and you remind and warn them of the things through which they sin, so that they may

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Visualize yourself in the crowd as Jesus calls out to Zacchaeus. How do you respond to Jesus’ going to the house of Zacchaeus?

be freed from wickedness and put their trust in you, O Lord.” When Jesus puts his trust in Zacchaeus, overlooking his sins, Zacchaeus repents of his fraudulent past, offering to give half his possessions to the poor and to pay back fourfold those who were defrauded.

You cannot buy your salvation, but Zacchaeus’ acts of contrition are signs of genuine repentance, so that Jesus can say, “Today salvation has come to this house.” It has come indeed, for though the solution to sin seems counterintuitive—do not hide it, but confess it and bring it out into the open—it is a person, Jesus Christ, who was placed high on the cross for all to see, who, when you turn to him, cannot see your sins. They have been overlooked.

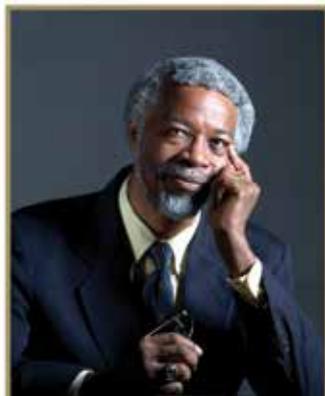
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