

# America

AUGUST 2020

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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Our Broken Prison  
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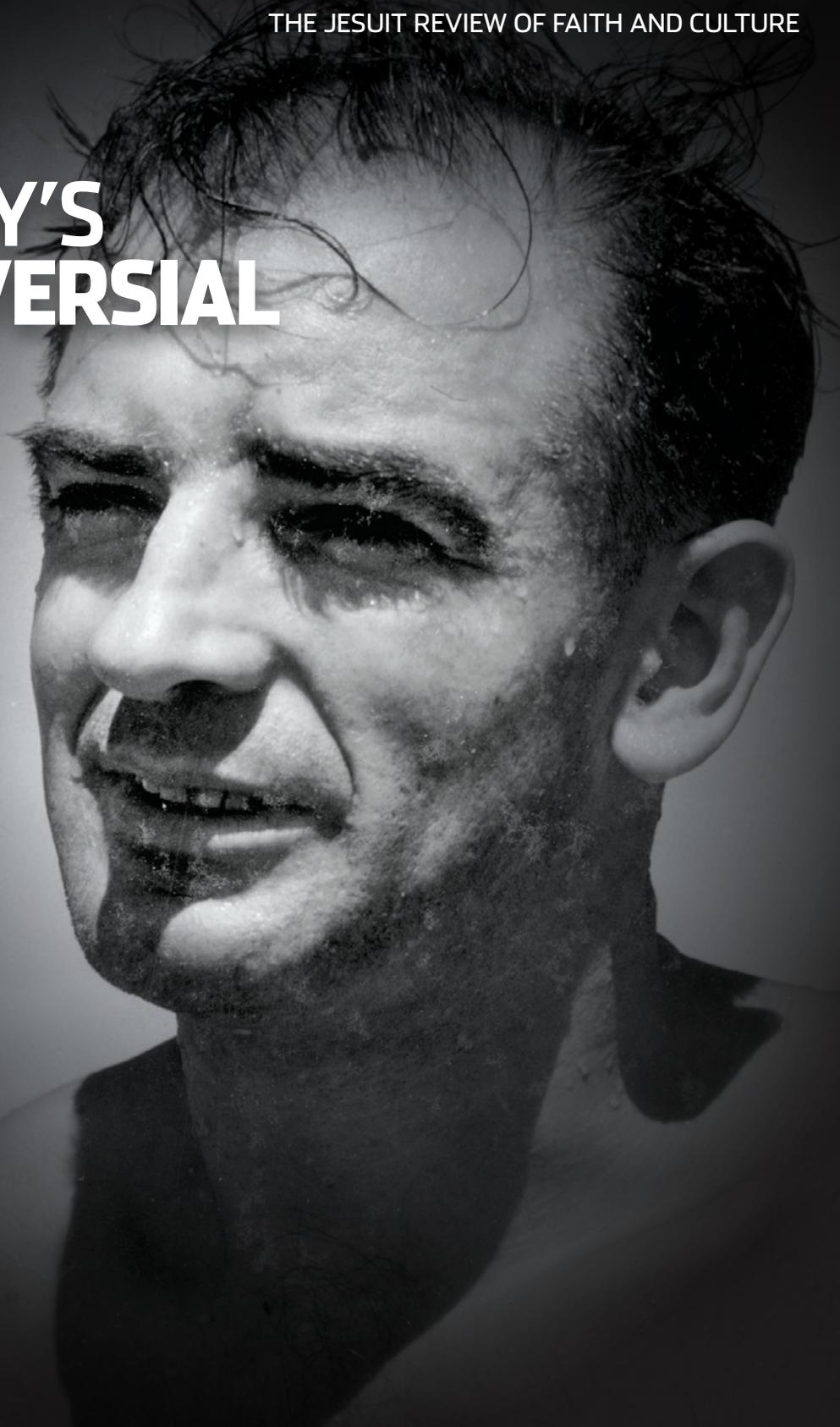
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## Ask a Better Question

My late philosophy professor, W. Norris Clarke, S.J., was always telling me to “interrogate the premise” of an argument. He believed that, generally speaking, most conclusions follow logically from their premises; so if an argument is false, it is likely because one or more of its premises is false. I apply this skepticism to news stories published in **America** and elsewhere. This is important because reporters mostly live in a two-dimensional world. Their task is to record events quickly by reducing complex phenomena to their simplest formulation.

The problem with that approach is that it can distort the very reality reporters are seeking to make clear. A good example is a news story published by The Associated Press on July 10. The lead paragraph was as follows:

The U.S. Roman Catholic Church used a special and unprecedented exemption from federal rules to amass at least \$1.4 billion in taxpayer-backed coronavirus aid, with many millions going to dioceses that have paid huge settlements or sought bankruptcy protection because of clergy sexual abuse cover-ups.

Shocking, no? But is that what happened? All of the facts cited are true. Indeed, as far as I can tell, all of the facts cited in the story are true. But how are those facts related to one another, if they are related at all?

The first claim is true. The Catholic Church received (“amassed” is a loaded word) somewhere between \$1.4 billion and \$3.5 billion in federal funds under

the Paycheck Protection Program, the federal initiative designed to mitigate the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Ordinarily, businesses that employ more than 500 people and all faith-based organizations are not eligible for federal, small business loans. In this instance, however, Congress and the Trump administration waived those rules.

This was, then, as the A.P. story states, “a special and unprecedented exemption.” What the story does not state explicitly—because it would muddy the waters of the narrative—is that the whole paycheck protection program is a “special and unprecedented” response to a special and unprecedented event. The story also initially leads the reader to conclude that these exemptions were carved out specifically for the Catholic Church when in fact all religious groups were similarly exempted.

The A.P. story also states that the money went to “dioceses that have paid huge settlements or sought bankruptcy protection because of clergy sexual abuse cover-ups.” This is also true. But how, exactly, is it relevant? These federal funds were distributed to every kind of small business, without consideration for whether they had settled lawsuits related to sexual abuse, or environmental damage, or negligence or malpractice. The unspoken premise of the A.P. claim is that the church may have been undeserving of paycheck protection funds because it had settled lawsuits. Yet no other industry was subjected to such a test.

The A.P. story is correct to point out that religious institutions sought and won an exemption from the rule that companies with more than 500

employees are ineligible. The story characterizes this exemption as “preferential treatment,” which sounds terribly unfair. Yet the unasked question in the story is whether it would have been fair to exclude the church because of the 500-employee rule. The church in the United States is not a monolith. It is a network of affiliated but legally and financially independent institutions. There isn’t a parish in the country that employs more than 500 people on its pastoral staff; and it is the parish, not the diocese, that has to make payroll for the parish staff each month.

For the record, America Media applied for and was approved for a Paycheck Protection loan. We applied as an independent non-profit corporation and not through the Archdiocese of New York. We were approved for a \$314,000 loan. This offsets the revenue we have lost due to the cancellation of programs and allows us to continue to support our employees.

America Media will not apologize for joining thousands of other small businesses in seizing this opportunity. This event constituted a national emergency, which was also a family emergency for every one of our workers. Likewise, the church in the United States has no need to apologize, regardless of what The Associated Press implies to the contrary.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Matt Malone, S.J.  
Twitter: @americaeditor.



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AP Photo/Mosa'ab Elshamy

Youths play as the sun sets on a reopened beach after lockdown measures were lifted in Rabat, Morocco, June 26.

Cover: Captain Joseph R. McCarthy, somewhere in the South Pacific, 1943  
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## Who has stepped up to lead?

**America** asked its readers about local leaders who have stepped up in response to the concurrent crises of racial injustice, a global pandemic and a crippled economy.

Dr. Rob McCann, C.E.O. of Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington, has prophetically pointed out the implicit racism within himself, his ministry and the Catholic Church. Plus, the homeless persons served by Catholic Charities housing have not had a single Covid-19 infection as of July 8.

**John Coc**

Spokane, Wash.

The Franciscan Sisters in Sylvania, Ohio, have been standing at the corner of Convent Boulevard and Main Street every Monday and Wednesday in support of Black Lives Matter.

**Beverly Bingle**

Toledo, Ohio

In Los Angeles, principal Rene de Leon of Hoover St. Elementary School (where I teach) has shown tremendous leadership in making sure every single child has a computer and internet access, getting hot spots into every home.

**Paula Van Houten**

South Pasadena, Calif.

## Letters to the Editor

I am an African-American Dominican friar down in New Orleans. I read every word of your essay, “A Letter to My Fellow White Americans” (July 2020). Your story conveyed a lot of empathy and hopefully will connect with people who feel that racial issues simply spring from weak arguments and complainers.

I was born in a Black Catholic ghetto in New Orleans in the middle of the last century. My entire life has been vulnerable to being treated solely on my color.

As a child, I was touched by the life of St. Martin de Porres, O.P. My identification with his dark skin combined with grace brought me to the Dominican Order. I was blessed to have a good novice master in that he never objectified me but simply treated me like a human being. That changed as a professed brother. Formators psychologized me out of the order. I didn’t fit their notion of a Black person. My undergraduate degree in Spanish was seen as weird, and I was deemed not intelligent enough to be in the order. Further, something had to be wrong with me in my willingness to live with white people.

When seeking housing for a doctorate at Columbia University in New York, an Eastern Province prior noticed my color on a newsletter photo and phoned my provincial declaring that he “did not want a Black guy in their priory.” During my four years of study, it pained me that I would not be welcomed in a New York Dominican priory.

When in San Francisco, I was praying in a Dominican church. The priest peeped out of the sacristy and 10 minutes later two African-American police officers arrived. They pretended they were not interested in my presence and left for their patrol car parked outside the church. Minutes later, I went out and told them I intuited that they came because of a call by the priest. The police admitted it and jovially chuckled that white people can’t conceive of a Black male praying.

These examples are not meant to point a finger at my brother Dominicans. However, it’s important to note that religious orders rarely look at their own participation in a racist culture.

**Herman Johnson, O.P.**

New Orleans, La.

### Diversity at *America*

In this time of our nation’s increased awareness of dismantling white supremacy, I am curious if **America** magazine has considered any efforts to diversify its staff and editorial contributors. A 2014 Pew study reported that the U.S. Roman Catholic Church is 59 percent white, 34 percent Hispanic/Latino, 3 percent Black, 3 percent Asian and 2 percent other. **America** appears to have a writing and editing staff that is overwhelmingly white. Diversity at **America** seems limited to gender but far less so race, with some exceptions. While this gap between the church, and the magazine’s, racial composition is not limited to **America** and is shared by other leading Roman Catholic weeklies and monthlies, I encourage you to take a leadership role in the prioritization of more representative racial composition of your staff. It would be welcomed to hear one of the Roman Catholic Church media leaders like yourself address this most embarrassing 21st-century gap.

**Joseph F. Duggan**

Santa Barbara, Calif.



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Tiara, 11 years old

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## The Supreme Court Cannot Solve All Our Moral Disputes

Starting in mid-June—and, for the first time in more than 20 years, continuing into the first two weeks of July—all eyes were on the U.S. Supreme Court. Over four weeks at the beginning of summer, these are just some of the most significant decisions handed down: a historic expansion of nondiscrimination protections to include sexual orientation and transgender persons; a continuation of the status quo on abortion that calls into question more than 40 years of pro-life political strategy; a school funding decision that may finally put the nail in the coffin for anti-Catholic Blaine amendments; a temporary lifeline for immigrants who faced deportation to countries they were too young to remember leaving; two affirmations of the religious freedom of employers that many decried as unfair to their employees; and rulings that the president is not immune to criminal investigations but may be able to continue stonewalling legislative subpoenas.

In thinking about the Supreme Court, as with almost everything else, it is worthwhile to begin with gratitude and to look for what can be praised. The court's refusal to let the administration proceed with the deportation of Dreamers avoided a tragic outcome that an overwhelming majority of Americans do not want, while the anti-discrimination decision extended to L.G.B.T. Americans basic civil rights protections that most of the country supports. In both of these cases the Supreme Court reached results that had been proposed multiple times in legislation and in some cases would have commanded a majority of congressional support, had they been

allowed to proceed to a vote.

The court's decision that religious schools must be equally eligible for funding made available for use at secular private schools reinforces an American tradition of encouraging the exercise of religion, rather than merely tolerating religious belief, while striking a blow against anti-religious and specifically anti-Catholic bias hiding under the rhetoric of a "wall of separation" between church and state. The judgments protecting the ministerial exception to employment discrimination laws and upholding a religious exemption from the contraceptive coverage mandate both commanded 7-to-2 majorities. The justices' votes indicate that the legal status of religious liberty is less contentious than the underlying moral questions, especially regarding employment discrimination. While the court preserved religious organizations' legal freedom to define who counts as a "minister," the unjust use of that categorization to fire L.G.B.T. employees or employees who are elderly or sick will only increase hostility to religious liberty claims in the future.

Other 7-to-2 decisions, in cases in which President Trump challenged subpoenas for financial records, similarly demonstrated that the court was able to reach significant agreement on legal reasoning even when political stakes are high.

Most of the public commentary on these decisions and even much of the news reporting, however, reveals a far greater investment in preferred outcomes than in clear legal reasoning. On the one hand, this is perfectly understandable: These decisions have vital consequences, and real and irreversible harms are at stake. Yet the

pressures that lead to using the court to achieve legislative goals—or to manage the fallout from arbitrary and capricious exercises of executive power—continue to build up.

What many of these cases have in common is that the American people are and should be more interested in their moral consequences than in their specific legal ramifications. Repeatedly referring these moral dilemmas to the court, often framed very poorly as legal disputes, is a slow-motion disaster for democracy. The court is functioning in these instances less as a judicial body than as a relief valve for legislative dysfunction and executive overreach, and the pressure is rising faster than it can be vented through the necessarily slow process of judicial opinions.

We bring our most vehement moral disagreements to the court, which almost never resolves them to anyone's full satisfaction. And even when real agreement does exist, we fail to legislate according to it, continuing the vicious cycle that brings us back, June after June after June, to wait for nine people, who all attended either Harvard or Yale, to try to achieve compromises that our legislators, elected officials and the voters themselves cannot reach.

The issue of abortion at the Supreme Court is a microcosm of this sorry situation. *Roe v. Wade* short-circuited the process of legislative compromise over abortion. In response, since amending the U.S. Constitution to reverse the court's constitutionalization of the abortion issue proved impossible, the pro-life movement turned its attention to judicial appointments in order to return abortion to the legislative arena.

Thus, the issue has dominated national presidential politics for decades, fueling fundraising and empowering single-issue lobbying groups while deepening partisan divisions.

Having the abortion issue locked up at the Supreme Court has also distorted Catholic rhetoric on the morality of voting decisions to the point where many Catholics are incorrectly convinced that no vote for a candidate who supports legal abortion can ever be justified, while any vote for a candidate who will appoint justices who may overturn Roe, no matter what other issues are in play, is obligatory. Such tunnel-visioned moral analysis played a significant and perhaps decisive role in the 2016 presidential election. And this year, Chief Justice John Roberts's deciding vote to uphold a 2015 abortion decision, which he justified in terms of *stare decisis* (ruling on precedent), reveals that having five justices presumably ready to reject Roe is not enough. The hope against hope that the next Supreme Court vacancy will finally be the one that solves this problem only indicates how intractable the situation is.

Legislative compromise will not prevent moral disagreements from landing in front of the Supreme Court. But it is the more conclusive and democratic resolution for issues where sincerely held values are in real tension with each other. To that end, we need not only to elect a president and senators who will give us the right justices, but even more to elect officials who are committed to addressing moral arguments to pass legislation and not simply to win elections.

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## A prayer for Catholic schools facing the Covid-19 pandemic

Tragically, the opportunity to attend a Catholic school may be denied to millions of children as private schools across the United States fall victim to the Covid-19 pandemic. Many have already announced the decision to close permanently, including the Institute of Notre Dame, an all-girls Catholic school in Baltimore once attended by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Absent relief, more and more private schools will close, hurting local economies on the way. The most vulnerable schools are those in lower-income neighborhoods serving lower-income families.

Providing an opportunity for a good education, regardless of income or background, should be common ground for both political parties. All families, not just those with the means, deserve to choose the school that can provide the best education for their children. For people of all sorts—from that young woman in Baltimore who became the speaker of the House of Representatives to the daughter of immigrants chasing the American dream—private schools are an essential element in the education of our future leaders.

The day I got the chance to attend a private school was the day my path took a turn for success. From kindergarten to eighth grade, I attended a public school that repeatedly failed to give me the education I deserved. Just having immigrated to the United States, my mother did not understand the U.S. education system, but it seemed to make sense for me to attend a school in close proximity to her job.

In Arizona, schools are required to send parents a notice of the ratings they receive. As it turned out, the

school I attended was a failing one, and we had not even known it.

Though some of the teachers at my public school were great, the curriculum was never challenging, and the environment was stressful. The security lockdowns that occurred up to three times a month took away valuable time during the most critical learning years.

After eighth grade, thanks to Arizona's school choice program and my mother's hard work, I finally got my chance to pick the school I would attend for high school. St. Mary's provided me with the rigorous education I needed to succeed. Class sizes were smaller, and teachers took time before and after school hours to make sure I was on the right path.

It is evident that many students benefit from having an option other than public schools, but tuition can be expensive. Private schools are not funded by the government, so in states like Arizona, choice programs and charitable donations are what allow them to operate. At the same time, U.S. public schools nationwide receive, on average, more than \$12,000 per student from taxpayer funds.

With the pandemic and unstable economy, many parents are struggling to pay tuition for their children in private schools, and some will have no option but to remove their children from the schools that best serve them. In a domino effect, some private schools will be forced to close, further reducing school choice.

Families should not be forced to leave schools where their children are thriving. The pandemic is a time for compassion from local, state and national leaders; and that compassion should not leave out families who only

want their children to continue learning and exceeding in school.

Attending a Catholic school formed me into the person I am today. I learned about values and morals through both hardship and opportunities. The environment I was in and the people who surrounded me helped me grow in my faith. In addition, attending St. Mary's opened so many doors for me. It led to scholarship opportunities that allowed me to continue my education in college and prepared me for the challenges of my career path. It helped build a type of discipline that earns respect.

One of the most important things about religion is that whatever language one speaks or wherever one comes from, it can create a deep connection. That is something all children of immigrants can appreciate. In a school setting, religion can make us feel at home and give us something to bond over. I will forever cherish the second family that I gained by attending a Catholic school. And I pray that our leaders will act now so that millions of students will not lose the chance to have access to an education they enjoy and thrive in—an education where they can make deep connections and find their own second families, the way I was privileged to do.

---

*Nydia Salazar is a Future Leaders fellow at the American Federation for Children, the nation's largest school choice advocacy organization.*



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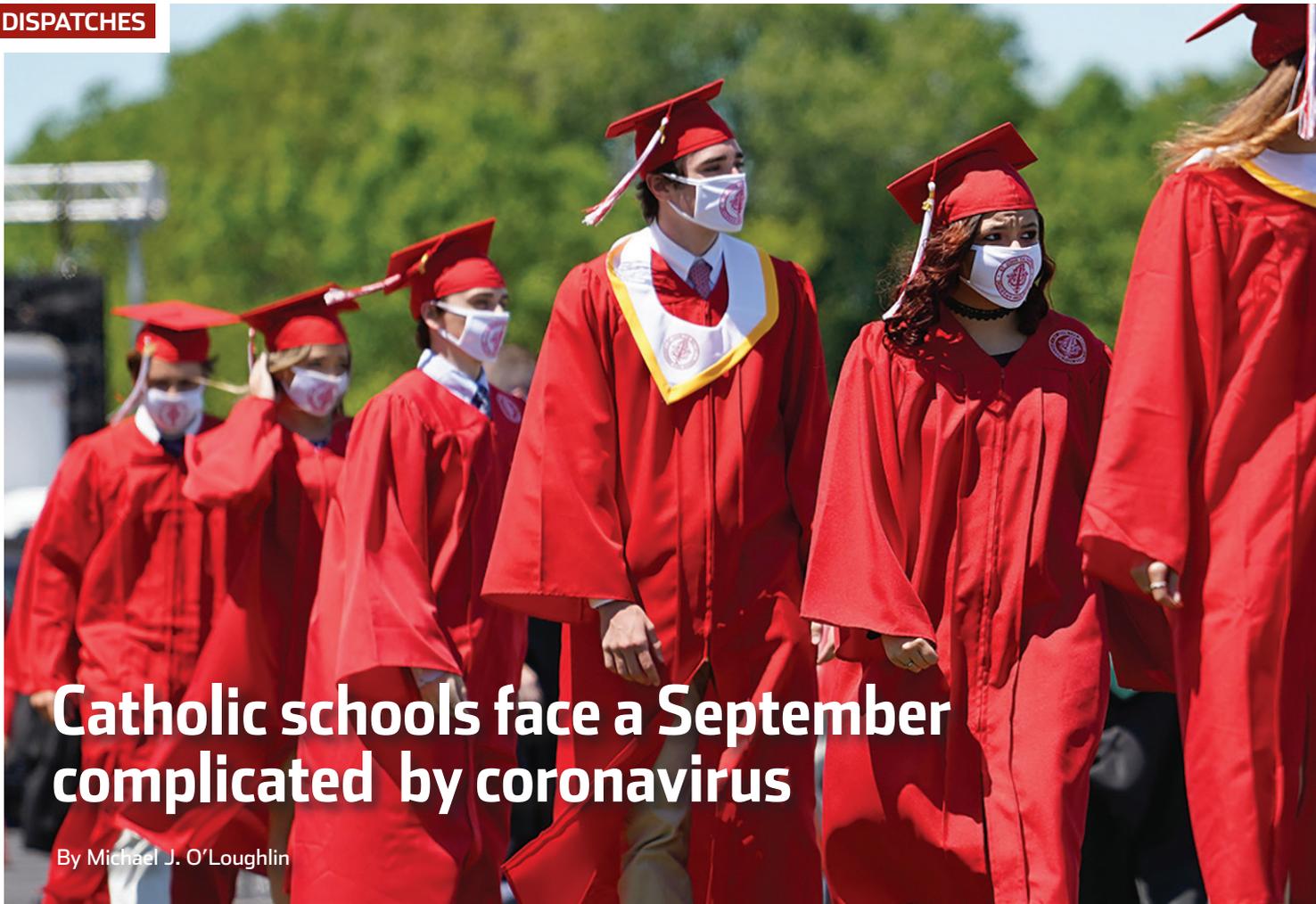
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## Catholic schools face a September complicated by coronavirus

By Michael J. O'Loughlin

For the roughly 1.75 million students enrolled in Catholic schools throughout the United States and their parents—especially their parents—news about what school will look like in September cannot come soon enough. But as the number of coronavirus cases continues to rise in most states, school administrators are still struggling to decide if classes can be held in person, if remote learning is here to stay for a while or if a hybrid of the two is needed. All that uncertainty makes planning difficult.

“It’s not like when you have a hurricane come rolling through or an earthquake or some major damaging event,” said Kevin Baxter, the chief innovation officer for the National Catholic Education Association. “It’s just the unknown, planning contingency upon contingency upon contingency.”

What schools and parents want may not be possible, as safety remains a priority.

“Schools are trying to think about how to start next year. They want to be in-person, they want to have kids back, but a lot of that’s going to be driven by the reality of

their specific geographic region,” Mr. Baxter added.

By July 9, according to the N.C.E.A., 10 Catholic school systems had said they planned to resume in-person teaching this fall, including two of the nation’s largest systems in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the Archdiocese of Chicago. The Archdiocese of Los Angeles stated in a letter on June 15 that opening this fall will require a number of safety measures, “such as physical distancing; facial coverings; frequent hand washing; keeping students in class-level cohorts; use of outdoor spaces for instruction; and non-touch temperature checks upon entry among others.”

“I think the protocol they put in place—with taking [students’] temperature, not penalizing if they’re sick and need to stay home, doing some social distancing...educating outside—is good,” said Lea Niehaus, a parent of three whose daughter is a Catholic high school student in Los Angeles. But she worries that it will be difficult for students to wear masks all day. “They’re trying to build in some breaks, and they’re also going to do all these cleaning protocols.”

Rebecca Foster is concerned about “the mental health



CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

Graduating seniors line up to receive their diplomas after leaving their vehicles during a drive-in commencement on June 14 at St. John the Baptist Diocesan High School in West Islip, N.Y.

toll” the experience of being kept out of school has had on her son Johnny, “not being around peers and friends and socializing.”

“I would much rather take on the risks of what it means to have a kid in a classroom all day than have him home all day,” said Ms. Foster, a Manhattan Beach, Calif., parent whose son is about to start eighth grade at American Martyrs School. “I just think it’s really hard for a middle school boy to be home all day without interaction with peers.”

In this parent’s assessment, the school experience is “20 percent about reading and writing and it’s 80 percent figuring out how to be a member of society through interactions with other adults and other students and all the other things that school is. And that’s what we’re missing out on.”

In New Jersey, one of the states hardest hit in the first few months of the Covid-19 pandemic, St. Matthias School in Somerset plans to reopen for a full five-day school week, with

mandatory masks for students and staff, social distancing and multiple cleanings each day. Elena Malinconico is the principal of the K-12 school, which serves more than 350 families.

“Children need that socialization, especially younger kids,” Ms. Malinconico said about the decision to reopen. “The distance learning was fabulous, but we lost a lot because they were just not capable at their age to do virtual learning.”

Catholic schools, she added, also have a commitment to community, family and faith, which is difficult to maintain in a remote learning environment. She said that conversations about recent news related to racial justice are essential to hold in person. But, Ms. Malinconico said, the plan to reopen remains “fluid” and that “the ultimate goal is the health and well-being of our students.”

Children are less likely to become seriously ill than adults, and there is little evidence that they are driving transmission, Jennifer Nuzzo, an epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins University’s Covid-19 Testing Insights Initiative

told The Associated Press. Still, there is a risk they could transmit the virus to others, including teachers or vulnerable people they live with.

“That is a reason to think about how to improve safety and to reduce the risk in school environments,” Ms. Nuzzo said. “Those measures and the move to reopen schools should proceed before the higher risk environments” like bars, restaurants, gyms and other indoor spaces.

If transmission can be reduced in the wider community, she said, it will make it safer for schools to reconvene. “We should be prioritizing the reopening of those public spaces that have known benefits and low risks,” Ms. Nuzzo said, “and we think that schools are one of those.”

So far, at least, the number of Catholic schools that have announced they are closing or consolidating before the next academic year is similar to that of the previous few years, which is usually just under 100, though that figure is typically reached over the course of the school year.

“We have all these schools closing, but sadly that’s been the reality for Catholic schools the last number of years,” Mr. Baxter said. “What I’m thinking about more is the long-term, the year from now, the end of the 2020-21 school year, if the economy doesn’t come back in any measurable way that the impact could be more significant,” he said.

Mr. Baxter, a former superintendent of Catholic schools in Los Angeles, said that many Catholic schools are supported by parishes, many of which are facing daunting budget challenges after being closed for several weeks and reopening with limited capacity.

According to the Cato Institute, 91 Catholic schools have already shuttered “at least partially” because of the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Catholic schools’ “razor-thin financial model,” its researchers said, “is proving very difficult to sustain as the coronavirus has led to school and church shutdowns—and hence big fundraising drops—and as tuition-paying families face their own virus-related financial problems.”

On July 9, the Diocese of Brooklyn announced six of its schools would close at the end of August, and the Archdiocese of New York announced that 20 of its elementary schools would not reopen in the fall and that three others would consolidate because of the various economic impacts of the pandemic. According to the archdiocese, spiking unemployment and continuing health concerns left New York families unable to pay current tuition and resulted in a significantly lower rate of re-registration for the fall. Months of canceled public Masses and fundraising for

Our Lady Queen of Angels School  
in East Harlem in New York.



CNS photo/Gregory A. Siermitz

scholarships have led to a loss of parish contributions that traditionally help support the schools.

Michael J. Deegan, the superintendent of schools for the archdiocese, said that if Congress does not pass another stimulus bill like the Heroes Act passed by the House in May, more damage to the system may be forthcoming.

That bill, passed along a party-line vote with just one Republican supporting it, includes \$3 trillion in stimulus money, including direct payments to families, but Republican leaders have signaled that they think the cost is too high. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, meanwhile, said on July 9 that the White House is committed to passing another stimulus package before the end of the month.

Though Mr. Baxter said many parishes believe they can support their schools during the difficult year ahead, support levels beyond that are less certain. In addition to likely weakened fundraising from parishes and dioceses, there are also questions about whether parents will be willing to pay full tuition in the event that schools transition exclusively to online learning.

“The next six to eight months are going to be really telling in terms of where the economy is to see the ultimate effect on Catholic schools,” he said.

Still, despite the challenges ahead, he has been heartened by the response of many Catholic schools and systems to the pandemic. For one, he said many schools have effectively used technology to foster a sense of community even while students were learning from home.

Mr. Baxter said he has been in touch with school leaders in many communities to talk about what opportunities may arise from the disruption caused by the virus, especially for schools that were stable before the coronavirus hit.

“Can we restart some schools, in a year or maybe two years, with a new curriculum model or some new approach to governance structure?” he asked. “We should be able to kind of reignite and restart.”

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

With reporting from editorial interns Maeve Orłowski-Scherer and Gabby Guerrero.

## As schools cope with coronavirus, will September be the cruelest month?

- ▶ **90**—the number of Catholic schools that have already closed “at least partially” because of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, according to the Cato Institute.
- ▶ **\$243 million**—additional cost to public school systems if they absorb students from closed Catholic and other private schools, according to the Cato Institute.
- ▶ **20 percent of U.S. dioceses** have already closed Catholic elementary schools because of the pandemic, according to a survey of 116 bishops conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. Another 25 percent are “considering” closing schools. Fourteen percent of the dioceses have closed Catholic high schools, and another 12 percent are considering doing so.
- ▶ **1,201,391**—enrollment in U.S. Catholic elementary schools during the 2019-20 school year; enrollment in secondary schools was 535,906—far below the combined enrollment of 5.2 million students in 1965, the peak year of Catholic school enrollment.
- ▶ **71.9 percent** of all Catholic school students identified as white (including Hispanics who identify as white) in 2019-20; 18.5 percent of students were Hispanic/Latino; 8.0 percent were Black; 7.2 percent were multiracial; 5.3 percent were Asian; 0.7 percent were American Indian or Native Alaskan and 0.6 percent were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.
- ▶ **19.1**—percentage of students in Catholic schools who are non-Catholic—up from 11.2 percent in 1980 and just 2.7 percent in 1970.

Sources: Except as noted, all data is from “United States Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools 2019-2020,” the latest edition of the annual statistical report from the National Catholic Educational Association. Number of dioceses reopening so far based on information from the N.C.E.A.

A Black Lives Matter protest in Rio de Janeiro on May 31.



## Black Lives Matter movement inspires demonstrations throughout Latin America

Activists and everyday people across Latin America, inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States, organized demonstrations in recent weeks related to their own local histories of police brutality, classism and racism.

“There’s a common denominator in the United States and Latin America: Human rights violations associated with police abuse many times go unpunished,” said Luis Arriaga, S.J., the rector of the ITESO, Jesuit University of Guadalajara, in Mexico. Last year, Father Arriaga founded the Francisco Suárez Center for Dignity and Justice, which has been documenting cases of torture and violence in Jalisco State.

“Racism and classism have a centuries-old history in the region that must be denounced,” he told **America**. “Data shows that the police are more violent with minorities and that there’s a pattern of criminalizing the poor.”

In Mexico, protests inspired by U.S. demonstrators erupted on June 4 after the circumstances around the killing of Giovanni López were released to the public. According to his family, López had been detained on May 4 in a city near Guadalajara because he was not wearing a mask.

The next day his lifeless body was taken to a hospital. An inquiry has begun into what happened to Mr. López while he was in custody.

The current wave of demonstrations has also encouraged Afro-Mexicans to keep pressing for their civil rights, said the Rev. Flaviano Cisneros, a member of the Afro-Mexican pastoral commission and the coordinator of the nongovernmental organization Mexico Negro.

“This is the time for Mexico to do some soul searching and acknowledge that it has done very little in terms of [responding to] racism, xenophobia, discrimination and other forms of intolerance when it comes to the Afro-Mexicans’ dignity of life,” he said.

In Colombia, activists on June 3 protested the killing of George Floyd and the presence of U.S. troops in front of the U.S. embassy in Bogotá. They also highlighted the case of Anderson Arboleda, a 19-year-old Black Colombian who was killed by police on May 19 in Puerto Tejada.

Rafael Savoia is an Italian-born Comboni missionary priest who worked 32 years with Afro-Ecuadorians and has spent 19 years working with the Afro-Colombian community. Over recent decades, the church has assisted the organization of the Black community in several Latin American countries, according to Father Savoia.

“The Latin American church’s preferential option for the poor opened the way to that attitude among us,” he said.

In Brazil, the nation with the largest Black population in Latin America, protests against racism and police brutality were held in Curitiba, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and other cities. The demonstrators demanded justice in the case of João Pedro Pinto, a Black 14-year-old boy who was shot dead at home during a police operation in the city of São Gonçalo, in the Rio de Janeiro metropolitan area, on May 18.

“For us, this anti-racist spring is a breath of Pentecost for the Catholic Church in Brazil,” said the Rev. David Santos, the founder of the Afro-Brazilian organization Educafro.

Father Santos is one of the coordinators of a campaign called *Somos 70%*—or “We Are 70 Percent,” a reference to the share of people who do not support President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil, according to recent polls—and believes that both themes must come together.

“This is the time to wake up and resist the genocide of the Black youth in Brazil,” he said. “More and more people in the church have realized that Catholics must be more involved in this struggle.”

Eduardo Campos Lima contributes from São Paulo, Brazil.



## Are Christians being targeted for genocide in central Nigeria?

Boko Haram Islamic militants have for years raged against minority Christian communities in northern Nigeria, and their intention to drive out “Western” influences and establish an Islamic state in northern Nigeria seems clear. At the same time, brutal attacks on Christian villages in Nigeria’s “middle belt,” or central region, have been attributed to Fulani cattle herders and have been explained as the result of conflict over diminishing resources.

But advocates gathered for an online press call hosted by the international advocacy group In Defense of Christians on June 25 believe that Christians are being explicitly targeted in an effort to drive them off their land. Frank Wolf, a former member of Congress from Virginia, bluntly denounced U.S. efforts in Nigeria so far, urging the creation of a special envoy to investigate the conflict. He said he was dismayed “for America to see genocide and not do anything about it.”

“I believe it will lead to what has happened in Darfur and Rwanda. I give Congress an ‘F.’ It has failed,” Mr. Wolf, a longtime campaigner for religious freedom, said.

Gregory Stanton, the founding president and chair of Genocide Watch, reported that since 2012, attacks by Fulani raiders and Boko Haram militants have killed as many as 27,000 Christians in Nigeria, more Christians than died at the hands of ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

He argued that the nature of the attacks clearly fit the

United Nations definition of acts of genocide. “They now arrive with truckloads of fighters and simply massacre a Christian village and leave the Muslim village alone,” he said.

The attacks, primarily on Christian farming communities, have been described as the result of tension over land use and traditional grazing rights. But U.S.-based advocates and Nigerian clergy say that narrative is belied by the clear and repeated targeting of unarmed Christians by well-armed Fulani raiders. “The future of Nigeria is bleak for Christians,” said Benjamin Kwashi, the Anglican archbishop of Jos. “I have seen far more funerals than I have seen any wedding ceremonies.”

He charged that the Nigerian government has abandoned its responsibility to maintain security and protect the vulnerable. He added, “A good number of the dead are children and women, the helpless, people that rely on the protection of government.”

Archbishop Kwashi said, “This thing is systematic. It is planned, it is calculated.” He complained that “the world doesn’t want to hear that, including the Nigerian government.”

A report on the conflict from the International Crisis Group notes the increasing role of Islamic militants but indeed suggests that the “violence is rooted in competition over resources between predominantly Fulani herders and



CNS photo/Abolabi Sotunde, Reuters

Catholic bishops in Abuja lead a protest against the ongoing violence in Nigeria on March 1.

mostly Hausa farmers.”

“It has escalated amid a boom in organized crime, including cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom and village raids,” I.G.F. researchers said, though they did acknowledge that “jihadist groups are now stepping in to take advantage of the security crisis.”

Anietie Ewang is a researcher for the Africa Division of Human Rights Watch in Nigeria’s capital, Abuja. She described the origins of the conflict between Fulani and Hausa farmers, both Christian and Muslim, as complex, with roots in competition over resources and longstanding ethno-religious tension. She argued that there was “nothing to suggest these are targeted attacks [against Christians], but there are religious and ethnic undertones because of the history, and that cannot be taken away.”

She said the Nigerian government must be held accountable to protect its citizens and prosecute wrongdoing but that it must also restore the currently suspended effort to broker an agreement between Fulani pastoralists and Hausa farmers, addressing the underlying tensions between the two communities.

Kevin Clarke, *chief correspondent.*  
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The Rev. Ken Fleck, pastor of St. George Parish in Tinley Park, Ill., tends to plants for the parish’s Seeds of Faith—Harvest of Hope gardens.

## GOODNEWS: Cultivating hope for the hungry with parish gardens

With the Covid-19 crisis sending more people to food pantries, parish community gardens have taken on a new importance.

Volunteers at the Jubilee Garden of St. Francis de Sales Parish in Lake Zurich, Ill., a Chicago suburb, debated whether or not to have the garden at all this year because of the pandemic but made a go of it after social-distancing measures were in place, said Sharon Fredrickson, the coordinator.

Volunteers work in the gardens on Saturday mornings, and produce is donated to the local St. Vincent de Paul food pantry. Parishioners are able to harvest several hundred pounds of organic produce each year.

What makes it especially challenging this year has been all the people newly in need because of area layoffs, Ms. Fredrickson told *The Chicago Catholic*, the newspaper of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

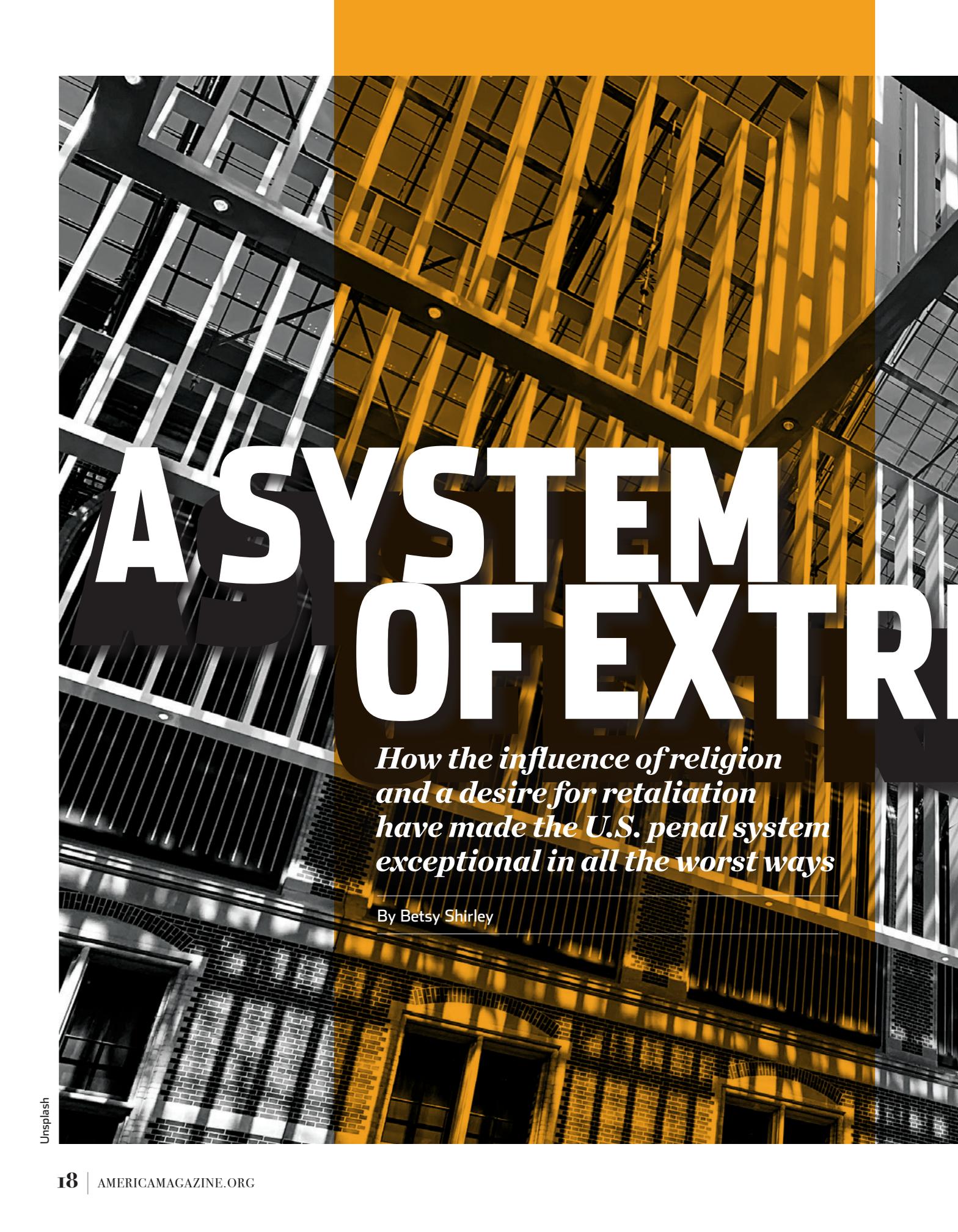
In the Centennial Garden at St. Paul of the Cross Church in suburban Park Ridge, social-distancing measures also are the priority this year, according to Adrienne Timm, director of social service ministry at the parish.

The parish is using SignUpGenius to schedule times when people can be in the garden. She said the garden is an effective way to build community within the parish and families. “There’s a lot of good stuff that comes out of it,” she said. “Our food pantry clients really love the fresh food.”

“It’s a very tangible way to feed the hungry, and people like to see the fruit of their labors,” Ms. Timm said. “It is about relationship, and it’s about hope.”

The Rev. Ken Fleck, pastor of St. George Parish in Tinley Park, uses the parish gardens to teach parish school students about the science behind growing produce. “They’re learning religion and corporal works of mercy and a little chemistry, too,” Father Fleck said.

Joyce Duriga, *Catholic News Service.*



# A SYSTEM OF EXTR

*How the influence of religion  
and a desire for retaliation  
have made the U.S. penal system  
exceptional in all the worst ways*

By Betsy Shirley



# EMES

The United States has 5 percent of the world's population but 25 percent of its prisoners.

It was week three of Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's stay-at-home order, and some Michiganders had grown impatient. On April 15, thousands of protesters gridlocked downtown Lansing to demand the state's reopening. In defiance of social distancing guidelines meant to slow the spread of Covid-19, many protesters crowded together outside the capitol building; few wore masks. They called for "freedom" and chanted "Lock her up." "Gov. Whitmer We Are Not Prisoners!!!" read one sign.

The next day, Troy Rienstra joined a smaller group of protesters at the state capitol—not to protest the stay-at-home order but to advocate for the 38,000 people in the state who are actual prisoners. Aside from a few honking car horns, the protest was silent; people stayed in their vehicles and drove through the city, funeral procession style, to draw attention to the inmates and prison guards who had already died of coronavirus (then around a dozen but surpassing 70 by early June) and urge the governor to take swift action so those numbers would not increase.

Mr. Rienstra understood why people were upset about the stay-at-home order, but as he explained over a video call in mid-April, his own coronavirus mantra is, "Always be mindful that it could always be worse." Being cooped up at home was not ideal, but he had the company of his wife and daughter, two adorable Rottweilers, plenty of books and a Netflix subscription. He was not complaining.

“Twenty-two years in prison—with six years in solitary confinement—will get you ready [to appreciate] the comforts of home [while] being locked indoors,” he told me. When he talks with other formerly incarcerated people, they remind one another: “We’re a long way from the yard, and we definitely know what bad looks like. And this is nothing.”

### **American Exceptionalism**

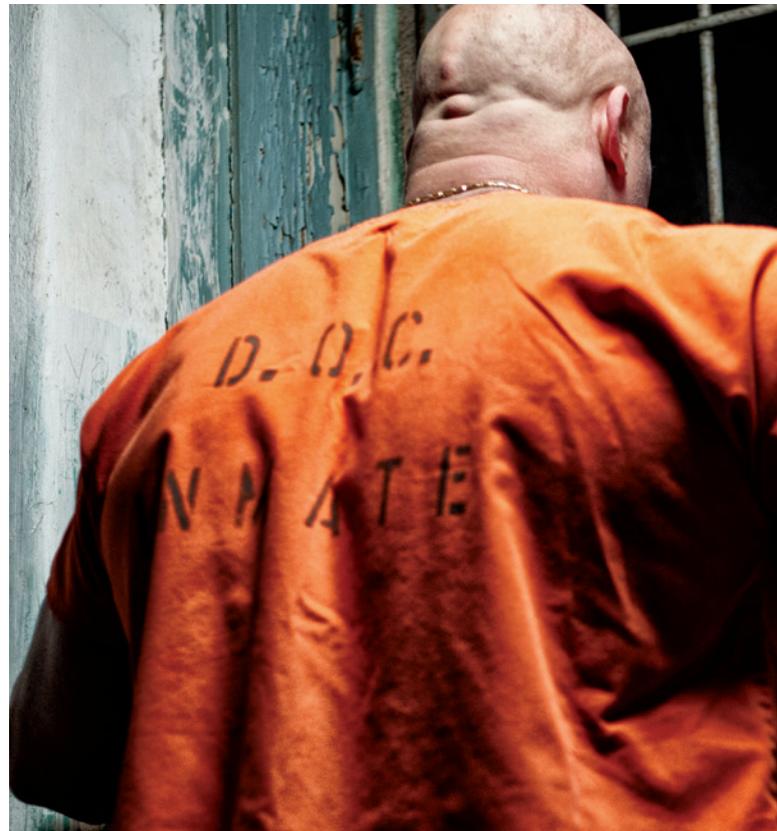
Mr. Rienstra was sentenced to life in prison for an armed robbery he committed in 1995; he was released on parole in 2016. He now works for Safe and Just Michigan, which seeks to reduce the harm caused by crime and incarceration, and Nation Outside, an organization led by formerly incarcerated people to build criminal justice policy reform. “People change. That’s the narrative we try to push,” he says. Ultimately, he would like to see the United States embrace a less punitive approach to criminal justice.

“In other cultures, if you steal something [and] they ask you, ‘Why did you do it?’ and you say because you were hungry, they bring you more food,” said Mr. Rienstra. But in the United States we have a “punitive approach to justice as opposed to a restorative approach,” he explains. When someone harms us, we want retaliation.

He is right: In almost every way measurable, the U.S. penal system is extreme. There are currently more than 2.2 million people—nearly one out of every 100 people in this country—in U.S. prisons and jails. (Though the terms are often used interchangeably, a jail is a locally run facility where people awaiting trial or sentencing are held; prisons are federal or state institutions for convicted offenders serving sentences longer than one year). The rate of incarceration in the United States is greater than that of any other nation in the world. All told, the United States has 5 percent of the world’s population but 25 percent of its prisoners.

It gets worse. “American authorities do not just impose more punishment: they also punish in a distinctive way,” wrote David Garland, a sociologist of crime and punishment at New York University, in a 2019 study. The most glaring example of this “distinctiveness” is the death penalty. Abolished in every other Western democracy and declared “inadmissible” in any circumstance by Pope Francis, capital punishment remains on the books in 28 U.S. states and is authorized by the federal government and the military.

Yet the distinctiveness of American punishment goes further still. When compared with other Western nations, writes Mr. Garland, sentence length and time served are “much longer in the U.S. than elsewhere”; prison conditions are “more austere” and include “more solitary confinement” with less “rehabilitation, education, home



leaves, and re-entry assistance”; and probation and parole in the United States are “more control-oriented, with multiple restrictions placed on supervisees’ behavior.” Consequences that affect former inmates after they are released—like not being able to vote, apply for public housing or clear their records—are “more extensive, more onerous, and more enduring in the USA than elsewhere.” All of this raises the question: How did our nation become like this?

### **On Alleviating Misery**

The U.S. penal system, now exceptional in all the worst ways, was once considered exemplary. In 1831, the French historian Alexander de Tocqueville arrived in the United States. Though he is more often remembered for his irresistibly quotable aphorisms about American life, de Tocqueville’s official assignment was not to document the young republic’s civic spirit but to study its recent penal innovation: penitentiaries.

Prisons are an ancient concept, but for most of history they functioned more like jails. In early America, this meant dozens of people crammed in a room until some other punishment—often some type of public humiliation, bodily pain, mutilation or execution—could be inflicted. Enter the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons, a group of Christian, mostly Quaker, reformers. These idealists saw the continued use of corpo-



# There is one thing we do know: Mass incarceration does not make us safer.

There are currently more than 2.2 million people—nearly one out of every 100 people in this country—in U.S. prisons and jails.

Unsplash

ral punishment as “proof of the feeble operation of reason and religion,” as the group’s founder, Benjamin Rush, wrote in 1787. They were not against punishments altogether. “I only wish only to change the place and manner of inflicting them so as to render them effectual for the reformation of criminals, and beneficial to society,” wrote Mr. Rush.

So the group proposed an alternative: Those convicted of crimes would be sentenced to solitude, each confined to his own cell where he could become penitent and restore his soul. Yet too much solitude leaves a prisoner “prey to the remorse of his soul and the terrors of his imagination,” noted de Tocqueville and his colleague Gustave de Beaumont in their report on American penitentiaries, so prisoners would be assigned labor that “fatigues the body and relieves the soul.”

To our ears, solitary confinement and forced labor do not sound like ways to alleviate misery; nevertheless, abolishing corporal punishment was considered an enlightened—albeit never realized—goal at the time. Throughout the early 1800s, these ideals coalesced into a number of new institutions, including Eastern State Penitentiary and Auburn Prison in upstate New York. The idealism quickly faded when the cost of these new systems became too taxing, but the use of confinement and hard labor stuck.

In devising this alternative, explained Andrew Skotnicki, a professor of religious studies at Manhattan College in New York City, these early prison reformers drew on the

monastic practice of confining a wayward monk to his cell, supplying him with work and letting time heal so that he might be returned to the community. Yet as the *Rule of St. Benedict* makes clear, Mr. Skotnicki told me over the phone, this practice was only to be used when the conflict-resolution process outlined in Matthew 18 (“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him...”) had failed. When confinement was necessary, abbots were instructed to send in older, wiser monks to counsel the offending brother lest he be “swallowed up by overmuch sorrow.” Imitate the loving kindness of the Good Shepherd, urged St. Benedict; find the one that has gone astray and gently carry him back to the flock.

“The ideology of confinement as it developed in church history never intended punishment as an end in itself,” wrote Mr. Skotnicki in a paper delivered before a 2015 roundtable at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, “but as a means to employ solitude and silence, aided by attentive mentors, as the motivation for the detained person to recognize their natural sociability and capacity for care and transcendence.”

But while this ideology may have inspired early American reformers, it is nowhere present in the U.S. prison system today, says Mr. Skotnicki. Absent loving kindness and community restoration, “we’re left now with this massive system, these gulags of jails and prisons, administering pain and punishment,” he told me. “And for the most part, you cannot get

one coherent explanation anywhere—and I read this stuff for a living. We really don't even know why we're doing it."

### **More Prison, Less Crime?**

There is one thing we do know: Mass incarceration does not make us safer. Two graphs animate most conversations about contemporary incarceration in the United States. The first is a flat line that erupts upward to illustrate the population of state and federal prisons by year (not including jails). From mid-century until the early 1970s, the U.S. prison population hovered around 200,000 inmates. But in 1972 the line shoots upward, reaching 1.6 million inmates in 2009—an increase of more than 700 percent. In the decade that follows, the numbers drop slightly, to reach the current U.S. prison population of roughly 1.3 million people (2.2 million, if you include jails).

The second graph shows a jagged peak, illustrating the rate of violent crime in the United States per 100,000 people. In the mid-1960s, the rate of violent crime begins to rise, builds over the next three decades and peaks in the early '90s before declining, first rapidly, then more gradually, to the present. Today, the violent crime rate is less than half of what it was in 1991.

Lauren-Brooke Eisen, an expert on crime data and mass incarceration at the Brennan Center for Justice, has spent much of her career explaining what these two graphs do and do not say. What they do show, she explained over the phone, is how widespread anxiety about increasing rates of violent crime in the 1970s and '80s motivated the United States to drastically increase its use of incarceration. "There was a lot of fear" and widespread "zeal for harsh sentences" among the U.S. electorate, she explained.

Over the next few decades, this was translated into bipartisan support for a variety of "tough on crime" policies: the war on drugs; increased use of stop-and-frisk tactics; and "broken windows" policing. States imposed more mandatory minimums, eliminated parole and passed "three strikes" laws. Legislation like the 1994 crime bill, signed by President Bill Clinton, offered states billions of dollars to build new prisons if they imposed truth-in-sentencing guidelines, which ensured offenders spent more of their sentences behind bars.

The result of these policies? The rise of mass incarceration in the United States.

But what these graphs do not show—and Ms. Eisen emphasized this point—is that increased incarceration caused the crime rate to decrease. In a peer-reviewed 2015 report, Ms. Eisen and her colleagues at the Brennan Center analyzed 13 different factors that have been thought to contribute to the decline of crime, including increased

incarceration, growing incomes, less alcohol consumption, more police and an aging population. Though the report found some factors, like decreased alcohol consumption, contributed to a decrease in overall crime by an estimated 5 to 10 percent, they found that "increased incarceration had no observable effect on the violent crime decline in the 1990s or in the 2000s." Researchers noted that in some states, imprisonment rates actually decreased while crime also decreased (and other states increased their imprisonment, but crime also increased).

"More incarceration does not lead to less crime," wrote Inimai Chettiar in the report's executive summary. "The United States can simultaneously reduce crime and reduce mass incarceration." These findings have been echoed by the National Research Council and the Vera Institute of Justice.

Ms. Eisen and other criminal justice experts have found that imprisonment is subject to diminishing returns: The more people confined, the less effective it becomes. Another reason is that prison is shown to have a "criminogenic" or crime-producing effect. People who are incarcerated are "separated from their community, not earning a living," said Ms. Eisen. Often they do not get the education they need to eventually secure a job or the treatment to address substance-abuse or mental health issues that often are underlying causes of their criminal behavior. Plus, she pointed out, they are separated from their families and other sources of support. "It's really a system that sets people up for failure," she said.

### **Racism Plus X**

It was day three after Gov. Gretchen Whitmer announced the end of the state's stay-at-home order, and many Michiganders—and Minnesotans, New Yorkers, Mainers, Californians and Americans everywhere in between—were outraged. On the first weekend in June, following a week of growing outrage across the country, tens of thousands of protesters flooded cities around the world to demand an end to police violence against people of color. Ignited by the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and the endless, hashtagged litany of Black men and women killed by the police, the crowds called for freedom and chanted, "Black Lives Matter." Signs reading "Defund the Police" popped up everywhere. By Sunday evening, the Minneapolis City Council had vowed to disband the city's police department.

Racism is inextricably intertwined with both policing and imprisonment in the United States. As explained in bestselling books like Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* and Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy*, America's original sin results in rampant discrimination in the way laws are enforced, whom a jury is willing to convict and the sentence

those found guilty receive—not to mention who is perceived as “dangerous” and the treatment they get from the police. Overall, people of color account for 37 percent of the U.S. population but 67 percent of the prison population.

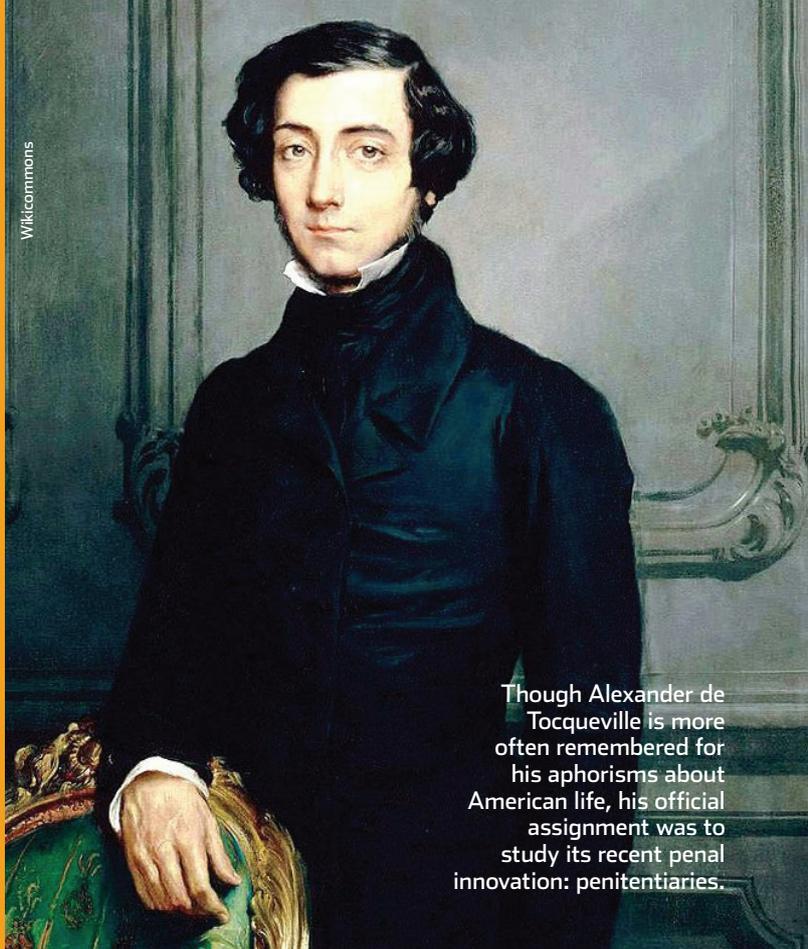
But when it comes to explaining the volume and severity of incarceration in the United States, systemic racism is not the only factor. The prison abolition activists and religion scholars Vincent W. Lloyd and Joshua Dubler offer a thought experiment in *Break Every Yoke: Religion, Justice, and the Abolition of Prisons*. Imagine that the United States suddenly released all state and federal prisoners who are Black, plus nonviolent drug offenders and anyone awaiting trial who cannot afford bail. This combination of measures would reduce the number of people behind bars in the United States by 50 percent—a major accomplishment. “What it would not do, however, is end mass incarceration,” they explain. “Even at half its current size, the U.S. incarceration rate would remain three times that of France, four times that of Germany and similar degrees in excess of where it was for the first three-quarters of the twentieth century.”

The comparative law expert and Yale Law School professor James Q. Whitman puts it this way: “Other countries are racist countries, but they are not countries with harsh criminal punishment on the American scale,” he writes in an article from 2007, “What Happened to Tocqueville’s America?” “That does not mean that racism plays no role in America,” he continues. “I believe it does. But racism as such cannot explain our practices.... Some other factor or factors must play a role; it can only be the case that ‘racism +  $x$  = harsh punishment,’ and if we wish to understand American punishment we must search for that  $x$ .”

### Too Much Democracy?

And we have searched. The problem of “American penal exceptionalism,” as scholars often call it, has produced a vast body of research examining how mass incarceration has been driven by everything from a cultural emphasis on individual responsibility to the private companies that provide services within public prisons—food, phone calls, transportation, health care—and have a strong financial incentive (and well-paid lobbyists) to ensure incarceration remains the dominant way our society solves its problems.

Many scholars, including Mr. Whitman, locate that  $x$  in the unique structure of our political system. Public opinion in *all* countries generally favors tough-on-crime policies, not just the United States, writes Mr. Whitman. But where other



Though Alexander de Tocqueville is more often remembered for his aphorisms about American life, his official assignment was to study its recent penal innovation: penitentiaries.

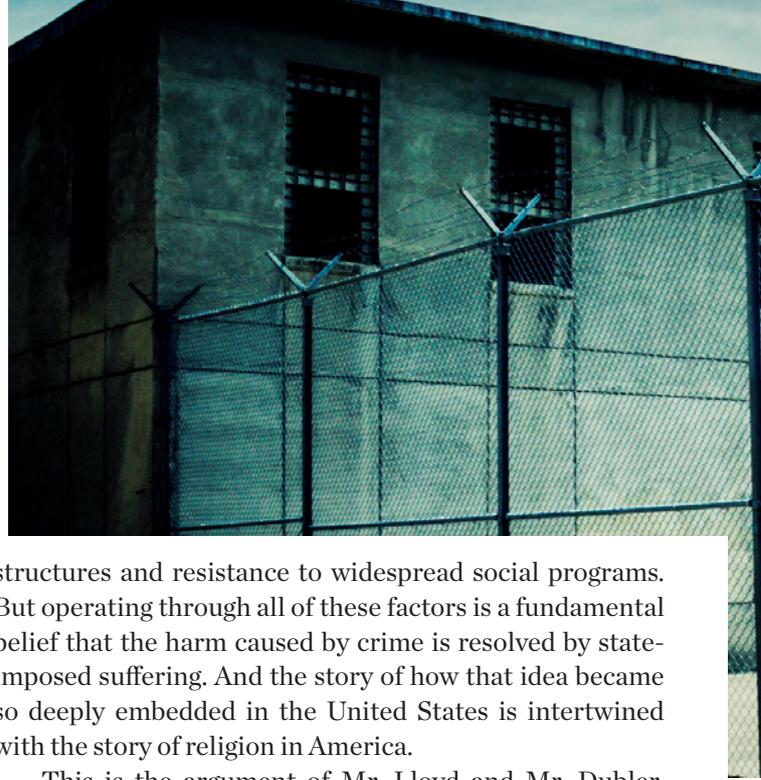
democracies have insulated their criminal justice systems from populist political pressures, in the United States the public has considerable power in shaping everything from the state’s prosecutorial agenda to sentencing guidelines.

In the United States, for example, district attorneys (who decide whether and how severely to charge an arrested person and what punishment to pursue) and judges (who hand down sentences) are put into office through a political process, whether by running for office or by political appointment by other elected officials. In Europe, however, the people making these decisions are not elected but rather are “highly specialized, bureaucratic officials,” who “almost always maintain a professional distance from popular opinion,” writes Mr. Whitman. “Because they do not run for election, they are not obliged to bid for popular support.” In a nutshell, U.S. officials are motivated to be “tough on crime” to get into office; in Europe, those making criminal policy can focus on measures that actually promote public safety and reduce recidivism.

The punitive, populist zeal within the United States, coupled with courts fixated on whether procedures are followed fairly rather than defending higher ideals of human dignity—Mr. Whitman observes that Europeans outlawed flogging because it was degrading, but American judges prohibited the practice because it was applied unfairly—results in a legal system that does little to “dis-



# The United States has repeatedly shown little political will for enacting widespread social measures that would address the underlying issues that lead to crime.



courag[e] the inclination to degrade persons on account of their race.” If the people think “tough on crime” sounds like a good idea, they can elect leaders who will deliver, regardless of whether those measures actually result in safer communities or intensify racial inequalities.

Other scholars, like David Garland of New York University, locate the *x* among our social services, or lack thereof. “Why did American legislators, at the federal, state and local levels, repeatedly define the problem as too little punishment—rather than too much poverty, or unemployment, or social disorganization?” writes Mr. Garland in a research article in 2019. “And why did they enact measures of penal control rather than more pro-social measures such as prevention, social services, social and economic investment?”

For Mr. Garland, the answer is that the United States has repeatedly shown little political will for enacting widespread social measures that would address the underlying issues that lead to crime, “especially where poor minorities are concerned.” While European countries can respond to rising poverty and social dislocation with “already-existing social service, public health agencies, community agencies, and professional caseworkers to deal in a non-penal manner with problems such as homelessness, mental illness, drug addiction, prisoner re-entry, and the needs of crime victims,” most of these systems are “underdeveloped” in the United States, resulting in “a default resort to police and punishment.”

## Deflating Justice

To recap: Extreme punitiveness in the U.S. criminal justice system is a product of many related factors, including racism, individualism, economic pressures, our political

structures and resistance to widespread social programs. But operating through all of these factors is a fundamental belief that the harm caused by crime is resolved by state-imposed suffering. And the story of how that idea became so deeply embedded in the United States is intertwined with the story of religion in America.

This is the argument of Mr. Lloyd and Mr. Dubler, who teach religious studies at Villanova University and the University of Rochester, respectively. In *Break Every Yoke*, they trace the influence of American religion on the underlying “carceral logic” that created the U.S. prison system. According to this logic, “violations of the law enact wounds to the collective that can only be healed through the deliberate infliction of suffering; and for those who violate the law, this suffering is potentially redemptive.” You can hear this logic working among Benjamin Rush and the Philadelphia reformers, Christians who believed criminals should “recover their former connections with society” but only after they had “expiated their offenses by the mode of punishment that has been proposed.” And it echoes still today. No matter the wrong, there is one way to make it right: Lock them up.

Especially relevant to the rise of mass incarceration, they explain, is a shift in the way the American public understood the word justice. As the groundwork for mass incarceration was laid in the ’60s and ’70s, evangelicalism eclipsed mainline Protestantism as the nation’s dominant religious expression. Religion became less about imagining radical alternatives to uplift society and more about personal morality, write Mr. Lloyd and Mr. Dubler. As a result, justice ceased to mean the higher ideals toward which we strive but rather the proper workings of the police, courts and prisons. “Once justice was equated with law and order, calls for justice became calls for more law enforcement and punishment,” they write.

Or as Troy Rienstra told me: “To most folks in the U.S., ‘justice’ means ‘you pay for what you do, and you pay for it a long time.’”



Extreme punitiveness in the U.S. criminal justice system is a product of many related factors, including racism, individualism, economic pressures and resistance to widespread social programs.

iStock

### **Blessed Are the Merciful**

As a Christian, Mr. Rienstra believes churches should be the loudest advocates for forgiveness, yet that is not the message he often hears from pulpits. “We don’t teach redemption and forgiveness very well,” he said. He paused and then clarified: “We teach it as a *principle*, not as a practice—that’s the difference.” In principle, forgiveness sounds great, he said, but as a practice, offering real forgiveness is difficult. “We have to make a self-sacrifice of our own interest to go be made right with somebody who may have done us harm—as opposed to leaving them to the courts we have appointed to mete justice for us.”

Kathryn Getek Soltis, who teaches Christian ethics and directs the Center for Peace and Justice Education at Villanova University, agrees. “Mercy seeks to bring the half-dead back to life. And mercy does this without being contingent on what is deserved,” she wrote in an article for *Church Life Journal* in 2019. “Mercy is such a profound commitment to liberation, healing, and restoration that it will not be undermined by the guilt or innocence of the half-dead.” But to most Christians, mercy merely means not getting the punishment we deserve, being let off “easy,” she explained in a telephone interview.

Is this impoverished understanding of mercy a uniquely American problem? Perhaps. Like Mr. Rienstra and many of the other experts I spoke with, Ms. Soltis points to the unique intermingling of racism, religion, politics and capitalism in this country, factors that have deeply ingrained in Americans the idea “that suffering is a currency that can reconcile and clear debts.”

“So as long as you believe that suffering is a currency to pay back, then you’re going to feel that punishment is a holy endeavor,” she said.

But as Mr. Lloyd pointed out over the phone, the many different strains of Christianity in the United States have a vibrancy and dynamism that is not found in European Christianity. And while this has created “destructive alignments” that fuel mass incarceration, “the range of religious communities that flourish in the North American context are providing models not just to make softer prisons but to do justice with no prisons at all,” he said. “That’s a radical form of mercy.”

Both he and Ms. Soltis point to the religious roots of restorative justice initiatives in the United States, including models developed by Howard Zehr and other U.S. Mennonites in the late 1970s. Today, there is a robust variety of organizations that offer alternatives to the legal system by working through violence and conflict with those who have been affected, including those who have harmed, those who have been harmed and those in the community. (Two notable examples include Project Nia, founded by Mariame Kaba, and the Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation, a project of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood).

In short, “religious ideas and practices have played a particular role in the development of this problem,” Mr. Lloyd and Mr. Dubler have written, “and they are particularly well positioned to help end it.”

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Betsy Shirley is senior associate editor at *Sojourners magazine*.

# INSIDE AMERICA

HIGHLIGHTING WHAT IS HAPPENING INSIDE AMERICA MEDIA THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

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Ms. Green will be awarded the \$25,000 prize in September. In addition to receiving the monetary prize, she will also deliver an original essay at the ceremony that will later be published as a cover story in **America** magazine.



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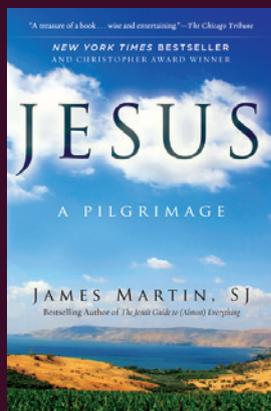
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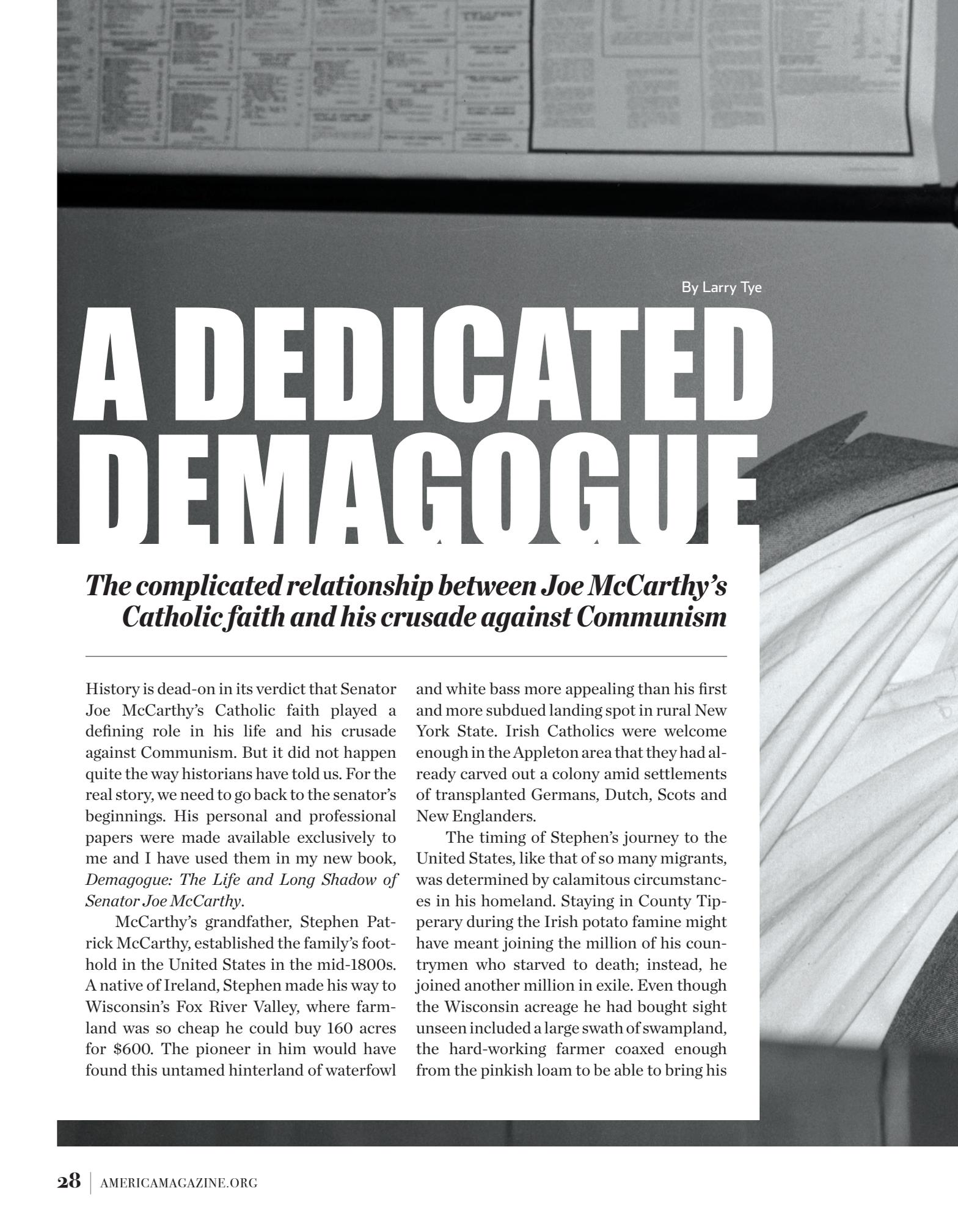
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By Larry Tye

# A DEDICATED DEMAGOGUE

*The complicated relationship between Joe McCarthy's Catholic faith and his crusade against Communism*

History is dead-on in its verdict that Senator Joe McCarthy's Catholic faith played a defining role in his life and his crusade against Communism. But it did not happen quite the way historians have told us. For the real story, we need to go back to the senator's beginnings. His personal and professional papers were made available exclusively to me and I have used them in my new book, *Demagogue: The Life and Long Shadow of Senator Joe McCarthy*.

McCarthy's grandfather, Stephen Patrick McCarthy, established the family's foothold in the United States in the mid-1800s. A native of Ireland, Stephen made his way to Wisconsin's Fox River Valley, where farmland was so cheap he could buy 160 acres for \$600. The pioneer in him would have found this untamed hinterland of waterfowl

and white bass more appealing than his first and more subdued landing spot in rural New York State. Irish Catholics were welcome enough in the Appleton area that they had already carved out a colony amid settlements of transplanted Germans, Dutch, Scots and New Englanders.

The timing of Stephen's journey to the United States, like that of so many migrants, was determined by calamitous circumstances in his homeland. Staying in County Tipperary during the Irish potato famine might have meant joining the million of his countrymen who starved to death; instead, he joined another million in exile. Even though the Wisconsin acreage he had bought sight unseen included a large swath of swampland, the hard-working farmer coaxed enough from the pinkish loam to be able to bring his



Senator Joe McCarthy, left, consults with his young aide and friend, Bobby Kennedy, shortly after the Senate voted to condemn its renegade member.

Al Muto/Bettmann/Getty Images



# If his earliest years planted the seeds of his religious identity, Joe's years at Marquette University also left a mark.

mother over from Ireland and to marry Margaret Stoffel, a Bavarian immigrant whose parents farmed the land across the road. Together, they would raise six boys and four girls, never guessing that one of the clan would write their surname into infamy.

Timothy, the third of Margaret and Stephen's brood, spoke with his father's Irish brogue and stayed on his parents' farm, inheriting 143 acres in the rustic township of Grand Chute. In 1901, he followed his father's example by marrying a neighbor, Bridget Tierney. Her father and mother both were Irish immigrants, although her family was a bit more prosperous than the McCarthys. "Bid" was four years younger than Tim, and, as all who met the pair noticed, she was taller, chunkier and less handsome than her husband, who stood just 5 feet 8 inches and was a wiry 150 pounds.

The couple would share child-rearing duties, which was almost as unusual for Irish-Americans then as Tim's teetotaling. The "old man," as the kids called him, carved out farm operations as his domain, and he got his children to do his bidding by persuasion, never by spanking. Bid was the family balance-wheel, dispensing practical advice about baking and homemaking as well as homespun philosophy. "Dog bite Indian once, dog's fault," she would counsel. "Dog bite Indian twice, Indian's fault." Tim's advice was more barefaced: "Don't forget to say your prayers."

## Irish Catholic to the Core

The latter admonition reflected a devotion to their Roman Catholic heritage that Tim and Bid would pass

on to their children. Every Sunday, they rode their buckboard—and later their Dodge—seven miles to St. Mary's Church in Appleton, just as their parents and other Irish neighbors did. Fellow worshipers called it "lovey-dovey" the way Bid and Tim held hands as they headed to their pew. They did the same thing later on the Lord's Day when they walked the farm, surveying their oats, barley and dairy cows.

Wisconsin farm families ran big, and the McCarthys already had four at home by the fall of 1908. On Nov. 14, with help from a midwife, Bid delivered the largest of her babies, Joseph Raymond. He came at an opportune moment, soon after the family had moved from a cramped log cabin to their white clapboard house with eight rooms and two porches. Electricity and indoor plumbing would come later. So would privacy; for most of his youth, Joe shared a bedroom with Howard, the brother he stayed closest to and later named as his beneficiary.

There was no confusing the McCarthys of Grand Chute with the likes of the lace-curtain Kennedys of Hyannisport and Palm Beach, but if some dismissed Joe and the rest of the McCarthys as "shanty Irish," so be it. It was one more chip on his shoulder he would carry proudly all his life.

If his earliest years planted the seeds of his religious identity, Joe's years at Marquette University also left a mark. Bid and Tim had impressed upon their children the importance of their Catholic faith, and the Milwaukee Jesuits reinforced that message. Joe took four semesters of theology courses, as required for Catholic engineering students. He earned A's in the first two, on "Natural Religion," which focused more on philosophy than on doctrine and explored how God shows himself through reason along with revelation. He did less well in "Social Justice–Sacraments," getting a B the first semester and a C the second.

What stuck with McCarthy, however, was his church's opposition to Communism and its *Index of Forbidden Books*. Books were banned if they contained material deemed to be heretical, salacious or just not edifying for Catholics to read, and a list of Marquette students who read them with permission for a class was forwarded to the archbishop every semester. Such tabulations, which had been around since the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, were discontinued by Pope Paul VI in 1966.

Still, we should not attribute too much of who Joe became to his instruction on the Jesuit campus, wrote Donald F. Crosby, S.J., a Jesuit historian who devoted an entire book to McCarthy's relationship with the church.



Wisconsin Historical Society

In 1942, six months after the assault on Pearl Harbor, Joe secured a commission as a first lieutenant in the Marine Corps. He served in the Solomon Islands as an intelligence officer and sometimes tail gunner. Here, Joe is ready for action with his pith helmet.

“His Marquette experience,” said Father Crosby, “seems less an exercise in formation at the hands of the Jesuits than simply a stop on the way up the ladder to political success.”

Another stop on McCarthy’s political and spiritual ladders came when, as the junior senator from Wisconsin, he fell in love with his aide Jean Kerr. Religion kept the pair apart early on. Jean was raised Presbyterian, but the more Sundays she spent with Joe, the more she embraced his Catholicism, until finally she became Catholic herself.

“Gradually, as I came to understand the Catholic faith and began to see how much his faith meant to him, in a quiet, basic way—like breathing or eating—I saw a new side to Joe,” Jean explained in *The Joe McCarthy I Knew*, her unpublished memoir that was part of the aforementioned stash of records kept under lock and key for 60 years. “Behind the warm, happy, bubbling personality, behind the kidding and the humor was a serious man, a purposeful man whom God had endowed with an extremely keen, absorbent and discriminating mind and the drive to make right what was wrong.”

Jean had it right about Joe’s faith. It was heartfelt, but he set the terms, not the church. For years, he quietly mailed \$50 a month to Catholic missionaries he had met in the South Pacific during his service in World War II. He seldom missed a Sunday service or chance to confess, but he would not be caught dead lighting candles or attending a Holy Name Society breakfast. Friends describe tripping over him in the dark as he knelt to pray; others recall taking him from Sunday Mass to a craps game at Milwaukee’s Hotel Schroeder that lasted until Monday afternoon; and he refused to travel—even in an elevator—without his money clip bearing the image of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the patron of missions.

Father Crosby concluded that “few Catholic politicians ever made less public display of their religion than did Joe McCarthy.” And while Father Crosby worried that “McCarthy thought that going to Sunday Mass (as well as getting baptized, married and buried in the church) was all that Catholicism stood for,” he conceded that Joe “observed these functions with a fidelity that would have brought joy to the heart of many a Catholic pastor.”

Pinning down Catholicism’s role in the launch of the senator’s crusade against Communism is trickier. Jack



Wisconsin Historical Society

Members of United Packinghouse Workers Local 40 signing a “Joe Must Go” petition in 1954, part of an unsuccessful bid to recall Senator McCarthy.

Anderson, sidekick to the influential syndicated columnist Drew Pearson and a onetime friend of McCarthy who penned a critical early biography, knew that Joe had a history of Red-baiting, but he wove a more romantic foundation myth about the senator's anti-Communism.

### **A Communist Behind Every Door**

Building on a specific newspaper column by Pearson, Anderson sought to reconstruct a dinner Joe had in early 1950 at Washington's swank Colony Restaurant with Edmund Walsh, S.J., the dean of Georgetown's School of Foreign Service, and two other prominent Catholics. Joe desperately needed an issue to raise his political profile. What about rallying support for the St. Lawrence Seaway? Joe: "That hasn't enough sex." How about a pension plan that covers all aging Americans? Joe asked. Too expensive, his friends advised. Finally, Father Walsh offered, "How about Communism?" Joe loved it: "The government is full of Communists. The thing to do is hammer at them."

As Anderson wrote, "His three fellow Catholics went away with the feeling that the sincere McCarthy would do his country a service by speaking out against the Communist fifth column." The author then imagined what might have been had Father Walsh and the others jumped at Joe's idea about a universal dole for old folks: "Joe McCarthy might well have gone forth, in all his aggressiveness, to win for himself a pedestal in the pantheon of fighting liberals."

The dinner happened a month before Joe's widely covered speech to a women's Republican club in Wheeling, W.Va. The avidly anti-Communist Father Walsh probably did urge Joe to play a more active role on the issue, whether or not he used the words attributed to him. And shortly after the dinner, Joe did ask one of his speechwriters for a talk on subversion in government. But compelling as the dinner conversation might have been, it was not the born-again moment suggested by Anderson and all those who have repeated it. Joe did not need Father Walsh to point him to an issue he had already been talking about for three years.

It was the wild reaction he would generate in his break-out anti-Red tirade in Wheeling—not the words of an aging Jesuit—that convinced him of the political hay he could make from it. But the Colony Restaurant story was embraced with special zeal by those who wanted to link McCarthy's campaign to the conservative Catholic Church, just as it was roundly rejected by Catholics eager to be free of that taint.

Whatever launched it, Joe's home-front holy war against the Soviets and subversives got a huge lift from his coreligionists. The Catholic Church in the early 1950s was ardently anti-Communist and explicitly pro-Joe McCarthy. That ardor sprang not just from a right-of-center ideology but from an eagerness to overcome anti-Catholic bias by showing that rather than harboring fealty to Rome and the papacy, American Catholics were true-blue patriots. An imposing 58 percent of them also were favorably inclined toward the senator, a January 1954 Gallup poll found, compared with 23 percent unfavorable and 19 percent who had no opinion.

Leila Mae Edwards, the wife of the Chicago Tribune journalist Willard Edwards, found the same thing when she volunteered at the McCarthy office, watching as Mass cards, rosaries and crucifixes fell out of the mail. The fact that Joe was devoted to his faith made it easy to equate Catholicism with patriotism with anti-Communism with pro-McCarthyism.

A closer look at the Gallup poll and other surveys, however, reveals that the line was not quite that straight. While most Catholics were McCarthy boosters, so were most Americans; Catholics were just 8 to 10 percentage points more supportive than the rest of the population. In his 1952 re-election campaign, Joe got only marginally more backing from Wisconsin Catholics than did the rest of the slate of Republicans. Nationally, his Catholic support was strongest among the working class, the upper crust, Republicans, Bostonians and Irish Catholics.

While the most commanding Catholic voice at the time was the pro-McCarthy Cardinal Francis Joseph Spellman of New York, known as "the American pope," liberal Catholics produced offsetting roars from the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, the journal *Commonweal* and, most convincing, Bishop Bernard Sheil of Chicago. Condemning anti-Communism, Bishop Sheil wrote, "feeds on the meat of suspicion and grows great on the dissension among Americans which it cynically creates and keeps alive by a mad pursuit of headlines." Bishop Sheil also lashed out at the "city slicker from Appleton" who is taking people in "like country rubes."

### **Strange Bedfellows**

Old Joe Kennedy, the patriarch of what would become America's first family, was outraged when fellow Catholics criticized McCarthy, even indirectly—which is what Msgr. John A. O'Brien of the University of Notre Dame did alongside two other leaders of the National Conference of

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I am now in the middle of a year-long fellowship at America Media in New York City. No, it's not the most financially profitable path I could have taken, but for me, it has been the right one. God invites me to love, to learn, to explore each day. That's enough for me.

Kevin Jackson, 2019-2020 O'Hare Fellow



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*Continued from Page 32*

Christians and Jews. Kennedy complained to his friend John Cavanaugh, C.S.C., the former president of the university:

I don't think it does Notre Dame any good to have Father O'Brien signing petitions for the Christians and Jews with Notre Dame behind his name.... I always thought that organization was completely dominated by the Jews and they just use Catholic names for the impression it makes throughout the country.

Robert F. Kennedy likely disagreed with his father on that anti-Jewish swipe, but he did embrace the political philosopher Peter Viereck's observation that "anti-Catholicism is the anti-Semitism of the intellectuals," and he joked that the ideal headline in the Jewish-led New York Times would be "More Nuns Leave Church."

If the Kennedys saw a conspiracy among critics of the church, an F.B.I. source reported a plot in which:

[A] group of Catholics in the United States led by Cardinal Spellman is at odds with the Vatican regarding various foreign issues. [The source] referred to the Cardinal's followers as a "conspiracy" working to undermine the Eisenhower administration and to eventually bring about the election of Senator Joseph McCarthy as President. [He] claimed that McCarthy is receiving the support of many wealthy Catholics, including prominent individuals such as ex-Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy.... [He] stated that he was not anti-Catholic and he claimed that he has many friends who are ardent members of that church.

No surprise, perhaps, that a master of conspiracy like Joe McCarthy spawned so many conspiratorial rumbles.

### **The View From America**

That push-pull within the church was mirrored in these pages. The editors of **America** started out skeptical of the senator but open-minded. But as McCarthy ratcheted up his attacks, **America** amped up its criticism to the point where the senator branded its coverage "completely and viciously false." Over time and at the prompting of its Jesuit overseers, the magazine pulled back its criticism.

The senator's demagoguery also deepened fault lines



**Whatever launched it, Joe's home-front holy war against the Soviets and subversives got a huge lift from his coreligionists.**

between Protestants and Catholics. Protestants presumed that Catholics supported the senator merely because he was Catholic; Catholics proposed an equally simplistic take on his Protestant detractors. The truth is that at his peak, McCarthy had the support of an impressive 49 percent of Protestants, which was just one point below his national rating. Jewish Americans were the one religious group who consistently and overwhelmingly rejected him, with 15 percent viewing him favorably and 71 percent unfavorably. To his credit, McCarthy himself never actively played up his Catholicism for political gain.

The seeds of McCarthy's reckoning were planted in the fall of 1953, when he put the U.S. Army in his crosshairs. He had picked the most stouthearted and sacrosanct institution in the United States to make his closing case that the government was infested with nests of Communist moles. For good measure, he was poking the war-hero president Dwight Eisenhower in the eye—calling him a Johnny-come-lately to the home-front Cold War, then slandering his faction of moderate Republicans as the party of "appeasement, retreat, and surrender." This scrappiest of lawmakers was going eyeball to eyeball with the nation's mighty fighting machine and gambling that the other side would blink first.

### **The Denouement**

At the 1954 Army-McCarthy hearings, which explored the senator's accusations and the military's counter-charges, Joe watched in horror as his support nosedived—from a full half of Americans before the proceedings commenced to merely a third as they were wrapping up in June. Approval also plummeted among Catholics, his base of support. Anti-Communist backers remained steadfast, but

# What stuck with McCarthy, however, was his church's opposition to Communism and its *Index of Forbidden Books*.

those from the political mainstream wavered. The public verdict on the senator's performance and the Army's was "a plague on both your houses," pronounced John Fenton, an editor at Gallup.

That December, by a margin of 67 to 22, his Senate colleagues denounced the Wisconsin rabble-rouser for having treated fellow members with contempt. All 44 Democrats present voted against McCarthy. So did 22 of 44 Republicans and the Senate's sole independent. Only two of the eight Catholic senators sided with their co-religionist, who himself cast a neutral ballot as "present."

The only lawmakers not to vote or to cancel their votes by pairing them with opposing senators who also were absent were the Republican Alexander Wiley of Wisconsin and the Democrat John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts. Wiley was afraid of alienating McCarthy's home-state fans or angering his foes. Kennedy blamed his recent back surgery; in truth, he made no effort to pair his vote or clarify his stand for fear of alienating Bay State Catholics who backed McCarthy.

## Buried (in State)

Both the church and the Senate put aside any grievances two and a half years later in 1957, when McCarthy died of hepatitis at the too-young age of 48. Four days after his passing, a pontifical high requiem Mass was held at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington, D.C., where Jean and Joe had been wed four years earlier. As 2,000 mourners listened, Msgr. John J. Cartwright said McCarthy's role in raising an alarm about Communism "will be more and more honored as history unfolds its record." Later that day, Joe was memorialized in the chamber of the Senate that he had joined at the young age



AP Photo

Annie Lee Moss, a suspended Army Signal Corps employee, testifies in March 1954 before the Senate Investigations Subcommittee headed by McCarthy.

of 38 and where, seven years later, his colleagues voted overwhelmingly to condemn him. The last senator given a Senate funeral had been William Borah back in 1940, although Senate leaders were quick to point out they would do it for any senator whose family asked, as Jean had.

"This fallen warrior through death speaketh," said Chaplain Frederick Brown Harris on the floor of the Senate, "calling a nation of free men to be delivered from the complacency of a false security and from regarding those who loudly sound the trumpets of vigilance and alarm as mere disturbers of the peace." Seventy senators were on hand, along with Jean Kerr McCarthy, three of Joe's six siblings, Vice President Richard Nixon and F.B.I. Director J. Edgar Hoover.

McCarthy's body was flown by military plane from Washington to Green Bay, with three of his closest Senate colleagues accompanying him; then it was driven to Appleton. Disciples came in flocks that sun-baked Tuesday, packing the pews at St. Mary's Church and spilling onto



Wisconsin Historical Society, photo by Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

In 1952, Dwight Eisenhower, who was running for president, and McCarthy, who was seeking re-election to the Senate, appeared together on the rear car of the Eisenhower Special whistle-stop train. Ike was not happy with Joe, but in those days he chose appeasement over confrontation.

the streets outside the Irish parish where Joseph Raymond McCarthy had been baptized and, six months shy of turning 49, was being eulogized.

“Senator McCarthy was a dedicated man, not a fanatic,” the Rev. Adam Grill intoned. “The guidance of our beloved land is under the guidance of human beings, and as human being[s] we are all fallible.” Flags across the city were flown at half-staff, the way they had been at the White House and other public buildings in Washington, and Appleton schools and shops were shuttered at midday. This was the last of three memorials to the senator and the first in the state that had easily and repeatedly elected him. Twenty-five thousand friends and fans from Green Bay, Neenah and his native Grand Chute paid their respects at his open casket. Others kept vigil outside the church alongside honor guards of military police, Boy Scouts and members of the Knights of Columbus. Flying in to join them were 19 senators, seven congressmen and a handful of other luminaries, most of whom had supported Joe in his relentless assault

on Communism.

Joe was buried in nearby St. Mary’s Cemetery, at his favorite spot on a tree-lined bluff overlooking the Fox River. As triple volleys were fired by a rifle squad from the Marine Corps and Catholic War Veterans, Jean stood at attention. The casket was slowly lowered into the ground between the graves of his parents, Timothy and Bridget, where a simple stone would read:

Joseph R. McCarthy  
United States Senator  
Nov. 14, 1908 May 2, 1957

Larry Tye is a former reporter at *The Boston Globe* and the author of eight books, including *Demagogue: The Life and Long Shadow of Senator Joe McCarthy*.



# CHRISTIANITY'S DEFENSE AGAINST TYRANTS

By Elisabeth Rain Kincaid

Is the ruler or head of the executive branch subject to limitations placed on his actions by the law? This question has become more relevant since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, as the presidents of the United States have claimed a widening swath of executive privilege and broader exemptions from civil and international law.

In the Bush and Obama administrations, many of these claims related to the ability to wage what Mr. Bush called the “war on terror,” free from constraints like bans on torture or drone warfare. In the Trump administration, some officials have claimed an even broader exemption for the chief executive. The memo issued by Attorney General William Barr on June 8, 2018, for example, claimed that corruption statutes that do not explicitly refer to the president should be presumed not to bind the president. This would include almost all the criminal codes.

Rather than being alarmed by this development of unlimited executive power, many Christians in the United States have in fact argued in support of the president's

claims to exemptions. In certain evangelical and Catholic circles, this may be traced to a belief that President Trump is willing to support Christian influence. A recent study by the Pew Research Center showed that many American Christians view their religious beliefs to be in conflict with American culture. However, many of these Christians also believe that Christians have begun to regain influence in the United States thanks to the support of Donald Trump.

For those who hold this view, it is tempting to take the consequentialist view that the administration's expansion of executive power at the expense of the legal system is theologically justified if Christian influence is restored. In the same Pew study cited above, 76 percent of Protestants and 51 percent of Catholics claimed that the Bible should have a greater influence on laws in the United States than the will of the people. For many with these presuppositions regarding the moral deficiency of the contemporary legal system, there is little to be concerned about in the president's illicit expansion of executive





# When considered in an eternal perspective, our job is never to protect our own political power.



power and dismissal of the legal limits intended to balance his power. In one of the more prominent examples of this viewpoint, Franklin Graham and Eric Metaxas, two evangelical leaders, described Christian opposition to President Trump as “almost demonic” in a radio interview on Nov. 21, 2019.

President Trump himself spoke to the strength of this conviction on the campaign trail in 2016, when he claimed that “I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn’t lose voters.” Putting aside for a moment the problems with the broader theological connotations of this claim—that Christians need secular rulers to protect them and care for them, rather than depending on the King of Kings and Lord of Lords—this argument also assumes that upholding the authority of the law to restrain the chief executive is not a core Christian value but rather can be sacrificed in the face of contemporary cultural contingencies.

## God’s Law, Civil Law

On the contrary, this consequentialist argument runs directly counter to the Christian tradition’s understanding of the value of law and how Christians should seek to uphold and support it. In the early days of the church, patristic theologians sought to uphold the goodness and force of civil authority but not at the expense of granting the ruler absolute authority—the latter stance springing from Roman law, not Scripture. Patristic theologians argued that Paul’s statements in the Book of Romans regarding God’s grant of authority to civil rulers had to be understood as limited by passages such as Acts 5, where Peter and John declare before the Sanhedrin that they must obey the laws

of God, not human laws that contradict God’s law.

The Old Testament stories of the heroes of the faith living in exile under a pagan king, especially Daniel, Esther, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, provided paradigms of obedience to God’s law when it contradicts the ruler’s command. By the middle ages, Christians shared an almost universal conviction that the possession of divine authority does not justify any action by the prince, but rather that the prince is always subject to question and restraint by divine law, natural law and the customary law of the people.

Simultaneously, Christian theologians argued that Christians had an obligation to work for the good not only of the heavenly kingdom, but of the country where they lived—a theme scripturally articulated in Jer 29:7. The most famous explication of this concept occurs in St. Augustine’s *City of God*, where Augustine explains why Christians benefit from peace and stability in the earthly city and should work with the citizens of the earthly city to promote those goals, while never forgetting that their heart and treasure lay in the heavenly city. In the 12th century, St. Thomas Aquinas linked this Christian commitment to the common good with a commitment to the rule of law, defining law itself as an ordinance “for the common good by him who has the care of the community” (*Summa Theologiae*, I.II Q. 90 A.3).

Therefore, the question as to whether the ruler is bound by laws becomes a question not only of absolute power, but also of whether exceptions to the civil law for the ruler could ever contribute to the common good. Aquinas assumes that these exceptions do not, writing that the prince who wills the common good will understand himself as bound by the law, even though no coercive power exists to enforce that obedience. He reminds those rulers that “the Lord reproaches those who ‘say and do not’; and who ‘bind heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but with a finger of their own they will not move them’ (Mt 23:3-4)” (*S.T.*, I.II 96.5 ad 3). Developing these scriptural passages, Aquinas argues that the ruler’s commitment to justice (not burdening others with burdens he is not willing to bear) and care for those whom he serves by law-making is also an important consideration in advancing the common good and thus, according to reason, forecloses the possibility of the ruler receiving a legal exception.

## Theologians Against Leviathan

This settled theological consensus was disrupted by the rise of the nation-state at the beginning of the early modern period. Kings and queens of the new European nations now

possessed the power to exercise absolute authority in ways that had been inconceivable in early feudal monarchies. Some Christian theologians supported the claims of their own rulers to absolute power, culminating in the work of Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes argued that the peace of the kingdom depended upon the ruler, the “Leviathan” possessing total authority, unchecked by law. Hobbes’s claims were most notoriously revised several centuries later in the controversial political theology of Carl Schmitt, whose argument that the inherent definition of the sovereign is one able to approve exemptions to the law was used to support the Third Reich’s exemption from German civil law.

Despite the theological divisions of the Reformation, most Catholic and Protestant theologians condemned this development as a false theological innovation, regarding it as a corrupt understanding of both secular and divine authority. Rather than submitting to the proponents of this absolutist political theory, they sought to retrieve the traditional Christian understanding that rulers are subject to the law. For example, the anonymous author of the Protestant treatise *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* (“Defenses Against Tyrants”) and the great Jesuit theologian Francisco Suárez both drew upon Scripture and tradition to argue that Christians should always understand that rulers are subject to laws enacted by the people that limit their actions and punish their transgressions.

Both authors argue that God’s power to rule is granted first to the people, who then apportion a specific amount to the chief executive. This power can never be fully ceded and is manifested in the people’s ability to make laws that the chief executive can never overrule. Although Suárez and *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* are probably not theological sources familiar to most American Christians, they had a significant influence on John Locke. Locke’s theologically inflected political theory in turn had a great influence, in a more secularized form, upon the framers of the U.S. Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Thus, not only were these concepts of limitations an important part of the legacy of Christian theology, but they were also incorporated into the secular foundations of our democracy.

### **Advocates for Justice and the Common Good**

The arguments of Suárez and the author of *Vindiciae* are particularly relevant in our current political situation, where many Christians are concerned about declining influence and question the authority of civil law if it departs from the Bible. This is because both Suárez and

the author of *Vindiciae* made their argument that the civil law should limit executive authority explicitly in contexts where the Christians, who they believed had the proper understanding of Scripture and the common good, were in the minority and even facing persecution. Suárez wrote supporting the authority of civil law over the executive to Catholics in Protestant England and the *Vindiciae* author to Protestants in Catholic France. Even when the community holding lawmaking authority is predominantly in grave theological error, they both claim that the community’s ability to enact laws that limit the chief executive must be maintained in order for law to actually advance the common good.

Suárez argues that permitting the ruler to claim exemption from the law is not only an abuse of the power God has granted the community, but also weakens the structure of the legal system itself and endangers the law’s ability to govern justly. The author of *Vindiciae* writes that the people not only have the right to punish the ruler who departs from the law, but also own the responsibility to be forward-thinking in preventing delinquencies from occurring at all. Those entrusted with the people’s authority must exercise particular care, because tyranny is “like a raging fever. At the beginning it is easy to recognize but very difficult to detect; afterwards, it is easy to recognize, but very difficult to cure.”

Both of these authors would argue that the protection of Christian influence in the political or cultural sphere is not worth sacrificing the authority of law or the legal limits placed on an executive. When considered in an eternal perspective, our job is never to protect our own political power. Rather, by being advocates for justice and the common good, we have the possibility of pointing others toward the ultimate good and ultimate arbitrator of justice, free from all fear, because a God who is greater than any earthly ruler is our true protector.

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# CHRIST CHOSE A FISHERMAN

By Rachel Lu

*Like a skilled angler, the evangelist must go into the unknown and find people where they are.*

Photo by Jed Owen on Unsplash

The memory remains vivid to this day. I crouched by the water, gulping the humid summer air. In my right hand, I held a sharp blade. The left secured my struggling victim. From behind, five pairs of eyes bored into the back of my skull. How, I wondered, had things come to this? It had all seemed so pleasant and innocuous at the start. Suddenly, I found myself with life in one hand and death in the other.

Do not worry, gentle reader. I have a license to kill. Of course, I am talking about fish. The memory I relate is of my first-ever effort to fillet bluegill caught by my five sons from the dock of our Minnesota home. It was an unsettling experience, though in retrospect it taught me something about my life as a Christian. Jesus called his followers to be fishers of men. We can understand this better if we consider what it takes to be a fisher of fish.

I did not grow up fishing. My natal family loved hiking and camping, but we generally left flora and fauna undisturbed. When my husband's job brought me to Minnesota, I noticed that fishing was popular here. Our house gradually filled with boys, and I found myself watching with interest as a neighbor and his two boys hitched up their boat for an afternoon. I knew that my fishing dreams would have to wait because toddlers and hooks don't mix. Still, I hoped that our turn would eventually come.

It did come, somewhat sooner than expected. Four years ago, the boys and I returned from soccer practice one day to find their father in a state of excitement. He had found "our house." I was skeptical at first, but then I saw the pictures. The house itself was fairly unremarkable, but it had a thrilling feature. The backyard sloped down to a lake.

Over the next 12 weeks, we worked harder than we had ever done in our lives, and then one magical morning we woke up to the vision of an eagle, soaring over rippling waves. It felt like a miracle.

I love lake life even more than I anticipated. It almost feels shameful to be this blessed. Why shouldn't everyone enjoy these sublime pleasures: the afternoon swims, the evening rows, the mornings sipping coffee on the cool, shaded balcony? I even relish the extensive yard care and the hours spent battling invasive plants from my kayak. For me, the water feels like home. No other place has ever given me this same sense of peace. Meanwhile, it is hard to imagine a better place to raise five boys. That, of course, brings us back to fishing.

We were obviously going to do it. Where to begin, though? Since no one in the family actually knew how to fish, I spent the winter months learning from videos on YouTube. In spring, the panfish moved into the shallows, and I knew the time had come. In a moment of heroism, I promised to make a meal from the boys' first real catch. They caught nine bluegill in a single afternoon, and suddenly I was the one on the hook.

It was odd how I had managed to daydream about fishing for years without fully noticing that it involved killing. The campfire songs and charming brochures had never emphasized this point. Nevertheless, I did fillet those nine bluegill, and many more afterward. By now, a great many fish have come under my knife. I like serving guests a lake-to-table meal, and fishing itself is a thrilling way of embracing our aquatic home. Still, I have never again allowed myself to forget that anglers are bringers of death.

A fisherman reaches across worlds, inserting himself with skill and cunning into a world that no human could inhabit. In a way, he is an ambassador for his species, but his touch is not gentle. He does not heed Aliyyah Eniath's injunction to "take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints, kill nothing but time."

In popular imagination, human hunters are often viewed as frightening and predatory, while the fisherman cuts a more benign figure. His cold, alien quarry is not the sort that inspires strong sympathies in humans. For the angler himself, though, it is different. He *does* feel for his scaly prey. He admires the fish's unique, ethereal beauty, even as he plunges in the knife.

Why did Christ choose such men as his first disciples? Through his life and teachings, our Lord brought honor to many professions: the carpenter, the gardener, the shepherd. Clearly, he saw the dignity of honest work done by

ordinary men. These other men, though, are makers and protectors. They nurture living things and make use of the fruits. They are not human predators, like the fisherman. Nevertheless, Christ selected anglers to be his first emissaries to the world. We cannot doubt that this choice was deliberate. "Henceforth," Jesus told the awe-stricken St. Peter, "you shall catch men."

I think about this when I am sliding a leech onto my hook, scanning the water for a glint of scales. As a convert to the Catholic faith, I understand in a personal way how baptism can bring a deep sense of brokenness and loss. The Gospel is beautiful and ultimately life-giving, but its initial embrace can be painful. Close relationships are changed. Cherished life plans must be reformulated. Before we can experience rebirth, we must first die to ourselves. A fisherman can understand this. He already lives at the margins, where life and death come together in a close embrace.

The fisherman also knows that he must approach his quarry with imagination, deftness and a lively sympathy. No angler ever succeeded by standing on his boat, pontificating about the superiority of the world above the waves. With careful observation and practiced skill, he must reach into unfamiliar territory, finding the fish where they are. Evangelists, too, need this ability. They are not salesmen. They are hunters. It takes discernment and tremendous humility to bring the Gospel into another person's life. We must follow each trail where it leads, always focusing on the other person and not ourselves, understanding that the consequences may be painful in unforeseen ways. This is ultimately in God's hands, not ours. When St. Peter left his nets to follow Jesus, he clearly had no sense of where that journey would end.

Few things in life are quite so thrilling as the blessed moment when my rod suddenly lurches in my hand, indicating the presence of a fish. For a few breathless seconds or minutes, I am a predator in earnest, fully absorbed in the chase. When I hold up my catch, though, I am flooded with a humble sense of awe. Partly, I am admiring the fish's beauty. At the same time, I am conscious of a strange connection between us. We both love this unique place, where wind and water meet. But we have both in our various ways been caught. We know how tightly life and death can be intertwined. In the end, am I the angler or the fish? Perhaps the good evangelist is the one who knows that this question has no clear answer.

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# ‘All Will Be Well’

By Mahri Leonard-Fleckman

Statue of Julian of Norwich,  
Norwich Cathedral, by David  
Holgate FSDC.



## *The shock and salve of Julian's vision*

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*"But all will be well, and all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well."* On May 13, the popular feast day of my beloved Julian of Norwich, I was struck again by her insights. To be honest, it is not really her famous "all will be well" line that captures me, though it has clearly captured our collective memory. (Whether this is because of Julian or T. S. Eliot's echo of her words in his *Four Quartets*, I am not sure). It is a magnetic line, as much in its soothing, repetitive sound as in its assurance of a future reality beyond our grasp. Today, it is a deeply grounding promise in the midst of a chaotic, painful world. Somehow, despite our current experiences, all will be well, and all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well.

And yet. All is not well. There is growing awareness that our current public health crisis will continue in waves for God knows how long. Educational institutions struggle to prepare for the looming unknown. The economic situation is staggering. The federal government is a bungled mess. The church at times seems paralyzed. And the recent murders of Black Americans are forcing yet another reckoning with systemic racism in this country.

And me personally? I am both comforted and disturbed. I am grateful to have a happy home life, a stable income, a natural inclination toward solitude, a steady





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# Julian's is no passive promise, no kumbaya statement. It necessarily involves human action, human purification. 🔥

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sense of hope. In my community, I regularly see acts of bravery, generosity and love. And yet concern, grief and helplessness have become my daily, heavy clothing. Living through current events in the midst of this virus that takes our breath away, I find it hard to catch my own breath. No, in general, things do not feel well.

Julian would understand these mixed feelings. In context, her revelation that “all will be well” was not soothing, at least not at first. It was shocking. By her account, she took in the divine words “heavily” and “mournfully” and with “very great fear.” Her instant response was, essentially, how could this possibly be, given the reality of pain, suffering and human frailty? Or in her words: “Ah, good Lord, how could all things be well, because of the great harm which has come through sin to your creatures?” According to the final chapter of *Showings* (the long version), she then spent 15 years and more isolated in her cell, immersed in a deep, faithful struggle to comprehend the divine meaning of these words. Just imagine. Fifteen years contemplating that one line.

No, it is not the famous line itself that pulls me. Within our current reality, what attracts is the *embeddedness* of it within her lifelong struggle to comprehend

its meaning. Julian's life was devoted to and absorbed by divine encounter. She received a series of 16 “showings” or revelations of God's love when she was around 30 years old, the mysteries of which slowly unfolded into more profound understanding and insight. And when true understanding finally emerged, when the divine finally revealed the meaning of “all will be well,” her description of this revelation is electrifying. She explains it this way:

Know it well, love was his meaning. Who reveals it to you? Love. What did he reveal to you? Love. Why does he reveal it to you? For love. Remain in this, and you will know more of the same. But you will never know different, without end. So I was taught that love is our Lord's meaning.

In other words, how can it possibly be that all will be well? Through love—not that fleeting feeling but the divine itself, a power and an action that beckons and encompasses everything, even the enormity of human frailty.

Without context, without the awareness of Julian's lifelong struggle and spiritual quest, that comforting famous line—“all will be well, and all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well”—runs the risk of becoming mere platitude, its sharp edges dulled by overuse. When T. S. Eliot drew her words into his masterpiece *The Four Quartets*, he understood its scandal and its depth. He described love and sin as two forces or “fires.”

“Sin is Behovely,” he wrote (quoting Julian), and yet “all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well” through Love. How will this be? Through the purification of our motives and our desires, describes Eliot in his fourth quartet, and the only way to purify these is to be “redeemed by fire from fire.” Writes Eliot: “Who then devised the torment? Love./ ... We only live, only suspire/ consumed by either fire or fire.”

So all will be well, yes. This is surely a salve, particularly in a unique historical moment like the present, when things seem so fractured, when global suffering is as transparent as deep-seated inequality and dysfunction. And yet it is equally meant to shock, to dare, to impel us into action. For with the medicine comes the mir-

ror, the accompanying challenge: How can it possibly be that “all things will be well” in this crisis and in this mess of human greed, corruption, indifference and deadly racism?

Transformation will happen within and through our world for “all things,” but not without our own inward work and outward response. Julian’s is no passive promise, no kumbaya statement. It necessarily involves human action, human purification—Eliot’s “torment” devised by Love itself.

From within her small, monastic cell, Julian’s revelation calls for the expansion of our collective memory to hear her question, “How can that be?” echoing in the promise of “all will be well.” The question then impels us inward and forward, introspection re-sharpening that well-worn line to become as much of a stimulus to action as it is an assurance that “all will be well, and all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well.”

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## Against Fireworks

By Natasha Sajé

we huddle for the blazing  
man-made strident colored stars  
shot with cannons  
propelled by rockets

they last seconds  
then dissipate like apologies

we sign off on the noise  
on costs and damages  
through habit or hunger  
for diversion

wouldn't we do better to love  
a face any face a dog's

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Natasha Sajé is the author of three books of poems, including *Vivarium*, a Book of Literary Criticism; *Windows and Doors: A Poet Reads Literary Theory*; and *Terroir: Love, Out of Place*, a memoir forthcoming this year. Her work can be found at [www.natashasaje.com](http://www.natashasaje.com).



# *Hilary Mantel's Case Against St. Thomas More*

By John Anderson





Masterpiece/Alamy

Mark Rylance, far left, played Thomas Cromwell in the BBC production of "Wolf Hall" (2015). Paul Scofield, right, won an Oscar for his portrayal of St. Thomas More in "A Man for All Seasons" (1966).

After a more than a decade of reading, waiting, reading, waiting, reading and then sitting back with a book on my chest and no small sense of grief in my heart, I found I had completed *The Mirror and the Light*—and, with it, Hilary Mantel’s magnificent trilogy about Thomas Cromwell. Immediately thereafter, the self-scrutiny commenced.

How could Mantel, who won Booker Prizes for both *Wolf Hall* and its sequel, *Bring Up the Bodies*, manage to weave so seductive and poetic a spell out of 500-year-old shards of court records, gossip, Tudor-era chronicles and scandals, royal intrigue, sex, love, sinners—and at least one saint? Partly through a quasi-stream-of-consciousness technique that puts us inside the head of the historically problematic Cromwell, who at the end of the third book has become Lord Privy Seal to King Henry VIII and ultimately loses



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# Despite being a monumental figure in English history, Thomas Cromwell also represents something very American.

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his head. Partly, it was through that old gambit of making the ancient feel contemporary. And partly by casting against type—at least according to any Catholic tradition.

According to the Mantel take on history, one of Cromwell's more loathsome nemeses is Thomas More, a saint of the Catholic Church (he was canonized relatively recently, in 1935, by Pope Pius XI, as a martyr) and one of the premier statesmen of his age. High school graduates of a certain vintage will know him best for *Utopia*, a word of his own coinage and the title of his 1516 fiction about an imaginary and ideal society. A defender of the pope, he was a nuisance to Henry Tudor, opposing his divorce from the first of his six wives, Catherine of Aragon, and refusing to recognize Henry as head of the Church of England—refusing, for that matter, to recognize the Church of England. He was anti-Luther, anti-Calvin and anti-Tyndale (as in William, translator of the Bible into English, although sometimes “heretical” English). He was also, according to Mantel, a torturer of Catholic apostates.

One of Cromwell's complaints against More, whom he dislikes on a very basic level, regards what he views as his opponent's hypocrisy: Within the realm that Mantel portrays, mere torture—never mind burnings, beheadings and hangings of various kinds—was a commonplace, to use the contemporary parlance. “He's bent more than his share over a wheel,” Cromwell says of More, who is dispatched in 1535 at the end of *Wolf Hall* but never really goes away.

St. Thomas More himself denied using torture, or even corporal punishment, save on a couple of occasions—so the subject must have come up. The Tudor historian John Guy has said that Mantel relied heavily on the accounts by the chronicler John Foxe, who “loathed More,” according to Guy, implying that as an Elizabethan, Foxe was more interested in Protestant propaganda than in enhancing More's legacy.

Historical accounts aside, though, what must always be remembered is that Mantel is creating fiction. Novels. Her portrait of More (as opposed

to the one we know by Hans Holbein, with its determined, clear-eyed, hawk-like visage) is of a self-serving whiner with a death wish. But, of course, this depiction is inside the head of Cromwell, whom Mantel intends as her hero and who carries several stones in his heart.

## Heroes and Antiheroes

One of those rocks is Thomas Wolsey, Cromwell's mentor, the onetime primate of England and papal legate. Wolsey was made a cardinal in 1515 by Pope Leo X but could not secure an annulment for Henry VIII from Leo's successor, Pope Clement VII, who declared Henry's subsequent marriage to Anne Boleyn invalid, thus setting in motion the English Reformation. It also sealed the fate of Cardinal Wolsey (who died en route to London from his archbishopric in York to answer charges of treason, a customary prelude to Henry's cutting off one's head). Thomas More was Wolsey's successor as lord chancellor of England, which was, in and of itself, enough to cultivate enmity in

Cromwell. (Again, I am addressing here the fictional Cromwell; in his own portrait by Holbein, the genuine article looks like he is suffering an acute intestinal ailment.)

But there are other reasons for their adversarial relationship, one being temperament. Cromwell, often to an admirably consistent degree, was an utter pragmatist. More, of course, went to his death in defense of the Catholic Church and what he believed to be God's will.

On a purely earthly level, there are two overarching reasons why Cromwell is a hero and More not, at least according to the chemistry in the Mantel books. One we will get to in a moment, but the other is this: People are perverse. They reflexively mistrust history, never mind news, sometimes because what they have been led to believe turns out not to be true but also because a revisionist take on almost anything pretends to be the secret history we have not been told and as such will inevitably find an audience. (See: vaccines, almost everything about food and the theory that Shakespeare didn't write the plays).

### Artistic Depictions

And despite their relative obscurity—among even a literate population that might never have read *Utopia* and gets its Tudor history from the entertaining Lucy Worsley via the BBC—both Cromwell and More have a public persona, thanks to movies and television. (These personas, dangerously, become the defining portrayal of almost anyone in any field. Think of Pope Julius II, and you think of Rex Harrison. It's inevitable).

The story of More's showdown with Henry was the basis for "A Man

for All Seasons," the play by Robert Bolt that premiered in 1960 on London's West End with Paul Scofield as More. Scofield would go on to reprise the role on Broadway and in the Fred Zinneman film, winning the Best Actor Oscar for a movie that won a Best Picture award in 1966. Scofield—handsome, yes, but also possessed of an elevated dignity and an innate eloquence that befit the role, and the cause—defined More for generations of film lovers. Leo McKern, decidedly more earthy, did something quite different for the image of Cromwell.

But Cromwell got his shot, as Lin-Manuel Miranda might say. The charismatic Mark Rylance, one of the better actors around, played Cromwell in the "Wolf Hall" shown in the United States on PBS's "Masterpiece" (which was actually an adaptation of the first two Cromwell books) and made him as fatalistic and romantic a figure as he was in the novels. Rylance, as is his wont, provided a window on Cromwell's interior life and portrayed him as a hero despite himself. Cromwell was, after all, a persecutor of Catholics, a champion of the Reformation and not just an apologist for but the chief accomplice to the homicidal maniac that was Henry VIII.

Which brings us to the other reason Cromwell works *a la* Mantel. And it has to do with our times versus that of the Tudors—or even a Paul Scofield. The events of recent years have made us a more egalitarian society, philosophically if not practically, and Mantel's Cromwell is the model of the self-made man. The son of a brutal, abusive blacksmith, Cromwell scrapped and schemed his way up the rickety ladder of success in a barely post-medieval world; he knows the

law as well as anyone.

Though he is of low birth, he becomes the second most powerful figure in the monarchy and is therefore loathed by the nobles around him, not just because he is their better but because he is an affront to their presumed superiority-by-birth. He keeps both a literal and figurative knife in his shirt that is ready to cut where it needs to in order to keep Thomas Cromwell in his place of privilege—not the place to which he was born but which he has earned through intelligence, guile and ruthlessness.

Because the reader is inside Cromwell's head, the reader knows the depths of his love for his family and his faithful allies, and for the motivations that sometimes lead him to charitable acts that gain him nothing. But he is a fearsome creature, and despite being a monumental figure in English history, he also represents something very American. If readers prefer Cromwell to More, it is not just because of Mantel's verbal magic. It is because she has tapped into their inner small-d democrat.

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John Anderson is a television critic for *The Wall Street Journal* and a contributor to *The New York Times*.

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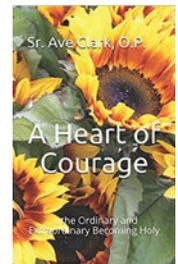
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# Hospital View

By Elena Croitoru

When they cut my father open  
a fifth time, he lost a little more  
of his life through the stitches in his skin  
and I worried his soul had been out  
for too long. A bag of blood dripped  
along plastic veins, into his valves & atriums,  
like an exposed, primitive heart.  
He thought he was being replaced  
with a stronger man, cell by cell.

By then he had more memories than flesh.  
I asked if he was hungry and he said  
his ration card filled out too soon.  
But communism had ended years before,  
though I still saw its geometric ghost  
spread over the tower blocks beyond  
the hospital's parking lot.

He looked thinner, his skin unaccustomed  
to the hollow underneath it. The new blood  
stains on his pyjama top revived the old ones,  
and made it look like God  
had pressed a rose onto his chest.  
He kept pulling his blanket to his chin, as if afraid  
the seams of another world showed.

His eyes, caged by a mesh  
of capillaries, were so far out  
of his head, that I wondered if he lived  
beyond himself. He kept looking down  
at his hands because for so many years,  
his body was the only thing  
he had owned alone.

If I visited too late in the evening,  
it would take him a few moments  
to remember my name. He'd point  
at the striated apples my uncle brought him  
and tell me to eat, still trying to be  
a father from beyond the edges  
of his bed and asking  
if I would come again.

---

Elena Croitoru lives in Kent, in England, and has an M.St. in creative writing from the University of Cambridge. Her work has been selected for The Best New British and Irish Poets 2019-2020.  
Twitter: @elenacroitoru.

*This poem was a runner-up in the 2020 Foley Poetry Contest.*

# The long reach of trauma

By Ellen O'Connell Whittet

An abandoned building on the campus of the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys in Marianna, Fla. The reform school was the inspiration for Colson Whitehead's recent novel.

The prologue of Colson Whitehead's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Nickel Boys*, reads like one long extended metaphor for the racial history of the United States—in particular the last several months, when nationwide protests have erupted over the murders of Black citizens by the police. “Even in death the boys were trouble,” Whitehead begins, “the boys” being the bodies found in mass graves on the grounds of a reform school, the Nickel Academy.

The “trouble” the boys cause is a headache for the real estate company that discovers them, the office park they planned to build put on hold for this “expensive complication.” Once the news of the graves breaks, developers and the rest of those in power have to wait for the discovery to be “neatly erased from history, which everyone agreed was long overdue.”

At its outset, the novel establishes that those who write history are the same ones who get to erase it.

“All the boys knew about that rotten spot,” Whitehead writes in the opening pages. “It took a student from the University of South Florida to bring it to the rest of the world, decades after the first boy was tied up in a potato sack and dumped there.” The surprise is never what has happened but how long it takes the nation to care.

*The Nickel Boys* tells the story of Elwood Curtis, one of the Nickel Academy's students in the 1960s, though “inmate” might be a more apt descriptor of his role at the school. Curtis is an earnest and ambitious teenager whose grandmother “raised him strict,” allowing the other parents on their street to “keep Elwood apart by holding him up as an example.” Because his grandmother doesn't allow him to listen to music, he listens to his record of Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches, “the best gift of his life,” which he commits to memory, “even if the ideas it put in his head were his undoing.” But when he hitches a ride to his first college

class from someone in a stolen car, he's caught and sent to the Nickel Academy as punishment for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Whitehead based the Nickel Academy on the Dozier School for Boys in Marianna, Fla., which didn't close until 2011. Whitehead's acknowledgments make clear that he invented the novel's characters, but the atrocities of the school—solitary confinement, boys snatched from their beds in the middle of the night to be brutally beaten for minor or fabricated infractions, authority figures who watch the boys shower and, of course, boys killed and buried on the grounds—are all conjured from the real-life testimony of the men who lived to tell their own stories, even when mainstream history kept those stories locked away.

Although the men who spent their boyhoods at the Dozier School for Boys tried for years to speak out about what they'd lived through, it

The Nickel Boys  
By Colson Whitehead  
Anchor Books  
224p \$15.95

wasn't until anthropologists from the University of South Florida uncovered the remains of 55 bodies that the news paid attention. "I got the worst beating I ever got at that school," Jerry Cooper told *The Guardian* last year, "over a hundred lashes at two o'clock in the morning, searing the cloth of my nightgown and my underwear into my skin. I was sure I wasn't going to survive."

"But there were those of us who didn't. I told them for years there's a lot more boys dead than the 55 they located. We've always known this."

The fictional Nickel Academy's founder, Trevor Nickel, started the school in 1946 after he "made an impression at Klan meetings" with his "speeches on moral improvement and the value of work." The school's origins were facilitated by racism, its greatest victims the ones silenced by years of inaction by authorities. Past the White House, the center of the school's worst violence, is what Elwood's best friend, Turner, calls "out back," where two oaks have iron rings embedded in the bark. "They say once in a while they take a black boy here and shackle him up to those," Turner tells Elwood. "Arms spread out. Then they get a horse whip and tear him up."

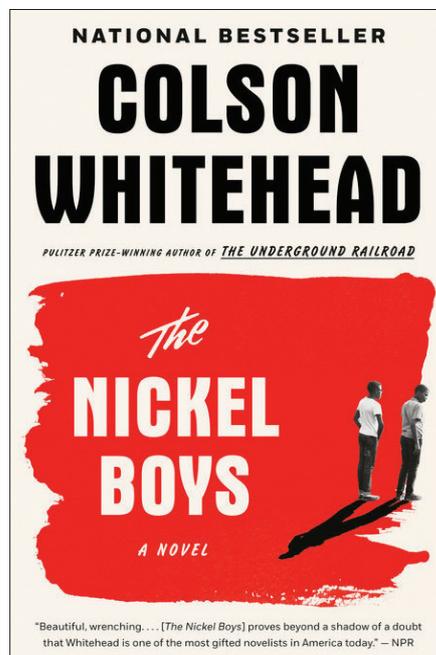
Elwood asks if white boys get taken *out back*, too. But Turner says it's just for Black boys. "They take you out back, they don't bring you to the hospital. They put you down as escaped and that's that, boy."

The Nickel Academy is more concerned with the appearance of reform than it is with actually achieving it. Late in the novel, inspectors come to the school, which has been tipped off about the surprise visit from one of

the director's fraternity brothers. In preparation, the boys are put to work, adding coats of paint and making small repairs to the grounds. They are bribed with a good meal, new clothes, fresh haircuts and school supplies. But Elwood and Turner's house father makes it clear these bribes have a price. "You boys mess up, it's your ass," he warns them.

The novel's structure is split between two stories, one happening to the Elwood of the past, the other following the Elwood of the present. What is remarkable about Whitehead's interwoven storylines is watching the effects of trauma decades later, the memories becoming echoes of a greater psychic haunting of the Nickel Academy. Elwood runs into a former classmate in the present-day storyline, still reeling from the abuse of his past. "That's what the school did to a boy," writes Whitehead. "It didn't stop when you got out. Bend you all kind of ways until you were unfit for straight life, good and twisted by the time you left."

Elwood's early love for Martin Luther King Jr.'s optimistic rhetoric ultimately does nothing to save him from the despair of being a Black inmate trapped by an institution designed to break him down. "The capacity to suffer," Whitehead writes, "Elwood—all the Nickel boys—existed in the capacity." That capacity required their silence. "Otherwise they would have perished," writes Whitehead. "The beatings, the rapes, the unrelenting winnowing of themselves. They endured. But to love those who would have destroyed them?" Elwood decides King's proclamation that even when broken down by oppressors they will still love them is an impossible thing to ask.



And yet this is exactly what the United States, over half a century later, continues to ask Black citizens to do by policing the ways they protest or walk down the street, where they fall asleep, how they exist within their own homes. *The Nickel Boys* lets readers learn our own dark history that was kept hidden until it was uncovered. King's long arc of justice is nowhere near its end and cannot meet the ground as long as history is written only by those who have a stake in washing away the very blood they have shed.

Ellen O'Connell Whittet *teaches in the Writing Program at U.C. Santa Barbara. Her ballet memoir, What You Become in Flight, came out in spring 2020 from Melville House.*



Photo courtesy of the National Council of Catholic Women

Margaret J. Mealey, executive director of the National Council of Catholic Women, explains the proper use and construction of an agenda at the Leadership Training Institute, 1955.

# Confronting essentialism

By Catherine R. Osborne

Glance at a wall in almost any American parish and you might still see their fading pictures: groups of middle-aged women with carefully composed hair, respectable dresses, handbags and strings of pearls, seated in neat rows in the parish hall or around tables at a luncheon. These matrons, the backbone of countless mid-20th-century churches, were exactly the well-behaved women who (the coffee mug slogan suggests) seldom make history. And indeed, as Mary Henold notes in the introduction to her moving new book, historians of women in the 20th century once “focused almost exclusively on those who called themselves feminists.”

Henold herself was once among this group of scholars, inclined to seek out the stories of women who were exceptional for their times. *The Laywoman Project* had its genesis in an unresolved dilemma from her previous book. The Catholic feminists she had studied consistently dismissed

women like Margaret J. Mealey, the executive director of the National Council of Catholic Women, as hopelessly retrograde. Yet Henold had seen hints in primary sources that this was not necessarily so. Mealey, for example, openly criticized the hierarchy and pushed laywomen to move into new roles in the church.

Henold began to look into the vast archival record of mid-20th-century Catholic laywomen’s organizations such as the aforementioned N.C.C.W., the Thesians and the Catholic Daughters of America, and found that these bourgeois ladies in white gloves were engaged in serious, wide-ranging discussions about Catholic womanhood.

The mainspring of this conversation was the convergence of the Second Vatican Council with the burgeoning feminist movement. Henold identifies the heart of the problem Catholic women faced in the mid-1960s and, in fact, ever since: “[B]ecause the Council made signif-

icant changes in the church’s understanding of the role of laity without questioning its core beliefs about gender, its leaders were sending Catholic women contradictory messages.”

If Catholic laywomen were no longer to pay, pray and obey but instead to take a leadership role as laity, how exactly were they to do that “if the church still taught that women’s nature was basically fixed and subordinate?” To answer this question, “moderate” Catholic laywomen set out on a voyage of self-discovery, wrestling with a culture-wide upheaval in gender roles as they did so.

The book’s title, then, refers both to Henold’s own painstaking work unearthing their stories and to the vast, distributed, semiorganized “project” undertaken by her subjects themselves: to discern what their role as laywomen really was. As such, it is a book primarily about changing concepts of women’s vocation during that rapidly moving decade.

The Laywoman Project  
Remaking Catholic Womanhood in the Vatican II Era  
By Mary J. Henold  
University of North Carolina Press  
248p \$29.95

Catholic readers may be surprised to discover that while the “vocation crisis” is the subject of Henold’s prologue, she is discussing not 1968 but 1958. The baby boom had produced an 89 percent increase in Catholic elementary school students from 1948 to 1958, but there were only 20 percent more Catholic sisters available to teach them. Accordingly, from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, Catholic media celebrated religious vocations while occasionally suggesting that married women were to blame for selfishly resisting their daughters’ vocations.

Many laywomen clearly felt the force of this criticism, and some joined a new lay society, the Theresians, begun in 1961 with the explicit purpose of promoting vocations to the sisterhood. Yet by 1969, the group voted to repudiate this goal: It was now to be a society “dedicated to a deeper appreciation of the vocation of the Christian woman”—in other words, Theresians’ own vocations.

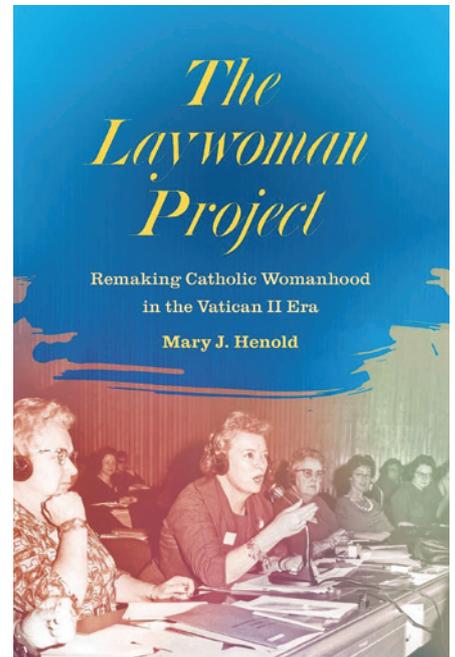
How closely would the new “vocation of the Christian woman” resemble the old? Some answers are found in Henold’s study of the N.C.C.W., founded by the U.S. bishops in the 1920s. With 13,000 parish-level affiliates, it was as close as the American Catholic Church got to a universal organization of women, with diverse local membership and leadership (though, as Henold points out, those at the national level—as with most voices represented in this book—were typically white and upper middle class.) While both bishops and Catholic feminists often saw the N.C.C.W.’s role as doing whatever members of the clergy told them to, Henold’s careful trawl through their publications and conference

schedules tells a different story. The N.C.C.W., in short, studied Vatican II documents closely and used them “explicitly to question and challenge both their traditional role in the church and their relationship to the hierarchy.”

What did ordinary laywomen, as opposed to the leaders of national organizations, think about all this? Accessing these voices can, of course, be challenging. Henold partly solves this problem with a deep dive into the pages of *Marriage* magazine, where she finds full-throttle discussions about work (paid and unpaid), sex and authority in the family. While the opinions aired in *Marriage* were varied, by the end of the 1960s letter writers “no longer took for granted... that God-given complementarity” made gender roles not only unchanging but unchangeable.

Moderate Catholic women’s *aggiornamento*, as Henold shows, depended on holding women’s liberation at arm’s length while at the same time embracing a call to upend discrimination and, critically, to question the church’s longstanding essentialist views on womanhood. But by the mid-1970s, both the N.C.C.W. and other organizations were facing internal backlash to even this “mild feminism.”

I was born in 1979, at the tail end of this round of conversations. As such, I grew up in a Catholic world that both assumed women’s equality and simultaneously accepted, at least on the surface, the church’s primarily male power structure. Henold’s superb work of scholarship, at once funny, insightful and wrenching, has helped me better understand the currents and tensions underneath the surface of our parish.

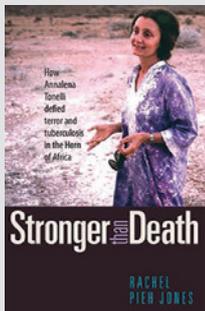


It ran on women’s labor and depended on women’s organizational leadership; the school’s religious education curriculum said nothing that I can remember about the separate vocations of men (to headship) and women (to service); and yet the parish did not allow altar girls; and, of course, we never heard a female voice in the pulpit.

My own memories, then, show me neither a church converted to a post-Vatican II feminism nor a church where, as we are sometimes inclined to exclaim in frustration, nothing has really changed. *The Laywoman Project* shows how my mother’s and grandmother’s generations fought an uphill battle, “confronting and dismantling” essentialist ideas inch by inch. Its patient, charitable, critical, empathetic account of its subjects calls both Catholic women and Catholic men to continue this work.

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Catherine R. Osborne is a historian of American Catholicism.



**Stronger Than Death**  
By Rachel Pieh Jones  
Plough  
280p \$26

### A humanitarian innovator

How to minister to the sick and the dying amid an international health crisis? How to bring them the love of Christ? *Stronger Than Death*, Rachel Pieh Jones's biography of Annalena Tonelli, sets these increasingly topical questions at the center of a lively—if at times slightly overheated—portrait of an innovative humanitarian aid worker whose commitment to radical service came at the cost of her life.

Tonelli, an Italian-born lawyer, moved to Kenya in her 20s to work as a teacher. Her desire was to live among the poor as one of the poor. There, scandalized by the suffering of nomadic peoples dying of tuberculosis, she used (or perhaps pioneered) the Directly Observed Treatment, Short-Course (TB-DOTS) strategy, which is now the World Health Organization's recommended control strategy for treating tuberculosis.

Medical practitioners had struggled for decades to get their nomadic patients to stay long enough in one place to complete months of drug therapy. Rather than attempting to corral the nomadic peoples into a hospital for a conventional Western form of treatment, Tonelli invited her patients to build their own nomadic settlement on the out-

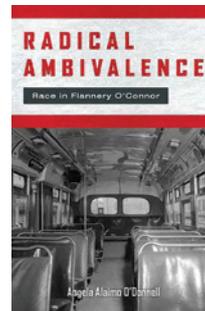
skirts of her charity center and live according to their own customs during their time of treatment. All she asked in return was that she be allowed to observe them take their daily pills.

Pieh Jones, an educator and freelance writer now based in Djibouti, tells Tonelli's story passionately, engagingly and with no pretense at impersonal detachment. From the first chapter, recounting Tonelli's assassination in 2003, the two women's stories are interwoven: The hospital where Tonelli was shot dead was only a few blocks from where Pieh Jones then lived with her husband and two children. There are times when personal investment in her story threatens to compromise Jones's objectivity, but more often she is commendably forthright in exploring her subject's flaws and complexities: a dispute around the claim that Tonelli invented TB-DOTS; her potential "white savior" complex; and, most seriously, her early complicity in female genital mutilation, a crime that she later went on to condemn forcefully.

In a sense, *Stronger Than Death* is two books: a journalistic investigation of a humanitarian innovator and a Christian meditation on one woman's growth in Christlike love in a situation of almost overwhelming suffering. Thoroughly researched and heartfelt, its honesty overcomes its occasional flaws. Readers will not need to be told the ways in which its lessons can be applied to our current times.

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Carino Hodder, O.P., is a member of the Dominican Sisters of St. Joseph, at St. Dominic's Priory in Lymington, Hants, Great Britain.



**Radical Ambivalence**  
Race in Flannery O'Connor  
By Angela Alaimo O'Donnell  
Fordham University Press  
192p \$30

### A walking contradiction

As the country continues to reel from racial injustice and police brutality, many Americans find themselves once again questioning their legacy of white privilege and their own complicity in structural racism. Angela Alaimo O'Donnell's new book, *Radical Ambivalence: Race in Flannery O'Connor*, is a welcome opportunity for readers to grapple with this legacy in the life and work of one of the most talented writers of the 20th century.

*Radical Ambivalence* brings together critical voices that enable readers to examine the portrayal of race in O'Connor's fiction, from contemporary to historical perspectives, political as well as theological, so as to better understand the forces that shaped O'Connor's complex attitudes regarding race. O'Connor was, O'Donnell notes, like many people of her time, "a walking contradiction when it came to matters of race."

O'Connor's personal letters to close friends illustrate the conflicting nature of her views on race. To William Sessions in 1963 she writes, "I feel very good about those changes in the South that have been long overdue—the whole racial picture. I think it is improving by the minute, particularly in Georgia, and I don't see how anybody could feel other-

wise than good about that.”

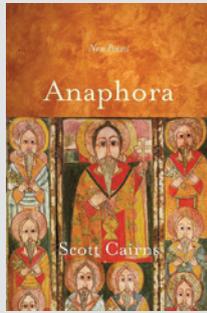
But then she writes to Maryat Lee in 1964 with her usual transgressive humor, playing the country bumpkin to Lee’s Yankee liberal: “You know, I’m an integrationist by principle & a segregationist by taste anyway. I don’t *like* negroes. They all give me a pain and the more of them I see, the less and less I like them.”

O’Donnell is at her best in her many close readings of O’Connor’s stories. Her comparative analysis of O’Connor’s reworking of her first and last published stories—“The Geranium” (1946) and “Judgment Day” (1965)—frame the dramatic confrontation with the “color line” and the racial codes observed between Blacks and whites throughout her writing career.

O’Donnell argues that as O’Connor lived through the dismantling of the Jim Crow South during the 1950s and 60s, her stories deconstruct race and the concept of whiteness not only in her characters, but in her own persona. Her stories, if not her letters, show that struggle, as she exposed the hypocrisy of her characters in parable-like ways. She writes for what we might call *recovering* racists—those who always need reminding of their white privilege—and O’Donnell shows that O’Connor would include herself in that group, as could many white people today.

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Mark Bosco, S.J., is the co-director of the 2019 documentary film “Flannery” and the vice president for mission and ministry at Georgetown University.



**Anaphora**  
By Scott Cairns  
Paraclete Press  
112p \$18

### The poetry of immanence

The poet Scott Cairns’s written pilgrimage picks up with his new collection, *Anaphora*. An Eastern Orthodox Christian whose 17 books range from a memoir about his search for a confessor on Mount Athos to a verse translation of ancient mystics, Cairns is a rare figure in American letters: a religious poet free of mawkish piety. The poems in *Anaphora* are elegant and simple expressions of the poet’s lifelong search for the divine, “[a]s when mid-prayer the icon yet/ returns the weary gaze.”

Throughout his career, Cairns has insisted, unfashionably, that poetry should reveal that words are a means of communion, not mere instruments of communication. In the preface, Cairns explains that while some poems deploy “anaphora,” the use of repetition common to oratory, he presses anaphora’s liturgical use, alluding to the precise moment in the Divine Liturgy when the eucharistic elements are consecrated.

Eucharistic images in *Anaphora* abound. “Conifer Forest,” for instance, elevates the memory of a hunting trip with the poet’s deceased father, whose spirit offers “again the sandwich, the steaming cup.” In “Fabric: Regarding Vesalius,” the eucharist appears in the Aristote-

lian language of early anatomical science: “what matters most is most infused/ within the patent matter of the host.”

Other poems directly argue Cairns’s sacramental poetics. Two of the three sections in the poem “Immanence” express the deficiency of different poetic modes. The “Poetry of Ideas,” he writes, is “transcendence unattended by dear body// and its blood proves a dry-/ mouthed, ethereal translation.” By contrast, the “Poetry of Things” is a “referential anecdote denoting/ how very dry the cracker.”

Cairns is at his best when the poems are the obvious fruit of prayer. In “Glimpses,” for example, the poet observes ordinary events with noetic clarity: “how the infant’s flickering/ smile mid-nap lifts/ the burden of a troubled day.” In “Sin *En Route* to Lent,” he exposes how self-righteousness can pervade even Christ’s parables, whereby one can mutter: “thank God I am/ not like this man/ the Pharisee/ who thought to scorn/ the publican.”

The central poem in *Anaphora*, “Late Sayings,” is an expansion of the Christian’s most treasured anaphora, the Sermon on the Mount. As the poem says, “Blessed are those who do not presume,/ for they shall be surprised at every turn.” Only a poet of Cairns’s humility can embark on that conceit without falling into presumption himself. *Anaphora* is a welcome addition to a body of work tailored to both serious readers of contemporary poetry and works of spirituality alike.

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Michael Angel Martín is a poet living in Miami, Fla. His poems and reviews have appeared in a number of journals and magazines, including *America*.

## An Invitation

### EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), AUGUST 2, 2020

READINGS: IS 55:1-3; PS 145; ROM 8:35-39; MT 14:13-21

Today's readings invite us to reflect on God's love for humanity. Both the first reading and the Gospel emphasize God's care by using images of nourishment. As we hear these readings, we can find comfort in God's love and use it as a way to model our interactions with one another.

In the first reading, from Isaiah, the people of Judah, having experienced great suffering and exile, are called to an abundant feast. "Come to the water; receive grain and eat; drink wine and milk; delight in rich fare." This passage is an invitation to restoration, welcoming all people to enjoy God's generosity. The passage even insists that those without money come to the banquet, bringing together people of various economic statuses to share in the bounty that God provides.

Isaiah can inspire us to strengthen, repair and restore our relationships with one another by inviting everyone to the table. Many people, especially people of color, women and people living in poverty, often feel overlooked and unable to advance. It is incumbent upon all of us, especially those in positions of power and privilege, to work consciously to include all people, especially those who are marginalized and disenfranchised. This is not only to right the wrongs of the past or to check a diversity box, although those are important goals. It is equally important, however, to acknowledge the ability of all people to contribute meaningfully to society, modeling our invitation to others in light of God's actions.

Today's Gospel is another re-

minder of God's inclusive generosity. We hear the popular miracle story of the multiplication of the loaves and fish to feed a large crowd. All the Gospels include a version of the miracle; Matthew and Mark even tell two versions of the story. Before multiplying the food, Jesus cures people who are sick because he is "moved with pity," setting the tone for the story. Then, when the disciples attempt to disperse the crowd because food is scarce, Jesus instructs them to feed the people, and then he shows them how.

Looking to heaven, Jesus takes the five loaves and two fish, blesses them, breaks the loaves and gives the food to his followers, who share it with the crowds. This calls to mind the Last Supper, as Jesus' actions here foreshadow the sacred feast (Mt 26:26-29). The power of Jesus' act is illustrated by the overabundance that remains after everyone eats, 12 baskets of leftovers. The numbers in the story are symbolic: adding five and two equals seven, a number of perfection and completion; and 12 is a recurring biblical number, as in 12 apostles and 12 tribes of Israel.

The multiplication of the loaves and fish highlights Jesus' compassion and interest in nourishing the crowds who are with him. Moreover, Jesus incorporates his followers, inviting them and teaching them to care for others, providing a model for how we should care for one another.

*You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat. (Is 55:1)*

### Praying With Scripture

In what ways can you work to be more welcoming and loving in your life?

How can you promote openness in society?

## Training Leaders

### NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), AUGUST 9, 2020

READINGS: 1 KGS 19:9-13; PS 85; ROM 9:1-5; MT 14:22-33

Today's Gospel shows Jesus training the disciples to be future leaders. They are put in an uncomfortable situation and must seek God's help in order to survive.

Last Sunday we read about Jesus feeding the multitudes, inviting the disciples to participate in the miracle by offering loaves and fish to the crowd. The miracle reveals God's interest in providing sustenance, and it alludes to the prophetic actions of Elijah and Elisha, who were also empowered by God to make a little bit of food go a long way (1 Kgs 17:8-16; 2 Kgs 4:42-44).

After the miracle is complete, Jesus withdraws and instructs his followers to take a boat across the Sea of Galilee. This brief journey includes a series of events, instructions and revelations that help the future leaders to strengthen their faith and more fully understand Jesus. In this training session, even the environment participates in the educational process.

First, Jesus goes to pray on a mountain, a location that recalls prophetic encounters with God, especially by Moses and Elijah, whom the first reading shows praying on Mount Horeb. While Jesus prays, the apostles struggle with waves and wind on the sea. Jesus appears and walks on the water, a sign of his divine power with echoes in the Old Testament (Job 9:8; Ps 77:19). Yet his followers fail to recognize him, declaring that Jesus is a ghost. Jesus comforts them, saying, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.” The Greek for “it is I” is *ego eimi*, which literally means “I am,” the same assertion of the divine name made to Moses at the burning bush on Mount Horeb (Ex 3:14). This “I am” statement indicates divine presence, but the apostles seek further assurance.

Peter requires evidence that he is encountering God, and Jesus acquiesces by enabling Peter to walk on the water to him. But the wind blows around Peter, causing him to be frightened and sink into the water. Jesus helps but also criticizes his fear: “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Jesus’ walking on water is a theophany, a divine manifestation that allows the disciples to more fully understand and experience God. Their eventual response is telling, as they worship and proclaim Jesus’ divinity as the Son of God. While on the water, Jesus reveals himself to them, using a difficult experience to correct fears and increase understanding.

Reflecting on the Gospel, we can see ourselves as the disciples who encounter many unexpected and

***‘Truly, you are the Son of God’ (Mt 14:33).***

### ***Praying With Scripture***

How do you recognize God in your midst during moments of crisis?

In what ways does the world affect your life?

upsetting conditions and seek reassurance from God. Such reassurance is offered through our must coming to recognize God in our midst. A direct theophany like Jesus’ walking on water is unlikely, so we need to be attuned to the world around us and look for God in the places and people we encounter.

## **Creative Persistence**

### **TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), AUGUST 16, 2020**

READINGS: IS 56:1-7; PS 67; ROM 11:13-32; MT 15:21-28

In today’s Gospel, we hear the story of the Canaanite mother who seeks healing for her daughter. Jesus initially ignores her request, but through her creative persistence, she convinces him to perform a healing. Jesus’ initial disregard for the mother’s request is troubling. There are multiple reading strategies to help understand this narrative.

Matthew’s Gospel emphasizes Jesus’ Jewish heritage and audience; and at the outset of his ministry, Jesus says to the disciples, “Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of

the house of Israel” (Mt 10:5). Despite this, Jesus performs healings for two Gentiles, the centurion’s servant (Mt 8:5-13) and the Canaanite woman’s daughter in today’s reading, showing some level of openness to Gentiles that is further confirmed when Jesus commissions the disciples to baptize “all nations” after the resurrection (Mt 28:19).

When the Canaanite woman asks for a healing, Jesus says, “It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.” Some interpreters attempt to soften this statement by noting that the Greek word used here (*kynaria*) actually means puppies or small dogs. Nonetheless, Jesus’ response was still offensive, as the chil-

***‘O woman, great is your faith!’ (Mt 15:28)***

### ***Praying With Scripture***

Are you persistent?

How can you promote open acceptance of all people?

dren are the Jews and the small dogs are the Canaanites. Other books of the New Testament also refer to Gentiles as dogs (Mk 7:27-28; Phil 3:2; Rev 22:15). Eventually, Jesus agrees to help only after the woman creatively reworks his insult: “Even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters.” Jesus interprets her rebuttal as a sign of faithfulness and

immediately heals her daughter.

This passage may reflect Matthew's community, made up largely of Jewish Christians, working through how to understand the presence of Gentiles among Jesus' followers. Matthew adapts his source text, Mk 7:24-30, in interesting ways. In Mark, Jesus enters the woman's home in Tyre, a non-Jewish region, but Matthew situates the event outdoors in a more ambiguous location, possibly within or outside of the Gentile district. In Mark's version of the insult, Jesus starts by saying, "Let the children be fed first" (Mk 7:24), suggesting that Gentiles can receive Jesus' ministry eventually. Matthew eliminates the statement, making Jesus' message sound more exclusively directed to Jews.

This narrative also might reveal Matthew's evolving thinking about the Gospel and the role of Gentile women in salvation history. Matthew's Gospel begins with Jesus' genealogy, tracing his Jewish heritage through Joseph back to Abraham. The genealogy names mostly men; but in addition to Jesus' mother, Mary, there are four other women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba). These women were either explicitly or implicitly non-Israelites who played a significant role in the history of Israel. Matthew might envision this Canaanite woman along the same lines, a woman outside of the tradition who helps shape its direction. Her insistence that Jesus heal her daughter contributes to the evolving Gospel message, which ultimately includes all people

## Discerning Leaders, Part 1

**TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), AUGUST 23, 2020**

READINGS: IS 22:19-23; PS 138; ROM 11:33-36; MT 16:13-20

The readings for this Sunday and next are timely. They focus on the call to leadership and the flaws of leaders. As we are in the midst of the election season, this is a good time to reflect on Scripture's insights on power and authority. Hopefully, the readings can inspire us to elect officials who are astute, open to knowledge and critical thinking and who avoid corruption.

The first reading from Isaiah is about Shebna, an official who abuses power for personal and familial wealth and gain (Is 22:15-18). This ancient text sounds eerily similar to some of our current political leaders, including those in the highest offices in the land. God speaks to the prophet, instructing him to criticize Shebna for his actions: "I will thrust you from your office and pull you down from your station." God promises a replacement for Shebna, showing God's commitment to just and virtuous leaders.

After condemning corruption, Isaiah affirms the new leader, who receives the "key of the House of David; when he opens no one shall shut; when he shuts, no one shall open." This statement imparts power and authority to Shebna's replacement, Eliakim, and it has echoes in today's Gospel when Jesus gives authority to Peter.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Peter

*'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'*  
(Mt 16:16)

### *Praying With Scripture*

Do you criticize corruption?

How can Scripture help you to discern good leaders?

demonstrates his ability to lead by declaring that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God. Jesus values Peter's understanding of his divinity, interpreting Peter's declaration as a revelation. Because of his faith and knowledge, Jesus imparts special authority to Peter: "I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

As in the first reading, today's Gospel mentions keys as literal and symbolic images of authority. Moreover, the statement about "loosing and binding" is often interpreted as giving Peter the authority to teach. The phrase could also give Peter powers similar to Christ's own, such as the power to forgive sins, exorcise demons and permit entry into the community, powers that are also given elsewhere in the Gospel, although not exclusively to Peter. Today's Gospel is often interpreted as scriptural evidence of the primacy of Peter among the apostles. Fittingly, the papal seal and other papal insignia use two keys as a symbol of the institution of the papacy.

Beyond the key imagery as representative of the authority of Peter and future popes, the reason that Je-

Jesus gives Peter the keys is especially important. Because Peter is able to understand and articulate who Jesus is, Jesus affirms that Peter is blessed and only then gives him authority. Peter first needed to demonstrate his understanding before receiving the keys.

As we think about the call to leadership, we desperately need to elect people who have insight and knowledge for the task at hand. Like Shebna, sometimes officials abuse their power and need to be removed. Even Peter, as the larger Gospel reveals, has multiple lapses. Despite the potential for failure, we should seek people who show the insight, openness and preparation to succeed in positions of power.

## Discerning Leaders, Part 2

**TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN  
ORDINARY TIME (A),  
AUGUST 30, 2020**

READINGS: JER 20:7-9; PS 63;  
ROM 12:1-2; MT 16:21-27

Today's readings continue to help us discern good leaders in our midst. The readings reveal the risks of speaking out against corruption, the importance of thoughtfulness, the dangers of misunderstanding and the necessity of selflessness.

On multiple occasions, the prophet Jeremiah laments his prophetic office, particularly because of his community's reaction to his word. He cries out, "I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me," because people reject him for proclaiming ominous prophecies about current and future destruction. Jeremiah bemoans his

calling because it is difficult to deliver messages that people do not want to hear. This risk persists today. Many people want to hear only positive, agreeable messages, even when there are difficult issues that need to be addressed and remedied.

While he is sometimes reluctant about his calling, Jeremiah also declares the importance of his speaking the truth, recognizing that it is painful and exhausting to withhold his prophetic messages. We can learn from Jeremiah's inner conflict. It is necessary to speak out against corruption, even at the risk of upsetting people who would rather not deal with the pressing issues of the day.

The second reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans is a reminder of critical thinking. Paul tells the Romans to transform their way of thinking in order to discern God's will. It is important to be informed thinkers and voters, especially as we make critical decisions in the near future.

Finally, today's Gospel builds on the topic of authority. Last week, we heard about Jesus giving Peter authority because of his understanding of Jesus' divinity. Yet soon after receiving the "keys to the kingdom of heaven," Peter missteps. In today's Gospel, Jesus predicts his Passion for the first time, revealing that he would suffer greatly, be killed and rise from the dead. Peter declares that this must not happen. Although Peter's rebuttal could show his devotion, Jesus harshly rebukes him: "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

Jesus criticizes Peter for failing

*Be transformed by the  
renewal of your mind.  
(Rom 12:2)*

### *Praying With Scripture*

Do you recognize the importance of thoughtful leadership?

Are you willing to adjust your own thinking for the betterment of society?

to understand God's plan. Like Jeremiah, Jesus delivers a message that is upsetting and difficult for people to process. Peter's angry reaction mirrors that of Jeremiah's community, which refused to recognize impending destruction.

Jesus then explains the implications of being one of his followers. It is a difficult but rewarding task that requires selflessness and suffering, although the reward will be eternal life. Self-denial was important for the early followers of Christ so that they could prepare themselves for the challenges they would face on account of their faith.

Good leaders show their selflessness by putting the needs of others ahead of their own. Scripture reveals the importance of openness to hearing the truth and the necessity of thinking critically about who is given power. We need leaders who fully recognize the implications of holding office and who demonstrate a commitment to serving others ahead of themselves.

*Jaime L. Waters teaches Scripture at DePaul University in Chicago. She is an associate professor of Catholic studies.*

# A Jesuit Way to Justice

*Boston College launches project to fight systemic racism*

By Vincent Rougeau



In 2021, Oklahoma will mark the 100th anniversary of what has come to be known as the Tulsa Race Massacre. That city's Greenwood district had been a vibrant, affluent African-American community, but in a night of terror, marauding gangs of white men murdered at least 300 Black men and burned Greenwood to the ground.

The attackers knew that their victims had no recourse to any meaningful form of justice. The racist structures of U.S. law and society made whatever rights Blacks had in principle meaningless in practice.

This kind of American story is an important antecedent to the passionate calls for racial justice that we are hearing today. We must recognize that racism remains a systemic problem in this country, part of the "structures of sin" that Pope John Paul II discussed in his 1987 encyclical "On Social Concern."

At Boston College, we have decided to address structural racism through a new project called the Forum on Racial Justice in America. This will be a transformative process for the university and will launch a rethinking of how we understand our role in higher education, in the greater Boston community, in the nation and in the world.

As a Jesuit university, Boston College has access to rich theological and intellectual understandings of justice. My hope is that the Forum will draw

heavily upon that knowledge. Catholic social teaching is remarkable in the American cultural context for its ability to draw immediate attention to our tendency to individualize agency and avoid notions of collective responsibility.

As the inaugural director and someone who has spent many years thinking about the relationship between U.S. law and Catholic social teaching, I see the Forum's work as being rooted in a profound understanding that personal conversion alone is insufficient to end racism in this country. Boston College must commit as an institution to dismantling racist structures. Members of the college community must live out the core values of our mission: that all human beings are created in God's image, are of equal worth and have an inherent right to a dignified existence regardless of race.

The Forum will move forward in its work to dismantle racist structures through three stages modeled on the process of "observe, judge, act," an important part of Jesuit pedagogy. In the first stage of our work, we will observe, as it were, through listening. We plan to organize a series of events modeled on the processes of truth and reconciliation and restorative justice that will allow victims of racism to speak and be heard.

The second phase will be one of discernment and judgment. Based on what we have heard and learned, how

should Boston College respond? What are our obligations to those who have suffered, including members of the Boston College community and the local, national and global communities? What actions should we take as a university to harness the resources and talents that we have at our disposal to offer ideas and policy prescriptions for change?

Finally, we should move quickly to act. This means a new mission for Boston College. We will be a university that will offer a unique voice to antiracist work and engagement, and we will bring our values, resources and expertise to thinking comprehensively about racial justice at the national and global policy levels.

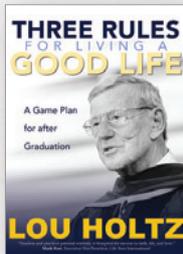
Taking an aggressive stance against racism and racial injustice is a natural outgrowth of serious engagement with Catholic social teaching and the values of a Jesuit education. Harnessing the resources of the Boston College community to fight for racial justice and create an antiracist future will build solidarity with people of good will across American society who share this commitment.

*Vincent Rougeau is the dean of Boston College Law School and president-elect of the Association of American Law Schools.*

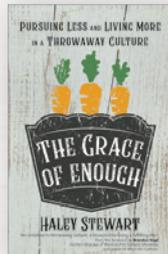
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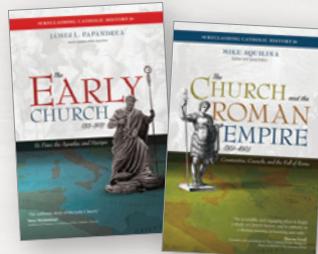
## FIRST-PLACE AWARDS



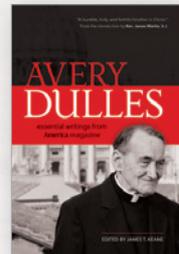
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CPA: First Place  
(Spirituality / Hardcover Books)



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**HALEY STEWART**  
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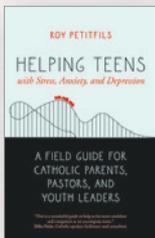


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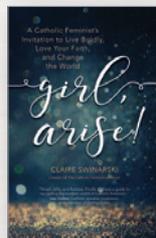


**Avery Dulles**  
**EDITED BY JAMES T. KEANE**  
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(Anthology)

## SECOND-PLACE AWARDS



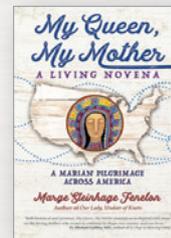
**ROY PETITFILS**  
CPA: Second Place  
(Family Life)  
ACP: Second Place  
(Resources for Ministry)



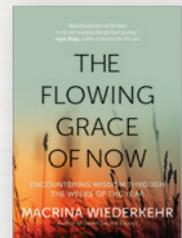
**CLAIRE SWINARSKI**  
CPA: Second Place  
(Gender Issues / Inclusion in the Church)



**ROBERT L. FASTIGGI AND MICHAEL O'NEILL**  
CPA: Second Place  
(Theology / Morality, Ethics, Christology, Mariology, and Redemption)

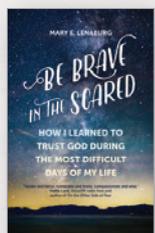


**MARGE STEINHAGE FENELON**  
CPA: Second Place  
(Pilgrimages / Catholic Travel)

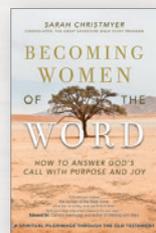


**MACRINA WIEDERKEHR**  
ACP: Second Place  
(Prayer)

## THIRD-PLACE AWARDS



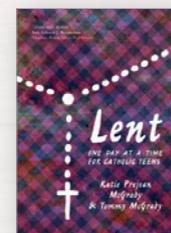
**MARY E. LENABURG**  
ACP: Third Place  
(Spirituality)



**SARAH CHRISTMYER**  
CPA: Third Place  
(Scripture / Popular Studies)



**KATHRYN WHITAKER**  
CPA: Third Place  
(First-Time Author of a Book)



**KATIE PREJEAN McGRADY AND TOMMY McGRADY**  
CPA: Third Place  
(Books for Teens)



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