

# America

OCTOBER 2020

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

## No Ordinary Time



**The Editors  
on the 2020 Election**

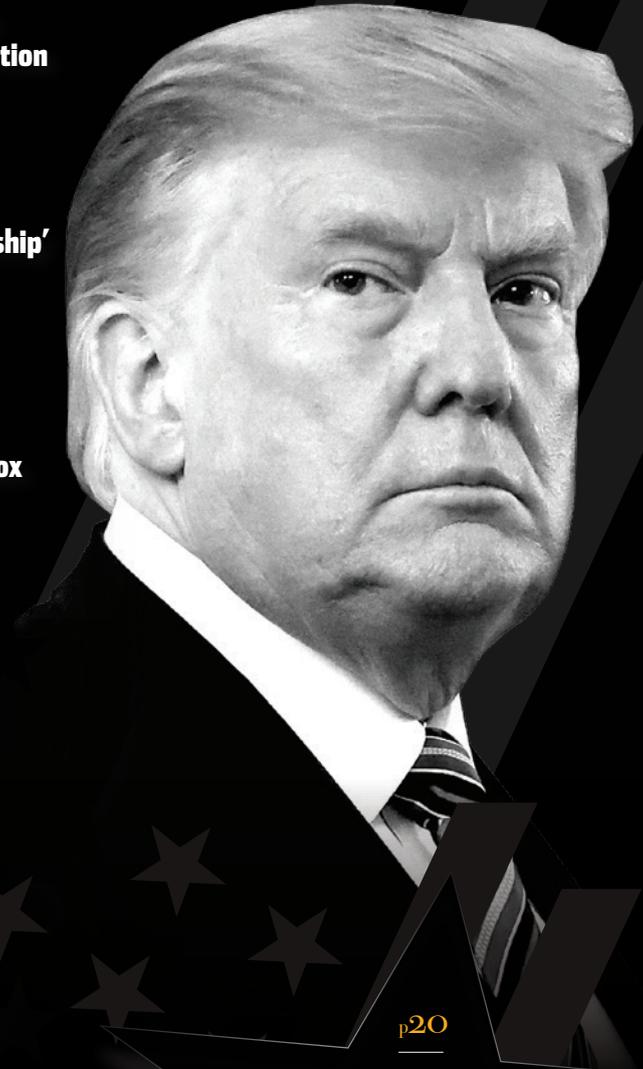
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**'VOTING  
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## ‘What Has Dick Nixon Done for Culpepper?’

Sixty years ago this October, a 13-car train pulled out of Union Station in Washington, D.C., headed south. It was the L.B.J. Special, named for its most important passenger, Lyndon B. Johnson, who was that year’s Democratic nominee for vice president of the United States. Facing what he thought would be a close race against the sitting vice president, Richard M. Nixon, Senator John F. Kennedy had chosen Johnson as his running mate in the hope that Johnson could add his native Texas to the Kennedy column and also help keep the Deep South in the Democratic fold.

Over the next five days, the L.B.J. Special made its way through the cities and towns of eight Southern states. In *The Passage of Power*, the fourth volume of his account of the years of Lyndon Johnson, Robert Caro describes the progress of the train in exquisite and highly entertaining detail. Senator Johnson designed the entire program for the trip himself, off the top of his head. Mr. Caro writes:

As the L.B.J. Special entered the outskirts of a town, its public-address system would be switched on, and over it would come the stirring strains of “The Yellow Rose of Texas.” Record player and engine would stop simultaneously, and a dark blue curtain that had been hung over the doorway onto the rear platform would be pulled aside, and the tall figure of Lyndon Johnson, waving a ten-gallon hat, would step through.

At each stop, Johnson was accompanied by the public officials of the town. After he delivered his stem-winder, the town’s officials would disperse into the crowd and start pressing the people to vote for Kennedy-Johnson. Just at that moment, the public officials from the next town on the itinerary would quietly enter the front of the train so the whole bit of theater could be enacted anew at the next station. Johnson’s speech at each stop was “shouted out,” writes Mr. Caro, “with the points he wanted to make delivered in a bellow, so that his voice was continually hoarse, and as he shouted, his arms flailed, and he would raise an arm—or two—high above his head, and jab a finger toward the sky.”

At a podium delivering a formal speech, Johnson was as stiff and awkward as Kennedy was smooth and distinguished. But on the stump, Johnson would come alive, like a giant, ravenous animal feeding on the energy of the people around him. He would become so excited, says Mr. Caro, that the townspeople could still hear him bellowing through the microphone as the train pulled away from the station. “Good-bye, Culpepper. Vote Democratic,” L.B.J. yelled as he left the small Virginia town. “What has Dick Nixon ever done for Culpepper?”

As a lifelong political junkie, I have a long list of places and events at which I would love to have been a fly on the wall. The journey of the L.B.J. Special nears the top of the list. This frenetic, passionate barnstorm through the backroads and hamlets of rural America was U.S. politics at its best. Sure, there were some tricks involved, some sleight of hand, as

well as partisan hyperbole and overly sentimental populist appeals. But that is also the sort of stuff that made the whole spectacle not just effective but entertaining.

It seems like a far cry from today. Politics seems anything but charming or entertaining now. In fact, it can be downright enervating. I’m sure at least some of you may have even let out a sigh when you saw this month’s issue was mostly about politics and the presidential election. What more could possibly be said about it?

As it turns out, there is something more to say, much of which has not been said; and you will find it in this issue. As always, you will agree with some of it, disagree with some of it; but I think you will find in all of it the intelligence and civility you expect from these pages. As always, please let us know what you think.

And don’t get me wrong. I do not have an overly romantic view of 1960, or 1952, or any other political campaign. Politics has always had its animosities, its backstabbing and cynicism. But like today, however hard it might be to see, politics has also always had noble men and women with noble aspirations.

But in the past, campaigns were also a lot of fun. It would do us no harm and might even help us a lot if we were to recover some of that sense of fun. For while I was born 12 years after the L.B.J. Special left the station, in a strange sort of way, I miss it.

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



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AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu

Firefighters walk in line during a wildfire in Yucaipa, Calif., Sept. 5. A brutal heat wave pushed temperatures into triple digits in many parts of the state.

Cover: Joseph R. Biden and President Donald Trump  
AP Photo/Brennan Linsley/CNS photo/Jonathan Ernst, Reuters

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## What are the most important issues of the presidential race?

**America** asked readers of its daily email newsletter to rank the issues important to them in the upcoming election and to explain their answers. Here is a curated selection of their responses.

If the coronavirus doesn't get controlled, none of the other issues will matter. There will be no way to get an education on all levels, race relations will be handled in the streets, no one will have adequate health care, etc. What matters the most to me is getting a president who understands the Constitution, his job and is a morally decent person.

**Nancy Hughey**

Wichita, Kan.

If we don't take care of reconciling the "Two Americas" through racial healing and addressing economic disparities, we will not survive as a nation nor have the will or resources to take on our other challenges.

**Charles Milteer**

Greenville, S.C.

One of the things I find most frustrating in national politics is the failure to recognize abortion's interconnectedness with other issues. I believe that it is more important to eliminate abortion than to ban it, but in the zeal to make it illegal, we have abdicated responsibility for the reform and renewal of our health care system (or access to health care). I'm tired of the false dichotomies that plague the Catholic vote.

**Tracy Keeter**

Broken Arrow, Okla.

There is no greater violence than abortion. To me, it is astounding that many seem to miss the connection between the violence of abortion and all the other violence that prevails in our world. If we are to become a nonviolent people, we cannot succeed by trying to wipe out violence in some areas and accepting it in others.

**Jan Sullivan**

Allegany, N.Y.

I indicated that abortion is "very important"; and because of that I will be looking at policies that not only protect the unborn but reduce the need to even consider abortion. These include immigration, poverty, health care, paid parental

### The Five Most Important Issues in the 2020 election, as ranked by respondents:

1. Response to the coronavirus pandemic
2. Health care
3. Race relations
4. Respect for democratic norms and institutions
5. Immigration

leave, race relations, sexual assault and treatment of women.

**Katie Herzing**

Charlotte, N.C.

Without keeping the democratic norms, getting rid of corruption and equal rights for all, we risk becoming one of the many other nondemocratic struggling world entities.

**Jenni Roeber**

Montrose, Colo.

I feel that the rampant corruption in the Trump administration and Donald Trump's aberrant personality pose real and present existential threats to our democracy. His defeat in November is critical for the renewal of respect and trust between parties and for the healing of this nation. Sadly, these goals will undoubtedly take time to achieve. No doubt, Trump certainly ripped the scab off some truly ugly facets of our society that had been kept in check by a sense of propriety, social pressure and a relatively shared national moral compass. Under Trump, however, propriety flew out the window with his name-calling, followed by his abject cruelty, overt racism, xenophobia and misogyny.

**Cynthia Poire Mathews**

Campton, N.H.

Race relations is high on my list because it includes the distribution of wealth in the country along with gun control, prison reform and the issue of the treatment of immigrants. It is one central issue that influences a number of other controversial issues as well.

**Anne Bracchi**

Lady Lake, Fla.

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## No Ordinary Time

American Catholics are again asking whether they can, in good conscience, vote for a political candidate who supports public policies in matters of life and death that are antithetical to Catholic teaching. The answer is not obvious. Both political parties support policies that offend the Catholic conscience, including widespread support for abortion on demand among Democrats and consistent support for the death penalty among Republicans. The two parties also have wholly different views of immigration, entrenched racism and economic justice. The fact that these issues involve different moral goods does not diminish their moral force and gravity, for each makes a compelling claim on the conscience and discernment of the Catholic voter.

Yet while the right choice is not obvious, neither is it unknowable. The bishops of the United States have asked American Catholics to evaluate the moral issues at stake and the character and integrity of the candidates themselves, as well as what they are likely to achieve in office, and then to cast their votes in light of the principles of Catholic teaching and the dictates of their well-formed consciences. We can, therefore, dispense with the specious claim that a Catholic is in some way obligated to vote one way or another.

In ordinary times, this debate about Catholics and presidential candidates can be a healthy and spirited exchange about how Catholics should approach their civic duties in light of their deeply held beliefs. But this is no ordinary time. Our discernment, moreover, pertains not only to our beliefs as Catholics but to our duties as citizens. **America** magazine has always sought to balance those religious and civic duties. Since 1909, **America** has covered

27 presidential elections, including 19 of the 44 men who have served in that office. **America's** commentary was not always right, accurate or prescient, but it was always guided by two overriding concerns: the moral character of political decisions in light of Catholic principles and the necessity of preserving the American constitutional order.

The first concern is an obvious one for a religious journal of opinion. The second is more specific to the history of the American Catholic community. For our forebears, the U.S. Constitution was a vital bulwark against the kinds of political and economic oppression that prompted millions of them to flee their homelands. The liberty and protection that the Constitution guarantees are still a primary motivation for the majority of the nation's immigrants.

The Constitution itself is inspired by a theological worldview. Our founders believed that they were creating a form of government for a fallen world. Their true genius lay in how they accounted for the human predilection toward sin and division by creating a strict separation of powers that, paradoxically, would serve to unify the country and guard it against would-be tyrants and demagogues.

In time, a system of extra-legal conventions took hold to further the founders' vision, including respect for the rule of law, a vibrant, free press and civilian control of the military. Yet as important as those safeguards were and remain, the constitutional order is ultimately dependent on the character and judgment of our elected officials.

The administration of Donald J. Trump has undermined the constitutional order to a degree unprecedented in modern American history, which prompts the editors of this review to register this unprecedented warning.

The principal concern here is not with Mr. Trump's positions on various public policies, some of which are right and some of which are wrong, but with the president's disregard for the system of laws and customs that establish the necessary conditions for debate, decision-making and public accountability in this republic.

Mr. Trump has subverted the rule of law by politicizing the Justice Department and interfering in its deliberations and investigations in novel ways. Mr. Trump has also fired inspectors general across the government, those whose only job is to uncover wrongdoing. The president has repeatedly attacked the press, declaring them to be the "enemy of the people." He has also disparaged the courage and sacrifice of the men and women of America's armed forces; his eagerness to use troops domestically prompted military leaders to issue an unprecedented reminder that men and women in uniform owe their ultimate allegiance to the Constitution and not the president. Mr. Trump has also used the White House as a partisan stage, which is contrary to the spirit and probably the letter of federal law. He has flouted constitutional norms, including the requirement of Senate confirmation for his cabinet members and other executive officials, by granting power to "acting" department heads for months at a time, saying it gives him "greater flexibility." Without any compelling evidence, the president has also consistently cast doubt on the integrity of the electoral process itself and has declined to state that he will abide by the judgment of the electorate. At the same time, in spite of the overwhelming evidence, Mr. Trump has downplayed attempts by foreign powers to interfere in American elections.

This pattern of presidential be-

havior is unique in American history. No doubt many of the men who have occupied the White House have at times skirted or shortchanged constitutional principles. But there is a difference between those presidents of both parties who at times tested or bent the boundaries of constitutional action in pursuit of their self-interest, and Mr. Trump, who time after time has demonstrated that his framework for decisions is merely transactional and that he has little regard for constitutional norms or the common good.

To be sure, the editors of this review have important disagreements with the Democratic nominee, Mr. Biden. He has shown himself too willing to heed the demands of the extremists in his party, like when he abandoned his long-standing support for the Hyde Amendment, the federal law that limits public funds for abortions. There is also Mr. Biden's uneven judgment in foreign affairs and his support for the Obama administration's misguided position on questions of religious liberty. Parts of the record of Mr. Biden's running mate, Ms. Harris, also concern us, like comments she made during congressional hearings last year that appear to be anti-Catholic.

Like many Catholics, for more than 40 years, **America** has consistently opposed the verdict rendered in *Roe v. Wade*. **America** still does. In ordinary times, the left's increasingly extreme position on that issue might suffice for some Catholics to determine in conscience that they must vote against the Democratic ticket.

In the election of 2020, however, Catholics face the unfortunate reality that the ostensibly pro-life presidential candidate also represents a proven threat to the constitutional order. That threat is real. As President Gerald R. Ford said upon assuming office during a moment of constitutional peril, "Our great republic is a government of laws and not of men." That means that the rule of law, the work of a vital free press, constitutional use of the military and a basic, operative respect for the separation of powers are not optional. For without those safeguards, this country will devolve into prolonged factional conflict—the outcome our founders feared most—which would mark the beginning of the end of a republican form of government.

# America | MEDIA

A JESUIT MINISTRY

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## Cities get our attention, but rural America has many of the same challenges

Walking into the corner store to grab a coffee, you pass two Sudanese women sitting on a bench, arguing about when the pandemic might finally be over. Inside, you grab a Coke and a bag of *chicharrones*, and the Salvadoran clerk rings you up. As you chat, you learn that he is worried about his daughter going back to public school in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, but his family cannot afford another computer for her at home; and their internet is bad anyway. Outside, a road repair truck pulls up; a gaggle of white and Hispanic workers jump out in bright green vests; they grab some Gatorade and smoke cigarettes.

This scene is not at a bodega in the Bronx. It is at a gas station in Marshalltown, a city of about 28,000 in central Iowa, where agricultural work, meat processing and refugee resettlement are making for an increasingly diverse population. Despite the deepening urban-rural divide in U.S. politics (in 2016, Donald Trump got less than 10 percent of the vote in Manhattan and Washington, D.C., but more than 80 percent in hundreds of counties across the Farm Belt), Marshalltown and many small communities like it are facing challenges not so different from those faced in big cities.

One in five residents of rural counties in the United States is a person of color. Most rural counties have been declining in population over the past decade; the exceptions (scattered throughout the states, including Iowa, Kansas and Oklahoma) have generally seen significant increases in their foreign-born populations. While the white rural population continues to decline, Hispanic and American Indian populations in these areas are growing.

Longstanding problems of poverty, drug addiction, inadequate funding for local governments and a lack of access to medical care precede recent demographic changes, and they affect rural residents of all races. The share of the population in completely rural counties without health insurance remains higher, at 12.3 percent, than in mostly urban counties (10.1 percent). Rural Americans also suffer from high rates of lung disease, hypertension and diabetes. And just as there are “food deserts” in Detroit and Oakland, five million rural Americans live more than 10 miles from a full-service grocery store.

Many rural areas in the United States have also been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in areas around meatpacking plants in the Midwest; and many rural counties, like Marshall County, Iowa, where Marshalltown is located, have higher rates of infection than does New York City.

Pope Francis asks us to “go to the margins” to preach the Gospel. In that spirit, we must all remember the places that are literally remote from the centers of power, the places that are often out of sight and out of mind for the decision-makers in a few large cities.

Many rural communities have already shown solidarity with Americans in urban centers. For example, amid the protests over the killing of George Floyd that swept U.S. cities early this summer, something remarkable happened. People crowded into town greens across the United States to protest racism and listen to their Black neighbors share their stories. In Spencer, Iowa, hundreds of people gathered to pray and to march.

Our political divisions can provide excuses for dismissing the concerns of people in “red” or “blue” states, but

our faith cannot allow us to give in to polarization. The growing racial diversity of rural areas reminds us that perception can lag behind reality, but all of us should have been paying attention to the challenges facing rural America all along.

In today’s world, the effects of sin are seen in the divisions between rich and poor; between races; and, increasingly, between city and country. But the Gospel tells us that an affront to justice anywhere is an affront to it everywhere.

Most people in the rural United States, whether they live in their hometowns or have moved from cities to start new lives, want to be able to take care of their families and loved ones. They want to be a part of a healthy community, and they want to share a good life together. That is not so different from what folks want in Boston, Houston or Chicago.

We must challenge the divisions in our nation that the powerful exploit for their own gain and instead speak to one another across barriers, not only during an election season but throughout our lives. The growing diversity of rural America is a reminder that, city or country, we have a shared future, and making that future equitable and just means replacing separation with solidarity.

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*Nathan Beacom writes from Fremont, Neb. His writing has previously appeared in *The Public Discourse* and *The Des Moines Register*.*

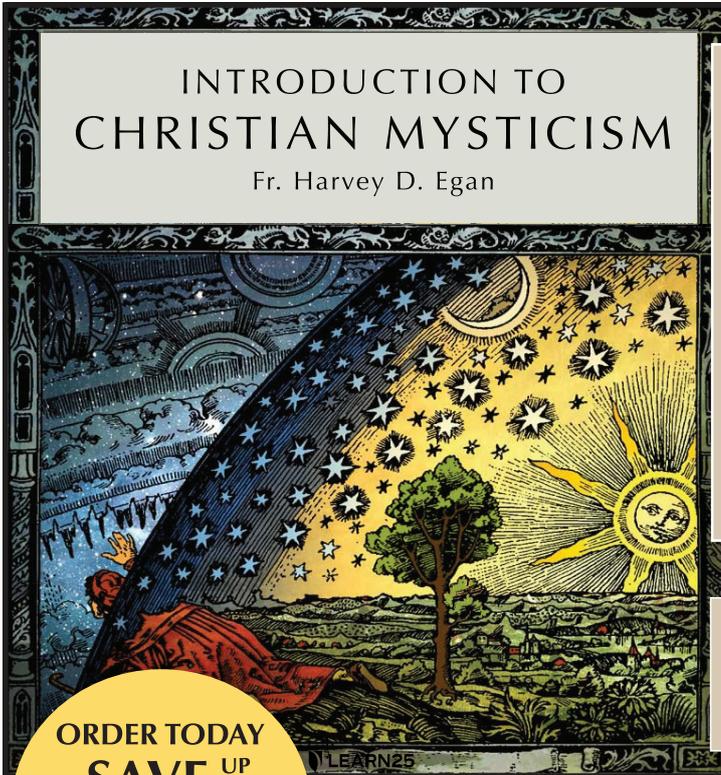
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## Catholics poised to decide whether Trump gets a second term

For those who follow Catholics on social media, it can almost seem as if this year's presidential election were a mere proxy for a debate over the direction of the church. That is, Catholic voters are not deciding between Donald J. Trump or Joseph R. Biden Jr.; instead, they are signaling their feelings about Pope Francis or the traditional Latin Mass, with the governance of the United States a secondary concern. But U.S. Catholic voters may indeed be instrumental in determining whether Mr. Trump gets a second term in the White House, with far-reaching implications for how the country responds to both current crises and what have seemed to be intractable problems.

Both major-party candidates are making a specific pitch to Catholic voters. Mr. Biden, the Democratic Party nominee for president, made frequent references to his Catholic faith during his party's virtual convention, and in early September launched a Catholics for Biden initiative with faith and political leaders. Among those speaking at

the kick-off event was Simone Campbell, S.S.S., the executive director of the social justice lobbying group Network, who also offered a prayer during the final night of the Democratic convention in late August.

Mr. Biden has faced attacks about how he squares his Catholic faith with his support for abortion rights, including from some bishops and priests. At the Republican National Convention, also in August, Lou Holtz, a former football coach at the University of Notre Dame, said Mr. Biden is "Catholic in name only," drawing a rebuke from the university. And the website Catholics for Trump, an outreach effort by the president, is promising that a Republican victory will bring "continued victories in pro-life issues, judicial appointments, and religious freedom."

Mr. Trump has also appealed to Catholic voters by sharing a letter of support from Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, the former papal nuncio to the United States and a critic of Pope Francis, and by making a high-profile vis-



CNS composite/photos by Carlos Barria, Reuters, Kevin Lamarque, Reuters

President Donald Trump and Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden are seen during their respective 2020 nominating conventions.

it to the Saint John Paul II National Shrine in early June, the day after police broke up a protest outside the White House against racism and police misconduct. Mr. Biden also found a way to invoke St. John Paul II, saying in a campaign commercial, “Donald Trump is determined to instill fear in America... I believe we’ll be guided by the words of Pope John Paul II, words drawn from the Scriptures: ‘Be not afraid. Be not afraid.’”

Mr. Trump’s “law and order” campaign this year is reminiscent of Richard Nixon’s successful strategy to win the White House for Republicans in 1968, another year of racial violence and civil unrest. But the country has changed dramatically since then. Ronald Brownstein of *The Atlantic* calculates that white non-Hispanic voters without college degrees made up almost 80 percent of all voters in 1968; that percentage is expected to represent about 42 percent of voters this year. Similarly, about 85 percent of U.S. adults

identified as white Christians in 1968, and that group is expected to cast about 42 percent of the vote in the 2020 election, thanks in large part to the sharp increase in the number of adults who do not identify with any religion at all.

Another change over the past 50 years is that the Catholic vote in the United States has become something of a bellwether for the overall vote, as the Democrats have lost their dominance over the voting bloc that was so enthusiastic for the candidacy of John F. Kennedy in 1960. In 2016, Catholics as a whole tracked pretty closely with the national popular vote, and the same has been true of Mr. Trump’s approval ratings. A poll conducted by the Pew Research Center in June found that 41 percent of U.S. Catholic adults had a favorable view of Mr. Trump’s job performance, not far from the 39 percent approval among all adults.

This and other polls put Catholics somewhere between

the white evangelical Protestants who form the bedrock of Mr. Trump’s support (72 percent approved of his performance as president in that poll) and those who do not claim affiliation with any church (24 percent approval for Mr. Trump). And Mr. Biden may get more of a hearing among fellow Catholic voters. An August Public Religion Research Institute poll found that 66 percent of white Catholics had a favorable view of Mr. Biden (there was no data for Hispanic Catholics), compared with only 26 percent of white evangelical Protestants.

Besides the fact that U.S. Catholics are not clustered at any partisan or ideological extreme, they are also important for being so numerous in the handful of “swing states” that will determine the election. The Religious Landscape Study, last conducted in 2014, estimated that 20.8 percent of the U.S. population is Catholic, but that number is closer to 25 percent in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin—two of the three states, along with Michigan, that put Mr. Trump over the top in the Electoral College in 2016. Of all the competitive states in 2020, Catholics make up less than 10 percent of the population in only Georgia and North Carolina.

Its size and wide distribution underscore the importance of the Catholic vote, but there have also been noticeable divisions within the U.S. Catholic population, with 54 percent of non-Hispanic white Catholics giving Mr. Trump favorable marks in the June poll, compared with 23 percent of Hispanic Catholics. That split is important because the electorate constantly changes, and the growing Hispanic population may put a new spin on the Catholic vote, either this year or in the future.

This split also shows up in attitudes about Mr. Trump’s signature issue, immigration. A survey conducted by P.R.R.I. in 2019 found that 68 percent of white Catholics favored “restrictive” immigration policies, noticeably higher than the 56 percent who held that view among all U.S. voters but below the 85 percent of white evangelical Protestants who agreed. By contrast, 39 percent of Hispanic Catholics favored immigration restrictions. (Curiously, among Hispanic Protestants, 53 percent favored immigration restrictions.)

There also appear to be political differences between Catholics who regularly attend Mass and those who may be considered “cultural” Catholics. In another Pew study, using survey data from 2017 to 2019, white U.S. Catholics

said they identified with the Republican Party rather than the Democrats, by 57 percent to 38 percent. (In 1994, there was an even split, 45 to 45).

But the Republican share was 60 percent among Catholics who said they attended Mass at least monthly and 51 percent among Catholics who said they attended less often. In a recent NBC News poll of likely voters in Pennsylvania, 69 percent of self-identified “practicing” white Catholics indicated support for Mr. Trump, while 60 percent of non-practicing white Catholics said they would vote for Mr. Biden.

The size and breadth of the Catholic vote means that it is certain to figure in the history of how Mr. Trump wins, or fails to win, a second term. And in a close race, the precise differences between Catholic groups—white versus Hispanic, regular versus occasional churchgoer—may determine the winner.

Robert David Sullivan, *senior editor*.  
Twitter: @robertdsullivan.

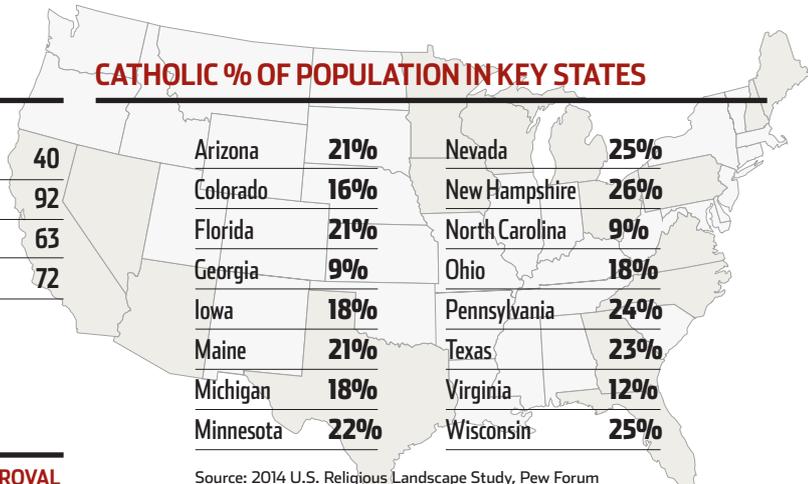
Additional reporting by Michael J. O’Loughlin.

### TRUMP VS. BIDEN, BY RELIGIOUS GROUP

All U.S. adults	45	53	White mainline Protestant	59	40
White Catholic	59	40	Black Protestant	5	92
Hispanic Catholic	33	65	Jewish	37	63
White evangelical Protestant	83	16	Unaffiliated	26	72

Source: Pew Research Center poll of U.S. adults, conducted July 27-Aug. 2, 2020, with detailed tables.

### CATHOLIC % OF POPULATION IN KEY STATES



Source: 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study, Pew Forum

### TRUMP JOB APPROVAL

	APPROVAL	DISAPPROVAL
All U.S. adults	39	59
White Catholic	54	45
Hispanic Catholic	23	74
White evangelical Protestant	72	25
White mainline Protestant	56	41
Black Protestant	12	83
Unaffiliated	24	74

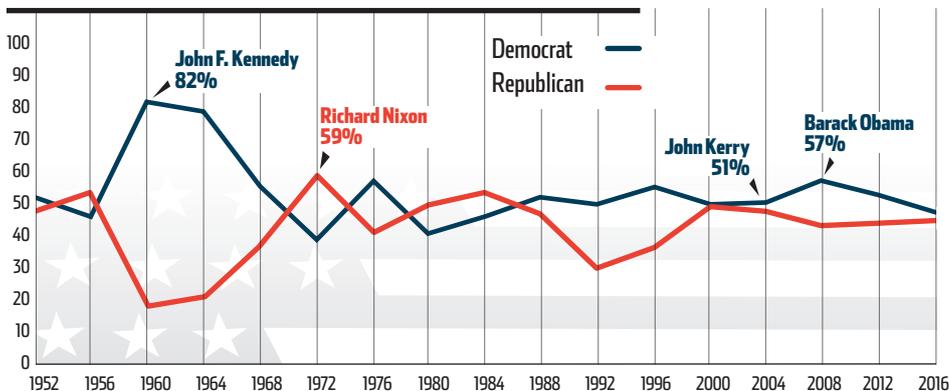
Source: Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults conducted in June 2020

### CATHOLIC VOTERS AND ABORTION

Which of the following comes closest to your view regarding abortion? (EWTN/RealClear poll of Catholic registered voters, January 2020)

It should always be legal	20%
It should be legal, except in the case of late-term abortion	31%
It should be illegal, except for rape, incest or to save the mother’s life	33%
It should always be illegal	11%
Don’t know	5%

### CATHOLIC VOTE IN PAST PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS



Source: National Election Studies (based on post-election surveys), as tabulated by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA).

### WHITE VOTERS AND POLICE BIAS

Percentage who say recent police killings of unarmed Black men are “isolated incidents” rather than evidence of systemic racism

All U.S. adults	42%
White Catholics	56%
White evangelical Protestants	72%
White mainline Protestants	53%
White unaffiliated	30%

Source: Public Religion Research Institute poll conducted in June 2020.



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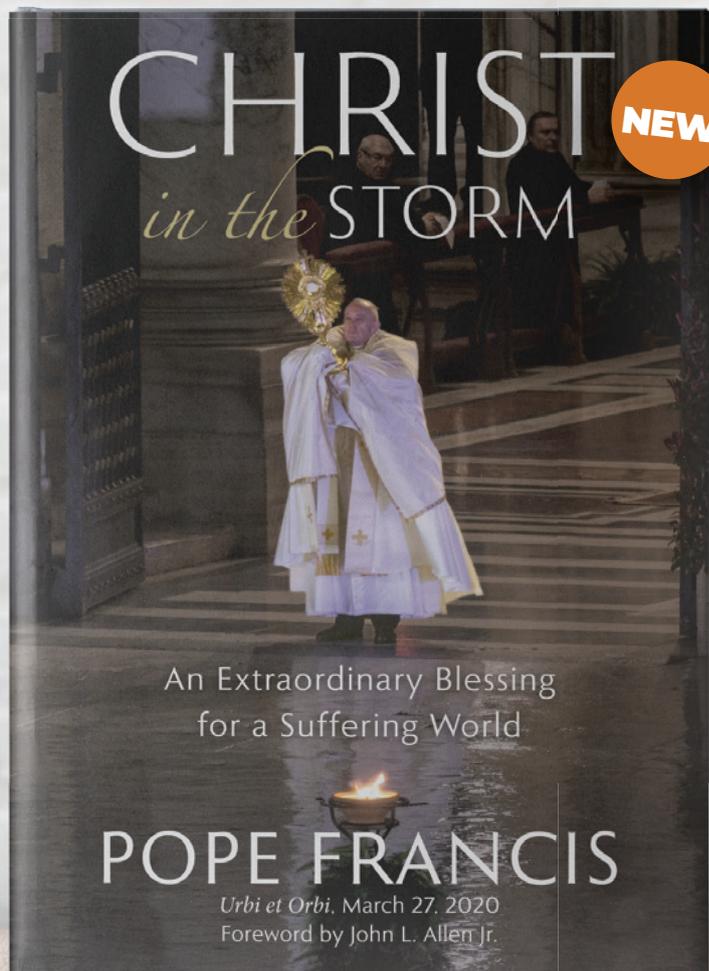
"One way to read modern history is as a story of capitalist enchantment and a theology of money." — Eugene McCarragher (2020)



Eugene McCarragher is an Associate Professor of Humanities and history at Villanova University. His work has appeared in *Commonweal*, *Dissent*, *The Nation*, *The Hedgehog Review* and *Raritan*. His latest book is *The Enchantments of Mammon: How Capitalism Became the Religion of Modernity* (Harvard, 2019).



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—Mark 4:40

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## A 'paschal death' for Canada's Scarborough missionaries

Ron MacDonnell, a Scarborough missionary priest, leads a workshop in St. Ignatius, Guyana, in July 2019.

The Scarborough Foreign Mission Society, aging and declining in membership like many other religious communities in Canada, is preparing for its end. Founded in 1918 with a focus on China, the society trained hundreds of ordained and lay missionaries. Their work eventually spread across the globe to 19 countries. Scarborough missionaries are known for living the Gospel and contributing powerfully to social justice efforts in some of the most impoverished regions of the world.

In 2017, however, the society told its supporters that with few applications and facing challenges as members grew older, it would no longer accept lay or priest candidates for missions.

Yet while they are going through this profound change, Canada's Scarborough priests still have plenty of life left in them and they plan to continue their work for justice, bringing all their experience to bear on their efforts. "I don't see the decline in membership or candidates coming forward as a reflection on us," said Jack Lynch, S.F.M., the superior general. "It's a call in the spirit to move us on to something else."

But what happens when a missionary priest retires? For many Scarborough priests, retirement will mean coming back to Canada after years immersed in a different culture on another continent.

"There's a variety of experiences," said Father Lynch. "Some find it very difficult to readjust to a culture they thought they knew. When they come home, the changes are so dramatic and radical that they have to really go through another enculturation process."

For some Scarborough priests, however, retirement does not mean choosing between Canada and their adopted homes. "I could see a both/and, snowbirding in the Amazon," said Ron MacDonnell, S.F.M., at 62 still abroad in the Diocese of Roraima in Brazil. "Many Canadians will go to Florida and sit around shopping malls," he said. "Why not

come to Brazil?"

Regardless of where the Scarborough priests finally end up, the end of the society will be a profound loss for Canadian Catholicism, according to Michael Attridge, a professor at the University of St. Michael's College in Toronto. "There are far more religious communities in Quebec, but in Upper Canada [the region that preceded modern-day Ontario], where Catholicism was a minority, it's the loss of one of the very few religious communities that are indigenous to that area," he said. "To me, that's significant for the history of social Catholicism in Upper Canada and Ontario."

"It's also a loss of a presence that worked for social justice, that was dedicated to social justice," Mr. Attridge said. As communities like the Scarborough Missions decline, Mr. Attridge thinks that Canadian Catholicism is entering "a period where the laity will need to find ways of continuing that legacy, to respect, preserve and promote the work that the Scarborough Foreign Missions has done."

As a Christian, said Mr. Attridge, he has hope that the Holy Spirit will guide the church through this transition. "Although we lament the loss, we see all sorts of signs of hope for the future."

Father Lynch also remains hopeful. He described the decline of the society as a "paschal death."

"We're invited to live, completely, the Gospel experience," he said. "Somehow, we're midwives, we're invited to give birth to something new. That involves letting go. It involves dying, being open to something new. I don't know exactly what that is, but I trust in God working in history, and I trust in people. I'm not concerned."

Dean Dettloff, *Toronto correspondent.*  
Twitter: @Deandettloff.



## Covid-19 contributes to uptick in sex trafficking in Latin America

The trafficking of women in Latin America has increased alongside the Covid-19 pandemic, according to church activists who support victims of sexual and labor exploitation in the region.

“The economic crisis left many women without any income. Poverty, confinement and amplified violence generated a situation of more vulnerability for them,” said Carmen Ugarte García, an oblate sister and coordinator of Red Rahamim, a Mexican network of religious people who support trafficking victims and work to prevent it.

Reporting trafficking and abuse “has always been something hard and scary for those women,” Sister Ugarte said. “Now it’s even more difficult, given that throughout the continent the police and the courts are much more inaccessible, with the imposition of social distancing measures,” she said.

“Many women are homeless, so they have to prostitute themselves to pay the rent. Others are forced by their own husbands to do so—something that has increased during the Covid-19 crisis,” she said.

In Mexican coastal tourist destinations, Sister Ugarte reported, there has been a sharp climb in violence against women. At the same time, the confinement brought about by the pandemic boosted digital forms of recruiting and abuse of teenagers and young women.

“We received several reports concerning fake model-

ing agencies that required the girls to expose themselves through a webcam,” Sister Ugarte said. After recording young women in a compromising state, traffickers pressure victims to give in to their demands.

That situation led Colombian Catholic activists to adapt their response, said Gisell Rivera Melo, a member of the Defenders of Lives network, an initiative of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent De Paul against trafficking.

“The demand for webcam pornography allegedly grew by 30 percent with the pandemic,” she said. “Reports on sexual exploitation related to that industry abound. So we had to increase our presence on the internet in order to work on prevention.”

Immigrants and refugees are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking, abuse and exploitation. According to Sister Ugarte, Venezuelan women, as they flee their own country, are being forced into prostitution throughout Latin America.

In El Salvador, criminal gangs frequently exploit undocumented immigrants and Salvadoran women who have been deported from Mexico and the United States, according to Carmela Gibaja, a member of the congregation of the Sisters of the Guardian Angel, who works against human trafficking.

“Little can be done now with the quarantine. But we’ve been trying to act in the marginalized communities where we’re present,” she said.



CNS photo/Mamuel Rueda

Luisiana Cordoba, a Venezuelan migrant, organizes her belongings in Gachancipa, Colombia, on June 28, trying to make her way back to Venezuela with her three children after losing her job in Ecuador.

“Since the Covid-19 emergency began, at least 100 teenagers have been abandoned at the Friendship Bridge,” which connects Paraguay and Brazil, María Julia Villalba, a sister with the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, told **America**. Most of the teenagers had been taken to São Paulo, the largest city in Brazil, to work in the textile industry.

“We have given refuge to 12-year-old girls who worked from 6 in the morning to 11 in the night and were also sexually abused in Brazil,” said Sister Villalba, whose congregation runs a shelter in Asunción, Paraguay, for girls who were victims of human trafficking.

In São Paulo, Sister Elizângela Matos dos Santos coordinates the Marginalized Women Pastoral Commission. She said that the economic crisis has made many women desperate.

They end up accepting phony job proposals that involve moving to other Latin American countries. “They often don’t recognize a dangerous situation,” she said. “I try to warn them of the risks, but they tell me: ‘My life is worse here.’ Many women are being trafficked to Peru, Bolivia and Mexico.”

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Eduardo Campos Lima contributes from São Paulo, Brazil.



Rodion Kutsaev/Unsplash

## GOODNEWS: Catholic ‘Shark Tank’ invests in evangelical innovation

For most people, words like innovation and creativity provoke images of scrappy programmers toiling in a Silicon Valley garage, artists breaking boundaries or scientists pioneering tomorrow’s discoveries. The words are less likely to bring to mind people laboring on the front lines of Catholic evangelization. But for participants at the OSV Innovation Challenge’s virtual Demo Day in August, innovation and creativity are defining characteristics of what it means to be Catholic.

Jason Shanks, the president of the OSV Institute—the corporate giving arm of the Catholic publisher Our Sunday Visitor and sponsor of the challenge—said the competition emerged out of a concern that “we sort of lost the Catholic sense of what it means to innovate.”

The OSV Innovation Challenge accepted over 350 entrepreneur-applicants in August 2019. Twelve finalists were eventually selected to participate in a customized accelerator program at the University of Notre Dame’s IDEA Center for 10 weeks before making their pitches.

Demo Day began with a prayer and continued with pre-recorded pitches as well as live introductions and Q&A sessions. Like viewing an episode of “Shark Tank,” it was striking to watch over Zoom as someone’s life changed in real time. That afternoon, three Catholic businesses each walked away with a \$100,000 prize.

Catholic Sprouts aims to support Catholic parents in faithfully raising their children and plans to launch an app called the Domestic Church Project in September. Eden Invitation seeks to reconnect Catholic members of the L.G.B.T. community with their faith and the church. Finally, the Juan Diego Network hosts over 30 podcasts to address the lack of professionally produced Catholic content for the Latino community.

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Erika Rasmussen, Joseph A. O’Hare Media Fellow.  
Twitter: @erika\_razz.

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Missionaries of Charity sisters during an ordination Mass at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Tenn., on June 13

# WHO WILL SAVE THE CHURCH?

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*Religious orders and the legacy of healing*

By Rachel Lu

CNS photo/Karen Puffer Focht



The Church of San Damiano would be a strong choice for the cover of a “Churches of Italy” calendar. It sits at the outskirts of the little town of Assisi, perfectly framed from behind by the rolling Umbrian hills. In front, farmland opens out like a patchwork quilt. It hosts a steady stream of pilgrims, but somehow the place still feels peaceful, untouched by time.

According to legend, this chapel was in serious disrepair eight centuries ago when Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone, a local delinquent, came to the altar seeking insight. Kneeling before the crucifix, he was told in a vision to “rebuild my church, which as you see, is falling down.” He threw himself wholehearted-

ly into the work of repairing the chapel, only to realize that his true call extended far beyond stones and mortar. Known today as St. Francis of Assisi, he is recognized as one of the greatest of Christian reformers.

I visited San Damiano nearly two decades ago, amid my own personal turmoil. I was not Catholic at the time. I wanted to be. Conversion would only be possible if I first laid aside the Mormon faith, which was shared by my entire extended family, most of our friends and four generations’ worth of ancestors. I felt a real kinship with St. Francis (who also had some family problems), and my brain seemed to be on fire that day in Assisi as I wrestled with questions about



# In periods of relative anarchy, the benefits of maintaining some vestige of ordered community can be immense.



tradition, revelation, grace, piety, divine justice and eternal truth. Strolling up to San Damiano, an odd thought popped unbidden into my mind. “Wouldn’t this church look rather charming, actually, as a ruin?”

It was a deeply ironic moment, for reasons I could not appreciate at the time. Converts enjoy some strange privileges, and this is one: We may actually remember a time when the church appeared to us to be neither more nor less than the Bride of Christ, without spot or blemish. To my pre-Catholic self, Rome looked like a safe haven, a shining city and a beckoning adventure all rolled into one. That vision powered me over the Tiber, but almost the very day that I donned my neophyte’s white garment after my baptism, I had to confront a new battery of difficult questions. What does it mean to live an ancient faith in a modern world? From afar, the situation seems good. The church has more than a billion members and a treasure trove of philosophical and spiritual resources. After settling into the Catholic life, though, converts may look around and start to wonder: “Isn’t this place falling down a bit?”

All practicing Catholics have wrestled with these questions. Are there any among us who have not felt the sting of shame, seeing the ineptitude, corruption and sinful weakness of so many of our figureheads and authority figures? Nearly all of us have at one time or another experienced bitter disappointment, when hopes were raised by a particular event or leader, only to be dashed again. However much we yearn for renewal, it seems as though the pews become more empty, fresh scandals keep emerging, and our communities remain intractably divided by the same stale debates. Where is our St. Francis? Who will repair this church?

It is some comfort to recall that Catholics have already survived many difficult periods like our own. Sometimes our institutions flounder, and it seems as though the bride of Christ has completely lost her way. Eventually, she finds it again, in God’s time and often in surprising ways. When this happens, it is a tremendous blessing, not only for the Catholic faithful but for the entire world. In deep and important ways, the church’s problems are truly the world’s

and vice-versa. To renew our own communities, we must return to our Gilead, the living waters of Christ. In time, we may find there a balm that can heal our suffering brothers and sisters.

All Catholics should contribute to this effort as we can, but in our eagerness to reform our hierarchy and empower the laity, we sometimes forget that Catholicism has its own particular path to renewal. In many cases, the catalyst for Catholic renewal is found not in the corrupt hierarchy nor the laity but in religious orders. This could very well happen again. Religious orders have often been God’s hands and limbs on this earth, especially in times of great spiritual need.

At first glance, this suggestion might seem bizarre and fanciful. To modern people, few things scream “out of touch” like a cassock or religious habit. Looking across history though, we can see religious communities rising to the occasion again and again when spiritual entrepreneurs were especially needed. Occupying a special place both within and outside mainstream life, the vowed religious have historically shown a special ability to diagnose and treat the particular maladies of each age. They have brought food to the hungry, knowledge to the ignorant and hope to those who were mired in despair. There is no human need that they have not at one time or another worked assiduously to fill. We owe them a great deal already, but in a demoralized age, we seem to need them as much as ever.

## **The Rule of St. Benedict**

Christians have formed communities since the earliest days of the church, but until the time of St. Benedict, they generally did not identify specifically as religious orders. In the first centuries after Christ, Christians nourished their faith with the blood of martyrs. After Rome embraced Christianity, desert hermits and radical ascetics filled a similar role, fostering a rich mystical tradition while reminding the faithful of the transformative nature of Christ’s call. Some early Christians continued living together in isolated communities in the desert or the wilderness even after their lifestyle received official recognition.

Still, the world was in flux when St. Benedict of Nursia stepped onto the scene in the sixth century. The Roman Empire was collapsing and with it the peace and stability that had anchored Western Christianity for the previous



CNS photo/Rick Musacchio, Tennessee Register

two centuries. Benedict himself was educated in the Roman style, but he chose to lay aside secular achievements in favor of a solitary, ascetic life. His holiness and luminous personality drew other men to his doorstep, and in time he accepted that he was not called to the life of a hermit. His talents would be used in another way: to lay the foundation for communal, monastic life.

*The Rule of St. Benedict* makes for fairly dull reading, but set in the context of history, we can see that it was truly an inspired work. It strikes a masterful balance between discipline and compassion, between holiness and practicality. It is specific enough to give meaningful direction to community life but still general enough that people from many different regions, classes and backgrounds were able to

use it. It is also remarkably succinct. A modern-day paperback can easily print the entire rule in under 100 pages.

These guidelines would prove invaluable for small communities of Christians who, in the centuries to come, would work assiduously to build and maintain a unique way of life that society at large could not have sustained. Benedictines lived in community, embracing an ethic of work and prayer that enabled them to endure when so much else in their world was collapsing. Fifteen centuries later, their founder is widely credited with preserving Christian culture across those chaotic centuries. In popular imagination, the early monasteries are remembered as oases of peace and stability, where important texts and customs were preserved from the ravages of a changing world.

Sister Maria Cecilia Neil, right, embraces another member of the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia on July 24, 2018, at the Cathedral of the Incarnation in Nashville, Tenn., where 10 members of their congregation made their final profession of vows.



## St. Francis attracted followers through the sheer force of his personality.

As romantic narratives go, this one is reasonably accurate. Without the Benedictines, our cultural memory would be greatly impoverished. It would be unjust, however, to view the monasteries as little more than cultural storage facilities, where Benedictine monks saved civilization by hiding from it. Monasteries served their own societies in many important ways. They offered hospitality to travelers in need of safe lodging. They made great advances in agriculture, viticulture and cheese-making. They domesticated animals, kept beehives and made important discoveries as inventors, architects and metallurgists.

In periods of relative anarchy, the benefits of maintaining some vestige of ordered community can be immense. There is no particular reason to think that St. Benedict saw this as his mission. He was focused primarily on the needs of the monks themselves. But in addressing their needs with such wisdom and discernment, he managed to concoct a kind of recipe that fed countless hungry souls and stomachs across the troubled centuries.

For all their tremendous achievements, however, the Benedictines had an Achilles heel. They were too prosperous. Even for those who have left the world, hard work and discipline can yield great worldly benefits. By the 11th and 12th centuries, Europe was pulling itself back together, and the Benedictines had become accustomed to a level of comfort that bred corruption and insularity. Across Europe, cities were growing and expanding, and with them came the challenges of urban poverty, civic unrest and a rising demand for education. The Benedictines, settled in their monasteries, were ill-equipped to address these concerns. By the 13th century, the world was ready for a new kind of religious order. It was ready for St. Francis and St. Dominic, founders of the mendicant orders.

### The Mendicant Path

In many ways, the early Dominicans seemed like mirror opposites of their Benedictine forerunners. Benedictines were drawn to rural areas, while Dominicans were found almost exclusively in the cities. Benedictines put down roots and tilled the soil. Dominicans wandered and begged for their supper. For the mendicants, poverty replaced industry as the defining discipline. They lived simply, moved frequently and labored to respond to the needs of a

rising, restless urban population.

St. Francis attracted followers through the sheer force of his personality. St. Dominic was less charismatic, but he had more of a knack for organization, and his goals were more specific. He wanted his Order of Preachers to combat heresy not with violence but with persuasion and sound teaching. His friars were to live simply and travel light, much like the evangelists of the Gospels. Soon Dominicans were preaching in cities across Europe. But they also established themselves in the universities, and it was there that they made their most lasting contributions.

Universities were among the greatest achievements of the high Middle Ages. For the most part, they grew out of smaller cathedral schools, but once established, they quickly gained fame and influence. Talented men rushed to Oxford, Paris, Bologna, Padua, Cambridge and Salamanca to participate in the scholarly discussions that were shaping and defining Christianity in a whole new way. Their goals were not modest. They wanted to explain how Christianity could be compatible with the best known philosophical work of their own day and of all ages past. They hoped to lay a foundation for Christian philosophy and theology for all periods to come, proving that Christian faith and human reason could indeed be harmonized.

It was a perilous moment for Christianity. Scholars are not famous for their humility, prudence or compassion. The scholastics could have compromised Christ's radical message, sacrificing Christian charity in favor of something more human. They could have strayed too far from orthodoxy and triggered a furious reaction, thus initiating several centuries of fundamentalist oppression. But somehow, the spirit of St. Dominic saw them through. They managed to find a reasonable balance between cleverness and humility, between nuance and simplicity. From the 13th century onward, universities have never ceased to be important and respected institutions. Catholics have clearly understood that we can use our God-given reason without undermining our faith.

### Contemporary Religious Life

Mendicants and monastics helped build civilization. They were the architects of innumerable institutions and customs that we may take for granted today. For example, St. Francis and St. Dominic inspired St. Ignatius Loyola to found the Society of Jesus. It is difficult even to imagine what our world would now be like but for their assiduous efforts to promote peace, security, public health, general education and the systematic pursuit of knowledge. We tend to lose sight of this because secular institutions have mostly assumed these functions in our day. We still

The face of St. Francis of Assisi on a mural at the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale, Ariz.



CNS photo/Nancy Wiechec

have schools, hospitals, courts, food banks, insurance companies, homeless shelters and scores of universities, but few of these now depend in any significant way on the labors of the vowed religious. Might the golden age of religious orders be behind us? Are monks and nuns simply becoming obsolete?

It might seem so, but for the obvious and immense reality of unmet human needs. We have solved at least some of the problems of St. Benedict's day or St. Dominic's. But the poor are still with us, and their continued suffering makes our other social achievements feel hollow. Somehow, modern societies seem to lack the will or capacity to address the real needs of their most marginalized citizens. When we recognize this, we may also see that religious orders are still on the front lines, testing innovative solutions to the most pressing problems of modern life. No single person illustrates this truth better than St. Teresa of Kolkata.

She lost her father at the age of 7, which only increased the influence of her strong and devout Albanian mother. Drana Bojaxhiu worked tirelessly to care not only for her own children but also for the poorest and most desolate residents of their native town. Inspired by her example, Ag-

nes, too, wished to serve the poor and desolate, in the most complete way possible. When she came of age, she entered the novitiate of the Sisters of Loreto and found herself taking passage to India. There she taught schoolchildren, surrounded daily by a deep and crushing poverty such as her childhood self could hardly have imagined.

What happened next is the stuff of legend, familiar but still mysterious. Mother Teresa received a second "call." She told her spiritual director, Celeste van Exem, S.J., that she was to leave the relative security of her convent and go out to the very poorest Indian citizens, embracing them in their vulnerability and ministering to their needs. Initially, her superiors were dubious. Could a young, European woman really endure the hardships that this life would entail? Would she be able to do any real good? In time, and with the help of Father van Exem, she obtained the necessary permissions.

She marked the transition by buying three white saris, normally worn by Indian widows. She looked for the cheapest material she could find, but she also selected saris with blue stripes, to honor the Blessed Virgin. Soon she was working daily with Kolkata's poorest, bandaging lepers and



CNS photo/Anne Mimault, Reuters

Women religious attend Holy Thursday Mass in a nearly empty cathedral on April 9, in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, during the Covid-19 pandemic

lifting the dying from the gutters. Her eye was ever drawn to the most marginalized and dispossessed: refugees, prisoners, orphans, beggars or those with physical deformities. Other charities tended to do a kind of triage with their supplicants, diverting resources toward people who seemed most able to benefit. Mother Teresa employed the opposite strategy. As she told her sisters, charity does not wait.

Like St. Benedict and St. Dominic, Mother Teresa seemed to draw followers naturally with her luminous personality. Local women came to join her, and she gladly put them to work serving the poor. She seemed to take a stubborn pleasure in tackling tasks that others deemed impossible: softening angry hearts, finessing legal and political challenges and magically finding the resources for schools, orphanages and clinics. Her Missionaries of Charity now number in the thousands. They still serve the neediest and most destitute citizens in 133 countries around the world.

Kolkata is less impoverished today than it was in Mother Teresa's time. Indeed, crushing poverty on that scale has become less common in most regions of the world, for

reasons that have very little to do with the Missionaries of Charity. Nevertheless, St. Teresa's story still feels relevant to us today. She understood that the poverty of our age is first and foremost spiritual. To her eyes, the bodily needs of the people she served were a kind of physical manifestation of a deeper neglect. Of course, they needed food, shelter and medicine. But they hungered even more for love, compassion and recognition of their intrinsic dignity and worth. By serving the poorest of the poor, she drew out a truth that resonated around the world. Every soul is precious to God. Every soul needs God. God thirsts for souls, longing to draw them back to himself.

### **America's Spiritual Impoverishment**

Looking around us, we can see that Americans are, in this deeper sense, just as impoverished as the residents of Kolkata's slums. Most have food and clean water, but they are ravenous for companionship, compassion and a sense of dignity. Leprosy is easily curable today, but addiction, mental illness, suicide and despair are ravaging

our communities. Solutions seem few and far between. Some religious orders are working hard to address these problems, and their efforts have made all the difference for certain individuals and communities.

These initiatives are certainly encouraging, but their impact may seem small considered against the backdrop of existing social problems. The harvest is so immense, and the laborers so few. We understand that modern people suffer grievously from alienation, loneliness and personal neglect. But how can we bring God's love into every individual life, in a world with nine billion people? We can learn much from holy men and women like St. Teresa of Kolkata. We need to acknowledge, though, that many riddles and challenges remain unsolved.

Who will repair God's church? History suggests that reformers can emerge at surprising times, usually offering solutions that are both simple and utterly transformative.

Initially, they tend to focus on a particular problem: a spiritual community lacking direction, a chapel whose walls are crumbling, a dying person yearning for a compassionate touch. By addressing these needs with discernment and charity, these men and women became catalysts for dramatic change. The church is healed because the world is healed or at least much comforted by God's love. This is exactly the sort of reform we should desire and expect from a church that is charged with bringing Christ's light to every land and nation.

Renewal will happen in God's time, not our own. Still, we can watch for it, and we can pray. The vowed religious have served God in unique ways, acting as his hands and feet upon this earth. We seem to need them as much as ever.

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*Rachel Lu is a freelance writer and instructor in philosophy. She lives in St. Paul, Minn.*

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**MISSION & MINISTRY**

# TEACH OUR CHILDREN WELL

## *Confronting prejudice in Catholic homeschool curricula*

By Patrick Tomassi

Like almost every other child in the Catholic parish where I grew up in Portland, Ore., my siblings and I were home-schooled. Our parish had a robust home-schooling community that organized group classes, dances, camping trips and graduation ceremonies. When my siblings and I eventually switched to a Catholic school—and later some of my siblings went to public school—many members of our parish saw this as a mistake.

Catholics and evangelical Protestants who home-school may do so for a number of reasons. They want to ensure that their children receive a strong religious education; they hope to protect them from cultural influences they see as dangerous and immoral; they want their children to have a robust education and do not trust conventional schools to provide one. Many people I knew saw the public school system as a secularist and politically liberal project that



indoctrinates children, but they also were skeptical about Catholic schools. The opinions of home-schooled children vary widely. Many I knew growing up valued the experience, crediting it with their intellectual formation, while others like myself and my siblings often found it tedious and longed to go to a “real” school. There are pros and cons on both sides. But in the midst of the national examination of conscience that has begun since the brutal killing of George Floyd, many of us who grew up in the home-schooling world have started to ask whether our education failed us when it came to understanding racism and our country’s troubled history with it. Some home-schooling parents have begun to ask the same question.

### Finding Blindspots

Many Catholics who home-school choose to do so using Catholic home-schooling programs like Seton Home Study, Kolbe Academy and Mother of Divine Grace. These programs provide curriculum guides that include textbooks, primary texts and sometimes lesson plans or supplementary materials. Some parents use these curricula just as they are, while others pick and choose the items they like from multiple programs and supplement those with other materials. For the purposes of this article, when I refer to Catholic home-schooling, I mean families who use specifically Catholic curricula, not to Catholics who home-school using secular materials.

If you walk into a home-school classroom—it usually doubles as the family room—of someone who uses one of these programs anywhere in the United States, you are likely to find among the books a thick volume whose cover depicts Christopher Columbus triumphantly planting a flag on the shores of San Salvador. The book is Anne Carroll’s *Christ and the Americas*, a high-school-level American history text that covers the period from 1492 until the early 1990s. It has been nearly ubiquitous in Catholic home-schooling circles since its publication in 1997. Until the early 2010s, it was the American history textbook that all major Catholic home-school programs used. While Kolbe Academy has stopped using the book, most Catholic programs continue to use it.

*Christ the King: Lord of History*, Ms. Carroll’s 1976 world history text, will also probably be somewhere nearby. Ms. Carroll was the founder of Seton School, which gave birth in the 1980s to Seton Home Study School, a home-school program that now has more than 12,000 students enrolled. Her husband, Warren H. Carroll, founded



# ‘Christ and the Americas’ focuses on the Catholic evangelization of the New World, claiming it as the true purpose of Columbus’s voyage rather than the spice trade.

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Christendom College, a small Catholic liberal arts college in Front Royal, Va., in 1977.

Ms. Carroll’s view of history, laid out in the introductions to her books, is still Seton’s guiding principle. In *Christ and the Americas*, she writes that “[the] Catholic knows that the most important event in history was the Incarnation/Redemption/Resurrection and the most important Person in history was Jesus Christ. History is moving in a straight line from the Creation to the Last Judgment, and we judge events by whether or not they glorify God and contribute to the building of the Kingdom of God on earth.” In *Christ the King*, she states that “[we] cannot really understand the history of the world unless we look at it from the standpoint of the Incarnation,” and that “[after] the Incarnation, the most influential events had to do with the establishment and spread of the Catholic Church.” Ms. Carroll is careful to point out that,

while she sought “to emphasize the great triumphs of Catholic history,” she would “not hesitate to point out times when Catholics, and even leaders of the Church, did not act in harmony with God’s will.”

When I was growing up, this approach to history did not strike me or my friends as particularly odd. Nor did we recognize the many problems that it created, the first of which was to present an often white-washed, triumphalist account of history that downplays the crimes of Europeans, especially Catholics, while largely ignoring non-European cultures. It emphasizes the struggles of Catholics while often minimizing those of other groups.

These books and others with similar viewpoints have affected how at least two generations of Catholic home-schoolers understand history. But now some hope to dismantle this legacy. “We stopped carrying Anne Carroll’s books six or eight years ago,” Everett Buyarski told me. Mr. Buyarski is the director of academic services for Kolbe Academy, a California-based Catholic home-school program with around 2,000 students. “One of the things that’s nice about Anne Carroll’s books is that most secular textbooks tend to be pretty negative about the Catholic Church. Those books try to correct that, and in many ways they over-correct that. So much so that [the books imply that] the Catholic Church did a bunch of wonderful amazing things and probably didn’t do anything bad, ever.”

## Whitewashing the Spanish Conquest

Ms. Carroll does allow a few flaws of the church to show through. Francisco Pizarro, the Spanish Catholic who conquered the Incan Empire in Peru, is depicted as a courageous but power-hungry and greedy



man who oppressed the native people. But he is the exception. In fact, one of the biggest problems with *Christ and the Americas* is the way it presents the Spanish conquest of the Americas. The Spaniards are shown as largely good, thanks especially to their efforts to introduce Christianity and European culture. Yes, they also enslaved the native people and imported enslaved people from Africa, but in Ms. Carroll's view, the Spanish form of enslavement practice was humane. Columbus and Cortés are godly heroes, much maligned because of the "Black Legend," a campaign of propaganda disseminated by the English and Dutch that exaggerated the crimes of Catholic Spain.

Ms. Carroll writes that "[t]he Spaniards made their share of mistakes and committed their share of sins, as did all the other colonial powers in the New World. But the benefits they brought to the Western Hemisphere far outweigh the mistakes. Gone were the days of human sacrifice, cannibalism and slavery of the Aztecs and Incas [that existed before the Spanish arrived], replaced by Spanish justice and the Cross of Christ." This passage is typical of the book: Native people are described repeatedly as "savages"; and cannibalism and human sacrifice are mentioned so frequently and in such graphic detail that one would think they were the two transcendent hallmarks of Indigenous culture from the north of Mexico to the tip of Argentina.

As for slavery, Columbus began the European enslavement of the native people of the Americas; he brought enslaved people with him to Spain on his return voyage and initiated the brutal *encomienda* system. The Black Legend did indeed exaggerate the crimes of the Spanish, but it did not create them. Thanks to war, disease and brutal treatment, the population of the In-

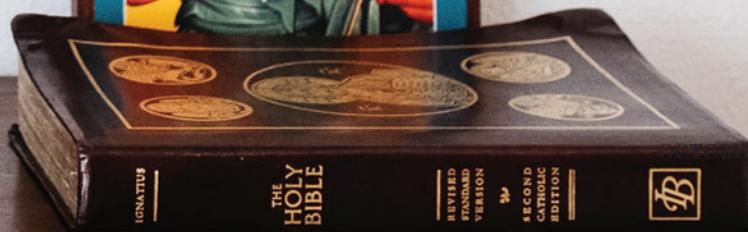
igenous people plummeted in the years after the Europeans arrived, and by 1502 the Spanish began importing millions of enslaved people from Africa to replace the shrinking native population. But no student would know any of this from reading Ms. Carroll's books.

*Christ and the Americas* focuses on the Catholic evangelization of the New World, claiming it as the true purpose of Columbus's voyage (rather than the spice trade). It mentions that the Spanish had mines but fails to point out that those mines supplied the Spanish crown with immense quantities of gold and other precious metals or that Indigenous and African enslaved people were regularly worked to death in them. The only discussion of the Indigenous cultures is of their faults, including "devil worship" and brutal slavery. In Ms. Carroll's telling, there was nothing of value, nothing to preserve. The native people, once freed of their evil practices, were blank slates until they were "civilized" by the Europeans.

### Slavery and Racism in the United States

The presentation of African enslavement in the United States also is problematic. The book gives serious attention to the topic of slavery in terms of U.S. politics, discussing the Missouri Compromise, the abolitionist movement and the Fugitive Slave Act. But it spends little time on the experiences of those who suffered the injustice. "It is possible to read *Christ and the Americas* and [come away with the belief] that slavery was a benign institution," said Stephanie Jenkins-Walters. Ms. Jenkins-Walters, who is Black and Catholic, home-schools her children in Georgia. "It is possible, and I have met home-schoolers that believe that. In my own family, my first ancestor in this country was separated from his 11

Grant Whitty/ Unsplash



children. On his way [back from visiting] his children, he came home late, and [his master] chopped off a foot. Slavery was not a benign institution. Slavery was brutal.”

In covering the period following the Civil War, the book briefly discusses Reconstruction and its aftermath, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and Jim Crow laws. But in its discussion of the period between the end of Reconstruction and the civil rights movement—a span of nearly 100 years—almost no attention is given to the systemic mistreatment of African-Americans, the suppression of voting rights, the Klan’s reign of terror or the use of the criminal justice system to revive much of the system of slavery. Ms. Carroll mentions that a Klansman was elected governor of Oregon but states that the Klan was “[not] just persecuting Negroes” and “also hated Catholics, Jews and immigrants.” While this is true, it gives the false impression that a similar level of attention and hatred was directed toward all groups. And facts that would imply otherwise—like the fact that more than 4,000 Black men were lynched, mostly on the false claim that they had raped white women—are never mentioned.

Black people are not the only ones whose stories are left out. In a 30-page chapter on World War II in *Christ and the Americas*, battles are discussed in great detail. However, neither the internment of Japanese-American citizens by the U.S. government nor the Holocaust receive a single word. (There is a brief paragraph in *Christ the King: Lord of History* that mentions the German concentration camps. Then the next three paragraphs discuss St. Maximilian Kolbe.) In a chapter on Manifest Destiny, the Trail of Tears is explained thus: “The controversy dragged on until 1835, when the Cherokees surrendered all their lands east of the Mississippi to the US and went wearily off to Oklahoma.” Later, however, covering a period when Catholic missionaries helped to represent the tribes in negotiations with the federal government, Ms. Carroll devotes significant attention to the breaking of treaties and stealing of native lands.

Most appalling is the treatment of the civil rights movement. In a 400-page book, the entire movement receives about two paragraphs, in which the only civil rights leader mentioned is Martin Luther King Jr. More time is spent on the riots that took place after Dr. King’s assassination than on the entire movement. Ms. Carroll writes: “Though the Civil Rights Movement contained many immoral aspects, as we shall see, on balance the movement resulted in an end to much discrimination against Blacks in our society.” In this telling, the civil rights movement appears almost to come out of thin air a century after the end of slavery, and it

vanishes just as quickly.

The mistreatment of Catholic immigrants, by contrast, is front and center. Ms. Carroll devotes an entire chapter, titled “No Irish Need Apply,” to nativist practices, including anti-Catholic violence and the exclusion of Irish immigrants from the workforce. Other topics also receive outsized emphasis. Even the Iran hostage crisis, important to Ms. Carroll because it reflects the failure of the Carter administration, receives several paragraphs.

### **How Do Catholic Home-Schoolers Respond?**

Some Catholic home-schoolers have been aware of the problems with Anne Carroll’s books for years. One mother of nine, a pillar of the community in which I grew up, told me that she had never really used the books, although they were part of the curricula she subscribed to. Her kids saw right through the whitewashing, she said, and knew that a lot had been left out. She moved away from the Seton curriculum in her home-schooling in part because of the emphasis it placed on overly “Catholic” readings of history.

Ms. Jenkins-Walters taught from *Christ and the Americas* in the home-schooling co-op to which she belongs. The co-op is part of the Regina Coeli network, which had about 1,500 students at 16 campuses last year. But she told me that she rarely referred to the book in her class. Instead, she focused on what she calls the “living books” in the curriculum, covering many of the events that are glossed over by Ms. Carroll. She did not become aware of the book’s problems until after the course was finished. She does not think other parents realize how bad the book is because many parents trust the home-school programs they belong to and do not vet books before having their children read them.

Now Ms. Jenkins-Walters is starting a group to try to get the book removed not only from Regina Coeli’s curriculum but from all Catholic home-schooling groups. She sees a connection between books like these, which whitewash history and neglect the experiences of non-Europeans, and racism. “I believe that a lot of the home-schoolers that have read those books are now the ones saying that racism doesn’t exist. I am concerned that by not calling this book out, we’re sanctioning children to grow up without the empathy to be able to understand how we got here in our country,” she said. “That book needs to die.”

The Jenkins-Walters family is among what appears to be a growing number of Black families who home-school. “There is a big surge in Black home-schooling happening right now,” Amber Johnston, a Black Christian



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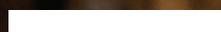
home-schooling mother of four who lives outside Atlanta, told me. “It’s growing every year by leaps and bounds.” Back in 2016, Ms. Johnston and her family moved in a mostly white world: Their church, their neighborhood and the home-school group they belonged to were all predominantly white. It was around this time that she started to notice a troubling pattern in her oldest daughter’s behavior. She would do things like hide her Black dolls in the back of her closet and say that she “only wanted to play with the pretty ones,” meaning the white dolls. Ms. Johnston realized that her children needed to be around Black children more regularly, so she decided to start a home-school group for Black families, hoping to get four or five others to join. When she was interviewed two years ago for a PBS special on the rise of Black home-schooling, Heritage home-schoolers of Cobb County had 66 families. Last year they had nearly 100.

In some ways, the group is like other home-school groups. They organize field trips, have group classes and enlist parents to help teach each other’s children. But in the mostly white home-school group, each family’s demographic situation looks similar to Ms. Johnston’s: The husband works, the wife stays home, and they have an attractive house and two cars. The Black group draws families from a wider variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, including families in which both parents work and some whose single moms have full-time jobs. Parents sometimes drop their kids off at the group for part of the day while they go to work—something that, according to Ms. Johnston, is unheard of in mostly white groups. Ms. Johnston buys complete curriculum sets so that she can loan them out to families who cannot afford them, making it possible for lower-income Black families to home-school if they want to.

Many Black families home-school for the same reasons as their white counterparts: a desire for religious education, healthy and supportive school culture and quality learning. But some also cite racism as a major reason for avoiding mainstream schools. “It’s not that we think the K.K.K. is hanging out by the school lockers,” Ms. Johnston told me. “It’s the conscious and unconscious biases. The fear that the teacher might not even know what she thinks of my little Black boys, because she doesn’t mean to think it.” She points to research that says Black children are disciplined more harshly than their non-Black peers for the same offenses, the “adultification” of little Black girls and the “school-to-prison pipeline.” Linda Rutledge and Don Anderson, a mixed-race couple who home-schooled their



**Many people I knew saw the public school system as a secularist and politically liberal project that indoctrinates children, but they also were skeptics of Catholic schools.**



Annie Spratt/Unsplash

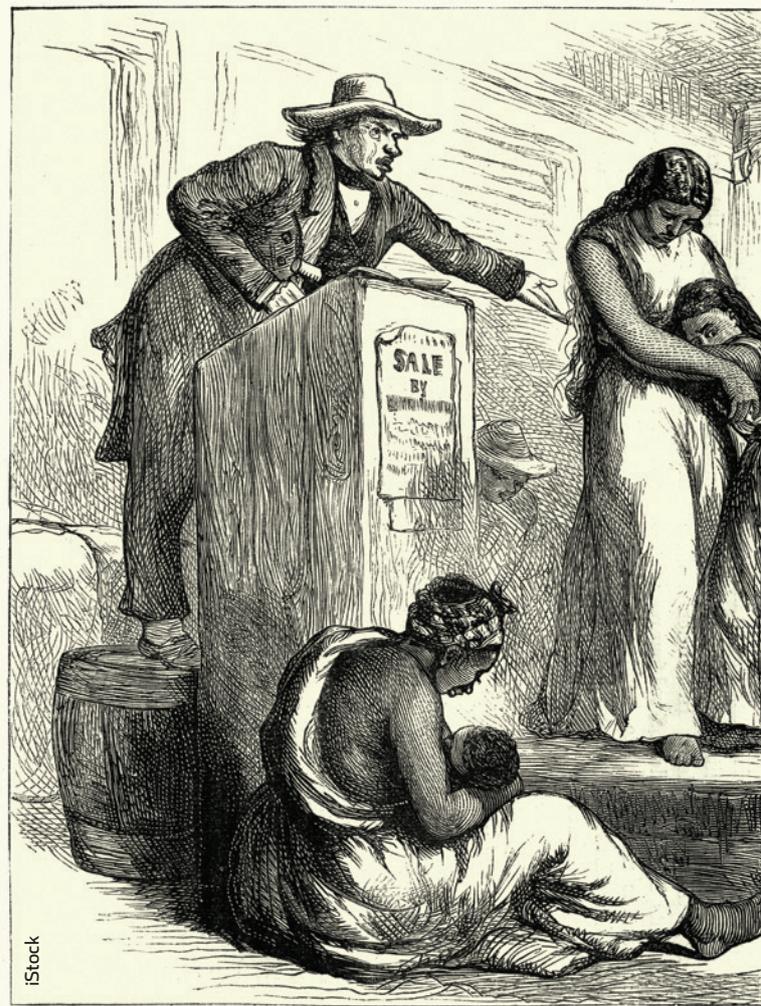
# 'It is possible to read *Christ and the Americas* and [come away with the belief] that slavery was a benign institution.'

four children in Vancouver, Wash., mentioned similar concerns, although they home-schooled mostly for other reasons. When their son played basketball on the mostly Black team at the local high school, they ran into what they described, echoing George W. Bush, as the “soft bigotry of low expectations.”

“The kids were allowed to behave like animals,” Mr. Anderson told me. “They disregarded what the coaches said, openly cursing at practice, bullying each other, smoking dope afterward. What was shocking was not the behavior but that there was no discipline for doing it. I mean nothing.” They found out later from the coach that the school’s athletic director had given the coach instructions not to discipline the players. To Mr. Anderson, the implication was clear: The athletic director believed Black boys could not be expected to behave well.

## Staying Away From Catholic Home-School

Ms. Jenkins-Walters’s family is the only non-white family in their Georgia home-school co-op. I spoke with nearly a dozen other Black Catholic home-schoolers, and many were either the only Black family in their home-school group or belonged to a group aimed at connecting Black families. But the Jenkins-Walters family’s situation is unique in that the group they belong to is specifically targeted to Catholic families. I spoke to administrators at three major Catholic home-school organizations. Seton Home Study and Kolbe Academy do not collect demographic information (Kolbe Academy mentioned that home-schoolers tend to be concerned about privacy) but said that, from what they can tell, they have relatively few Black students. At Mother of Divine Grace, which does collect demographic information, Black students made up 2.95 percent of those enrolled in 2016 (the last year for which they have data). This may be partly due to the demographics of the church. Only about 3 percent of American Catholics are Black, and despite an



apparent surge in the past decade or two, Black families are still slightly underrepresented in home-schooling.

However, several of the families I spoke with had looked into Catholic home-schooling programs and had opted instead either to create their own curriculum or to use a Protestant or secular home-school curriculum. Dee Dukes, a Black Catholic mother of six from New Orleans, told me one of the biggest red flags was the “forced whiteness” she found both in Catholic and Protestant home-school curricula, the way they “seem to go out of their way not to include anything about Black people.” People she encountered talked about “repairing the ruins of Christendom,” but she found that for them Christendom was synonymous with “European.” Ms. Dukes said that many families she met wanted to focus on teaching truth, goodness and beauty—as did she—but in a Eurocentric way. “Do not other people have truth, goodness and beauty in them?” she asked.

Occasionally, Ms. Dukes has also run into overt racism in the home-schooling world. Once, in a Protestant group, she walked into a room to hear another parent speaking



Vintage engraving of a mother and daughter sold at a slave auction, southern United States, 19th century

lar home-schoolers. That’s really hard for me.”

### A Moment of Opportunity

Most of the people I spoke with hope to see Catholic home-schooling programs make changes in terms of curriculum. And some programs are already working in that direction. Kolbe Academy stopped using Anne Carroll’s books to teach history. Seton Home Study is in the process of writing a new textbook to replace *Christ and the Americas* and hopes to make it available by the end of the year. Draper Warren, Seton’s director of admissions, told me that the book will go into much greater detail about the civil rights movement. It will also discuss Japanese internment in the chapter on World War II.

But Mr. Warren and others point out that, especially in home-schooling, textbooks are only one part of an education. Students tend to read numerous other works, including primary texts, and use the textbook to get a sense of the big picture. The parents I spoke to hope to see changes made throughout the curriculum.

Whitewashed and triumphalist texts should be replaced with ones that are honest. Just as important, good books by and about people of non-European descent should be added. Homeschooled children of all backgrounds would benefit from this.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic and uncertainty around school reopenings, many more Americans are likely to consider some form of home-schooling this year than in the past. Administrators at Kolbe Academy, Seton and Mother of Divine Grace all told me they expect enrollment to increase this year—their estimates range from 10 percent to 90 percent. With this increase, most of the families I spoke with view this moment as a real opportunity and believe that it is more important now than ever to make positive changes to Catholic home-schooling—changes that have been a long time coming.

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Patrick Tomassi is a teacher and writer in Portland, Ore. He helps organize the annual New York Encounter and is a contributing editor at *Veritas Journal*.  
Twitter: @patricktomassi.

directly to her children, saying that Black people are the descendants of Noah’s son Ham, whose children had been cursed with servitude, and that is why they had been enslaved. Later, she ran into the same idea in a book of scriptural commentary that was on a Catholic home-school curriculum list (but now seems to be out of print): “The African negroes are descended from [Ham], and they are to this day sunk in the lowest state of superstition, governed by cruel tyrants, treated as slaves, and often bought and sold as such. Their way of living is very barbarous, and they are very hard to convert to Christianity.” This belief was one of the primary justifications Christians slaveholders gave for slavery. Ms. Dukes has also been told in home-schooling circles that she “won’t be Black in Heaven” and that Black people “have a lot to be thankful for” from slavery.

Ms. Johnston shared these concerns about curriculum and culture. “I expected to find my people with other home-schoolers who share my faith,” she said. “But the people that are most accepting of my family and my children and that kinky hair and their brown skin are the secu-



# ‘FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP’ AND POLITICAL HOMELESSNESS

## *Lessons for the 2020 Election*

By John Carr

For years, I have said that I often feel politically homeless as a pro-life, social justice, consistent-ethic Catholic. This is not a badge of honor. If we Catholics are politically homeless, it is because we have failed to build a home. Sometimes we cannot even find shelter.

Our homelessness has many causes. We have not persuaded others to share our commitment to protect all human life and promote the dignity of all God’s children. Powerful partisan factions and ideological interests have emphasized personal autonomy and freedom over community and solidarity. Our church too often proclaims positions, rather than listening and learning, engaging and dialoguing in a search for the common good.

I write from long experience trying to share the church’s moral principles and policy priorities. This has been a personal, professional and institutional journey for more than 40 years. I helped the U.S. bishops develop their documents on political responsibilities of Catholics. Over 12 presidential elections, these “Faithful Citizenship” statements have been among the most widely used, misused and abused statements of the bishop’s conference, offering both a useful moral framework for Catholic participation in political life and also opportunities for manipulation and distortion to

advance narrow and partisan causes.

In this reflection, I look back to the beginning of those efforts, examine how these documents have evolved, address recent controversies and explore implications and applications in this critical election year. I do not offer this assessment as a moral theologian or church official but as someone who has worked at the intersection of Catholic faith and American politics for decades and has been in the rooms where bishops developed their statements on what it means to be Catholic and American, a believer and a voter in election years.

I also write as a Catholic layperson, convinced that our bishops, priests and religious have a responsibility to teach, preach and form consciences, not to tell us how to vote. As someone who encourages other lay people, especially young people, to apply the principles of our faith, I want to offer a modest contribution on how I am trying to do that in this election.

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In 1975, I was a young staff person at the bishops’ conference. With the 1976 elections approaching, I suggested to conference leadership that the bishops offer a short summary of Catholic teaching on faith and politics

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*This essay is part of a series of articles on the presidential election. For more, including alternative views on the candidates, visit [americamagazine.org/election2020](http://americamagazine.org/election2020).*

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and a brief review of their statements on key issues. I worked with colleagues to develop a simple text drawing on papal encyclicals, documents of the Second Vatican Council and bishops' policy statements. On Feb. 12, 1976, the statement was reviewed, amended and adopted without controversy by the conference's administrative board, which consisted of 40 bishops.

The message, "Political Responsibility: Reflections on an Election Year," was a call to Catholics...

to vote, to become informed on the relevant issues, to become involved in the party or campaign of their choice, to vote freely according to their conscience...We specifically do not seek the formation of a religious voting bloc; nor do we wish to instruct persons on how they should vote by endorsing candidates. We urge citizens to avoid choosing candidates simply on the personal basis of self-interest. Rather, we hope that voters will examine the positions of candidates on the full range of issues as well as the person's integrity, philosophy and performance.

This modest statement inaugurated a precedent, and before each presidential election the U.S. bishops' conference has offered a reflection on the moral responsibilities of Catholics in political life. Through 12 documents, the title changed from "Political Responsibility" to "Faithful Citizenship" to "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship." The statements also grew much longer, from 3,100 words in 1976 to 17,800 words in 2019. They shifted from a basic summary of Catholic teaching on politics and issues

to more elaborate teaching documents on conscience, prudence and moral considerations in voting. But they always called Catholics to active participation in public life: "Citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation" (No. 13).

Bishops insisted these were not traditional voting guides or political scorecards, nor a checklist of issues. They made it clear that Catholics "are not single-issue voters." They insisted that voting is "a decision to be made by each Catholic guided by a conscience formed by Catholic moral teaching" (No. 37). The statements also outline responsibilities and limitations of the church in public life, suggesting ecclesial leaders should be political, not partisan; principled, not ideological; civil, not silent; and engaged, not used. Over 12 elections, the U.S. bishops encouraged Catholics to use the resources of our faith and the opportunities of our democracy to protect human life and dignity, seek justice and peace and advance the common good.

I understand that such statements have limited impact and reach, are far too long and that most Catholics are not actively looking for political guidance from their bishops. Nonetheless, these statements have been among the most widely purchased, downloaded and shared documents issued by the U.S. bishops.

In countless visits to dioceses, I found pastors generally welcomed these statements as a useful moral framework and pastoral resource. Partisans did not. They were disappointed that the statements did not support their political, ideological or ecclesial agendas. While widely used, these statements were also misused or abused as individuals and organizations employed selective quotations, misleading interpretations or partial references in alternative materials to make partisan or ideological appeals. The greatest controversy concerned whether the statements adequately reflected distinctions among issues and priorities among different moral claims. "Faithful Citizenship" was criticized on the one hand for making opposition to abortion the defining criterion for voting and on the other for minimizing abortion's moral gravity by including it in a list alongside other election issues. Both could not be true, and neither claim was accurate.

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In 2007 the name, process and content of "Faithful Citizenship" changed. A task force comprising the chairs of key U.S.C.C.B. committees prepared a major revision, which was debated, amended and voted on by the entire body of bishops. This version focused more clearly on conscience and prudence, distinctions among issues and more specific moral guidance for voting. This new approach and name reflected Benedict XVI's articulation

of the church's mission in political life:

It is not the church's responsibility to make this teaching prevail in political life. Rather the church wishes to help form consciences in political life, and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly. ("Deus Caritas Est," No. 28)

The final document, "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," was approved by a vote of 221 to 4. This is the statement that has been essentially reissued in 2011, 2015 and most recently in 2019 with brief, new introductory notes.

In November 2019, U.S. bishops again debated "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship." Several bishops, led by Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego, argued that the current document was inadequate for these times, failed to reflect the mission and message of Pope Francis and relied on the category of "intrinsic evil," which he argued was the wrong way to frame political choices. Conference leaders and the majority of bishops rejected the call to develop a new document.

I believe the resistance to starting over reflected a fear that divisions among the bishops would not lead to a better consensus about how Catholic voters should approach their choices. A major revision might also make public divisions on Pope Francis' leadership and priorities and on the bishops' assessment of political and moral challenges. My own view is that a new and shorter version, more fully embracing the teachings of Pope Francis and addressing new threats to human life and dignity and even democracy itself, would be better; but the bishops' conference lacks the unity, capacity and sense of urgency to undertake such an effort.

The other major debate in November 2019 involved the document's introductory note. Language declaring that "the threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority" was adopted, while a proposed amendment to include the following full paragraph from Pope Francis was rejected:

Our defense of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm, and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development. Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection. ("Gaudete et Exsultate," No. 101)

The amendment to include the full paragraph from Pope Francis failed by a vote of 143 to 69, perhaps because those who opposed the amendment framed it as a test of the bishops' continuing commitment to defend unborn human life.

In my view, the failure to include the full Pope Francis quote was a mistake and describing abortion as the pre-eminent priority is an incomplete and overly narrow moral criterion. Defenseless unborn children have a compelling claim on our consciences as a matter of justice and our duty to protect "the least of these." We must oppose the destruction of the lives of children before birth, and we must recognize the scale and gravity of this issue. And just as the unborn have a special claim on our consciences, so too do those who suffer from the legacy of slavery and continuing racial injustice have a unique claim on our consciences and action. We must be clear that Black lives matter, especially when Black Americans are being killed before our eyes. When Covid-19 leads to the deaths of more than 185,000 Americans, when an economic crisis, health and other disparities disproportionately threaten the poor, vulnerable and communities of color, I believe the protection of the lives and dignity of all God's children should be the moral imperative in this election year.

The fundamental test is whether we truly recognize the humanity of the unborn child, the full equality of people of color and the God-given dignity of those who suffer injustice. Sadly, Americans do not have a realistic option this November to cast a vote for a candidate who fully meets that test.

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The polarization in American politics is increasingly reflected in our Catholic communion. Various voices are insisting you cannot be a Catholic and a Democrat or that no Catholic can vote for President Trump, challenging the faith of Joe Biden or the character of Donald Trump.

So what is a faithful Catholic citizen to do? We should reflect, discuss, engage, discern and decide; and at the same time, we should respect the consciences and choices of other Catholics. In my parish just outside Washington, D.C., we are blessed with enormous diversity. We are Democrats, Republicans and independents. Some of us, sadly, will not vote. Many will vote our party, pocketbook or even our prejudices. We have pro-life parishioners who believe support for abortion is disqualifying and will vote against anyone who supports legal abortion. We have Black parents who are repelled by the president's racist rhetoric and responses to the current crisis and will oppose him. We have Latino families who face discrimination, deportation or loss of DACA status, and they will vote against a president who demonizes their families. We have leaders in

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Catholic climate change efforts who believe this is an existential threat to God's creation and his people, and they will vote for candidates who take this seriously.

I try to understand the way they think and the votes they will cast. I might try to engage and even persuade some of them to think differently. But I am not going to tell any of them that they do not belong in our family of faith unless they think and vote the same way I do. In the words of Pope Francis, we are called to “form consciences, not replace them.”

As a pro-life, social justice, consistent-ethic Catholic, I am considering the criteria, distinctions and guidance in “Faithful Citizenship.” These three paragraphs are crucial (emphases mine):

Catholics often face difficult choices about how to vote.... A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who favors a policy promoting an intrinsically evil act, such as *abortion*, euthanasia, assisted suicide, deliberately subjecting workers or the poor to subhuman living conditions, redefining marriage in ways that violate its essential meaning, *or racist behavior*; *if the voter's intent is to support that position*. In such cases, a Catholic would be guilty of formal cooperation in grave evil.

There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate's unacceptable position even on policies promoting an intrinsically evil act may reasonably decide to vote for that candidate *for other morally grave reasons*....

When all candidates hold a position that promotes an intrinsically evil act, the conscientious voter faces a dilemma. The voter may decide to take the extraordinary step of not voting for any candidate or, after careful deliberation, *may decide to vote for the candidate deemed less likely to advance such a morally flawed position and more likely to pursue other authentic human goods*. (Nos. 34-36)

In this election, at least two of these intrinsic evils are central issues: racism and abortion. On the evil of abortion, Mr. Biden, who started out in politics as a pro-life Democrat, has now under pressure embraced his party's extreme abortion agenda, with federal funding for abortion and no restrictions. Donald Trump has moved in the other direction, from a “very pro-choice” position to committing to appoint judges who will overturn *Roe v. Wade*, oppose abortion in legislation and executive orders and establish conscience protections for religious objections to abortion, contraception and same-sex marriage.

On the evil of racism, the differences are also stark. Mr. Trump demonizes immigrants, fans the flames of race and division, refuses to denounce racist groups or actions and seeks to divide the country by overt appeals to racial fears. Mr. Biden condemns racism and seeks national healing, speaks for voting rights and against systemic racism. He served as vice president to the first Black president and chose the first Black woman to run as a major party's nominee for vice president. At this moment of national reckoning on racial injustice and clear disparities in the impact of the coronavirus crisis, electing a president who will fight racism, not exacerbate it, is a moral imperative for me.

The Catholic Church's efforts, working with others, have kept the cause of the unborn alive in a divided nation. However, after a quarter-century of waiting for justices appointed by Republicans to overturn *Roe*, when the pro-life cause has become increasingly partisan and Donald Trump is its political face, when Democratic pro-lifers are not welcome in their own party, I doubt we can look to ongoing political combat as the primary way to convince our fellow Americans to value and protect the lives of unborn children.

While Republican politicians promise pro-lifers anti-abortion judicial nominees, they often deliver judges who vote against voting rights, immigrant rights, workers' rights, affirmative action and environmental justice as well—and whose decisions related to abortion are often disappointing to the pro-lifers convinced that appointment of judges is the most essential political goal.

In the end, we vote for candidates, not issues. Who they are and how they lead is critical. As the bishops point out, “these decisions should take into account a *candidate's commitments, character, integrity, and ability to influence a given issue*” (No. 37).

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Character, competence, honesty and integrity are crucial. This is not about religion. Character cannot be reduced to whether a candidate is a sincere believer, carries a rosary, goes to church or understands what is in the Bible. I have watched Joe Biden for decades and worked with him on

occasion. Like most politicians, he sometimes exaggerates and dissembles. Mr. Biden's story is one of faith and family, tested by tragedy. His political leadership reflects Catholic social teaching and Democratic party orthodoxy, limited by political pragmatism. I was deeply disappointed by his abandonment of the Hyde Amendment under the pressures of the primary campaign. I have also seen him stand up on issues of justice time and time again.

I do not know Donald Trump personally. But after four years of watching him in office, he seems to be consumed with himself, lacks empathy and will not accept responsibility. His language on women, people of color, media, political adversaries and the military is crude and unacceptable. His dismissal, dishonesty and delayed response to Covid-19 brought deadly consequences for tens of thousands. He seems to view faith as a political tool, not a way of life; and his past and present behavior seems to violate most of the Ten Commandments, especially "not bearing false witness."

When neither party's platform reflects the full framework of Catholic teaching, and when both candidates are committed to policies that violate Catholic moral principles, I will follow my conscience. I will exercise my prudential judgement to vote for the candidate who has the character, integrity and competence to serve; who will seek the common good and protect our democratic institutions; and who will do the least harm and the most good within our political and constitutional structures. And since neither of our present options reflects a full commitment to the Gospel, I am committed to work for better choices in our politics, parties and nation.

While I understand that others will come to different conclusions, my personal choice to support Vice President Biden is clear, but not without reservation. To frame this judgment in the words of "Faithful Citizenship," I believe Mr. Trump's character, lack of integrity and record on racism and Covid-19, among other matters, constitute "morally grave reasons" to oppose his re-election. I believe Mr. Biden has the "character [and] integrity" to lead our nation and is "more likely to pursue other authentic human goods." I will vote for Mr. Biden for what he can do to help us recover and heal, lift up those left behind, ensure health care for all and treat immigrants and refugees with respect. I will not vote for him to support his position on abortion, but in spite of it.

For those who vote for Mr. Biden for similar reasons, we should be clear with ourselves, the Biden campaign, the Democratic Party and the American people that our votes to end Mr. Trump's time in office and turn away from the chaos he foments are not a mandate to end all abortion restrictions, provide federal funding for abortions or to undermine religious ministries that serve the poor and vul-

nerable consistent with the principles of their faith. To the contrary: A vote for Mr. Biden carries with it a duty to work with others to reduce abortions and to support priorities, programs and ministries that serve women, children and families in need. Our responsibilities as citizens begin in the voting booth, but they do not end there.

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Sadly, it is probably the case that a Catholic who fully embraces the teaching of Pope Francis—or Benedict XVI or St. John Paul II—could not be nominated for any national office, appointed to the Supreme Court or serve in a major cabinet position or in a senior position in the White House of either a Republican or Democratic administration. Imagine the vetting or Senate confirmation of a Democrat who opposes unrestricted abortion rights or conscience protections or a Republican who opposes the death penalty, supports immigrant or labor rights or is committed to strong action to address climate change.

When you are politically homeless, you need to seek shelter. We need to work together to find or build a home. We need to be more rather than less engaged, to find others who share our values, to dialogue and persuade people to join us. We need to insist that parties, media and elite institutions see us, hear us and open their doors to us as we seek to advance the common good. We especially need to avoid righteousness, cynicism and any judgment or condemnation of others. As the PBS commentator Mark Shields suggests, it is better to seek converts than to punish heretics.

I hope the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown, which I direct, offers a shelter for politically homeless Catholics. America Media offers such shelter. Pro-life pregnancy centers are places we can work together. Our Catholic parishes, universities, organizations and ministries should be places for those seeking shelter. Pope Francis is a pastor for the politically homeless, reminding us that "Catholics tasked with political life must keep the values of their religion before them, but with a mature conscience and competence to realize them."

For almost 50 years, I have been blessed to work at the intersection of Catholic faith and politics. I believe that in this election year, when our church is hurting and our nation is wounded, Catholics are called to be salt, light and leaven and faithful citizens more than ever. This may help us find shelter, if not a home.

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Pope Francis arrives for a private audience at the Vatican.

# The Reactionary Rift

*Pope Francis' critics are dividing the church and families—including mine*

By Mike Lewis

“Pope Francis has damaged my faith,” she told me. I held my tongue, remembering my futile past attempts to respond to her antipathy toward our pope.

“I told Father today, and he says Pope Francis has hurt his faith, too,” she added. A final dig.

Last December, my mom was only a few days from the end of her final illness. Our pastor had seen her that morning and heard her confession. It was the last time we ever discussed faith or religion.

There was nothing more important to my mother than her faith. She often reminded us that her vocation and mission was to pass the faith down to her four children and to get us into heaven. With the same talents that made her a gifted schoolteacher, she instructed us in the church’s teachings. She shared the faith with us in a way that was attractive, rich, interesting and true—supplementing and far surpassing the standard parochial school catechesis we received.

The faith she passed down to me and my siblings was influenced by her own Catholic school education in the 1950s and early ’60s. Her teenage faith was informed by her father, who was deeply angered, even traumatized by the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. And he was vocal about it. As an adult, however, my mother’s views on religion became less recalcitrant. My dad converted to Catholicism months before they were married, and I think his faith—genuine but also practical and down-to-earth—tempered the reactionary impulses of her upbringing. Still, my mother’s religiosity was always the center of our childhood experience.

She taught us our prayers, the Scriptures and saints. Mom instructed us in moral doctrine, the four last things and the dignity of human life. Although I never heard her use the term Catholic social teaching, she opposed the death penalty, supported justice for immigrants, was strongly against racism and stood with the pope on matters of war and peace.

We had a picture of Pope John Paul II in our kitchen. I remember as a child looking at it and thinking how lucky we were to have such a great leader for our church. Although my grandfather often viewed the hierarchy with suspicion and contempt, my mother developed a love for the pope and trusted the church to teach the truth.

Certainly there were gaps in our religious formation, but this was not due to a lack of effort on her part. She passed everything she had on to her children. Our everyday conversations often revolved around our faith: big, deep, eternal questions. Catholicism became an integral part of who I was—who we were—and even during dark times in my life, even when God seemed distant, my prayers went

unanswered and my future was uncertain, my faith never left me.

Even when my relationship with my mother became strained from time to time, I was grateful to her for the faith she passed on to me.

That is why our division over Pope Francis was so painful.

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Pope Francis’ election in 2013 coincided with a period of personal conversion and spiritual growth in my life. Not only had I thrown myself more deeply into practicing my faith, attending daily Mass and eucharistic adoration, but I had begun to understand my faith more deeply in terms of my relationship with God and encounter with Christ.

The faith that Mom shared with me, the faith that she helped nurture, finally became my own. Many people contributed to my education and formation in the faith. But there is no question that the person who first watered the seed of my faith was my mother.

When Francis became pope, everything seemed to come together. Most of us remember fondly those first months of his papacy: a whirlwind of powerful gestures, challenging words and unprecedented, surprising decisions. The worldwide good will generated by the beginning of his papacy created a “Catholic moment” in our culture. After years of media focus on church scandals and involvement in political culture wars, it was as if our new Argentine pontiff had single-handedly changed the narrative when he stepped onto the loggia, offered a modest wave and said the words “Buona sera.”

While most of the world’s attention was focused on his public actions—paying his hotel bill, living in the simple Casa Santa Marta rather than the apostolic palace, washing the feet of young prisoners on Holy Thursday—I followed closely what he was saying. I was challenged when, days after his election, he exclaimed, “Oh, how I would like a church that is poor and for the poor.” I was moved when he articulated his view of the role of the papal authority in the homily at his installation Mass. “Let us never forget that authentic power is service,” he said, “and that the pope, too, when exercising power, must enter ever more fully into that service which has its radiant culmination on the cross.”

What I and many other Catholics recognized in Pope Francis was how he put the principles of our faith—the Gospel of Jesus Christ—into action. This was reinforced by his words. In his homilies, addresses and interviews, he constantly admonished us to understand that without humility, repentance, conversion, transformation and a heart filled with tenderness and hope, our faith was hollow and self-referential.

# Since the early days of this papacy, there has been a growing and concentrated effort to undercut Pope Francis' message. 🙏🙏

It was also clear to me that Pope Francis' vision for the faith is precisely the cure for the embattled, embittered and polarized church in the United States.

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Unfortunately, not everyone in the U.S. church agrees.

Since the early days of this papacy, there has been a growing and concentrated effort to undercut Pope Francis' message. Catholic media outlets and public figures once regarded as reliably orthodox and faithful to the magisterium began to question his words and teachings. Off-the-cuff statements were taken out of context and interpreted as "insults" to devout Catholics. His encyclical on care for creation, "Laudato Si'," was met by critics who decried his reliance on "unsettled science" and his criticism of capitalism.

As this papacy has progressed, the reactions of several media organizations and periodicals popular with U.S. Catholics progressed from positive to wary to suspicious. When the pope's apostolic exhortation on marriage and family, "Amoris Laetitia," was released on April 8, 2016, many of those outlets became openly hostile.

The opposition to Francis—bolstered by the publication of a document signed by four cardinals who insinuated that "Amoris Laetitia" violated immutable Catholic doctrines on marriage, adultery and objective truth—has become relentless. Well-known Catholic apologists who openly encourage opposition to Pope Francis and the bishops—including extreme voices like Michael Voris of Church Militant and the popular YouTube commentator Taylor Marshall—have wildly popular multimedia platforms and go largely unchallenged by church leaders.

This is not simply a social media phenomenon. Many Catholics across the country hear figures like Archbishop

op Carlo Maria Viganò—the former Vatican nuncio to the United States who has repeatedly attacked Francis after calling for the pope to resign in 2018—praised from the pulpit. Articles disparaging the pope are shared among groups of Catholics and posted on parish websites. I have several friends who belong to Catholic book clubs where members will refuse to read anything by Pope Francis.

Since I began writing and speaking publicly about this phenomenon, I have heard from hundreds of Catholics who have seen their families and communities divided over Pope Francis. In some parishes—and even some diocesan seminaries—negativity toward Francis has become so commonplace that those who support him feel compelled to keep their views to themselves. One priest told me that several seminarians referred to their seminaries as "Francis-free zones."

Francis' less reactionary critics have done little to stem the rise of their much more vicious counterparts. Nor has this story received significant public attention from U.S. bishops or Catholics who support the pope. Quite often, they will actively discourage others from speaking out publicly against these reactionary leaders, arguing that to do so would give them the attention they crave. But as we have witnessed in the United States and international politics, the "establishment" can no longer afford to ignore these powerful populist movements.

Whatever motivates those who have been leading this assault on Francis' reputation—money, politics, ideology or, in the best case, deeply held convictions—the whole thing has become a grand distraction from Christ's mandate to spread the Gospel to all creatures and to build the kingdom of God here on Earth. The focus has drifted very far from what Jesus implored us to do. And things are not improving.

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My mother, who never read anything Pope Francis actually wrote, became convinced he was a heretic by her friends at church, members of her Catholic book club and through watching "The World Over Live," a weekly talk show on EWTN hosted by Raymond Arroyo, which often features outspoken papal critics.

Early in Francis' papacy, we argued about him frequently. Prior to each of the two sessions of the Synod on the Family, for example, she repeated the common claim among Francis' critics that the synods were "rigged" and that they were little more than vehicles for predetermined changes to doctrine. Similarly, whenever a bishop she deemed to be moderate or progressive was appointed to lead a U.S. diocese, she would insist—relying on commentary she read in Catholic media—that these decisions were further proof

that Pope Francis was deliberately trying to destroy the church. Any attempt I made to clarify or correct this narrative was immediately shut down.

At a certain point, I realized that I would never persuade her, and I tried to avoid the subject rather than create more division. When she became sick, I raised the subject a few more times, but it was clear that her views had become entrenched. She even had a coffee mug with the word “Viganò” written on it in capital letters. And every conversation we had about religion drifted into an argument about Pope Francis. Being unable to talk about God with the person who gave me my faith as she lay dying was agonizing.

My experience is not unique. This division in the church is a tragic situation that is harming families and communities of faith. It is totally opposed to the Gospel and to Pope Francis’ message. As the pope said in his homily on June 29, “There are always those who destroy unity and stifle prophecy.” I experienced this division in a very personal way. The impact of the public defiance against the pope is not theoretical; it is doing real damage to the body of Christ. Which leaders among us will respond to the urgent need for action to promote unity in the church?

Certainly, there are difficult disagreements to resolve, and not every division will be healed on this side of heaven. But we cannot lose sight of who we are as Catholic Christians. By our baptism, we are united as brothers and sisters with Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. Jesus entrusted the care of his sheep to Peter and his successors. The church teaches that Pope Francis is the visible foundation of communion for all the faithful, and the healing of these wounds can only begin in unity with him.

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## The Parable of the Young Man and the Old

—after Wilfred Owen

By John Poch

Abraham heard his name and rose, and took  
his son, provisions of a knife and wood,  
and went to distant, higher ground with fire  
to worship in the solitude required.  
The patriarch, by then already old,  
he made the lad to carry all the load,  
as the Scriptures tell. And Isaac, feeling wise,  
rebuked his father for the sacrifice  
forgotten, the oversight the old man’s fault.  
Of course he was mistaken, and Abraham spelled  
it out with stones, the wood. Stronger than  
the boy had thought, he bound his promised son.

But Isaac broke loose, fled like holy hell  
for town, a man unleashed. Our prodigal  
who wanted company, his own imprint  
and license, would later, a good time gone, repent,

returning to a hug, a ring, and laughter  
infecting all the house, and kill his father.

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John Poch’s work has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Paris Review* and *The New Republic*. His most recent books are *Texases* and *Between Two Rivers*, a photography/poetry collaboration with Jerod Foster, both published in 2019.

# THE UNFLINCHING FAITH OF MAMIE TILL MOBLEY

By Abraham M. Nussbaum

Emmett Till’s mother is the saint we need in the fight for racial justice

One evening in June, I came home from a protest against racism only to discover that my teenage son had been at the same protest. It was another sign of the times. A pair of pandemics—one of inequality and another of infection—are so prevalent that a father and a son can unknowingly march together.

Back at home, we talked about the way protesters peacefully and purposefully chanted. *Say his name! George Floyd! Say his name! George Floyd! Say his name! George Floyd!*

To me, as a cradle Catholic, it felt like the beginning of the Litany of the Saints. As the march continued, others were named. *Say her name! Breonna Taylor! Say his name! Ahmaud Arbery!* The pleasure of the Litany of the Saints is that it unfurls out into eternity. The horror of the protester’s litany was that a new name could be shouted each minute of the march without exhausting the names of the dead, an infernal unfurling.

Every name of a slain person is the name of someone’s child. They were birthed, raised, loved and then killed. This is no new story, even if it has become the news story.

As I listened to my local NPR station while washing dishes later that night, an African-American pastor was asked, “Why now, when racism and injustice have been with us

for so long?” She opined that it was because George Floyd’s murder was filmed and because he called for his mother.

Her comment helped me understand why George Floyd’s death had pierced me. “Mama,” he called, as the police officer’s knee slowly robbed him of his breath. “Mama, I’m through,” he called, as the police officer killed him. George Floyd’s mother had died two years earlier. And yet he called for her.

I can relate. As a Catholic, I have been trained to call on mothers—Mama, Mother Church, Mary—daily but especially in my distress. Who else but a mother can answer her child’s call?

Thinking about the Litany of the Saints, the cries of murdered children and the mothers who answered their calls, I thought of a most remarkable mother, Mamie Till Mobley, and told my own children part of her story.

Mamie Till Mobley mothered a son, Emmett Till, whose dead body sparked a national outcry. In August 1955, Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African-American boy from Chicago, was visiting relatives in Mississippi. In a local grocery store, he spoke to one of its proprietors, Carolyn Bryant, a 21-year-old white woman. Her husband, Roy Bryant, and his half-brother, J. W. Milam, shortly thereafter abducted Emmett Till from his great-uncle’s home, savage-

ly beat him, shot him and sank his body in the Tallahatchie River. Three days later, his mutilated body was discovered.

The discovery of his body never led to legal justice. Not in 1955, when an all-white jury found Bryant and Milam innocent. Not in 1956, when Bryant and Milam confessed to the murder in a story for *Look* magazine. Not in 2004, when the Department of Justice opened an investigation into the case. Not in 2017, when Carolyn Bryant admitted in an interview that she had lied in her testimony against Emmett Till.

Each moment is a sour confirmation of the world's order. Each is a reminder that the only justice Emmett Till ever received was from the faithful witness of Mamie Till Mobley, his tireless mother.

So I asked our son to read aloud her oral account, preserved by Studs Terkel in *Will the Circle Be Unbroken?*, of receiving her son's brutalized body. Less than two weeks after she had bidden him farewell on a Mississippi-bound train, Ms. Mobley retrieved the body of her only child from the train station in Chicago. She recounted the moment in unflinching detail:

I began a real minute examination. I looked at his teeth and there were only about four of them left. He had such beautiful teeth. I moved on up to the nose. And it looked like somebody had taken a meat cleaver and had just chopped the bridge of his nose. Pieces had fallen out. When I went to look at his eyes, this one was lying on his cheek. But I saw the color of it. I said, "That's my son's eye." I looked over at the other and it was as if somebody had taken a nut picker and just picked it out. There was no eye. I went to examine his ears. If you'll notice, my ears are detached from my face and they kind of curl on the end. And his did, too. There was no ear. It was gone. I was looking up through the side of his face and I could see daylight on the other side. I said, "Oh, my God." The tears were falling, and I was brushing tears away because I had to see.

Ms. Mobley knew the body, even in its despoiled state, as the body of the son she had birthed, nursed and bathed. She received his body in the funeral home, examined it and knew it, as only a mother could. Then she prayed:

Later, I was reading the Scriptures. And it told how Jesus had been led from judgment hall to judgment hall all night long, how he had been beaten—and so much that no man would ever sustain the horror of his beating. That his face was just in ribbons. And I thought about it, and I said, "Lord, do you mean

to tell me that Emmett's beating did not equal the one that was given to Jesus?" And I said, "My God, what must Jesus have suffered?"

As my own son read these words aloud to his sisters, I was dumbfounded again. How could she say her own son suffered less than Jesus? How could a mother be so faithful? Ms. Mobley understood something our sanitized pictures of Jesus hide: that the suffering of Jesus continued in the death of her son and is ongoing in the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and all the brutalized black bodies before and after. It is an infernal litany but one that, through a mother's call, becomes a catalyst for justice.

After privately viewing her son's body, Ms. Mobley exposed his body in an open-casket funeral. On Sept. 6, 1955, tens of thousands of people viewed the brutalized body in the gathered company of their church. After viewing his body, the mourners and those around the world who saw the graphic photographs cried out for justice.

Within 100 days of Emmett Till's murder, Rosa Parks began her bus boycott while thinking of Emmett Till. His body became a call to action because Rosa Parks and Ms. Mobley transformed his suffering from a private wound into a public sin.

In the days after her son's death, Ms. Mobley, in a statement recorded by *The Chicago Defender*, cried out to a gathering:

Lord, you gave your only son to remedy a condition, but who knows, but what the death of my only son might bring an end to lynching.... Lord take my soul, show me what you want me to do and make me able to do it.

I count Mamie Till Mobley in the litany of the saints whose company I hope to keep. Learning from Ms. Mobley, I pray to be shown and to be made able. I pray for Emmett Till, for George Floyd, for the mothers they called upon. And I pray for the justice they sought.

---

Abraham M. Nussbaum, M.D., is a writer and physician who practices at a safety-net hospital in Denver, Colo., where he lives with his wife and three children. He is the author of *The Finest Traditions of My Calling: One Physician's Search for the Renewal of Medicine*.

 Did you find this article compelling? So did our audio team! So we adapted it for our new **Church Meets World** podcast. To experience how this story has been recreated with the voices of Abraham and his son, archival audio, immersive sound design and additional commentary from *America's* editors, visit [americamagazine.org/churchmeetsworld](https://americamagazine.org/churchmeetsworld).

*Humbilis. et Obli: Se:*  
207 Galileo

# *The Galileo Myth*

By Guy Consolmagno and Christopher M. Graney



The signature of the astronomer Galileo Galilei appears on a document from the records of his trial kept in the Vatican Secret Archives.

Everyone is familiar with the legend of Galileo: how one of the great astronomers in history bravely stood up to the Inquisition in defense of his argument that the earth orbited the sun, rather than vice versa. In recent variations of this myth, the Catholic Church has been cast in the role of science deniers who used Scripture as a cudgel to deny Galileo's claims and found him guilty of heresy.

Part history, part science fiction, that Galileo story is less a legend than a myth. It claims to explain what happened 400 years ago, and it looks to a future where such mistakes can never happen again. But the stories we tell ourselves are never really about the past or the future; they are about the times in which they are written. The Galileo myth reflects how we understand science and history, church and mythology in our present times of social strife and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Consider a key character in the Galileo story: the Grand Duchess Christina of Lorraine. A descendent of the French royal family, she was the widow of the Medici Grand Duke Ferdinand I of Tuscany and the mother of Cosimo II, who ruled Tuscany in the 1610s. Galileo came from Tuscany, and Ferdinand gave Galileo his first teaching job; Galileo tutored Cosimo in math, and Cosimo made Galileo his official court philosopher and mathematician.

In December 1613, the grand duchess, a devoutly religious woman, asked Galileo's friend, the Benedictine monk Benedetto Castelli, about the things Galileo had discovered with his telescope and his support for Nicolas Copernicus's idea that the Earth, not the sun, moved. To her that seemed contrary to certain biblical verses; Eccl 1:5, for example, says, "The sun rises and the sun sets; then it presses on to the place where it rises." Castelli, though

intimidated by the prospect of arguing with royalty, politely and respectfully defended the idea of a moving Earth.

We know all this because Castelli described it to Galileo in a letter dated Dec. 14, 1613. Galileo responded with a letter back to Castelli a week later and after that with a longer letter to Christina herself. These letters have come to be known as masterly discussions of science and religion, full of statements like "Holy Scripture and nature both equally derive from the divine Word, the former as the dictation of the Holy Spirit, the latter as the most obedient executrix of God's commands."

But they were words about religion, a topic where Galileo had neither formal training nor church remit to teach. In 1615, the letter to Castelli became the subject of a complaint lodged against Galileo with the Inquisition. The Galileo story, full of religious politics, personality and pettiness, was off and running.

Was Christina then a science denier? Did she and those like her reject science for Scripture? Actually, no.

### Compelling Scientific Reasons

Note that Galileo responded to Christina not through scientific arguments but by focusing on the Bible. That is because Christina did *not* disagree with the science. She granted to Castelli that everything Galileo had discovered was true. After all, by April 1611 a team of Jesuit astronomers had verified Galileo's discoveries, discoveries that showed that Jupiter had moons circling it, that Venus circled the sun and so on.

The trouble was that moons circling Jupiter or Venus circling the sun did not show that the Earth moved. Those discoveries were fully compatible with the ideas of Tycho Brahe, the most

# There is a subtle problem with seeing the Galileo story as a narrative of the church denying science. It implies that science is a single worldview based on unchanging facts. ●●

capable astronomer of the previous generation. Brahe envisioned the sun, moon and stars circling an immobile Earth, while the planets circled the sun. Brahe's and Copernicus's systems were identical when it came to observations involving the sun, moon and planets.

But there is a more subtle problem with seeing the Galileo story as a narrative of the church denying science. It implies that science is a single, monolithic worldview based on unchanging facts that can be objectively proved. But consider Brahe. He admired Copernicus and his work, yet he argued against Copernicus. He did so based not on the Bible but on what we can recognize today as compelling scientific grounds.

## Look at the Stars

For one thing, the physics of the time, the geocentric physics of Aristotle, explained the motions of celestial bodies by assuming they were made of a mysterious, lightweight "quintessence," not found on Earth, that naturally stayed up in the heavens and moved in circles. By contrast, earthly things were heavy and naturally tended to rest. There was no physical explanation for how a heavy Earth might move forever around the

sun. (Newton's laws of motion were still decades in the future.)

A second compelling argument for Brahe's system was the size and position of the stars. If the Earth were moving, then its motion relative to the stars should have been detected. Brahe had himself observed stars with remarkable and accurate precision; he had detected nothing. So either the Earth did not move, or the stars were so distant that Earth's orbit was nothing by comparison. But how could anyone tell?

Astronomers at that time thought Galileo's new telescope could give them the answers. They thought they could measure the apparent sizes of stars because, as Galileo claimed, the telescope was capable of "showing the disc of the star bare and very many times enlarged." And then, assuming those stars were the same size as the planets or the sun, they could calculate their distance from the Earth.

The German astronomer Simon Marius, measuring the disks that he saw in his telescope, did the calculation and wound up endorsing Brahe's system, not Copernicus's. So did the Jesuit astronomer Christoph Scheiner, who noted that if the orbit of the Earth cannot be detected in a heliocentric universe but the size of a star

can be, then the star must be larger than that orbit. Every observable star would have to be larger, utterly dwarfing the sun and every other celestial body. In Brahe's geocentric system, by contrast, the sizes of stars compared nicely to other celestial bodies.

The problem was that no one at the time understood the subtleties of telescopes. Telescopes focus imperfectly. What should be a point of light in a telescope winds up looking like a fuzzy spot. That spot was what astronomers, including Galileo, were measuring. A full understanding of telescopes and the relative motion of the stars would not be achieved until the 19th century.

## Rising (and Falling) Tides

A third scientific argument against the Earth's motion was that a falling object should not drop straight down but should appear to be slightly deflected if the ground to which it falls is part of a spinning Earth. That tiny effect was first suggested by Jesuit scientists of Galileo's time. Today, it is understood to be a key factor in weather patterns, and it is called the Coriolis effect, after a 19th-century scientist. The Jesuits, understandably unable to detect it, argued that its absence suggested the Earth's immobility.

Galileo's letters to Castelli and Christina said little to those who were drawn to Brahe's ideas for scientific reasons such as these. Instead, Galileo would provide a scientific argument for Earth's motion in the 1616 essay "On the Tides" and in his famous 1632 book *Dialogue on the Two World Systems*, which eventually led to his trial.

In these two writings, Galileo claimed that Earth's double motion of rotation about its own axis plus its revolution about the sun sloshed the oceans back and forth daily in their



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basins, generating the tides. But this action alone could not explain the Mediterranean tides, which occur *twice* daily. To this, Galileo argued that the tidal periods in different places were determined by local characteristics that reflected the water surge back and forth within the local basin. Thus, the twice-daily tides were characteristic of the Mediterranean only.

In his 1616 essay, Galileo claimed that the Atlantic Ocean's tides observed in Lisbon, Portugal, occurred once daily, in agreement with his theory. In 1619, however, Galileo was informed (by Richard White of England) that this claim was in error; tides are twice daily at Lisbon, too. That should have proved Galileo's theory false. Yet in 1632, Galileo presented it again, with a key change to his argument from 1616: He omitted all mention of the Atlantic tides.

Galileo's scientific argument was fallacious. The science of the day—the observable evidence, the most correct reasoning—was against him and his theory. And his opponents knew that. Francesco Ingoli, a Theatine priest, who played a role in the church's censoring of Copernicus's work in 1616, cited the star-size problem and the problem of falling bodies. Melchoir Inchofer, S.J., who played a role in the rejection of the *Dialogue*, noted the star-size problem; the Rev. Zaccaria Pasqualigo, also involved in that rejection, noted the issue of tidal periods. Thus when churchmen or a royal woman argued against Galileo, they were not denying science. They had science on their side.

Nevertheless, as we know now, they were wrong.

### The Nature of Science

That is not to say that Galileo was ultimately proved “right.” What gives

the Galileo myth its infamy is that it is supposedly about “science” and “facts” versus powerful people attacking “Truth.” But no one today views the universe as Galileo did. The Earth may not be the center of the universe, but neither is the sun; it is just one star in a galaxy of stars, which, in turn, is one among a universe of galaxies. And today's understanding of the universe is barely 100 years old and comes with its own mysterious “quintessences,” like “dark matter” and “dark energy.” Who knows how science will describe the universe 100 or 400 years from now? Any Galileo story that ends with a triumphant finality misunderstands the nature of science itself.

Furthermore, such a story misses the very things about Galileo that made him great: his wider vision; the artistic talent that allowed him to see and intuit the truth even if incompletely; his mathematical ability to ask the right questions and suggest ways of searching for answers; his genius for communicating his ideas to a broad and influential audience.

But just as we must recognize that science is neither monolithic nor always right, we also should be wary of treating the other side of this equation, the church, as if it, too, were a single entity speaking with a single voice. Even in Galileo's time, many clergymen (like Castelli) argued his side. Indeed, one of the fascinating puzzles of the whole story is that for many years it seemed that Pope Urban VIII, who would be the driving force behind Galileo's trial, was himself a Galileo man.

Galileo's story is certainly not one of church versus science. But Galileo's trial was indeed a terrible injustice. Historians debate the root of that injustice. Some blame the personalities involved. Others cite the political and economic pressures involving the

Holy See and the wealth of the Medici family, represented by Grand Duchess Christina. Still others cite the upheaval of the Thirty Years War, which reached its peak during the time of Galileo's trial. All these pressures were real. None justified a heresy trial.

And let's face it: On the scale of things that the church gets wrong, the Galileo story is competing with many other sins that are always before us. To cite but one example: A generation after Galileo, Jesuit priests in Maryland would own slaves. That racism infects society even today.

We study what happened in history to imagine a better future. That is the immediate relevance of the Galileo story to us today. But we must be careful that the stories we tell ourselves do not fit too neatly into contemporary stereotypes like “science denialism.” If we do not diagnose problems correctly, we cannot come up with good solutions. You do not treat Covid-19 as if it were the flu. You do not treat systemic racism as if it were merely an economic issue. You do not treat the mistakes the church made with Galileo by assuming it was due to science-denial in the church. And you do not treat the problem of science-denial today through the fiction that it was at the root of the Galileo story.

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Guy Consolmagno, S.J., is the director of the Vatican Observatory. Christopher M. Graney is an adjunct scholar with the observatory. Both write for the Vatican Observatory Foundation's blog, “Sacred Space Astronomy,” where many of the ideas in this article were first developed.

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# Daughter Hymn

By Kay Bell

Mother, I keep praying the parts of you  
out of me & yet you keep returning,

always wearing a secondhand dress  
always fraught and wayward  
always sunbathing in grief;

refusing to love any one island or man.

& you know how hard I've tried to not disappoint you  
but how I've innately become a wound on the flesh salted,

& how you have carried me like a knife on the tongue twisting

& how each time I tried to say goodbye it was your maternal glory  
that choked me

& then you couldn't bear to love the one who reminded you of yourself,

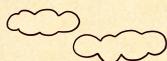
& each time you tried you were forced to recite prayers of your own:

*Dear Lord, you have buried a gun in my womb please don't shoot*

---

Kay Bell is the author of the poetry chapbook *Cry Sweat Bleed Write* (Lily Poetry Review Books, 2020). Her poetry has appeared in numerous publications, including *The Ekphrastic Review*, *The Write Launch*, *Pithead Chapel and Brown Molasses Sunday: An Anthology of Black Women Writers*. She lives in the South Bronx.

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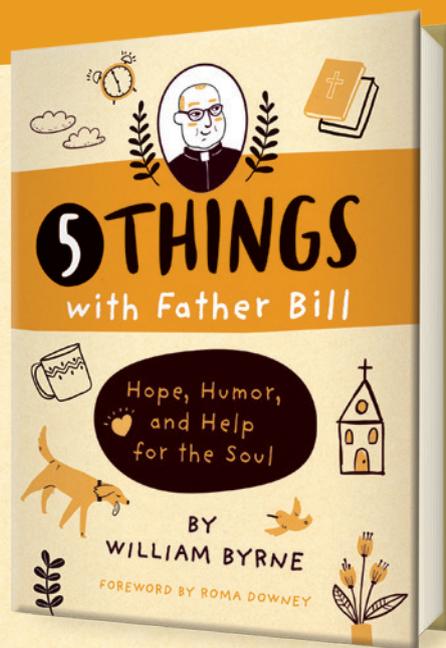
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A tragedy mask. Detail from a statue of Melpomene, the muse of tragedy, on the island of Corfu in Greece.

## A tragic protagonist

By Ron Marasco

Midway through the first chapter of Terry Eagleton's new book, *Tragedy*, one gets the sinking feeling that this is one of those unlucky books that was completed and typeset into galleys just prior to a shift in the zeitgeist so immense that the published book is forced to step blinking into a world for which it is now awkwardly ill-suited.

No writer could have foreseen what was in store for us all in a year best summed up by a tweet from George Martin, the creator of "Game of Thrones," "2020 was directed by me." But Terry Eagleton offers a dense book of lit-crit hairsplitting to a chaotic time badly in need of a cultural thinker of his caliber.

The book begins, promisingly enough, with Eagleton identifying the stuff of tragedy to be "affairs of state, revolts against authority, thrusting ambition, court intrigues, violations of justice, struggles for sovereignty." But Eagleton stays so focused on the minutiae of critical criteria that

some of what he says comes off as a wince-worthy trivialization of the human dimension of the tragic. Even with his authorial tic of riffing on the quotations of other theorists in a way that blurs his own stance, plenty of tone-deaf howlers leap out.

I kept imagining a darkly comic Monty Python sketch with Terry Jones—a dead ringer for Eagleton—reading aloud from this book to a just-evicted family: "Tragedy cannot tolerate a utilitarian ethics or an egalitarian politics. As an aristocrat among art-forms, it serves among other things as a memory trace of a more spiritually exalted social order at the heart of a distastefully prosaic epoch." Or shouting through a bullhorn, over tear gas, at a rally, "Whatever leaves us dejected rather than exalted—an air crash, or famine, the death of a child—fails to qualify for tragic status."

This is the very thing Eagleton himself pounced on in a previous book about tragedy called *Sweet Violence*,

taking a scholar to task for saying that "in tragedy, there is implicit, not only the possibility of redemption, but the spiritual assertion that man is splendid in his ashes, and can transcend his nature." To which Eagleton replied: "It is hard to see that the victims of Bosnia or Cambodia are particularly splendid in their ashes."

But that was Terry Eagleton a few iterations of self ago. He has been a shape-shifter since making a name for himself as Oxford's rebel-in-residence on the then-hot subject of Marxist aesthetics. When that field cooled in the '80s, he remade himself into a more gentlemanly don and gatekeeper of the burgeoning craze that provided the title of his best-selling book, *Literary Theory*.

But in a rare lapse of timing, he has missed a moment here. At this time in our riven *polis*, with raging hostility on all sides that can turn a family's holiday dinner table into "Thanksgiving at the House of Atreus," Eagleton shows

**Tragedy**  
By Terry Eagleton  
Yale University Press  
216p \$26

up for *Tragedy* tweed-side out. In fact, for a book of that title, with no clarifying subtitle, he stays aloof from the emotional drama of the genre.

His only in-depth look at an actual play comes in the skimpy second chapter on “Oedipus Tyrannus,” which is a quarter of the length of the other four chapters in the book. Bearing the unfortunate title “Incest and Arithmetic,” it is an oddly wonkish reading of incest as a largely numerical phenomenon. “In the peculiar arithmetic of incest, each individual is also several-in-one,” Eagleton posits, trying to stretch into universality the King of Thebes’s rather unique provenance: “As more than one, Oedipus is no more than anyone, since all individuals, if only by virtue of being subject and object, are necessarily non-self-identical.”

The reason for this perfunctory treatment of the play comes clear in the next two hefty chapters (“Tragic Transitions” and “Fruitful Falsehoods”). Here we see what Eagleton really seems to want to do in this book, which is parsing critical theory and sparring philosophically with a list of his favorite theorists, from Lacan to Kant to George Steiner to Hegel. Eagleton is without question a deft parser of critical nuance and a complex philosophical thinker. At its best, the interplay bursts forth in a passage like this one—as thrilling a description of the milieu of tragedy as one could ever find:

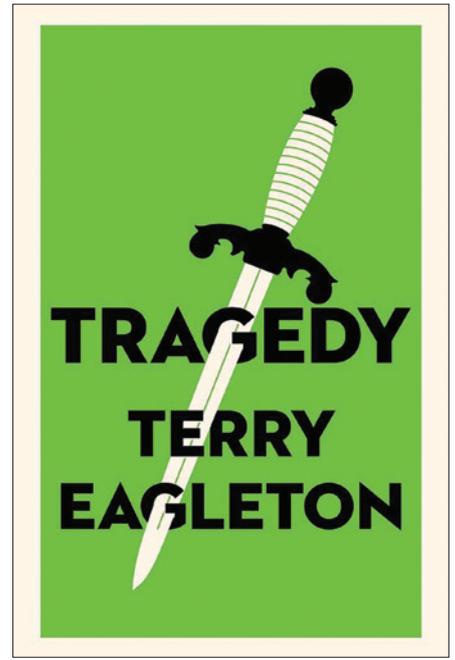
In this realm of pampered, perverse desires, history is mere temporal decay, flesh, honour and allegiance are

commodities to be bought and sold, and a deep desire for oblivion runs beneath the steady dissolution of meaning into savage farce. Human identities are as fractured as the broken-backed form of the plays themselves.

At its worst, you feel like you’re eavesdropping on a pedant amusing himself with overwrought asides like: “Althusser’s theory of ideology mixes a dash of Spinoza with a touch of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Freud.”

There is some value to a book that lets us watch a talent like Eagleton dissect other theorists. This is, after all, what he did so beautifully in *Literary Theory*. But there was a clarity and “spirit of teaching” in that book that is all but absent here. *Tragedy* is a difficult read, with no clarifying chapter subheadings and too few paragraph breaks to guide us through the labyrinth of Eagleton’s highly subjective perceptions. And the structure, if there is one, relies simply on how long he feels like lingering over a point before hopping on to some new notion. Rarely do the (albeit sometimes brilliant) smaller units cohere into solid takeaways for a reader, let alone build up to something approaching revelation. All of which calls into question the editorial latitude Eagleton has been given here.

In the last decade, Yale University Press has published book after book of his. But with them coming sometimes annually, it is hard to believe each project is an individually wrought work of carefully ripened ideas burning to be shared with their moment in



time. This may explain why *Tragedy* feels like a mishmash of new glosses on old preoccupations and one big rush to get some as-yet-unpublished gems into print. By the time we reach *Tragedy*'s final, aptly named chapter “The Inconsolable,” you can almost hear him shifting through yellowed pages of the previously-killed darlings he is repurposing.

The real shame here is that an opportunity has been missed. There is, to be sure, a timely book to be written about this subject, but not one that gentrifies tragedy into a set of aesthetic imperatives in the service of a superstar scholar’s intellectual whims. What is needed is a book that will, instead, use this powerful genre to serve our collective understanding of human suffering.

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Ron Marasco is professor emeritus of theater arts at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, and the author of numerous books.



# Christianity and Entitlement

By Tom Deignan

Protestors dance at a Black Lives Matter rally in Washington, D.C., on June 6.

Khyati Y. Joshi's timely new book raises important questions before one reads even a single page: How will Joshi define "white"? Or "Christian"? Or even "privilege"? Joshi offers up historical context, as well as contemporary interviews and anecdotes, to shine "a light on Christian privilege and its entwinement with White privilege" as well as to "equip readers with tools and ideas regarding how they can recognize it operating in our society and foster a more equitable environment for all."

To deny that white Christians enjoy a substantial amount of structural advantage in the United States would be absurd. That has not stopped the cries of "reverse racism" or yearly suggestions on Breitbart that there is a "war on Christmas" or the continued success of fringe organizations like One America News Network.

This is a shame because Steve Bannon's enraged acolytes are among those who could use a strong dose of what *White Christian Privilege* serves up. Look no further than President

Trump's dangerous, deeply offensive, Bible-toting stroll to St. John's Episcopal Church back in June. Nearly as outrageous as Mr. Trump's publicity stunt is the fact that he or members of his administration apparently believed this bizarre move might play to at least a certain segment of the Republican base.

But Joshi is not only challenging reactionary evangelicals. "This book is not an exercise in political correctness," she declares early on, noting that "popular and academic authors have railed against Christianity in particular, and we can find bias against religion...in higher education and social justice or progressive circles. Religion is the last topic some of my progressive colleagues in ethnic and Asian American studies want to discuss."

Joshi bluntly and deftly analyzes two centuries of Supreme Court decisions that buttress what she characterizes as "three specific, related, and mutually supporting phenomena" in the United States: "Christian privilege, Christian normativity, and Christian hegemony." From *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823), which "endorsed the White

Christian Supremacist effort to take Native American lands," through the notorious World War II Korematsu decision and up to *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* (2014), Joshi argues the Supreme Court has reinforced white Christian privilege, in part because "most Supreme Court justices are themselves born, raised, socialized, and educated within the symbols and structures of White American society, with its deep Christian normativity."

Joshi's heavy use of academic jargon is likely to irk some readers, as will assertions like this: "The attitudes of White Christians who would never pick up a tiki torch or fly the Confederate flag nevertheless give license to those who would." Still, most of her claims about the degree to which Christianity influences everything from work schedules to hairstyles are difficult to refute.

Joshi does, however, miss a valuable opportunity to explore how American institutions *have* evolved in recent decades. Since the 18th century, when (as Joshi points out numerous times) the 1790 Naturalization Act limited full citizenship to "free

**White Christian Privilege**  
The Illusion of Religious Equality in America  
By Khyati Y. Joshi  
NYU Press  
256p \$28

white men,” the nation’s corridors of power have been “overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon and Protestant.” Yet today’s Supreme Court has not a single justice who was born a Protestant, which likely would have horrified the dominant “native stock” from not that long ago, with its (in Joshi’s words) “anti-immigration, racism, anti-Catholicism, antisemitism, and pro-eugenics beliefs.”

Has a Supreme Court dominated by once-reviled outsiders (Catholics and Jews) done anything to undermine “Protestant hegemony”? How and why did the likes of Samuel Alito Jr. or the late Antonin Scalia (each a son of immigrants) become agents of the very WASP power structure their parents so offended?

Joshi dives into the murky waters of “whiteness” and the social construction of race, but this tends to obscure as much as it clarifies. She informs us that “the Catholicism of John F. Kennedy—still today, the nation’s only Catholic president—prompted great public hand-wringing” but also that “mid-twentieth century America was a time when ethnic difference among Whites ‘melted away’ and created a new imagined reality in which Catholicism, Judaism, and Protestant faiths were reimagined as the three ‘pillars of democracy.’”

Modest as this may sound in 2020, the ramifications of past “demographic shifts” for Joshi’s tripartite title are quite profound but never explored. For example, certain politicians (Jeff Sessions, a former senator and attorney general, for one) use this recent past as an endorsement of new immigration restrictions, like those passed

in 1924, to give today’s immigrants time to assimilate and advance. This naïvely ignores the parties—particularly African-Americans—who were long legally excluded from this new chapter in American pluralism, an injustice Joshi notes and which has had profound consequences.

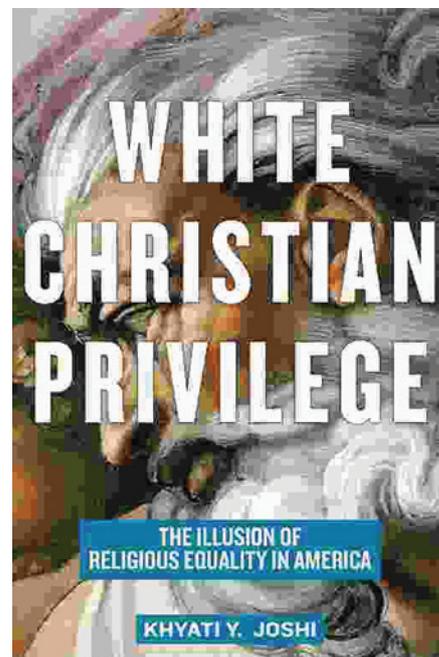
But progressives have their own shortcomings when it comes to immigration and hegemony.

Even if one believes that once-despised huddled masses from the Mezzogiorno or Bialystok consciously struck a racial bargain for modest privileges (Joshi has little to say about class), who is to say the children of immigrants from Hunan Province or Punjab or Santo Domingo won’t strike similar bargains? In this sense, Joshi’s skepticism about American demographic change is welcome.

For decades, pundits and journalists have been counting down the days to when white people will become a “minority” in America. Much of this coverage, like Paul Starr’s essay on the “emerging Democratic majority,” published in *The American Prospect* way back in 1997, was aimed at tweaking conservatives who (it was assumed) could do nothing to resist a “majority minority” America.

Then came 2016.

Yet as Joshi notes, whatever demographic changes may be in the offing, “275 years of embedded advantages in our laws and public policies are not going to disappear overnight.” After all, the looming majority-minority shift is really just a statistical sleight of hand, relying as it does on millions of Americans who identify as



*both* white and non-white.

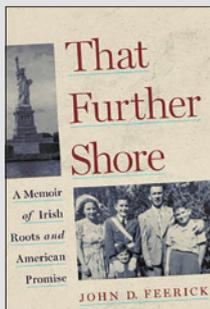
That identity and structural power remain such slippery entities may well undermine Joshi’s own ambitious hopes of “dismantling...the edifice of White Christian supremacy, brick by brick.”

What, then, can be done?

“There are positive models for what Christian faith in the public sphere can look like,” Margaret Renkle observed recently in *The New York Times*, highlighting the advocacy and activism of the Rev. Stacy Rector, Rev. Becca Stevens and even Daniel J. Berrigan, S.J. And as important as it is to challenge and interrogate sprawling structures, feeding the hungry and comforting the afflicted on a daily basis is certainly revolutionary in its own way. That reminds us that the “Christianity” Joshi identifies as the source of so many social problems can also play a significant role in many solutions.

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Tom Deignan, a regular *America* contributor, has written about books for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *National Catholic Reporter*.



### That Further Shore

By John D. Feerick  
Fordham University Press  
456p \$34.95

#### A Bronx tale

The history of America Media is so steeped in Irish-American DNA and culture that we have been (fairly) accused over the years of an inordinate bias toward sentimental tales of Irish-Americans and their origins “on the other side.”

With that in mind, I understand if anyone is a bit suspicious toward a review of a book about a Bronx-born Irish-American tracing his family history and telling his own story of rising to great success in the United States. I can assure the reader that John D. Feerick’s *That Further Shore* is no maudlin or sentimental tale. While Feerick has a talent for the craic, this memoir also engages important chapters in American urban, intellectual and legal history.

Feerick’s life epitomizes the American story. The son of Irish immigrants, he was raised in a two-bedroom apartment in the Bronx shared with his parents and four siblings, attended Catholic schools from St. Angela Merici through Fordham Law and worked his way through each stage. A lawyer at the firm of Skadden, Arps for 20 years, Feerick returned to Fordham Law School in 1982 for a term as dean, a position from which he retired in 2002. Never shy of fighting for a cause, he went on to found the

Feerick Center for Social Justice at Fordham Law School.

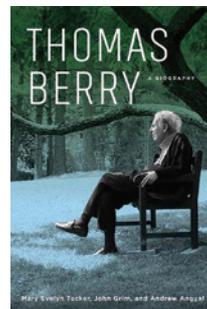
But it is Feerick’s other involvements that will really capture the reader: Helping to formulate the 25th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which clarifies the line of succession for the presidency; accompanying President Clinton on his trip to Ireland in 1995; his service to the Archdiocese of New York, legal aid services, the New York City Bar Association and the American Bar Association; his efforts on post-Watergate legal ethics and public integrity programs; and his continued commitment to the poor, the homeless and the destitute.

What is most striking about *That Further Shore* is that, for a memoir of a New York lawyer, it strikes one as a rapturous love tale. It is a love that is more than just passion, it is a love that is cognizant of the care of and concern for other people. It is a love stemming from family, faith and tradition. Feerick’s gratitude and love for his family, for the love of his life, Emalie, and for his children and grandchildren permeates the pages. This loving gratitude extends to his professors, friends, colleagues, law partners and the men and women religious in his life.

For an extraordinary tale about an extraordinary man, Feerick’s most striking trait is the humility present in these pages born from love of other people.

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Nicholas D. Sawicki is special assistant to the president and editor in chief of America Media.



### Thomas Berry

A Biography  
By Mary Evelyn  
Tucker, John Grim  
and Andrew Angyal  
Columbia University Press  
360p \$28.95

#### A pervasive legacy

Meticulously crafted by a trio of co-authors whose lives and work were informed by Thomas Berry, this biography delivers on a difficult assignment: to portray the intellectual thought and vivify the life’s textures of a multifaceted thinker and teacher.

Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, who co-direct the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale, have devoted their public scholarship to promulgating and developing Berry’s wisdom through the intersections of world religions with ecological considerations; they are also the literary executors of his estate. Andrew Angyal, a professor emeritus at Elon University, came to know Berry first through admiration of his 1988 book *The Dream of the Earth* and then in person, when the late Passionist priest retired to Greensboro, N.C.

Berry’s legacy for a rising generation of eco-theologians and ethicists is pervasive. Berry held that environmental crises are spiritual crises, that Earth is a communion of subjects, and that what is needed is a “New Story”—a “functional cosmology”—that reorients human beings to the evolutionary-ecological epic that has shaped our conditions of possibility, and in turn gives rise to

the “Great Work” of ecological-evolutionary consciousness.

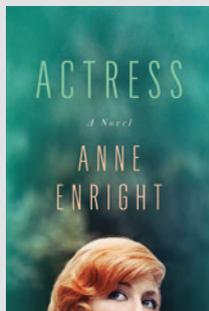
This book smoothly portrays the intersection of historical and personal events in Berry’s life as they coalesce with his intellectual development. Compelling narratives depict the impact of his time in China, the influence of Ted de Bary and Tu Weiming, the importance of his years at Fordham, the impact of thinkers like Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., and the ethos of the Riverdale Center, where for decades students came to learn from the beloved man nicknamed “the casual corduroy prophet.” Berry’s influence on communities of women religious is also clear.

The book is less adept at offering points of critique of Berry’s corpus, and at times it is a bit overstated (an essay on patriarchy is extolled as a “watershed piece,” without recognition that ecofeminists and theologians had been working on such ideas for some time). More engagement with critical interlocutors, like scholars who took complementary but distinct approaches to ecological matters, might also have rounded out the intellectual lineage aspect of this book.

Nonetheless, for the fullness of its depiction of his life and work, for its tracing of intellectual influences and for its reviving of the memory of a scholar whose Catholic roots expanded out to reject exclusivism and embrace “the global spiritual past,” this is a valuable study of Thomas Berry’s life and legacy.

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### Actress

By Anne Enright  
W. W. Norton &  
Company  
272p \$26.95

#### Off Broadway

In *Actress*, Anne Enright tells the story of a famous Irish theater star, Katherine O’Dell, through the eyes of her daughter. Katherine is a legend for her long career in Ireland, the London West End, Broadway and Hollywood. However, she is better known to a new generation for her role in a butter commercial; at the end of her life, she is best known for shooting a television producer in the foot.

All this may sound like a spoiler, but it is just chapter one. For Enright, the story is not a typical arc but is instead an ever-tightening coil, circling the same events from new vantage points, ready to spring at any moment.

The story is told by Katherine’s daughter, Norah—who in middle age is trying to understand and rediscover her deceased mother, in particular her sexuality. Enright shines in laying bare the mother-daughter relationship. Every detail is so exact and telling that even the absolutely outlandish ones ring true. Katherine is always larger than life, as ephemeral as whatever character she’s playing and as real as the judgmental hand on her daughter’s waist.

I read *Actress* in the early days of New York’s Covid-19 lockdown, and crammed in my small Manhattan apartment, I relished Katherine’s

1948 Broadway run. The extravagant lunches, her boat rides in Central Park, her long walks along the East River and her packed theaters: Will such things ever exist again?

Norah often vividly recounts scenes from her mother’s past for which she was not present—including from before her own birth (like the Broadway scenes). And yet for a book with an unreliable narrator, *Actress* couldn’t be more intimate. At moments, Norah slips into the second person. It’s then you discover the intended audience: her husband. She tells him, “There were times—whole years, perhaps—when you annoyed me, in one way or another, but you don’t annoy me any more.” And so, the reader becomes an interloper—trespassing within a marriage.

Of course, any review of *Actress*—especially for a Jesuit publication—would be remiss without mention of Father Des Folan, Katherine’s “pet priest...handsome like a wax doll.” Father Folan practices psychoanalysis and looms large over Norah’s understanding of her mother’s sanity and sexuality. He is one of Katherine’s few regular outings in the years before the shooting, so he becomes a gateway to Norah’s opening question: What was Katherine like before she went crazy? Religion and spirituality are the center of Norah’s ever more insightful perspective on sanity, feminine sexuality and her mother—and are interrogated in this exceptional novel.

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Emma Winters is a former Joseph A. O’Hare fellow at America Media and the communications coordinator for the Center for Migration Studies of New York, a Catholic think tank.

## Rejection and Acceptance

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), OCTOBER 4, 2020

READINGS: IS 5:1-7; PS 80; PHIL 4:6-9; MT 21:33-43

The themes of rejection and acceptance are present in today's readings. In the Gospel, Matthew uses the parable of the wicked tenants to criticize the chief priests and Pharisees for their rejection of Jesus and the message of the Gospel. The parable builds on imagery and ideas heard in the first reading, from Isaiah, adding allegorical elements representing the kingdom of God. In the second reading, from Philippians, Paul reminds the community to accept God's comfort and presence in their lives.

Today's Gospel stops at Mt 21:43, but the end of the chapter sheds light on the tension between Jesus and the audience to whom he addresses this parable: "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they knew that he was speaking about them. And although they were attempting to arrest him, they feared the crowds, for they regarded him as a prophet" (Mt 21:45-46).

These leaders are likened to the tenants in the parable. The landowner (God) gives the tenants (leaders) control over the vineyard (Israel). When the landowner sends multiple servants (prophets) to collect the harvest, the tenants reject and kill them. Final-

ly, expecting the tenants to accept the landowner's son (Jesus), the tenants reject and kill him too.

Matthew ends the parable with Jesus asking his audience to recall Ps 118:22-23: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes." This psalm is invoked to affirm that although many reject him, Jesus is the foundation of the kingdom of God. Acts 4:11 and 1 Peter 2:7 also quote Psalm 118 and make a similar comparison, using this rejected-stone image to explain that even when his message meets with opposition, Jesus is fulfilling God's plan. The declarations that many reject Jesus are meant to inspire people to openly accept Jesus and the Gospel.

The second reading, from Philippians, addresses an early Christian community and reminds them to look to God for comfort, especially during times of uncertainty. Paul exhorts the Philippians to pray, offering petitions and thanksgiving to God. They are instructed to seek the peace of God, which "surpasses all understanding." Paul reminds them to be attuned to their world, looking for things that are true, honor-

*The peace of God will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:7)*

### Praying With Scripture

How can prayer help you during times of uncertainty?

Are you open to hearing ideas that are different from your own?

How can reading Scripture foster a relationship with God and with your community?

able, just, pure, lovely, gracious and excellent. Paul insists that these qualities should be sought and praised.

During a time of much disagreement and uncertainty, today's readings offer a few reminders. Just as Jesus criticizes leaders of his day and meets with opposition, so too should we be willing to speak up against injustice, even if people in power resist, reject or persecute us for proclaiming the kingdom. Moreover, as Paul suggests, we should pray for guidance and comfort from God and consistently seek qualities and actions that are consistent with the Gospel.

## Get Ready

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), OCTOBER 11, 2020

READINGS: IS 25:6-10; PS 23; PHIL 4:12-20; MT 22:1-14

In today's Gospel, we hear another parable (or two) about the kingdom of heaven. Like the story of the wicked tenants right before it, the parable of the wedding banquet addresses and criticizes Jewish leaders and provides insights into how to enter and remain in the kingdom of heaven.

The Lectionary has shorter and longer Gospel options because of the unclear ending of the parable. In the shorter reading, Mt 22:1-10, there is a standard structure of an allegory for the kingdom of heaven. The king (God, the Father in heaven) hosts a banquet for his son (Jesus). Servants

(prophets) invite many guests (Israelites/Jewish leaders) to the banquet (kingdom of heaven). Yet the guests leave, and some of them mistreat and kill the servants, a metaphor for those who reject prophets.

After the disrupted banquet, "the king was enraged and sent his troops,

destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.” This is often interpreted as an allusion to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem about 40 years after Jesus’ death. Matthew frames the historical destruction as divine retribution.

Following destruction, the king tells the servants that the invited guests were unworthy, and new guests (presumably everyone who hears the Gospel) should be invited from the streets. The new guests, who are “bad and good alike,” fill the wedding hall. If the parable originally ended at this point, it would suggest that all people, both good and bad, are invited to hear the message of the Gospel. In Luke’s version of this parable (Lk 14:16-24), the story ends here, suggesting the next verses may have been originally separate.

In Matthew’s longer ending, the king encounters one of the guests who was not properly dressed in a wedding robe. The king criticizes his outfit and has him thrown into darkness, where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth (hell).

Reading the longer version in Matthew as one continuous parable is difficult because the king’s reaction to the underdressed guest seems odd and unreasonable. If the new guest was brought in from the street, he was not expecting to attend a wedding and would not be properly dressed for one. While the missing wedding garment seems to be part of the allegorical framework, the text is cryptic about what the man lacks that leads to his punishment. His “wedding clothes” could refer to his openness to receive the Gospel or his willingness to live a new life in Christ. Because the man is speechless when asked about his garments, this could show his unpreparedness or unwillingness to adapt himself and his life to enter the kingdom of heaven.

If the verses are read separately, as a similar parable using the same allegory, rather than a continuation, that helps to explain the king’s reaction to the guest. In that case, the man would have been among the originally invited guests and should have been properly dressed. That does not clarify what the wedding

*I can do all things in him who strengthens me. (Phil 4:13)*

### *Praying With Scripture*

How does the Gospel influence how you live?

How do you react when the Gospel is proclaimed to “bad and good alike”?

Do parables help you to understand the kingdom of heaven?

clothes represent, but it explains the king’s punishment at the end.

Although somewhat puzzling, the parable illustrates God’s openness to all people, not only select groups. Yet though God invites all, the parable shows that guests must be ready and willing to do what is required to enjoy the feast. Accepting the invitation is a first step, but those who are “chosen” are the ones who not only accept the Gospel but live out its message.

## Reframing the Question

**TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), OCTOBER 18, 2020**

READINGS: IS 45:1-6; PS 96; 1 THES 1:1-5; MT 22:15-21

In today’s Gospel, we hear the well-known passage that is sometimes used to justify paying taxes or to advocate for a separation of church and state. Instead, Matthew may simply be trying to demonstrate Jesus’ ability to reframe arguments and spotlight important matters.

The Gospel begins with the Pharisees plotting against Jesus. At this point in Matthew, Jesus has had multiple conversations and confrontations in which

he criticizes the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders. Today we hear a portion of the Pharisees’ counterattack, as they try to entrap Jesus into saying something condemnable and dangerous.

The Pharisees sent some of their followers along with the Herodians, supporters of Herod Antipas, to question Jesus. The group offers disingenuous compliments on Jesus’ sincerity, ability to teach and impartiality. Then they pose the question whether it is

lawful to pay taxes to the emperor. Jesus immediately points out their malicious intention: “Why are you testing me, you hypocrites?”

The reason this is a test is that Jesus’ answer could upset different groups of people and could be used against him. If Jesus said people should not pay the tax, this would anger the Herodians, since Herod’s power depended on his relationship to the Roman emperor. If he said peo-

ple should pay the tax, zealots who opposed Roman occupation would be angry with the assertion.

Jesus carefully sidesteps this trap by asking them whose image and inscription are on the coin used to pay the tax. They reply that it is the emperor. The coin they presented likely bore the image of Tiberius Caesar, who ruled during Jesus' adult life. Jesus then declares, "Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

The first part of this response is clever. Jesus affirms that the money is issued from the emperor, so giving a portion as a tax is merely returning the money to its owner. Jesus' thoughtful and safe response likely would not anger those who were pro- or anti-tax. But Jesus also adds a second, more challenging, response: the importance of giving to God what

belongs to God. Jesus does not elaborate on what that entails; but since life comes from God, in whose image and likeness humans are made, Jesus could be reminding his hearers of the call to devote their actions and lives to God.

Today's Gospel reading ends with Jesus' declaration, but the following verse shows how effectively Jesus reversed this test: "When they heard this they were amazed, and leaving him they went away" (Mt 22:22). Their stunned reaction shows that the Pharisees and Herodians recognize the implications of Jesus' challenging statement. Likewise, their shock demonstrates Jesus' ability to provoke people to focus on important matters rather than seeking to justify themselves.

It is very unlikely that Matthew wants to make a claim regarding the

*Give the Lord glory and might. (Ps 96:7)*

### *Praying With Scripture*

What does "Give to God what belongs to God" mean to you?

How can you live a life that is inspired by the Gospel?

How do you deal with confrontation?

separation of church and state. The concept itself would be unfamiliar in Matthew's context, and it is best not to retroject the idea back to first century Palestine. Instead, Matthew depicts Jesus being clever and thought-provoking, showing Jesus' ability to recognize and avoid traps and shift the focus to how people live and treat one another.

## Who Cares?

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), OCTOBER 25, 2020

READINGS: EX 22:21-26; PS 18; 1 THES 1:5-10; MT 22:34-40

Today's readings are extremely important, especially as we near Election Day. They remind us to consider the candidates' rhetoric, track-records and policies, not solely political party affiliation. They also compel us to ask the questions: Who has shown care for vulnerable populations? Who cares about how we treat one another? Who promotes love?

In the first reading, from Exodus, the Israelites travel through the wilderness toward the promised land. After the exodus from Egypt, they receive laws, first the Ten Commandments and then hundreds of additional laws. The laws themselves were

written after they were settled in the land, and they include reflections, aspirations and reminders of the exodus experience for future generations.

The reading highlights groups who are most vulnerable and susceptible to abuse: resident aliens, widows and orphans. Laws are enacted to protect these people and punish their oppressors. The spirit of these laws is to remind the Israelites to care for those who are marginalized and most in need. The text instills the importance of empathy and memory, as the Israelites are to care for resident aliens, motivated by their own recollection of suffering, "for you were once aliens yourselves in the land

of Egypt." As we elect leaders, consider who cares about vulnerable groups. What policies have been promoted that offer protection to those most in need?

In the Gospel, Jesus is confronted with another test by the Pharisees. A lawyer in their group asks Jesus which commandment is the greatest, and Jesus responds with a paraphrase of two laws: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is a partial quote of the Shema Yisrael ("Hear, O Israel"), a Jewish prayer that affirms the oneness of God and the importance of faithful worship to God (see Dt 6:4-5). Jesus adds, "You

shall love your neighbor as yourself,” a partial quote of Lev 19:18.

Jesus proclaims that the whole law and the prophets hinge on these two laws, so the implications are significant for Jesus’ ancient audience and for modern Christians. Arguably, today’s Gospel has one of the most important teachings of Jesus, in which he draws on his Jewish heritage to affirm tradition and shine a light on what is most important: love.

As has been mentioned in previous columns, there are multiple words in Hebrew and Greek for love. The words in these two passages are *ahavah* in Hebrew and *agape* in Greek, whose meanings go beyond simple affection toward God and others. These words are calls to demonstrate sincere commitment to God through actions in service to God and each other.

There are tangible things that can be done to show love. Love is imple-

menting policies that protect the vulnerable and penalize oppressors. Love is reprimanding people who brandish weapons at those working for racial justice rather than applauding intimidation and instigation of hateful acts. Love is treating all humans as neighbors, not just those who look like you. Love is fighting for life.

It is hypocritical to pretend that advocacy for unborn life can override our responsibility to speak up in defense of every vulnerable life, or that advocacy for marginalized groups can absolve us of the need to defend the unborn. It is equally problematic to disregard the many people who live with and suffer from the evils of poverty, racism and violence while claiming to be pro-life.

So, if you are thinking of using Scripture to help you decide how to cast your ballot, Jesus’ message is utterly clear: love. Americans have been

*You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Mt 22:39, Lev 19:18)*

### *Praying With Scripture*

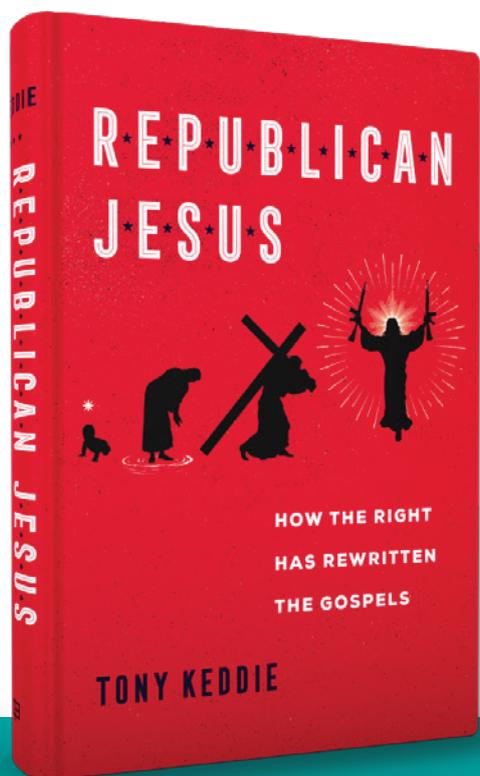
How do you show love to your neighbors?

Do you treat people who look different than you as neighbors?

How can the Gospel inform your vote on election day?

divided by rhetoric and actions fueling hate and division, actions that are in opposition to Jesus’ call for love. On election day and always, let the Gospel message of love influence whom you choose as your leaders.

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



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# Policing the Police

*Learning from the church's response to sexual abuse*

By Kathleen McChesney



The nation was shocked this past spring by the video of a police officer in Minneapolis killing George Floyd by kneeling on his neck for several minutes. The accumulation of similar incidents of police misconduct has prompted calls for criminal justice reform and even “defunding” the police. They have also prompted the question of what the police might learn from the church’s implementation of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, which includes guidelines for preventing and responding to reported acts of sexual abuse.

The desire for sweeping changes in policing is understandable, but a national charter is not a necessary or viable proposition. Codes of conduct for law enforcement officers already exist in every state and at the federal level, obviating the need for the reinvention of the wheel. As with the church and sexual abuse, it is compliance with the rules that counts.

The federal Department of Justice is responsible for the enforcement of the civil prohibition on any policing practices that violate the Constitution or other federal laws. The D.O.J. can obtain consent decrees through the courts regarding specific police reforms; it can also engage an independent monitor to oversee the agency’s remedial actions. In addition, the Presidential Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice, established in

2019, has been mandated to conduct a “soup-to-nuts” review of the criminal justice system in the United States and will identify challenges associated with mental illness, homelessness, substance abuse and other social factors that influence crime, as well as the recruitment, hiring and training of law enforcement officers.

But though there are mechanisms for the federal government to respond to the most egregious examples of misconduct, there is no structure to enforce a national charter for U.S. law enforcement. The leaders of the 18,000 law enforcement agencies in this country, like the diocesan bishops and religious superiors, do not report to a single U.S. authority. Thus, it is critical that law enforcement leaders, states’ attorneys general and the D.O.J. step in when systemic police misconduct occurs and that citizens hold public servants accountable for fulfilling their responsibilities to maintain a safe and fair society.

Recognizing the impracticality of a national charter, there are two important concepts that still deserve more attention from police. First, a national database of law enforcement officers who have been accused of or dismissed for serious misconduct is laudable, but it would likely require federal legislation and a significant infrastructure to manage the data submitted. For now, databases could

be handled by each state or agency, in conformance with privacy laws and union contracts. Notably, the earliest clergy offender databases were generated by journalists or survivor-support organizations. A constituency of persons who have been maliciously harmed by law enforcement officers may yet emerge to create similar lists of offenders’ names.

Second, agencies that do not currently use civilian oversight boards should consider doing so to address policies and issues of serious police misconduct. The church’s use of lay review boards to address abuse allegations has been found to help hold offenders accountable and reduce the risk of future abuse.

Law enforcement agencies do not need to develop a charter, but they do need to recommit themselves to adhering to existing ethical standards. Their leaders must also implement constant oversight over their personnel and maximize the use of citizen involvement in fulfilling their mission if they are to effectively protect all persons regardless of race, gender or creed.

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*Kathleen McChesney is a former executive director of the U.S.C.C.B.’s Office of Child and Youth Protection and a former F.B.I. executive. She is president of Kinsale Management Consulting.*



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