

# America

OCTOBER 2021

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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# NEW FROM FR. MICHAEL WHITE AND TOM CORCORAN

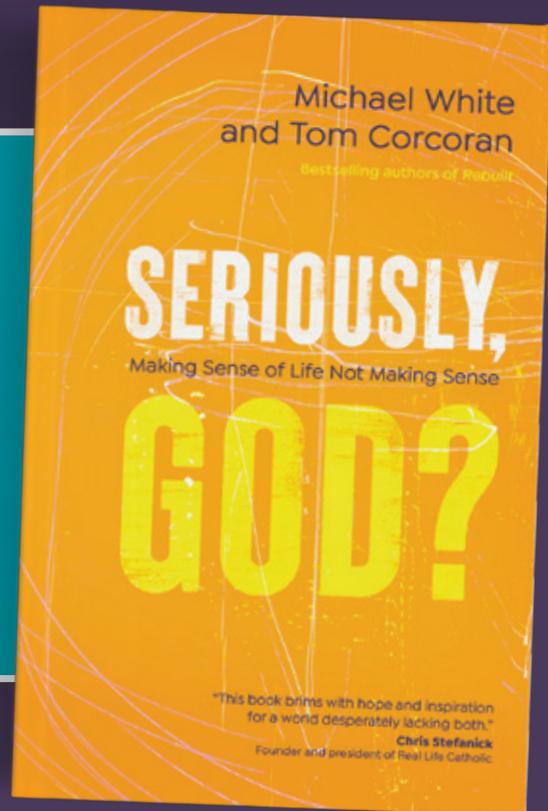
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## Women in the Life of the Church

In the late winter of 1995 Peter Hans Kolvenbach, superior general of the Society of Jesus, convened a general congregation—the global governing body of the Jesuits. Usually a general congregation is convened following the death or resignation of the superior general, in order to elect his successor. But Father Kolvenbach was convening the 34th General Congregation not to elect a new superior but to ask the delegates of the global Society to reflect more deeply on their response to the “signs of the times,” especially in light of the Society’s commitment to “a faith that does justice.”

Among the General Congregation’s formal communiques was Decree 14, “Jesuits and the Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society,” in which the delegates wrote: “We Jesuits first ask God for the grace of conversion. We have been part of a civil and ecclesial tradition that has offended against women.” The delegates then called for a conversion of the whole Society of Jesus, asking every Jesuit “to listen carefully and courageously to the experience of women” and to take specific steps to address the injustices that women experience in nearly every area of human life.

The general congregation’s call for solidarity and advocacy set off a burst of apostolic action throughout the Society of Jesus that continues to this day. *America* Media has been no exception. I am pleased to report that *America* Media has recruited and hired more women in the last decade than it did in the whole previous century—several of them serving in the highest ranks of the organization. Even more, *America* has made a commitment to sustain an intense editori-

al focus on questions related to women in the life of the church and larger society. One of our proudest moments as an organization came in October 2013, when *America* became the first Jesuit publication in history to publish an issue that had been edited and written entirely by women.

The present issue is our latest step on that journey. It has not been edited and written entirely by women, though Kerry Weber, our talented executive editor, has done the lion’s share of the work of preparing the content for publication. We decided that a crucial next step involved widening the conversation. And that means one other departure from the 2013 issue. Then we made a conscious choice not to cover the question of the ordination of women to holy orders. As Ms. Weber explained in her introduction to that issue: “We understand that many Catholics feel passionately about the topic of priestly ordination of women. [Yet] in trying to focus attention on or divert attention from this ‘closed’ topic, Catholics have frequently sidelined many other issues of importance.” In other words, when we are talking about the ordination of women, we too often aren’t talking about anything else—the many ways women do or could contribute to the church now without being ordained.

I think that point holds. At the same time, we should always heed the words of the Lord and “be not afraid” to talk about challenging questions and how they affect our faith lives. So we have decided in the present issue to begin a conversation about the topic of ordination and gender. As a ministry of the church, of course, we begin any such conversation with the teach-

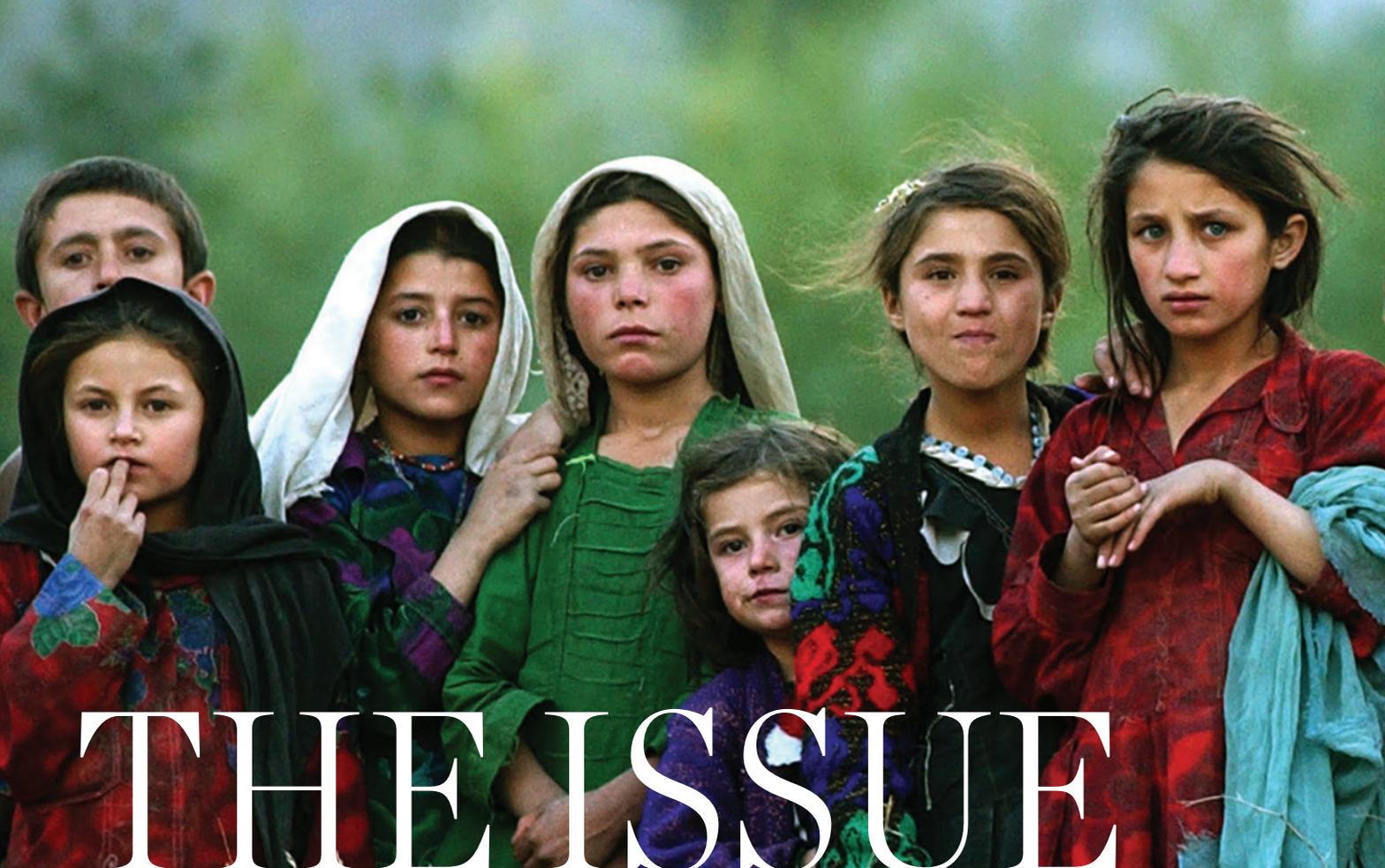
ing of the church, as articulated by its magisterium. And so our conversation begins with an article from our archives by the late Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J., which explains in clear and precise language just what the magisterium teaches about this matter and why. Regardless of whether you agree with its contents, I can assure you that it is the best presentation of the magisterium’s teaching that has ever been produced in English. We have then invited two distinguished theologians to offer their responses to Dulles’s article. And, of course, you are welcome to join the conversation.

Decree 13 of General Congregation 34 was issued one year after St. John Paul II issued his apostolic letter reaffirming the centuries-old teaching of the church that ordination to the priesthood is reserved to men. I do not know for certain, but I suspect that this sequence was not a coincidence. And Cardinal Dulles delivered the lecture on which his article is based in 1996, the year after General Congregation 34. I suspect that this sequence, too, was not a coincidence. It seems apparent that these three ecclesial characters were in a public conversation with one another.

As well they should have been. At the end of the day, even the most settled teachings of the church must still be received and appropriated by the faithful if those teachings are to be a true leaven for communion and evangelization. One primary way that happens is through conversation.

Once again, welcome to the conversation.

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



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Local girls watch U.N. workers unload ballot kits in a village northeast of Kabul, Afghanistan, in 2004. The last U.S. troops left Afghanistan on Aug. 30, 2021.

Cover: Alessandra Smerilli, F.M.A.,  
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## Woman's Role in the Church—1966

In the July 23, 1966, issue of **America**, the cover story featured an essay from a prominent female Catholic philosopher, Mary-Angela Harper, on the nature of womanhood and the question of women's ordination. "What, then, is my reaction to the demand for full equality among men and women?" Mrs. Harper asked. "If by equality one means that there should be a full measure of recognition in every order for the contribution that is uniquely feminine, I most enthusiastically approve. But if by equality one refers to some sort of absolute and universal fraternity in which women would participate in every masculine enterprise, in order to remove themselves finally and forever from subordination to masculine 'domination'—if equality means sacrificing her woman's femininity then I say: 'Thanks, but no thanks!'" Below is a curated selection of some of the letters Ms. Harper's view evoked that were printed in the Aug. 27, 1966 issue.

I was happily surprised by the title of your cover story "Woman's Role in the Church." I've awaited AMERICA's treatment of this urgent question for a year. The article, however, was much less than what I expected. It was not a response, but a reflex, the well oiled defense mechanism of the party line—"not equal, but different," "man is the head; woman, the heart," etc., etc. In a more discreet phraseology, of course. I'm not denying the "equal, but different" truism. No one can deny that a woman is different from a man, not even the so-called feminists. The question that Mrs. Harper failed to answer is whether a woman in the Church is not only different, but *less* than a man, when she is barred from the highest Christian commitment, the priesthood, only by the fact of her sex. Doesn't such an exclusion suggest an inadequacy of that sex?

The author cannot imagine a woman wanting anything else than a "feminine" role and makes bold to wonder "what woman in her inmost heart would ever exchange the incontestable measure of influence and power she wields as a beloved, a wife and/or a mother [Is there no place for sisters, for single women?] for the 'neutral' intellectual or social situation in which she is one among equals."

Yes, Mrs. Harper, there are women who would exchange this power, not to approach your "altar of equality," but rather to go to the altar of God.

**Louise Pierce (age 18)**

Philadelphia, Penn.

The Christian Church, which loudly proclaims how wonderful it has been to women, has in fact always been last, not first, to better the role of women. Women in most of the world are still denied education, for example, and in many European countries they are still denied access to theology, the study of God. Only male theologians, it seems, are entitled to know anything about God. I speak here of so-called Catholic countries. Recently I was informed by a

woman friend, a graduate of Louvain (a Catholic university whose faculty has been busy downgrading the idea of women priests), that this institution opened its doors to Catholic women only because so many were going to secular universities riddled with Freemasonry. There was nowhere else they could get an education...because they were women.

**Cecelia Wallace**

Representative and Organizer

St. Joan's Alliance in Canada

Toronto, Ont.

Have we women missed the point of our status in the Church? Do we have to be ordained priests to fulfill our role? What about the priesthood of the laity? What better way to participate in the function of the Church than to serve in whatever mission our state in life carries with it? In the era of the Secular City, can't we as unordained women carry out our priesthood where we are, rather than waste valuable time fighting our way to the pulpit?

**Marion Laffin**

Rockford, Ill.

I strongly disagree with [Mrs. Harper's] supposition that *all* women who would like to become priests are seeking "equality" or, what is worse, "power."

I don't know what it means to be "equal" to men, or to any other person. And I couldn't care less about power—even the tender "feminine" kind that Mrs. Harper cherishes. But I think the priesthood involves a unique service to the people of God, which should not be closed off to women. I see no reason why ordination would have to involve the rejection of one's femininity. Quite the contrary. I think a woman could bring much to the vocation and grow much in the living of it.

**Mary Jo Herr**

Cincinnati, Ohio



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## Lessons Out of Afghanistan

Any exit was bound to be fraught; and second-guessing mortal, real-time decision making is an arrogant, infuriating exercise. That does not reduce our responsibility to assess the Biden administration's missteps during the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the chaotic effort to rescue civilians that it propelled.

It would be a huge mistake, however, to limit a period of national introspection on Afghanistan, as many political leaders seem keen to do, to that last chapter of this costly misadventure. The United States spent nearly 20 years failing to achieve most of its aims in Afghanistan. The most pressing question now is not how the United States could have better managed the retreat in these last months—as if a more competently administered defeat could excuse the strategic failures that produced it—but rather how could the United States have admitted earlier that there was ultimately no way to win. Here are a few lessons to carry forward.

*Democracy cannot be exported by force.* In retrospect, the effort to impose political and social modernity on Afghanistan, a campaign of wishful thinking that disregarded that country's historical and cultural complexity, can only be described as the worst kind of nationalistic hubris. Americans have shown themselves too ambivalent and too naïve about empire to be any good at keeping one together, and a thwarted attempt at mob rule on Jan. 6, plus the ongoing possibility of domestic political violence, suggest that the United States is presently in no credible position to play the global paragon of democracy.

*The United States must not "lead" with military might alone.* With no

more boots on the ground in Afghanistan—and diminishing numbers in other global hotspots—the Biden administration must develop new soft-power skills and flex old diplomatic muscles. In the short term, that will necessitate rebuilding those capacities at the State Department, which were profoundly diminished during the Trump administration.

For far too long and at too great a cost, the United States has sought to impose its will and protect its interests primarily through its military capacity. But all that power has proved to be a poor match for the remote and asymmetrical security threats and geopolitical challenges of our times.

Stumbling into complex geopolitical realities with guns drawn has led to too many ruinous outcomes over the course of U.S. history. Taking a respite from a historic dependence on military power can only be to the good in this conflict-happy world. Of course, becoming a soft-power "influencer" in Afghanistan creates new perils for U.S. policy makers. A primary concern is that any program of economic sanctions intended to undermine or redirect the Taliban government will strike instead the Afghan people, who have suffered far too much already.

The last days in Kabul also suggest a new militarist temptation to be wary of: settling for a clinical, "over the horizon" war to replace the lethal capability lost by the U.S. withdrawal. Drone and fighter strikes are described as a precise, low-cost method of projecting U.S. power, but they are of dubious legal and moral legitimacy, and they have frequently produced collateral damage that provokes new cycles of enmity and violence.

*Scrutinize the "experts."* Ameri-

cans must reconsider how an active, engaged citizenry can better manage a self-appointed analyst class whose baseless optimism conjured into being this unhappy exercise in nation-building. Revelations from the leak of the Afghanistan Papers in December 2019 suggest the analysts and experts were abetted by those at the highest levels in the intelligence community and military and political leadership, who frequently hid from the public their harshest and most accurate assessments of "progress."

Groupthink, supported by corporate profit or think-tank subsidies, was rewarded, and criticism of the project turned aside. The analyst class was incentivized to create a narrative of nation-building that was doomed to unravel as soon as a real end date in Afghanistan emerged.

Yet it must be remembered that the U.S. public, perhaps lulled by the myth of invincible American power and righteousness, allowed this catastrophe to unfold as it did. After two decades of war in a fractious, far-off place, only a tiny number of U.S. families, those with loved ones in harm's way, were still paying attention, a complacency that is inexcusable and must be rejected. Those who served the people of the United States in Afghanistan deserve that reckoning.

So what now? What does the United States and its political and military establishment owe the people left behind—the collateral damage of this vast policy failure, especially Afghan women, who have been misled for 20 years about U.S. willingness to remain local enforcers of their human rights? At a minimum, perhaps the hope of a safe passage out.

If the United States remains in

dialogue with its former adversaries, the Taliban, it can still do some good in Afghanistan. Ongoing negotiations with Taliban leaders should be aimed at securing the evacuation of the hundreds of U.S. citizens or legal residents who were unable to reach Hamid Karzai Airport during the last tumultuous days of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. Those who worked with the U.S. military and government or international agencies, as well as former members of the Afghan government or military and their families, similarly deserve the best U.S. efforts to secure safe passage out.

While the world rightly recoils from the Taliban's systematic misogyny, there is some reason to hope that the worst excesses exhibited during the last Taliban rule can be mitigated. Regardless, Afghan women deserve whatever protection from gender-based violence the international community can muster.

The United States and other Western powers still have substantial leverage over the coalescing Taliban government. The International Monetary Fund has blocked access to \$440 million in emergency monetary reserves, and most of the Afghan central bank's \$10 billion in assets are held outside Kabul. More than \$7 billion is warehoused (and currently frozen) in the United States.

Sooner or later the new government will want overseas capital to begin reviving the economy and rebuilding Afghanistan after decades of conflict. The release of those reserves and assets can be predicated on the Taliban's street-level performance on human rights and its efforts to quash any terrorist threat emerging inside Afghanistan's borders.

Ultimately, like the rogues' gallery of nations who would be kings in Afghanistan before it, the United States will be tempted to wash its hands of the calamity it has created. That must be resisted. America must find a different, peaceful and productive way to "stay" in Afghanistan, without drones and without troops, but with a resolve to put right what it still can.

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## Being family: what the U.S. church can learn from Hispanic Catholics

The only reason I joined a Bible study group as a freshman at my Catholic college in Texas was because one of the leaders had a Hispanic last name. I figured that maybe she also spoke Spanish and we could be friends. (She did not, but we became friends anyway.)

Looking back now, I recognize what I was hoping to find in the group. I was not only looking for God in Scripture but also longed for community and real connection. What first-year student doesn't? Luckily, I found it with that small group of women, and I became close with all of them over the following four years.

When I graduated from college, I moved to Toronto, where I did not know a single soul. And I found myself yearning for the same thing: a community, a family. Transitioning from a life full of family and friends into one of solitude was difficult. Not only did I have to deal with the culture shock of a new country, I had to figure out how to nourish my faith on my own and in English, my least preferred language to worship in.

So I searched for a home in the most logical place: my parish's young adult group. And it was...fine. They offered the sacraments and adoration and the occasional praise and worship session, which are all beautiful experiences. They offered lectures and fellowship at the local pub—again, perfectly fine evenings. But I was looking for something more. I ended up dreading those weekly events even while recognizing that those were the only times I was engaging in any sort of fellowship.

Even now, I wonder why “young adult” gatherings elicit cringes from me. But a new survey of young adult

U.S. Catholics, to be released this fall by the Center for Applied Research for the Apostolate, touches on what I now realize was missing from these groups: a safe space where one can be vulnerable, be honest and feel at home.

One of the things the survey does is highlight differences between Spanish-speaking and English-speaking Catholic faith groups. The responses suggest that Spanish-language groups are perceived as warmer, more familial, intergenerational and relationship-driven. English-speaking groups are seen as more goal-oriented and individualistic; they are more likely to be organized around a liturgical season, or to be defined by age, political or cultural interest, or anything else that can divide Catholics. From my experience, this rings true.

We often discuss the problem of young people leaving the church. I wonder what would happen if, instead of focusing on numbers, we focused on building lasting relationships and cultivating the church family to be just that: a family where *everyone* is welcome, regardless of age, race, sexual orientation, language, or marital or immigration status. To get there, the English-speaking church in the United States could learn a lot from Latino Catholics.

As the CARA survey indicates, Hispanic faith groups, like almost all Hispanic groups, operate on the principle that *estas en familia* (“here you are family”). Latinos pride themselves on the deep relationships we cultivate with our family members and the *extranjeros* we can welcome into the fold. Even when I am away from my own family, I am welcomed by Latinos I encounter in public (like food service workers), in my church community and at work. We are *en familia*

wherever we go.

I struggled to feel this “at home-ness” in the English-language faith groups I attended. They skewed more intellectual. This is an important aspect of our faith life, but when we focus more on the intellectual, we tend to want to “do things right” or “win” at being Catholic. This frame of mind leads to more division and judgment. And it leaves little room for the Holy Spirit.

The whole point of being Catholic is that there is no single answer, as my current spiritual director once told me. This realization freed me to live in the ebb and flow of daily life, leaning into all its interruptions because it was exactly in those interruptions that I found real connection.

This is something Pope Francis explores deeply in “Fratelli Tutti”: the necessary but often missing connections between faith, family and community. “To care for the world in which we live means to care for ourselves,” Pope Francis writes. “Yet we need to think of ourselves more and more as a single family dwelling in a common home” (No. 17).

Eighteen months into a pandemic that has left us starving even more for real and tangible connections, we should take heed of the examples of Latino Catholics, who can encounter love, joy and communion in a family that extends to far more than just those who share our DNA.

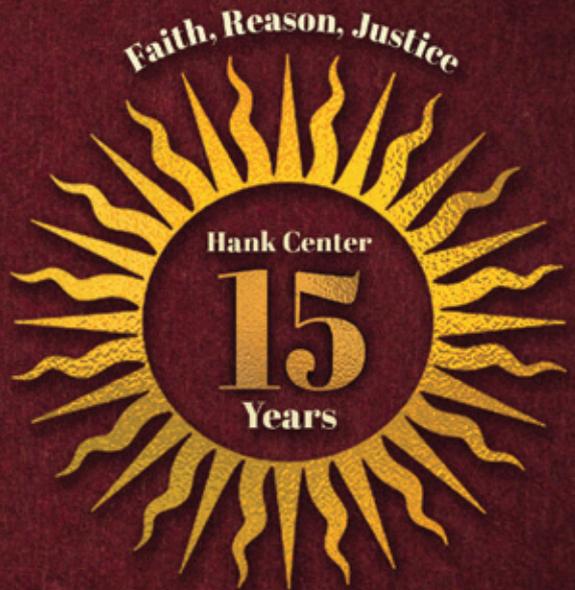
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*Vivian Cabrera is a former assistant editor at America Media. She is a graduate of the University of St. Thomas, Houston, and is attending the Graduate School of Social Service at Fordham University, in New York.*



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## **Teilhard Lecture 2021**

# **Things Get Broken:**

A Jesuit reflects on Leonard Bernstein's "MASS" at 50

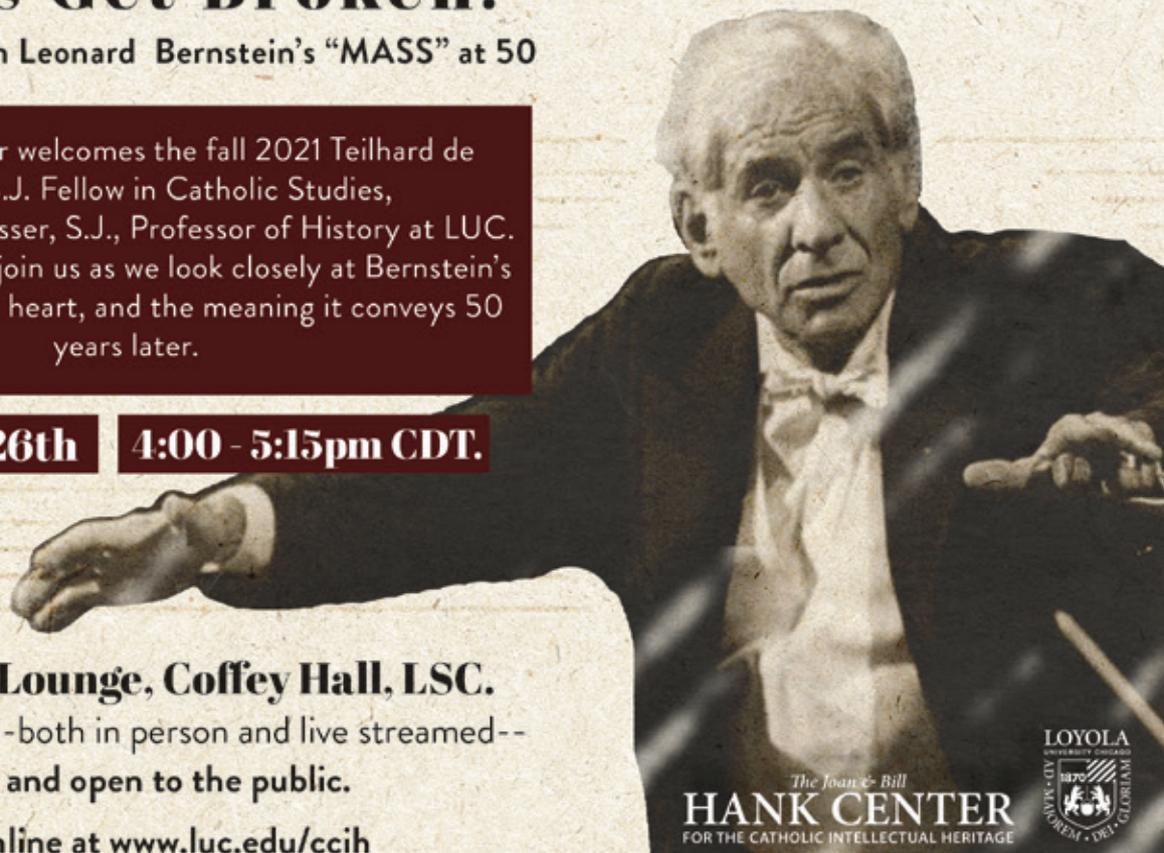
The Hank Center welcomes the fall 2021 Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. Fellow in Catholic Studies, Dr. Stephen Schloesser, S.J., Professor of History at LUC. All are welcome to join us as we look closely at Bernstein's Mass, its prophetic heart, and the meaning it conveys 50 years later.

**Tues. Oct. 26th 4:00 - 5:15pm CDT.**

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# CAN MUSIC MINISTRY MAKE A (SAFE) COMEBACK?

CNS photo/Harold Levine, courtesy Church of Our Saviour

At St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Fulton, Md., Sundays are slowly starting to sound normal again. After more than a year of restrictions on music ministry, liturgies once more include congregational singing and a scaled-down choir.

For Brandon Henley, the music director at St. Francis of Assisi since 2019, it is a welcome shift. “I’m excited to have our music ministry and our parishioners experience the normalcy that they’ve been missing for a long time,” he said.

Parishes were in dramatically different circumstances as summer ended in 2021 than they were a year ago. Though Covid-19’s Delta variant has revived anxieties around the country, in many dioceses, as vaccination rates permit the lifting of some Covid-19 restrictions, churches are expanding capacity at Masses, parish groups are beginning to host in-person events again, and congregations are easing back into singing.

The changes to music ministry over the past 16 months have been significant. Early in the pandemic, the Centers

for Disease Control and Prevention identified singing as an activity that carried one of the highest risks of spreading the coronavirus, a reality that swiftly led to the suspension of choir rehearsals and forced musicians to get creative.

Now that the familiar forms of music ministry are becoming possible, music ministers are looking back at the past year and a half, reflecting on what has changed and how the pandemic has shaped their ministry. For some, the changes brought by the pandemic invited them to reimagine how they connected with their communities.

Teresa Cobarrubia Yoder, who recently retired from her role as the director of music ministries at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Hampton, Va., said that music ministers need to be flexible, creative and patient with themselves and others during this period of transition. Ms. Yoder, a member of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians, recommended that ministers ease their musicians back slowly. Ms. Yoder suggested that a new repertoire could help

Amanda Sidebottom, Elizabeth Merrill, Grace Bernardo and Clare Maloney, members of the Choir of the Church of Our Saviour in New York City.

musicians reset their expectations and get excited about returning to church and rebuilding their skills.

“It’s going to be a slow process,” she said. “Look for new repertoire that [the choir] can simply put together and then also look for some stretches that they can build toward in the next six months.”

Since the outset of the pandemic, Mr. Henley has tried to channel his choir’s efforts into new projects and new music, rather than try to maintain the status quo amid Covid-19 restrictions. Thinking outside the box has helped him to see restrictions as an opportunity to reimagine music ministry at his parish.

Mr. Henley said that he relied in new ways on his parish’s handbell choir, since bells do not carry the risk of virus transmission the way singing does. He also piloted new projects: an Advent concert that blended virtual choir videos and live handbells, and an online concert series in collaboration with another parish that included a performance of Mozart’s Requiem.

“It was still a really meaningful experience for our parish and our music ministry in a way that wasn’t like, ‘Oh, this isn’t really the lessons and carols that we normally do,’” Mr. Henley said. “I think that made a big difference.”

Mr. Henley said that he was encouraged by the response to his efforts to adapt music ministry to the pandemic. “I feel really fortunate that I was able to continue to make music through my church job, when so many people were not able to make music at all,” he said.

Now, as more familiar ways of making music return at many churches, Ms. Yoder said that it is important to let the Holy Spirit lead the way in music ministry. She emphasized the need for patience as parishes transition away from virtual Mass and back to in-person liturgies.

“You’re not God,” Ms. Yoder said. “As much as we want to control what’s going to happen, we have to be flexible. God’s got this.”

She also noted that the congregation returning to church is not the same congregation that was in the pews in winter 2020. The pandemic has been traumatic for parishes.

“I remember seeing at least four of our parishioners the Sunday before we completely shut down, and the next thing I knew we were preparing for their funerals,” Ms. Yoder said. “There is some trauma that happens to a music minister when you realize some of the people are not going to be there.”

This fall she recommends that music ministers accept that many people are nervous to return to church; others

have lost family members or friends to Covid-19. Amid the traumas wrought by the pandemic, Ms. Yoder said that it is important to make space for the new life and new starts that are now slowly becoming possible.

Ms. Yoder said choir directors and parish leaders should look for ways to “resurrect” their communities after a year and a half apart. It does not have to be by singing.

She described joyful reunions at a “homecoming” celebration hosted outdoors at her parish. Friends long separated by the pandemic were at first tentative, then eager to share hugs and stories, thanks to vaccinations and the outdoor venue. For Ms. Yoder, the outdoor events were a reminder that parish ministries should prioritize community—the parishioners needed music but also human connection.

“It was very emotional,” she said. “There were tears of joy.”

Aaron Renninger, the director of liturgy and music at St. Bede Catholic Church in Williamsburg, Va., had similar stories. Members of the choirs in his parish have celebrated the summer with outdoor potlucks in local parks, trying to maintain a sense of community.

Although virtual choir projects and livestreamed liturgies began as stopgap measures, music ministers say that they will be using what they have learned about technology to serve a broader population moving forward.

Mr. Renninger said that all his parish’s livestreamed Masses attracted viewers far from the church’s Virginia home. The livestream of the Spanish-language Mass reached online attendees as far away as Mexico and elsewhere in Central America. It is a trend that Mr. Renninger said testifies to the evangelization possibilities of continuing to incorporate technology into parish life and “reach beyond our immediate parish family.”

According to Mr. Renninger, livestreaming enabled some extended families who live far apart to pray together for the first time.

Similarly, technology can be a way to engage a larger proportion of parishioners. “Our homebound parishioners, in particular, and those in assisted living facilities are able to maintain contact with the parish family that they may not have been able to do pre-Covid,” Mr. Renninger said. His church will continue streaming events to improve accessibility.

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Grace Doerfler, *editorial intern*.  
Twitter: @gfdoerfler.

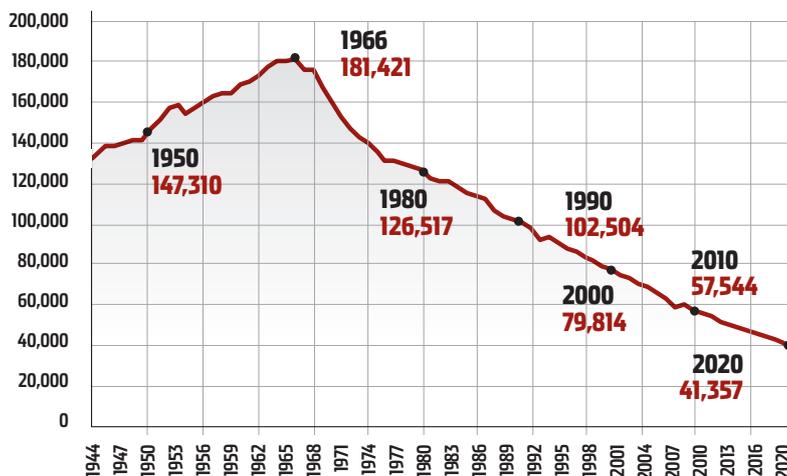
## PUTTING WOMEN IN THE LEAD

These days it would not be uncommon for your parish council to be led by a laywoman; and across the United States, bishops are placing women religious and laywomen in diocesan leadership positions, emulating Pope Francis, who has doubled the number of women in significant roles inside the Roman Curia. (See Colleen Dulle’s report on women in the Vatican on page 20.) Five of the 22 most important Curia offices now have women on the leadership team, and Francis became the first pope to appoint a woman to a top position when he named Alessandra Smerilli, F.M.A., as the interim secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

Increasing the visibility of women and tapping the wisdom they offer will surely encourage laypeople around the world. Religious sisters and nuns were ranked more trustworthy than bishops, priests and the Vatican in a recent survey of U.S. Catholics sponsored by **America** (see our August issue).

And lay Catholics may be ready for more. That **America** survey also found that 56 percent supported allowing women ages 35 and older to be ordained as permanent

### U.S. WOMEN RELIGIOUS



deacons, and nearly the same share—52 percent—supported allowing women to be ordained as priests (see our September issue). The need for greater visibility of women in the church could not be more pressing. According to a 2017 study by Georgetown’s Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, only 17 percent of millennial women in the United States attend Mass weekly.

### WOMEN IN ROME

**649:** The number of women working for the Holy See in 2019—up from 385 in 2010 and jumping from **17.6% to 24%** of all staff.

### WOMEN IN HIGH RANKING POSITIONS IN THE CURIA

(out of 80 to 100 spots)

2009: 3	2019: 8	2021: 6
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### WOMEN RELIGIOUS

**630,099:** The number of women in religious orders worldwide in 2019, a decrease of almost **2% from 2018**, continuing a downward trend.

The number of women religious in the United States peaked at **181,421 in 1966** but declined more than **77% since then to 41,357 in 2020**.

**Sources:** The Vatican’s Statistical Yearbook of the Church; The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University; CARA/America survey; The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities.

### WOMEN IN CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

**62%** of students on Catholic campuses identified as female and **38%** identified as male in **2017-18**. That compares with **56%** of students in all of higher education identifying as female and **44%** of students identifying as male.

(This statistic is slightly skewed for Catholic higher education because of the number of all-female Catholic colleges and universities.)

### BEFORE ENTERING THEIR RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE IN THE UNITED STATES IN 2020

**49%** of responding women religious were in some form of business or an occupation or trade.

**33%** were in education.

**14%** were in health care fields

(that compares with 4 percent of men religious).



For daily Dispatches from around the United States and around the world, visit: [americamagazine.org/dispatches](http://americamagazine.org/dispatches).

Brazilian Sisters of Providence celebrate a novice's final vow ceremony with a "selfie" in September 2020.

## Brazilian sisters are on mission around the world

Once a mission territory itself, with a church dependent on European clergy and religious, Brazil has become a rich source of missionary vocations, with women religious comprising the vast majority of Brazilian missionaries sent abroad. According to the most current data from Brazil's National Missionary Council, women represent more than 80 percent of the total of Brazilian missionaries.

"The situation has reversed," Sister Sandra Regina Amado, of the Comboni Missionary Sisters and advisor to the Commission for Missionary Action at the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops, told **America**. "Europe now needs witnesses of the Gospel, and they come from the Southern Hemisphere, from Brazil, from African and Asian countries. We are the ones leaving our homes to go share the faith with these people," she said.

As European religious congregations experience aging and diminishing numbers, they are beginning to call for capable women from around the world to fill in. The Scalabrinian Sisters are a notable case. Founded by Bishop John Baptist Scalabrini in 1895, the order sent its first four Scalabrinian sisters to São Paulo in 1897. Today, the order's superior general is a 58-year-old Afro-Brazilian, Sister Neusa de Fátima Mariano, who was re-elected for a second six-year term in 2019.

A fellow Brazilian, Sister Ana Garcia, has a seat at the Congregation of the Sisters of Providence's general council in Rome. The order was founded in 1845 in Italy by St. Luigi Scrosoppi.

After visiting Italy several times as a Brazilian provincial superior, Sister Ana returned four years ago to serve a six-year term as counselor. She had to learn Italian and get used to colder weather to become one of the supervisors of the congregation's global activities from its headquarters in Rome.

"We can no longer look at our religious communities in a localized way," she said. "We have to understand that

we are a global religious family, and when we go on a mission we are serving the kingdom where the religious family needs it most."

Out of the more than 600 religious women belonging to her congregation, 86 are Brazilian, of whom eight are permanently stationed in Italy. Brazilian sisters have also been sent to support missions in Thailand, Uruguay, Argentina and Ivory Coast.

A member of a congregation focused on serving the poor, Sister Ana said that leaving a developing country like Brazil to go to so-called developed Europe is not a betrayal of the spirit of religious life. On the contrary, "there is no such a thing as 'my country is the poorest.' To see poverty, you just have to look around. There are many forms of poverty," she said.

"Here in Italy, we have more and more people living on the streets, elderly people who are lonely and abandoned, people who need company, [who] need to be listened to, and so many children who need a family. We continue here our mission with the poor wherever we go," she said.

Sister Sandra explained that since the Second Vatican Council the church "has understood that its action and mission in the world willed and loved by God is part of God's own nature: to love the world in its totality," an idea manifested in the council's "Ad Gentes" decree on the mission activity of the church.

"Brazilian women can make a big difference in Europe and in other places with their simplicity and humility, but also with the dynamism and joy that characterize us," Sister Ana said. "But at the end of the day, we are here as missionaries. We are here to witness Jesus and what he means to us."

*Filipe Domingues contributes from São Paulo, Brazil.*  
Twitter: @filipedomingues.



## Despite earthquake and politics, a Felician sister says Haitians remain 'people of hope'

Sister Marilyn Minter was “sitting in my chair praying with the word” when everything began “to shake like crazy.” She and the other sisters ran out of the Felician community house in Jacmel, Haiti, on the night of Aug. 14, accompanied by the screams and shouts of the villagers around them. Incredibly, another major earthquake was rocking Haiti.

At 7.2 on the Richter scale, this event was even more powerful than the devastating 7.0 earthquake in 2010. Though the damage, death and injury was much lower this time, it was still significant. More than 2,200 people were killed, and thousands were injured.

Hundreds had to endure amputations because of the severity of their wounds or in the course of efforts to extricate them from collapsed structures. More than 130,000 homes were damaged or destroyed.

Adding to Haiti’s woes and further complicating recovery, Tropical Storm Grace followed just a few days after the earthquake.

Weeks later, Haitians were still transitioning into emergency shelters, and relief efforts were stymied by damage to already poor infrastructure and the pre-existing problem of outright banditry on Haiti’s dangerous roads, where criminal gangs often wield more authority than police do. The people themselves will often halt relief trucks, Sister Marilyn said, explaining that their needs have become so great that desperation has set in.

“People just need care,” she said. “You have trucks

coming in, but people are waiting on the side of the roads, and they’re in such a state that they’re attacking the trucks, and they can’t get through right now.”

Sister Marilyn and the other Felician sisters began working in Haiti in response to the devastation it experienced in 2010. They have been providing medical, social and employment assistance ever since. Sister Marilyn was organizing the Felician Sisters’ latest relief effort from the order’s motherhouse in Lodi, N.J., as summer concluded.

It is a troubling reality for Haitians that their struggle seems to be brought to wider attention only in the aftermath of catastrophes like the August earthquake. Sister Marilyn has served there long enough to watch a number of relief efforts come and go from outside Haiti without leaving much of a long-term impact.

She is determined that the Felician service to the people of Jacmel accomplishes more than applying a Band-Aid to Haiti’s woes. Discerning a way to respond to crushing need without contributing to a cycle of individual and national dependency is a constant and difficult balancing act, she said.

And some problems are simply too profound for the sisters even to attempt to address. Government corruption and incapacity, she reported, remain foundational issues. The Felicians focus on listening to the people themselves to learn what needs are most pressing, whether that is job creation or funding a mobile health clinic, then crafting



Photo courtesy of the Felician Sisters of North America

Felician Sisters Marilyn Minter and Inga Borko treat a young patient in Jacmel.

those responses to maximize personal autonomy and civic capacity building.

Beyond its high unemployment and the natural calamities that have enveloped Haiti, the nation has also been troubled by decades of political dysfunction. Its most recent cycle culminated in mid-July with the assassination of the president, Jovenal Moïse. Sister Marilyn allows that Haiti's chronic social disorder has proved a heavy weight on its people. Many are profoundly depressed. "More people are coming in [to the Felician house], wanting to talk and wanting to share, [asking], 'How can we make things better?'"

To outsiders the situation can appear completely beyond repair, but that is not the reality she has come to know in Jacmel. "People need to hear that Haitians are survivors," Sister Marilyn said. "They are people of hope."

Sister Marilyn plans to return to Haiti and to the Felician mission there this month, brimming with optimism about a plan to establish a new, job-creating bakery for the people of Jacmel.

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Kevin Clarke, *chief correspondent.*  
Twitter: @ClarkeAtAmerica.



CNS photo/courtesy Associazione amici di Cristina Onlus

Maria Cristina Cella Mocellin

## GOODNEWS: Pope Francis advances the sainthood cause of an Italian mother of three

Pope Francis advanced the sainthood cause of a young mother who died of cancer after delaying chemotherapy treatment in order to save the life of her unborn child. The pope signed decrees recognizing the heroic virtue of Maria Cristina Cella Mocellin—along with two others—during a meeting on Aug. 30 with Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Born in Italy in 1969, Mocellin had been considering life as a Salesian sister when she met her future husband, Carlo Mocellin, at the age of 16. She went on to finish high school and marry Carlo, despite the discovery of a sarcoma in her left leg. The tumor was at that time successfully treated.

The couple had two children together, Francesco and Lucia, when a malignancy reappeared during her third pregnancy. Mocellin continued with the pregnancy and opted for treatment that would not jeopardize the life of her child, Riccardo, who was born in 1994.

She left behind a letter for Riccardo to explain her decision: "I fought with all my power and did not give up on the idea of giving birth to you, so much so that the doctor understood everything and said no more.... Riccardo, you are a gift for us. It was that evening, in the car on the way back from the hospital, that you moved for the first time. It seemed as if you were saying, 'Thank you mama for loving me!' And how could we not love you? You are precious, and when I look at you and see you so beautiful, lively, friendly, I think that there is no suffering in the world that is not worth bearing for a child."

Mocellin died of cancer at the age of 26 a few months after Riccardo's birth.

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From Catholic News Service and Vatican News

# INSIDE AMERICA

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## SPECIAL ISSUE: WOMEN IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

In this issue, we take a closer look at some of the personal, political, theological and social justice matters that are most relevant to Catholic women today. Our award-winning team of writers examines those aspects of our faith and our church that speak to women and those aspects that challenge. Finally, we look at how the experience of Catholic women in our church and our world continues to evolve.

For more on this topic, visit [americamagazine.org/topic/women-church](http://americamagazine.org/topic/women-church).

## "INSIDE THE VATICAN" SPECIAL PODCAST EPISODE: WOMEN IN THE VATICAN

In recent years, women have risen to new heights in the Vatican, increasing both in numbers and in the ranks they have held, filling positions previously held only by men. This episode of “Inside the Vatican” includes interviews with some of the highest-ranking women in the Vatican: Sister Nathalie Becquart, the first woman under secretary (a top-three role) in the Vatican’s all-male Synod of Bishops, and Cristiane Murray, the deputy director of the Vatican’s press office.

The episode also features an interview with the celebrity economist Kate Raworth, whose “doughnut economics” theory combining social justice and environmental concerns has caught the attention of Pope Francis. Ms. Raworth has consulted for the Vatican’s Covid-19 commission and spoken at the Vatican conference “Economy of Francesco.”

The three women explain how the corporate culture of the Vatican is changing, as is the Vatican’s understanding of what women bring to the table. And Sister Nathalie Becquart, who is expected to be the first woman ever to be given the right to vote in a synod of bishops, explains why she thinks synodality—Pope Francis’ more democratic decision-making model—is a path toward greater equality in the church.



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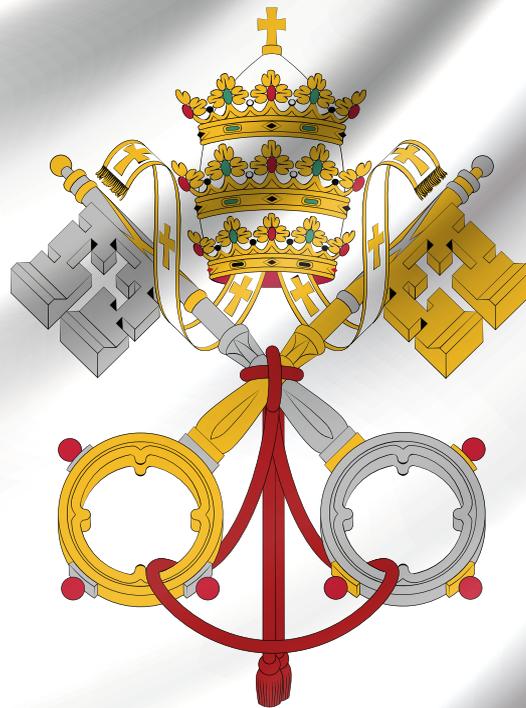
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# THE RISING

## Can a new group of women leaders change the Vatican?

By Colleen Dulle



When Nathalie Becquart, a member of the Congregation of Xavières, was appointed the first woman undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops, she voiced an observation that made headlines around the world. In a press conference at the Vatican, she told reporters her appointment was evidence that “the patriarchal mindset [of the church] is changing.”

Is it true?

Pope Francis has appointed women to positions of greater authority than any previous pontiff, but the Vatican remains a largely male-dominated space that, because it must be controlled by an ordained bishop, places a definite restriction on the heights to which women can aspire—a limit some have termed a “stained-glass ceiling.”

Under that stained-glass ceiling, though, women are gaining ground. In 2019, 24 percent of employees at the Holy See were women, compared with 17.6 percent in 2010, continuing a gradual increase that began in earnest after the Second Vatican Council.

The women working in the Vatican mostly hold behind-the-scenes positions running the day-to-day operations of the many dicasteries, congregations and secretariats of the Roman Curia and the Vatican City-State. According to the

archives of the city-state’s governorate, the first lay woman to be employed full time at the Vatican was Anna Pezzoli in 1915. Ms. Pezzoli worked for the nuns who ran the Vatican’s tapestry restoration laboratory. Gudrun Sailer, a Vatican Radio journalist who has written about the history of women working in the Vatican, said that although Ms. Pezzoli was the first woman whose employment information was archived, she may have had female predecessors.

According to Ms. Sailer, the first educated women began working in the Vatican’s Apostolic Library in 1929, and the first woman to hold a leadership position was the lay woman Rosemary Goldie, an undersecretary in the Pontifical Council for the Laity, in 1967.

### A New Day

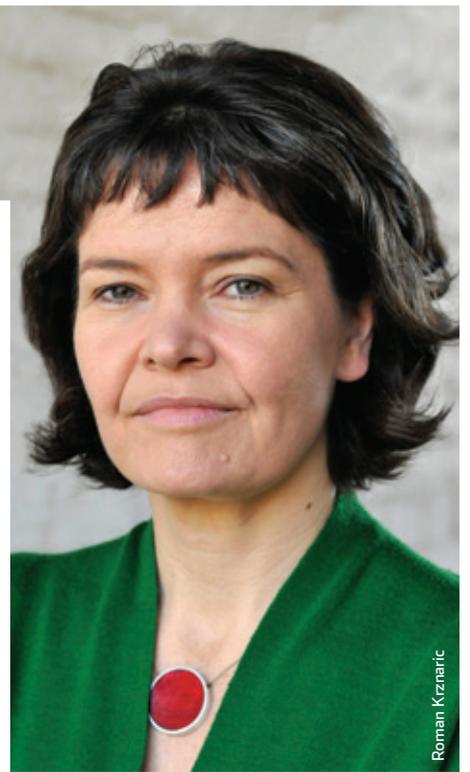
More women have also taken on higher-ranking leadership roles in the Vatican in recent years. Whereas in 2009 only three women held such positions, the number was eight out of 80-100 such roles in 2019, including that of deputy foreign minister and deputy head of the Vatican Press Office. The pope told Reuters in 2018 that he had had to “fight” internal resistance in the Vatican when naming the



CNS photo/Paul Haring



CNS photo/Paul Haring



Roman Kiznaric

Nathalie Becquart, X.M.C.J., left; Cristiane Murray, center; and Kate Raworth, right, are among the women gaining influence at the Vatican.

journalist Paloma García-Ovejero deputy head of the press office. Now, according to Ms. Sailer, who has compiled statistics on women in the Vatican, there are six women holding leadership roles, including Sister Nathalie Becquart in the Synod of Bishops. The group also includes Alessandra Smerilli, F.M.A., an economist, who in August was appointed as interim secretary—the second-highest role in a department, akin to a vice president—in the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, becoming the highest-ranking woman in the Roman Curia.

The pope is also appointing women to posts that have previously been held only by men—including the highest-ranking woman in the Vatican City-State’s governorate, Barbara Jatta, the director of the Vatican Museums. The museums are a major source of income for the Vatican City State, a separate entity from the Roman Curia that contributes to its bottom line. Ms. Jatta shepherded the museums through a tumultuous year in 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic closed the museums for months at a time, causing an 82 percent drop in visitors. The museum pivoted to digital offerings, including publishing seven new virtual tours of the museums and a new video series called

“The Secrets of the Vatican Museums.”

In 2020, Pope Francis also appointed six lay women to the previously all-male Council for the Economy, which oversees the financial and administrative structures of the Holy See and the Vatican City State, and appointed the first woman promoter of justice (in American parlance, a prosecutor) in the Vatican’s Court of Appeals.

“A new face, that of the ‘woman’ church, is beginning to appear in sectors of the Holy See, with its traits of closeness, compassion and tenderness, as well as feminine intelligence and intuition,” wrote María Lía Zervino, president of the World Union of Catholic Women’s Organizations, in an email interview with **America**. According to its website, the group seeks to “promote the presence, participation and co-responsibility of Catholic women in society and the church.”

### Women and Power

Still, Ms. Zervino and other women familiar with Vatican operations believe there is a long way to go before women’s voices are satisfactorily integrated into the central leadership of the church. What is “satisfactory” also



María Lía Zervino, president of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations, meets with Pope Francis at the Vatican on Jan. 20, 2020.

remains elusive. The Catholic Church does not ordain women, and many Vatican roles are reserved to members of the clerical state. Therefore statistics on gender parity are of limited help for understanding how much power women hold in the Vatican.

Complicating the situation further is how we understand the way power is wielded in the Vatican. Whereas in other organizations, employees may put themselves forward for promotions, high-ranking Vatican positions are made by appointment, and there has been a longstanding taboo since at least the counter-Reformation against campaigning for higher roles, although this certainly still happens.

When an appointment is made to a Vatican post, the leader appointed is more likely to describe his or her position in terms of service rather than power. This means that discussions of “women’s empowerment” are scant and that creating measurable goals for women’s leadership is unheard of; instead, any goal is usually framed in more abstract terms like “giving women a seat at the table” and “ensuring women’s voices are heard.”

Some women have specific ideas for how to achieve that. Ms. Zervino, for example, would like to see the Vatican institute a “World Observatory on Women” that would bring together scientific research on the issues facing women around the world and help the church respond to those issues more effectively. Lucetta Scaraffia—a feminist jour-

nalist who founded a women’s magazine at the Vatican and later resigned from it in protest after she said she was discouraged from publishing an exposé on the sexual abuse of women religious by clergymen—would like to see women appointed cardinals and the heads of women’s religious orders appointed as top advisors to the pope.

Inside the Vatican, though, where women are admittedly less publicly critical of the institutional church, there is a shift underway as well. As more women have taken Vatican positions, longtime employees say they have seen the clerical culture slowly begin to erode. At the same time, women who have begun working with the Vatican recently are putting forward a new perspective on what women bring to the church’s table. Rather than the elusive “feminine genius” that members of the hierarchy have often struggled to describe, they say the gift of women is the perspective they have gained as outsiders.

### **The Culture of the Vatican**

Cristiane Murray, one of the Vatican’s top-ranking women as deputy director of the Press Office of the Holy See, remembers when she started working at Vatican Radio in 1995.

“When I started working here, I was a young woman of 33, and I was very afraid of clericalism; the curial environment scared me,” Ms. Murray said in a recent presentation on the roles of women in the church. There were some women working as translators in the department at the



# There is a long way to go before women's voices are satisfactorily integrated into the central leadership of the church.

time, but most employees were men. “As incredible as it may seem, I felt that some priests or bishops, elderly or not, were just as afraid of me. Some even avoided looking at me. Today I see how this has changed; I observe the attention and sometimes the admiration that many members of the Curia give to the women who today, thank God, are not lacking in ecclesial spheres.”

Today, most of the employees in the Vatican press office are women, Ms. Murray said, but that is rare in other departments across the Vatican. The press office is also the only Vatican dicastery with a lay prefect, the top departmental leader. “In 2018, I arrived at the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops to collaborate in the preparation of the Youth and Amazon synods, and I found as colleagues only male officials. Indeed, a similar environment to that of most of the Vatican dicasteries with which I interact today,” Ms. Murray said in a written interview with **America**, adding “And we work very well together!”

And as Pope Francis has worked to elevate the roles of synods—that is, meetings of bishops around one issue, like the recent Synod on Amazonia—and make them more inclusive of women and lay people, women who hold top roles in the Vatican see synodality as a promising path toward gender equality. At both of the synod sessions Ms. Murray participated in—the 2018 Synod on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment and the 2019 Synod on the Amazon—the attendees’ final document of recommendations to the pope called for a greater recognition of women’s roles in the church.

The Amazon Synod called specifically for women to be included in parish and diocesan councils and in positions of governance (“Final Document of the Amazon Synod,” No. 101) as well as ministry: “It is urgent for the Church in the Amazon to promote and confer ministries for men

and women in an equitable manner” (No. 95). The pope’s exhortation after the Synod on Young People also pointed out young women’s desire to see more female role models in the church (“Christ Is Alive,” No. 245).

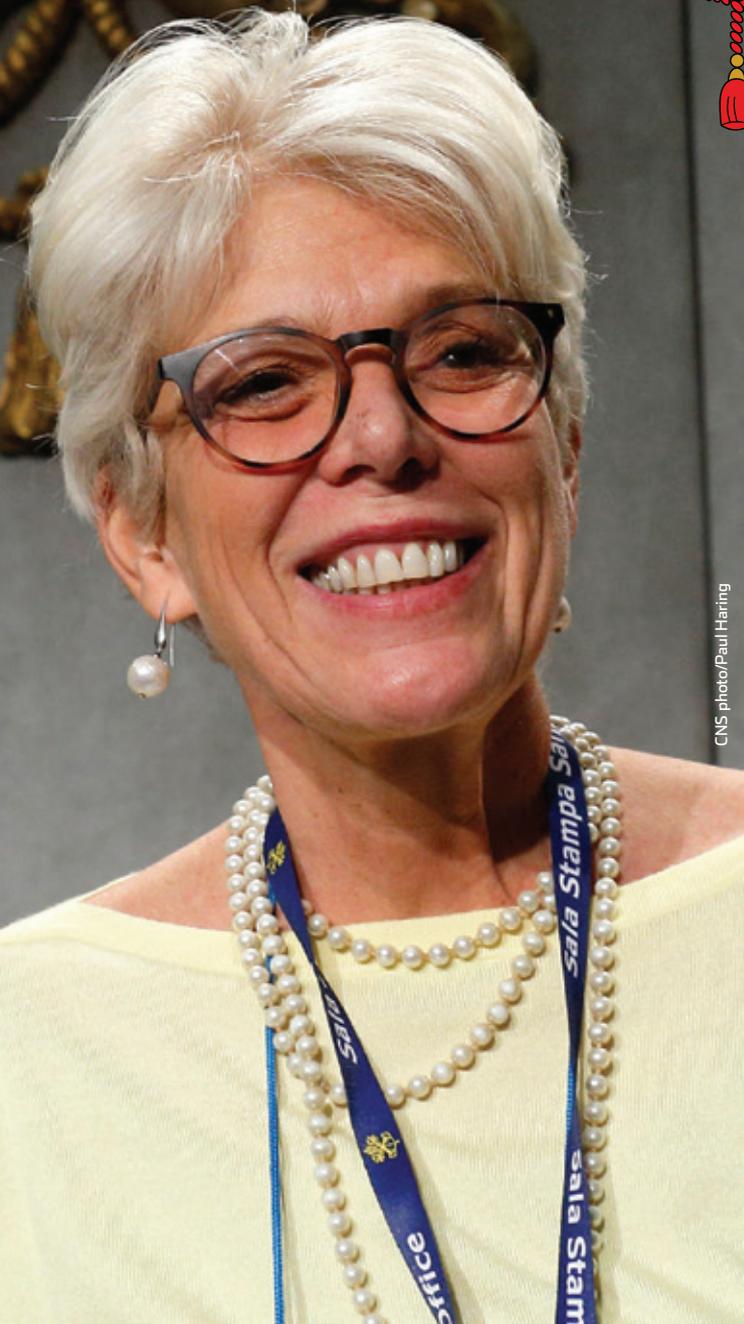
Pope Francis responded to these calls, in part, by opening the permanent liturgical ministries of lector and acolyte to women. While women have served in these roles for decades, previously only men could be permanently instituted in these roles; that prohibition was rarely enforced in the United States but was more common elsewhere. He also created the similar lay ministry of catechist, which gives official recognition to women catechists, who in areas like the Amazon, which face a severe priest shortage, are often the leaders of their church communities.

Ms. Scaraffia, the journalist who founded the Vatican women’s magazine, criticized the opening of the permanent lector and acolyte ministries to women but welcomed the creation of the catechist role. She sees the permanent institution of women as lectors and acolytes as a way of bringing a ministry women have exercised unofficially for decades under a bishop’s control, thus limiting their freedom. In her view, the ministry of catechist is different because it entails a new and official recognition of women as leaders in parish life. “Always bearing in mind, however, that recognition also entails control,” Ms. Scaraffia added in an email interview with **America**.

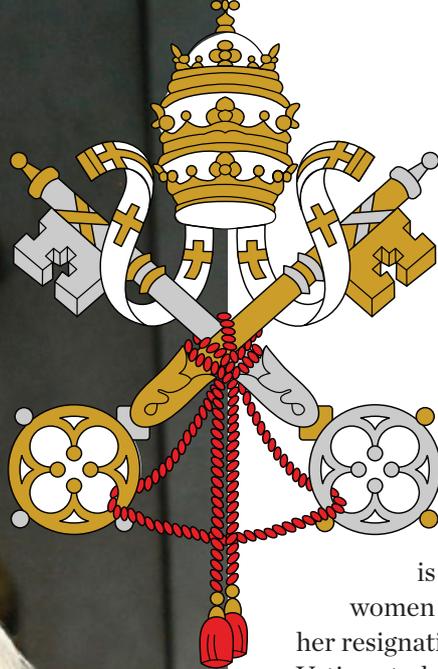
Ms. Scaraffia, like the other women quoted in this story, believes that the ultimate goal of feminists like herself pushing for change in the Vatican is to allow women’s voices to be heard. For her, the goal has proven to have particularly high stakes. With the blessing of Pope Benedict XVI, she founded the magazine *Donne Chiesa Mondo* (“Women, Church, World”) a monthly insert in the Vatican’s daily newspaper, *L’Osservatore Romano*. Being under the purview of the official Vatican media operation meant that the magazine could not cover controversial issues like abortion, a restriction with which Ms. Scaraffia was glad to comply.

But the magazine ruffled some feathers in March 2018 when it published an exposé on the conditions of women religious working in the houses of bishops, cardinals and priests. In a 2019 interview with **America**’s podcast “Inside the Vatican,” Ms. Scaraffia explained to me that the sisters were in a position of subservience to and dependence on their employers, who usually provided their housing, and were often unpaid. The exploitation they faced, she said, sometimes even included sexual abuse—a detail that, Ms. Scaraffia explained later, she had been told by a senior Vatican official not to report on.

Cristiane Murray, vice director of the Vatican Press Office, attends a press briefing following a session of the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon at the Vatican on Oct. 8, 2019.



CNS photo/Paul Herring



Soon after that interview, Ms. Scaraffia and the entire editorial board of *Women, Church, World* resigned, citing hostility from new editors at *L'Osservatore Romano*. The archives containing their seven years of work have been removed from the newspaper's website.

Ms. Scaraffia is concerned that there is no longer a Vatican-sanctioned space for women to express criticism of the institution. Since her resignation, she said: "The situation of women in the Vatican today seems to me to have worsened. There is no longer any free voice, in exchange for a few places in medium-high positions without the possibility of changing anything or making a critical voice heard."

"Of course, the presence of women at executive levels in the Vatican is a positive thing, but for now they are always in an overwhelming minority and are women chosen by the hierarchical institution, therefore in the first place obedient and not very critical," Ms. Scaraffia said. "I think the situation would be different if at the top levels—I am thinking of the small group of cardinals who advise the pope—the leaders of the great world associations of women religious, elected by the religious themselves, were invited. They are almost always courageous and intelligent women, with a deep knowledge of the state of the Catholic Church in the world, who are capable of a critical and new vision."

"In recent years, although the ecclesiastical institution has not actually changed, the religious have changed a lot," she added. "Vocations are decreasing dramatically, but those who remain are lucid and combative, no longer the obedient servants of the clergy." It is particularly important to raise up the voices of women religious, Ms. Scaraffia added, in order to combat the abuse.

"I think that a change in the mortifying condition of women in the church can only happen if women change, if women are fighting for their requests to be heard and granted," Ms. Scaraffia said. Women cannot wait for the pope to make changes; they need to be proactive. As she said in her 2019 interview with *America*, "Pope Francis has opened doors to women; it is up to women to pass through them" and to use their new positions to push for better treatment for women.

Within the Vatican, the tone from women in leadership is much less outwardly critical, but most women ad-

mit that the church has a long way to go to reach the goal of equality between the sexes. Ms. Murray, the press office deputy, told **America** that for the last five years, the Donne in Vaticano (“Women in the Vatican”) association has brought together the women working in the Vatican to support one another and increase the visibility of women in the Vatican, while also doing charitable work for women in difficult situations around the world. “The goal of equality is still some way off,” Ms. Murray said, “but unfortunately this is a reality not only in the Vatican, but even in the world’s most advanced countries.”

When asked what she would tell Pope Francis about the situation of women in the Vatican, Ms. Murray said, “I believe I would ask for this: that we be more listened to” and “that there be a greater dialogue of exchange and interaction, at all levels, between men and women.”

### The Economics of Change

One area in which Pope Francis has prioritized putting women into leadership roles has been finance and economics, especially in the last year, as the world’s economies floundered because of Covid-19 shutdowns and the pandemic cast wealth disparities into sharp relief. The pope believes that women economists have a unique perspective that gives them the ability to lead the world into a brighter post-pandemic economic future.

In 2020, he named six female economists to the Vatican’s Council for the Economy, which oversees the financial activities of Vatican entities. Seven places on the council are reserved for lay people and eight for clerics. It was the first time any women had been appointed to the council, which the pope formed in 2014 to assist in his ongoing overhaul of the Vatican’s scandal-plagued finances.

“I chose these particular women because of their qualifications but also because I believe women in general are much better administrators than men,” the pope says in his 2020 book *Let Us Dream*, which presents his vision of a world transformed for the better by the trial of the pandemic.

He mentioned how nations with female heads of state “on the whole reacted better and more quickly than others, making decisions swiftly and communicating them with empathy” and went on to cite the work of two female economists, Dr. Mariana Mazzucato of University College London and Kate Raworth of Oxford University. Pope Francis praised both women’s willingness to go “beyond the polarization of free market capitalism and state socialism” to imagine an economics that—to use Ms. Raworth’s “doughnut” model—keeps the poor from falling into the “hole” of

destitution while remaining within the finite limits of what is environmentally sustainable.

Both Ms. Raworth and Dr. Mazzucato have been brought on as consultants to the Vatican’s Covid-19 Commission, which focuses on the church’s humanitarian response to the pandemic, analyzes the ecological elements of the crisis, communicates the Vatican’s view on the way forward and works with other nations to advance international cooperation toward this vision. In August 2021, Pope Francis appointed Alessandra Smerilli, an Italian economist and member of the Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco, as the commission’s interim secretary, making her one of the highest-ranking women in the Vatican.

Ms. Raworth describes herself as a “renegade economist,” pointing out that she teaches in Oxford’s Environmental Change Institute rather than in its economics department. She said that she studied economics hoping to go into public policy but was frustrated “because the issues I cared most about, I felt were at the margins of concern.”

“If you study economics at almost any university in the world, and I’m sorry to say it’s still true, it’s likely that within the first lecture, [the professor will say] ‘Welcome to economics, here is the supply and demand of the market.’ And we start with the market. Why, why do we start with the market? I mean, ‘economics’ comes from ancient Greek: *‘eco’* *‘nomos’*: the art of household management. What a beautiful ambition, to aim to manage our planetary home in the interest of all its inhabitants! If that’s economics, I’m in,” Ms. Raworth said.

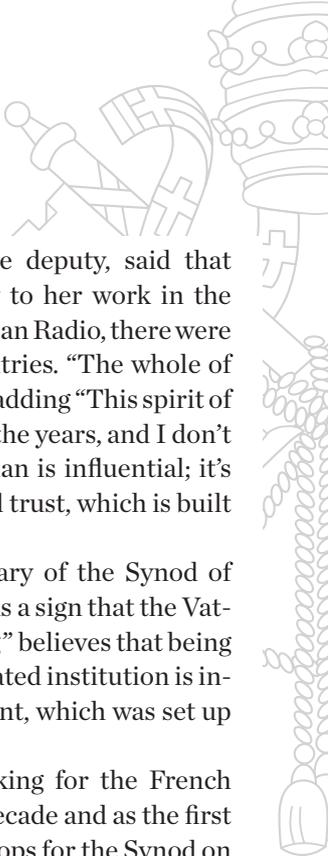
Pope Francis has been criticized over the years for at times using outdated language to describe women, which he responded to in *Let Us Dream*, echoing Ms. Raworth’s sentiment. He says that “housewife” or “*ama de casa*” in Spanish carries the sense of “the art of household management.”

The pope wrote that he believes what sets the women economists he has promoted apart from others is that “theirs is a perspective born of their practical experience of the ‘real’ economy, which they say has opened their eyes to the inadequacy of standard textbook economics. It was often their unpaid or informal work, their experience of maternity or running households in addition to high-level academic work, that made them aware of the flaws in the dominant economic models of the last seventy years.”

When asked her thoughts on this analysis, Ms. Raworth took a moment to ponder the question. She said she was struck by how many of the economists and theorists who had influenced her were women who, for the most part, had “stepped outside the traditional route in academia.” One example she cited is the writer Janine Benyus, who popu-



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# The ultimate goal of feminists pushing for change in the Vatican is to allow women's voices to be heard.

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larized the term “biomimicry,” the idea of studying natural processes and applying them to solve modern-day human problems with the goal of environmental sustainability.

Speaking about the women who inspired her, Ms. Raworth said: “I think many of them are renegades, to be honest. I think they are coming from the outside, taking a different route, and they’re seeing something that the mainstream isn’t seeing.”

She said that rather than there being some sort of “feminine genius” women are born with, their experience of the world prepares them from an early age to see economics differently. “[When] you’re a girl growing up, you typically would be expected to imagine yourself becoming a mother one day. And so you imagine yourself maybe having a career and being involved in the world of paid work, but you absolutely are already imagining yourself involved in the pain of the world of unpaid work,” Ms. Raworth said. “Women and men may well be equal, but [there] may still be something unique in women’s perspective because they have been excluded or because the house care work is put on them, in the same way that people of all races are equal, but people of color have something that they can see because of their lived experience of racism.”

“Only when we bring in all of these perspectives will we have a fully rounded perspective of economics,” Ms. Raworth continued, “and the beauty of that is no one person can therefore see it all. We need to work in big teams, diverse teams.”

## The Central Role of Synodality

Ms. Murray, the Vatican press office deputy, said that collaboration in diverse teams is key to her work in the Vatican. When she first worked at Vatican Radio, there were staff members from 40 different countries. “The whole of the Vatican is multicultural,” she said, adding “This spirit of collaboration has increased a lot over the years, and I don’t think the fact of being a woman or man is influential; it’s just a matter of experience and mutual trust, which is built up over years of hard work.”

Sister Becquart, the undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops, who said her appointment was a sign that the Vatican’s “patriarchal mindset is changing” believes that being a woman in a historically male-dominated institution is influential, particularly in her department, which was set up to represent the world’s bishops.

Drawing on her experience working for the French bishops’ conference for more than a decade and as the first woman consultor to the Synod of Bishops for the Synod on Young People in 2018, Sister Becquart said the bishops she has worked with “really felt that nowadays if you just put the same people among the same people, you have just a part of the view. And so I feel that being appointed there is [intended] to put into the structure of the Synod of Bishops the importance of listening to what we call the *sensus fidei* of the people.”

Sister Becquart is an expert on synodality, the model of governance advocated at the Second Vatican Council and championed by Pope Francis, in which bishops and lay people speak freely—with *parrhesia*, or boldness, as Pope Francis often says—about the issues facing their communities and where they believe the Holy Spirit may be calling them, with the goal of making decisions together.

After acknowledging in the first year of his pontificate that the Synod of Bishops was “half baked” in comparison with the model the Second Vatican Council called for, Pope Francis instituted a college of cardinal advisers who he suggested could eventually be elected by the Synod of Bishops and hosted high-profile synods on the family, young people and the Amazon in Rome. He appointed a handful of women, including Sister Becquart, as consultors to the synods on young people and on Amazonia. Now, with her appointment as undersecretary to the Vatican’s standing Synod of Bishops, Sister Becquart will likely be the first woman to vote in a synod assembly. The extension of voting rights to more women, which the superiors of several religious orders, as well as some Catholic advocacy groups, have been called for for years, is now under consideration at the Vati-



The director and editorial staff of "Women Church World," the magazine insert in the Vatican's newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, resigned in 2019, claiming a lack of support for open dialogue and for an editorial line run by women.

CNS photo/L'Osservatore Romano via Reuters

can and, according to Vatican watchers like **America's** Gerard O'Connell, could be granted as early as 2023, when the final phase of the global synodal process on synodality takes place in Rome.

Although voting is involved, synodality is not necessarily a process of democratization, as final decisions still rest with the Synod of Bishops and, ultimately, the pope. Pope Francis has at times used his role to reject majority recommendations, like the Synod on the Amazon's recommendation that married men be allowed to be ordained, because there has not been enough of a consensus on the issue or because opinions are starkly divided.

While pursuing a licentiate in sacred theology at Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry, Sister Becquart wrote her thesis on synodality, which she believes is key to solving the gender disparities in the church. Starting from the point that all people are created equal, "synodality is about getting rid of a pattern of domination, separation, to enter into this system of cooperation and interdependency, interconnectedness between all," Sister Becquart told **America**.

"With Vatican II we have rediscovered, we can say, the primacy of the baptismal call. In the very important decree the 'Constitution on the Church' ('Lumen Gentium'), there was a deliberate choice to put the chapter on the people of God, Chapter 2, before the chapter on the hierarchy," Sister Becquart said. For her, that baptismal call both respects the diversity of vocations that people have and at the same time

requires that people of all vocations are able to be heard in the church's decision-making processes. That vision, she says, has not yet been fully actualized.

Sister Becquart believes that synodality, properly understood, incorporates all voices—including people of other faiths or no faith at all. She advocates for special attention to be paid to young people and those on the margins of society, who have in the past been left out of the church's central decisions. "During so many years, we had this experience and pattern [that was] rather clerical, and we haven't finished receiving the fruits of Vatican II," Sister Becquart said. "It's a long way to get rid of this patriarchal mindset and to have true equality, reciprocity [and] mutual respect between men and women, but society is changing and [in] the church, through baptism, all the baptized are equal in dignity. Synodality is about how to implement this fundamental equality that doesn't suppress the diversity of ministry, of roles, the role of pastors and bishops, but how you live that as a service, in the service of the community in which everyone is equal."

**Colleen Dulle is an associate editor of America and co-host of the podcast "Inside the Vatican."**



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# Building a Better Child Care System

*Politicians are starting to understand what Catholic social teaching has always known: We must all care for the most vulnerable.*

By Kate Ward

The summer after I graduated from high school, I worked in a day care center, watching over children from 18 months to 5 years old. Not yet responsible for my own expenses, I felt lucky to have a job that sometimes took me outdoors and paychecks I could save for my college needs. My co-workers with children were in a different position. They loved every one of our charges and worked hard to keep them happy and safe and to help them develop. Yet they spoke frankly about the impossibility of supporting their own families on our low hourly wages.

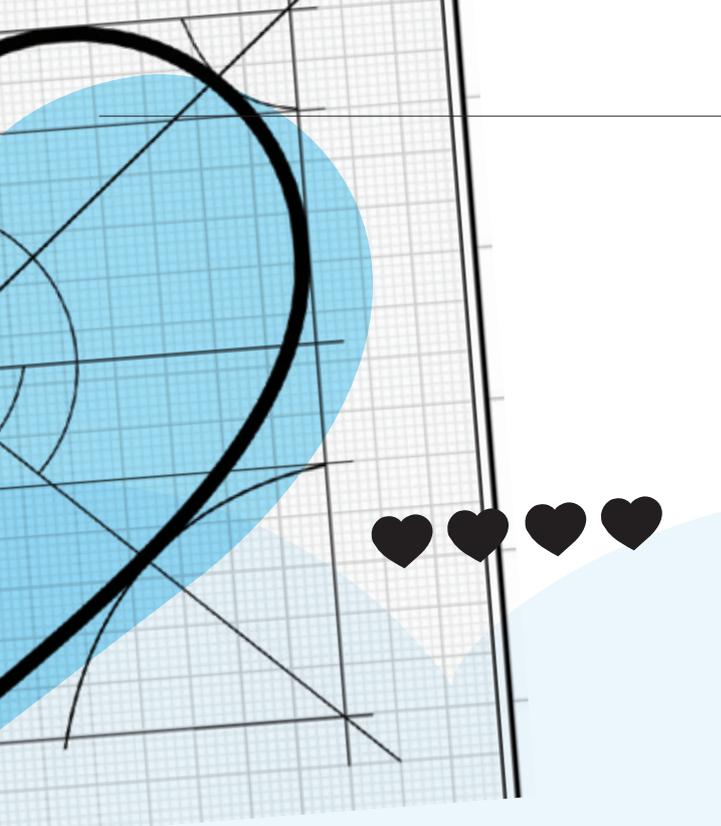
The job had other challenges, like working without pay when parents were late for pickup. A cook prepared students' meals, but teachers were not allowed to have one, even when a daily hot meal would have made a big difference. A regular lunch for one of my co-workers was a snack-size bag of chips.

The societal upheaval of the Covid-19 pandemic has revealed how many U.S. families depend on underpaid educators like these for their own economic stability. After shutdowns of schools and day cares shredded the already fragile safety nets of many working families, the United States has finally begun to engage with child care as a public policy issue. Elected officials and policy wonks across the political spectrum are bringing diverse proposals to the table. In a society that has long viewed child care as a mat-

ter of private choice (read: the responsibility of individual families and particularly of working mothers), substantive arguments over public child care policy are a huge step forward. Particularly given the U.S. tendency to envision family life as sealed off from public life and the economy, the acknowledgement that voters might want their leaders to help secure reliable, high-quality care for all young children is a welcome paradigm shift.

Equally important, discussions around child care policy suggest a growing consensus that all of society shares responsibility for making sure vulnerable people are taken care of, and that human beings matter to our common life regardless of whether they are seen as independent and productive members of society. This anthropology, or way of seeing human beings, is one proudly proclaimed by the Catholic tradition.

Currently, many different plans are being discussed for helping provide and pay for care across the stages of childhood. President Joe Biden's comprehensive American Families Plan starts with infancy by calling for a national paid family and medical leave program, addressing the shameful reality that most U.S. workers have no paid time off after welcoming a baby. (Only 13 percent of workers have access to paid leave, and many fear career consequences if they actually use it.)



The Family and Medical Leave Act, enacted in 1993, guarantees unpaid leave for employees of larger companies, but many families cannot afford to go without a parent's paycheck. This helps explain why nearly a quarter of new mothers in the United States return to work within two weeks of giving birth—a shameful practice that harms moms, babies and the society our children are joining. Catholic thought would heartily agree with an insight on paid leave supplied by Matt Bruenig, of the socialist think tank People's Policy Project: While U.S. society too often views parental leave as a nice perk for elite workers, it is more accurately “a benefit for children,” and making it accessible to all families should be a national priority.

### **The Early Years**

The years between the newborn period and full-time school are no easier to navigate, as many families must choose between keeping a wage-earning parent home with the children or paying major sums for child care. The early childhood advocacy organization Zero to Three reports that in 30 states, center-based child care costs more than public college, and worries about child care costs in particular drive nearly two-thirds of Americans to

limit family size below what they see as ideal.

So Mr. Biden wants the federal government to guarantee “high quality” preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds, with additional financial assistance—beyond tax credits—for child care for lower-income families. And Senator Mitt Romney, Republican of Utah, has proposed a plan of cash grants to families, though his proposal would eliminate a welfare program that benefits many parents for a portion of their children's lives.

Perhaps most ambitious is the Universal Child Care and Early Learning Act proposed by Senator Elizabeth Warren, Democrat of Massachusetts. Ms. Warren recognizes that families struggle to access child care for two reasons: 1) the challenge of cost and 2) the shortage of spots at quality centers. Her plan would direct the federal government to establish and fund a network of locally run, center-based and certified in-home care providers, while helping families pay for care. While some conservatives raise concerns about the potential quality of government-sponsored, center-based care, Ms. Warren frames it as a pathway to economic opportunity for women and notes that the government already runs public schools, the Head Start early childhood program and military child care centers.

Cash grants to families could help pay for center-based care or cushion the cost of a wage earner staying home. Mr. Biden's and Mr. Romney's proposed cash grants resist the temptation to tie cash assistance to waged work, or to punish the poorest families in which parents do no paid work at all. Stay-at-home and working parents earn the same benefits under both plans. Cash payments to caregiving parents is settled policy in most other wealthy nations, and the idea boasts a range of advocates, from feminist activists to the pope.

The multiracial, international Wages for Housework movement first called for cash payments to caregivers in the 1970s, and Welfare Warriors, a Milwaukee group with a similar history, continues to advocate that “Motherwork IS work and should be paid.” In “Laborem Exercens,” his 1981 encyclical on work justice, St. John Paul II wrote that “family allowances or grants to mothers” are a means for securing just wages and “verifying the justice of the whole socioeconomic system.” As the Catholic writ-

er Leah Libresco Sargeant explains, “There is dignity in work, but we should support more than just work done for wages.”

Years after my brief stint as a day care worker, I picked up *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, by Christine Firer Hinze, a theology professor at Fordham University. Hinze’s text on care work in the global economy reveals how day care workers’ low wages and scanty support for parents at home are two sides of the same coin. Dr. Hinze shows that our society’s failure to care for those who give care stems from the fact that economists traditionally count and observe only work that generates economic exchange or profit, which is typically done outside the home. But though we may not think of unpaid care in the home as “work,” it actually creates immense economic value.

Dr. Hinze shows how unpaid in-home care constitutes “a systemic transfer of hidden subsidies to the formal economy that go unrecognized.” Innumerable daily acts of cooking, cleaning and laundry prepare paid workers to go out and generate countable profits, all while helping to raise children who will one day join the paid workforce. Unpaid in-home care is stigmatized as unskilled and treated as invisible in large part because it is typically done by women and widely viewed as “natural” to them. And unpaid care work transfers its low status to care work done for pay, including child care and elder care, as well as cleaning and food service—low-paid and precarious forms of paid work that are disproportionately done by women and, in the United States, by women of color.

While paid and unpaid care workers deserve public concern and better working conditions, Dr. Hinze says their hardships are actually not unique, but increasingly common in an economy that has failed to account for all humans’ need to receive care. She said paid and unpaid care workers are “canaries in the coal mine,” whose struggles warn of a larger system failure.

Dr. Hinze’s book helps us see how care undergirds the entire economy, from the day care workers and unpaid family members whose work allows some parents to work for pay to practices as simple as office workers packing their own lunch. The vital omnipresence of care in economic life proves the claim that “child care is infrastructure.” And it evokes another classic claim of the Catholic tradition: Families are the basic unit of society. *Infra-structure* means what is below the structure, at its base.

Both framings help us see that our whole society is

built from the ground up on the care each adult worker received as a child. And professional child care is not something separate from family care but an extension of it that many parents rely on as they raise their children and carry out their many other important tasks in society, including paid work.

### **The People’s Policy**

Since our culture highly prizes economic self-sufficiency and familial privacy, it might feel strange to Americans to think about public policy supporting parents raising their children, but it makes sense from a Catholic understanding of humans and the world. The view that the family, not the individual, is the basic unit of society is not just a call for families to receive support; it makes a deeper claim about human nature. Humans are by nature vulnerable and relational, and the family is most often the place where we are allowed to be both of those things.

As relational beings we create societies and, in democracies, elect government representatives to pursue our shared goals. The government, in Catholic thought, is not something over against the people, but the people’s legitimate agent, so a government enacting policies to support families is one legitimate way for a society to take care of its own. No surprise, then, that government policies that support families are frequently called for in the writings of popes and bishops that make up the body of Catholic social doctrine. We can use that tradition to explore what governmental support of families should look like through a Catholic lens.

First, policies that seek to improve children’s lives need to recognize the basic fact that families come in many forms. Some approaches to child care policy want to push more parents of young children into the waged workforce, while other advocates want measures that would incentivize mothers, specifically, to stay home. But a too-stringent insistence on families taking one path or the other could end up penalizing needy families whose division of labor looks different.

Amber Lapp, a researcher who writes for the conservative think tank American Compass, notes that stable employment and marriage can be difficult goals to accomplish while in poverty. Poverty causes familial instability. The economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton observe that “repeated re-partnering in the US is often driven by the need for an additional income, something that is



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less true in Europe with its more extensive safety net.” If aid to caregivers is contingent on marriage or stable employment, such plans will exclude the families most in need of help.

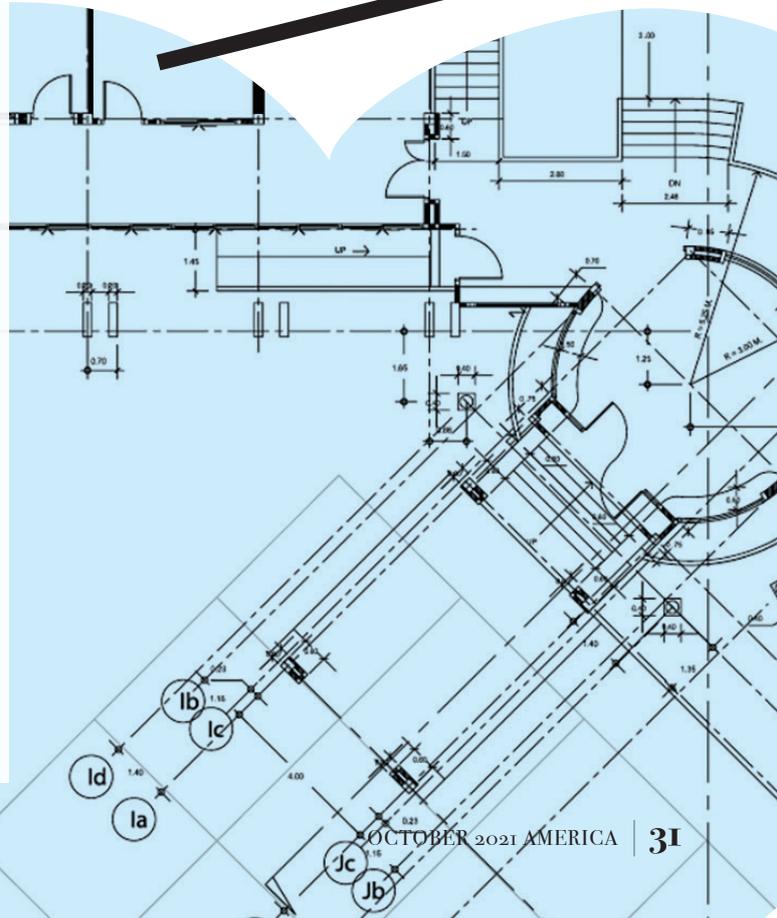
“Whereas the intent is to instruct and promote virtue, the practical effect is to punish mothers in desperate situations,” Ms. Lapp notes; and of course it punishes the children of unmarried parents, too. “Amoris Laetitia,” Pope Francis’ beautiful document on the family, called Catholics to support families in precarious situations by fighting stigma and working to build structures of support. Attention to the concrete realities of poverty is crucial for any good national child care policy.

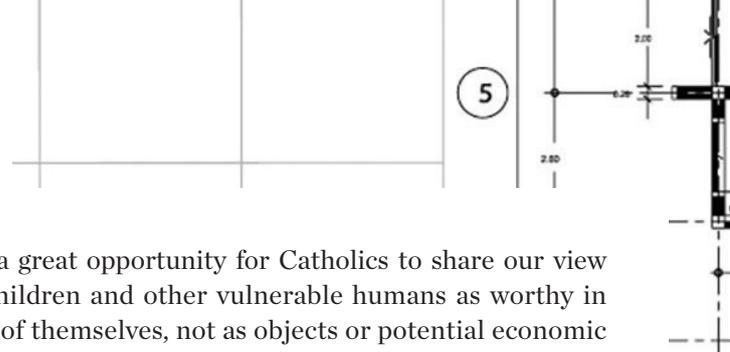
Second, as Dr. Hinze reminds us and I experienced myself, caregiving conditions are working conditions. The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California, Berkeley, reports that almost half of early childhood educators receive public assistance available to those in poverty, such as Medicaid or food stamps. “Undertaking this work has been a pathway to poverty for many early educators and poses a risk to their well-being,” the center concludes, “with consequences extending to their own families and to the children in their care.” Of course, every parent would prefer that their child’s caregiver receive just wages and good benefits and have safe, stable working conditions; but when working families must pay for the entire cost of child care, wages stay low and turnover stays high.

The plans proposed by Mr. Biden and Ms. Warren are commendable for their acknowledgement of the economic struggles of professional child caregivers. While Mr. Biden’s plan calls for a \$15 minimum wage, Ms. Warren’s would link early educators’ wages to those of local K-12 teachers. Proposals for cash grants to family caregivers also align with the Catholic understanding of work as much broader than waged economic activity.

Last year, Pope Francis told a gathering of informal workers, including caregivers, that “this may be the time to consider a universal basic wage that would acknowledge and dignify the noble, essential tasks you carry out.” The cash grants proposed by Mr. Biden and Mr. Romney are not the same as a universal basic income, but their proposals share Pope Francis’ understanding that unpaid care work is work with real value to society and deserves to be compensated.

While the Catholic tradition describes work (not only





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paid work) as a good, it rejects the view that work is the only good thing in human life, or that we are only useful to ourselves and others when we are working. Paid work should allow workers to support families and also spend time with them, as well as allow time for worship, civic activity and restful relaxation.

All this means that if universal child care becomes a reality but results in more parents in full-time jobs with inflexible schedules, family advocates will have lots more work to do. Rare is the situation where one worker can support a family, including providing health insurance, and spend time with young children during the week after work. A more family-friendly economy would make that possible. Policies like universal health care, paid sick leave, paid vacation time for all workers or even a universal four-day workweek are further goals to keep in mind.

Third, good child care policy values children for themselves, not for their economic potential or (worse) their nationality or race. Predictions of population decline, or a “baby bust,” across the United States are worrying college administrators and inspiring awkward jokes about couples doing their bit for society. Concerns centered on the economic impact of a smaller workforce have been rightly criticized as oblivious to the economic reasons parents are having fewer children. More troublingly, “baby bust” concerns have been twisted to openly racist ends by those who imply or state outright that white American babies are preferable to allowing more immigration to the United States.

Catholics should resist these shameful attempts to oppose the two good goals of welcoming immigrants and supporting U.S. families. Child care policy conversations

are a great opportunity for Catholics to share our view of children and other vulnerable humans as worthy in and of themselves, not as objects or potential economic producers. The Catholic writer Ross Douhat does this beautifully in his reflection that “the idea that having more kids is swell and good and all-American” sits uneasily with his own lived reality of “parenthood as enforced kenosis,” an unmistakable spiritual discipline full of joys and rewards but perhaps fundamentally at odds with individualist, pleasure-obsessed U.S. mainstream culture.

Finally, while children can never be reduced to objects, people who desire to be parents aspire to a legitimate vision of the good life that they can validly expect their elected officials to support. It is deeply troubling, especially from a Catholic perspective, that people in the United States will have, on average, one fewer child than they say they want, and that this is largely for economic reasons.

The unfulfilled dreams not fully captured by that statistic trouble commentators across the political spectrum, from conservatives like Mr. Douhat to the feminist writer Mona Eltahawy, who bitingly writes, “Sometimes the patriarchy will say the quiet part out loud—HAVE BABIES FOR THE ECONOMY—while ignoring what many who do indeed want to have babies have long been saying out loud—YOUR ECONOMIC POLICIES HAVE MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO HAVE BABIES TO BOOST AN ECONOMY THAT BENEFITS VERY FEW OF US.”

Contrary to the way it is often described in the popular media, “reproductive justice,” a framework of thought developed by working-class women of color, is not concerned only with access to abortion; it also proclaims that the right to have children and to raise them in flourishing communities is part and parcel of the human right to bodily autonomy.

Developed in U.S. communities where forced sterilization of poor women of color is part of living memory, the “right to have children” aspect of reproductive justice has now been cited by high-income women who find their dreams of parenthood threatened by the increased precariousness of today’s economy. Family-friendly policies like government-subsidized child care could help more would-be parents welcome and raise the children they hope for. Better care policies will address a symptom whose root is an economy oblivious to the needs and



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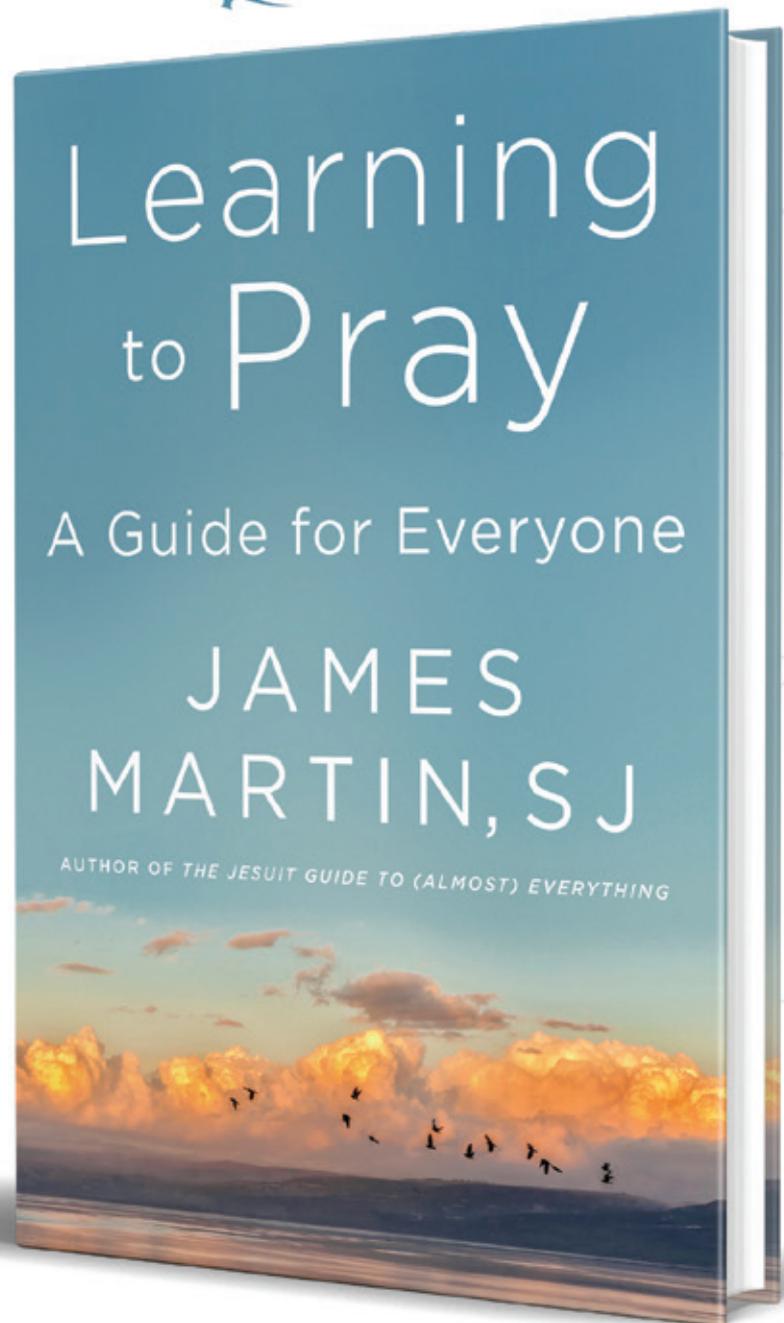
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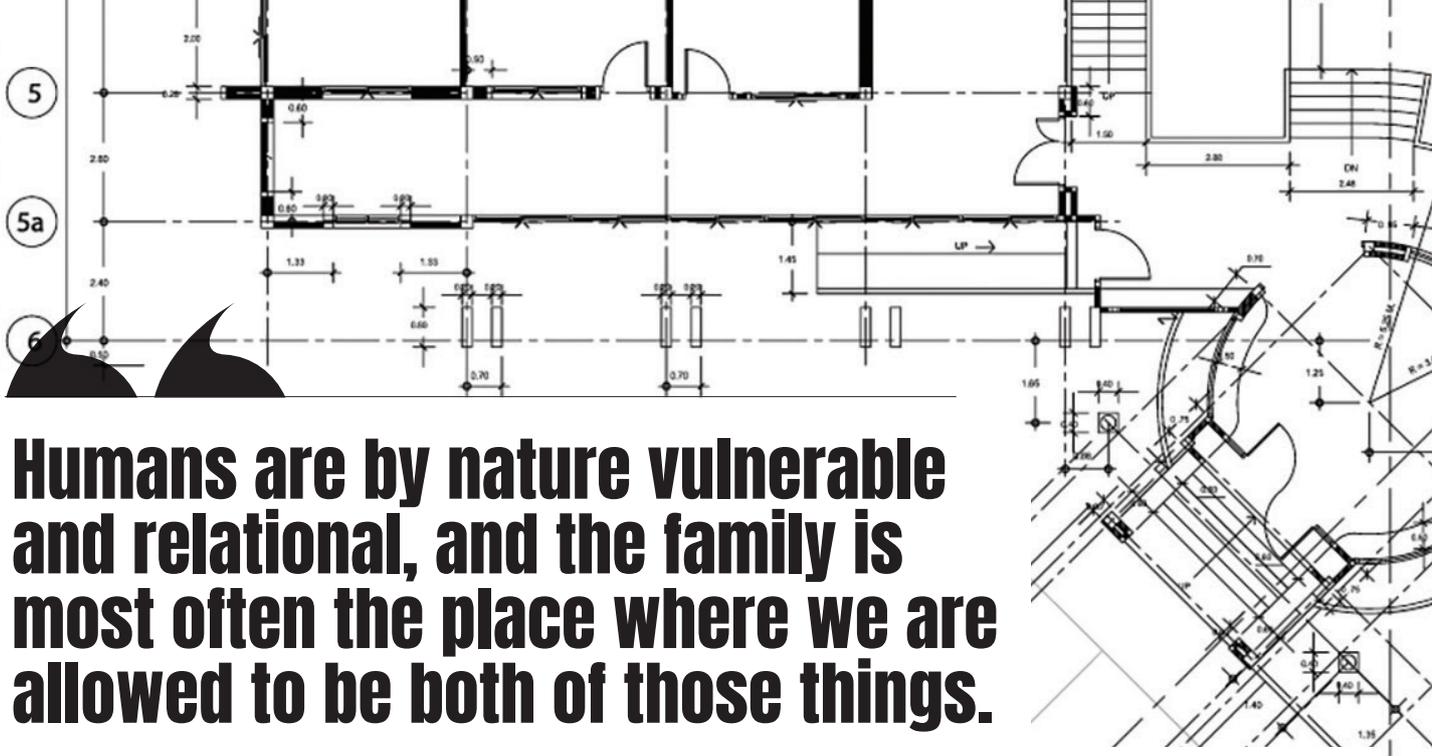
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# Humans are by nature vulnerable and relational, and the family is most often the place where we are allowed to be both of those things.

flourishing of vulnerable people, including children, and the family networks that support them in care and love.

## In Search of the Ideal

Sociologists coined the term “ideal worker” to describe the expectation that workers will be always available, unconstrained by family or social duties, tiredness or illness, or the desire to do anything at all besides work for wages. In white-collar jobs, ideal workers answer email at all hours and travel at the drop of a hat; in hourly work, employers issue bizarre schedules on short notice, expecting employees to have no commitments besides their paid job.

For far too long, employers in the United States have expected every worker to fit the mold of an ideal worker, and workers have tried their best to meet these impossible standards. This past year, as children burst in on Zoom calls and workers interacting with the public weighed keeping their jobs against exposing family members to Covid-19, we have seen anew just how unrealistic the “ideal worker” image is.

The “ideal worker” could not be further from the view of working humans found in Catholic anthropology. Catholics believe that needing care is part of every human life, and all of society is responsible for making sure vulnerable people are cared for. Living for and with others can be challenging, but it is one of the best and most precious things we can do, and for many people, raising children will be a major way they live out that human calling.

“The State has the responsibility to pass laws and

create work to ensure the future of young people and help them realize their plan of forming a family,” Pope Francis wrote in 2016. With a variety of child care policy proposals on the table, U.S. leaders are moving closer to fulfilling this responsibility. Want to help? Tell your elected officials you support good child care policy at the national level, and talk to your friends about what our society can do to better support children and families raising them.

Whether or not we are parents, we all benefit from our economy’s invisible structures of care. Making that structure visible—and giving caregivers respect, compensation and support—helps make our economy more friendly to everyone who works, gives care and receives care within it; and it helps every one of us as vulnerable, relational human beings.

Kate Ward is the author of *Wealth, Virtue, and Moral Luck: Christian Ethics in an Age of Inequality*, from Georgetown University Press, and assistant professor of theology at Marquette University.

**For more on women's changing role in the church and society, including a reflection on 50 years of Jesuit coeducation from Professor Susan Ross, visit [americamagazine.org/women-church](http://americamagazine.org/women-church).**



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# Gender and the Priesthood

Two scholars look back at Avery Dulles's 1996 article on women's ordination

A sixth-century mosaic depicts holy women with offerings to the Virgin Mary in the Basilica of St. Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, Italy.

*In a lecture at Fordham University in New York in 1996, Avery Dulles, S.J., addressed what he saw as the major objections to the apostolic letter of Pope John Paul II in 1994, "Ordinatio Sacerdotalis," on the inadmissibility of women to the Catholic priesthood. The talk was published in *Origins* (Vol. 25, No. 45, dated May 2, 1996) as "Gender and Priesthood: Examining the Teaching" and was reprinted in *America* in 2001. To mark the 25th anniversary of this essay, we asked two scholars to respond. The full text of the essay (excerpts are below) can be found online at [www.americamagazine.org/dulles-women-priesthood](http://www.americamagazine.org/dulles-women-priesthood).*

The most controversial statement that has come from the Holy See during the present pontificate is in all probability that which has to do with the priestly ordination of women. On Pentecost Sunday 1994, Pope John Paul II issued a brief letter "Ordinatio Sacerdotalis," which concluded with the words: "In order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter which pertains to the church's divine constitution itself, in virtue of my ministry of confirming the brethren (cf. Lk. 22:32) I declare that the church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the church's faithful."

..."Ordinatio Sacerdotalis" is the culmination of a long

series of documents issued under Paul VI and John Paul II since 1975. In these documents the case against women's ordination is made under four principal headings: Bible, tradition, theological reasoning and magisterial authority.

...Since about 1970 a number of voices have been raised, even in the Catholic Church, favoring the admission of women to priestly orders. Although many of the faithful have been convinced by the official pronouncements of recent years, others have responded negatively. The critics include theologians of acknowledged professional competence. The objections they have raised to the standard arguments cannot be written off as merely flippant.

...Challenging the argument from tradition, some au-

thors maintain that the question of women's ordination is a new one for the church and that more time is needed for dialogue and reflection before the magisterium can properly decide the matter. As a matter of fact, however, the question is almost as old as Christianity itself.

...It is still objected in some quarters, however, that the tradition of the church and likewise the practice of Christ and the apostles have been socially and culturally conditioned. Some argue that women were in a position of social inferiority and were therefore not considered eligible for anything resembling priestly office. But the evidence does not support this objection. Whatever the social inferiority of women may or may not have been, priestesses were common in pagan religions throughout the Greco-Roman world. They were a familiar institution among the Babylonians and the Assyrians, the Egyptians and the Greeks. If Christ followed the practice of the Jews in this regard, that practice was itself shaped by divine revelation and stood in contrast with that practice of the surrounding peoples such as the Canaanites. Nor was the practice of Judaism by itself determinative for Christ. Where his mission required, he showed an astonishing independence from Jewish customs.

...Yet another objection arises because of the state of biological science in the early centuries. The church's tradition regarding priesthood is held to have been shaped by the opinion of Aristotle and other ancient authors that women were genetically inferior. This opinion, which is now recognized to be false, was occasionally alluded to by theologians in their discussion of women's position in the church. Thomas Aquinas accepted Aristotle's faulty biology, but when he comes to an explicit consideration of the reasons why women cannot be ordained, he does not argue that women are weaker in mind or in body. In fact he acknowledges that some women have greater spiritual and intellectual qualities than men.

...With respect to the theological reasoning, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the popes have appealed to the so-called "iconic" argument to suggest reasons why Christ chose to reserve the priesthood to men. The argument is that the ministerial priest has to represent Christ, especially in the eucharist, which is the sacrament that pre-eminently "expresses the redemptive act of Christ, the bridegroom, toward the church." The words of institution are no mere narrative about the past; they are performative speech acts whereby Christ himself, through the priest, accomplishes the sacramental sacrifice. The shift to the present tense and the first person singular are there-

fore essential. Uttering the words, "This is my body ... ; this is my blood," the priest puts on the very person of Christ. In order for him to be identified with Christ as bridegroom, it is fitting for the priest to be of the male sex.

...To this it is sometimes objected that representation, according to the biblical concept, is simply an authorization to speak in the name of another and that the messenger need not bear a natural resemblance to the person represented. The objection would hold if the priest were simply a messenger, passing on a verbal report, but in fact the priest is a symbolic figure, who serves as both a sign and an instrument in performing the very action of Christ as bridegroom. This symbolic argument does not prove that Christ could not have called women to the priesthood, but it helps us to see that his decision in the matter was not arbitrary. In order for Christ himself to be the bridegroom of the church, as God had been bridegroom of Israel, he had to be a man. For similar reasons it was highly suitable that those who were called to put on the person of Christ in sacramental actions such as presiding at the Lord's Supper should also be of the male sex.

...If one compares the grounds for this teaching with the evidence given for Catholic doctrines such as the immaculate conception, the assumption and papal infallibility, the biblical and traditional basis for the nonordination of women would seem to be firmer. This doctrine is solidly grounded in Scripture. From the earliest centuries it has been in peaceful possession throughout Catholic Christianity; it has been constantly observed in the practice of the church, confirmed by canon law and by the virtually unanimous agreement of the fathers and doctors who have dealt with the question.

...Legitimate questions can still be raised. Because the biblical and historical evidence is complex and at some points obscure, doubts can arise about the meaning and force of certain texts from Scripture and the church fathers. The so-called "iconic" or "symbolic" argument, in the forms hitherto proposed, may be in need of refinement in order to increase its persuasive force. As for the teaching of the magisterium, it remains to be clarified whether the doctrine is to be believed by an act of divine and Catholic faith. It would be desirable if further information were offered regarding the thinking of the bishops throughout the world and the binding character that they attribute to the doctrine.

While the equal dignity of men and women is clearly established in official teaching, it remains to be shown how the true worth and talents of women can be adequately re-

spected and utilized if women are not eligible for priestly and episcopal orders. The question whether women can be ordained to the diaconate requires further exploration. Further study may be needed to determine whether women can hold jurisdiction, and if so, under what conditions. In my opinion a calm and open discussion of issues such as these is not only legitimate but, if conducted without acrimony, could clarify and advance the doctrine of the church.

...The pastoral leadership of the church, recognizing the complexity of the theological issues and the inevitability of dissenting views, should be patient with Catholics who feel unable to accept the approved position. While assuring the

integrity of Catholic doctrine, the bishops should show understanding for dissenters who exhibit good will and avoid disruptive behavior. Such pastoral consideration, however, should not be taken as a license to contest or call into doubt the tradition of the church, confirmed as it is by recent pronouncements of exceptional weight.

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Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J., was the McGinley Professor of Religion and Society at Fordham University in New York City from 1988 until his death in 2008. He was the author of 27 books and over 800 articles and reviews.

# Throw Open the Windows

By Lucetta Scaraffia

*Opening up the church to women must be a proposal that originates from within*

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Avery Dulles's lucid essay on the female priesthood, or rather its impossibility within the Catholic Church, raises fundamental questions that go beyond the scope of the ordination of women: What is the church's relationship to its female members overall? And by what criteria do we judge the institutional church's response to women?

If we judge by modern standards of equality and equal opportunity between women and men, are we not in danger of placing too much emphasis on social conditioning? A religion, and particularly the Christian religion, is not simply a moral system. It is born of revelation and obeys a tradition, and we must take that into account.

As Christians, we certainly do not lack the arguments within the Gospel tradition to find sure and clear indications in this regard. In Scripture, Jesus acknowledges that women have an equal—and sometimes even superior—capacity for spiritual understanding, and he entrusts them with complex and difficult missions, including the commission to tell the other disciples of his resurrection (Jn 20:1-18; Mt 28:1-10; Mk 16:1-11). If he does not entrust them with the priesthood, it is certainly not because he considers them inferior, nor because of the influence of the social customs of his time. More than once, and precisely on the subject of women, he is able to subvert these customs with courage (Jn 4:1-42; Lk 7:36-50). We can deduce from this that Jesus wants to point women and men to missions of

different kinds, but equal value.

The history of the church, unfortunately, confronts us with another reality. The exclusion of women from the priesthood has been considered evidence to sanction their inferiority, even on a spiritual level. This has had consequences in the life of the church, where for almost two millennia women have performed secondary, if not servile, tasks, and where their voice has not been heard. In other words, their exclusion lies at the root of the conception of priesthood that has prevailed. Despite what Dulles writes—“The ministerial priesthood is not a sign of personal superiority, but a humble service to be performed for the good of all God's people”—the priesthood has been transformed into a role of power and an opportunity for an institutional career instead of one of service to the faithful.

When asked if she wants a female priesthood, a friend of mine who is a woman religious replied, “No, I want there to be no more priests.” She obviously understands the term “priest” to be the equivalent to “man of power.”

For this reason, the debate on the possibility of female priesthood must have as its first objective that of re-examining the priestly figure in the light of its historical reality, one that is certainly not consistent with the Gospel message. In this sense, any attempt to ordain women in order to give them more power in the church is also not consistent with the Gospel message, even if this project has the noble

intention of putting an end to the subordination of women. In human history, justice has never been restored by shifting power from one class to another.

The refusal to accept the ordination of women to the priesthood would be more easily accepted if it were accompanied by respect toward women and an openness to collaborate with them. The current subordination of women in the church and the lack of respect and listening shown by the ecclesiastical institution certainly does not help anyone to understand the reasons for this exclusion, which seems more like a way to continue to hold power. Dulles grasps the need for greater respect toward women, but limits himself to citing John XXIII and John Paul II's timid comments about women. Aside from the fact that both popes made statements about the equal treatment of women that have not been followed up in the life of the church, they issued texts—particularly John Paul II's "Mulieris Dignitatem," with its problematic explication of the qualities of the "feminine genius"—that require further discussion and debate.

But above all they are words. Just words. No consideration is given to reality, which conveys a very different set of information to women in the church.

### **The Witness of Women Religious**

The real life of the church reveals a total lack of consideration for women in religious life, who until recently constituted well over half of the worldwide members of religious institutes. It can be said without any exaggeration that the sisters have kept up the presence of the church in the world by their tireless and passionate work without receiving anything in return. Their voices have never been heard and their opinions are almost never asked for, not even during the procedures for selecting new bishops. This, of course, is an issue on which they would have much to say because they know the priests of the various dioceses well; what is more, they are devoid of any competitive interest.

In essence, women religious are treated as obedient and silent servants, and accepted only if they behave as such. Only recently did Pope Francis, during one of his periodic audiences with the superior generals of women's religious institutes, allow—at their explicit and precise request—a dialogue with him, as had always happened with their male counterparts.

If the church has not changed, women religious have. Their flagship association—the International Union of Superiors General (U.I.S.G.), which brings together almost all the women's congregations of active life in the

world—has initiated important international projects. The U.I.S.G. has also received prestigious awards for its work, most from non-Catholic institutions. Outside the church it is becoming an association that is listened to and respected. Inside the church it is almost as if the organization did not exist. Neither the president nor the women religious who are part of the U.I.S.G. governing council—capable women and experts on the situation of the church in different countries—are ever regularly consulted by any Vatican body, much less by the Council of Cardinals, an advisory council established by Pope Francis and formed only by cardinals.

### **Laywomen in the Church**

This is not to mention the parallel situation of subordination encountered by women in parishes, those who are catechism teachers, and also those interested in the life of the church from the inside or the outside. For example, women who work as journalists covering the church have long experienced condescension and disinterest from male church authorities, with the implication that they are less important and interesting than men. A hierarchy that is totally male and not used to having relationships with women obviously prefers to have contacts with men, even in the media.

In these conditions, it is difficult to create a theological and symbolic discourse that can justify the rejection of the female priesthood in any way that is credible to women in the church. The reasons offered for a male-only priesthood start to seem like they were invented to justify other things, such as the holding of power. I think instead that a real openness to listening to and collaborating with women would make this prohibition of women's ordination less difficult to accept for women. Above all, it would have the function of attenuating (if not actually zeroing out) much of the clericalism that today poisons the life of the church on an institutional level. If women could offer their points of view, their particular experiences, their freedom as people who do not pursue ecclesiastical career goals, it might bring to the church the breath of fresh air and life that it sorely needs.

Of course, this would also mean truly reopening the discussion about the role of the laity in the life of the church, with the consequence of de-emphasizing or at least further contextualizing the role of the clergy. Giving such a true opening to women would be a fulfillment of the desire of John XXIII—to throw open the windows of the church and to let fresh air into a sclerotic institution.



# The priesthood is not a profession. It is a mission. And not everyone has the same mission.

## A Modest Proposal

There is no need to cancel tradition or to destroy the symbolic meaning of a consecration in the name of an equal access to professions imposed by the contemporary social context. The priesthood is not a profession. It is a mission. And not everyone has the same mission. This is the prophetic message that the church claims but needs still to hear, a message that invites us to look at the world with eyes that are less ideological and more attentive to diversity, more respectful of spiritual needs. Those spiritual needs do not necessarily coincide with social needs.

But there is also another possibility, one that would allow women to acquire authoritative roles in the church without substantially altering tradition: appointing women who have especially distinguished themselves as cardinal deacons. They would not need to be ordained priests to serve in this office.

The idea was suggested to me many years ago by Mary Douglas, the great English anthropologist of Catholicism and a careful scholar of the role played by symbols in religious traditions. Perfectly aware of the symbolic significance of the male choice for the priesthood, Douglas also knew that in the tradition of the church there was a figure—that of the cardinal not ordained a priest—that could serve as a precedent for the development of this role for women.

Cardinals, as we know, are appointed exclusively by the pope. According to the criteria confirmed by the Council of Trent, their ranks can include non-ordained persons. It is true that according to the current Code of Canon Law one must be ordained a priest to be admitted to the order of cardinal deacons. However, this is a rule of canon law, not a dogma, and not even an ancient one. There have been many cardinals in the history of the church who were not ordained priests, like Rodrigo Borgia, later Pope Alexander VI, who received holy orders only shortly before being elected pontiff.

The presence of female figures in the College of Car-

dinals, a body whose tasks include electing future popes, would guarantee a greater voice in addressing the problems of the church and would finally give women the authoritative role they deserve in the Catholic community.

In the past it has been said that at least one of the cardinals appointed *in pectore* (those appointed by a pope who for various reasons does not make the appointment public) by John Paul II was a woman; some rumors point to Chiara Lubich and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. It has never been determined if this rumor was well-founded, but the very fact that it circulated and was considered possible—and above all the fact that there were authoritative candidates for the role—demonstrates how such an action can be practiced and accepted.

Opening up the church to women while maintaining the idea of diversity in mission must be a proposal that originates within the ecclesial institution, one that draws its origins from its traditions and from attentive listening to the Gospel message, not from social conditioning coming from outside. This requires serious self-criticism and a great deal of courage. Let us hope that in the future, a church that has grown and evolved over two millennia will surprise us in this way and give itself a prophetic look again.

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*Lucetta Scaraffia is a professor of contemporary history at Sapienza University of Rome. She was the founder and editor in chief of Women Church World magazine.*

# The Unanswered Question

*The sin of sexism in the church runs deep*

By Julia Brumbaugh

In his defense of “*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*,” which declared that “the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church’s faithful,” Avery Dulles, S.J., enumerated arguments for accepting the prohibition of women’s ordination as biblically, traditionally and theologically sound despite a range of serious theological objections. These arguments warrant revisiting, because the matters at stake speak to things at the heart of the question: sacraments, tradition and salvation.

Reading Dulles’s essay 25 years later, I am reminded of the reflection of the great Dominican ecclesialogist Cardinal Yves Congar: You can condemn a false answer, but not a real question. For Dulles, the question of women’s ordination had been asked and answered many times, and it has been answered definitely in the negative by the magisterium. But have the questions about women’s full participation in the life of the church really been answered? Has the question even been heard in all its dimensions?

The theological tension here is in the crux where the ancient practice of a male-only clergy—which existed in social and ecclesial contexts where women’s subordination and inferiority were largely assumed—now exists in a context where the church clearly teaches that women are not inferior or naturally subordinate to men. While at the surface the question about women’s ordination has been asked and answered, rarely has it been asked in this new context where women’s full human dignity is unreservedly affirmed and defended.

## Doctrine and Authority

In his essay, Dulles treats the history of women in the church as one in which the prevailing historical view that women are to be subordinated to men has not problematically shaped the practice of church structures down the centuries. Though he rejects sexism as an evil that must be resisted, in accord with the 20th- and 21st-century pastoral magisterium, he does not accept arguments that sexism has been entangled in the practice of ordination in ways that may have distorted it. Catholic scholars asking questions about women in the church have frequently

argued that the church’s teaching about and treatment of women shows that the sin of sexism runs much deeper than Dulles acknowledges.

In Dulles’s own theological legacy, there is ample evidence that questions like these, which interrogate the many contexts and motivations that shape our practices and teachings, are not only appropriate but proper to the theological task. For example, in 1976, in a talk titled “The Theologian and the Magisterium,” Dulles said:

It has become evident that those in positions of ecclesiastical power are naturally predisposed to accept ideas favorable to their own class interests. Popes and bishops, therefore, are inclined to speak in a way that enhances the authority of their office. The alert reader will take this into account when he interprets and evaluates official documents.

In that address, Dulles critiqued an understanding of doctrine and authority that reduced the role of theologians to expounding upon the teaching received from the bishops. In line with the practice of theology that informed the Second Vatican Council, Dulles argued that theologians are not merely the mouthpiece of the bishops and that they have a proper sphere of competence based on their work as scholars; indeed, he explores the idea that they form a magisterium that, together with the magisterium of pastors, works in “complementary and mutually corrective ways” to serve the church.

To engage this dialogue between the magisterium of the church’s pastors and that of the church’s theologians is the work of the whole church, living in the power of the Holy Spirit. That Spirit is not received exclusively through the formal and institutional structures of the hierarchy but is given to the whole church and to each of the baptized. To affirm this reality requires an imagination that includes the Spirit working boldly within communities, arising in and transforming the hearts of ordinary people of faith and blowing throughout the whole world. This Spirit opens our hearts to ever greater and wider love, reveals our failures



# The metaphor of the bridegroom and bride as an image of the divine-human encounter is ancient. But it is and remains a metaphor.

(past and present), makes possible true repentance and opens the way to a future yet to be realized. The Spirit and the Word co-create the church.

We live within the mystery of the Trinitarian God's enfolding love and desire for our flourishing; and in every age we learn and grow, even as we stumble, fail, forget and learn again. Nourished by Scripture and the sacraments, by prayer and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but also by the abundance of created reality and by compassion and solidarity with and from our many neighbors, Christians are called again and again to be open to discerning the arrival of the reign of God, who is in our midst yesterday, today and forever.

If the church, living in the power of the Holy Spirit and the memory of Jesus, awaits its fullness, then it is never enough to argue only from what has been done in the past. The full pastoral and theological project must ask: What is Christ in the Spirit doing now? What is God calling us to be now and in the future?

We live in a historical moment where, led by the Holy Spirit, the recognition of the full equality of women is dawning. There is so much work to be done to untangle sexism from our ideas and ways of being human together. For this work, we need the memory of Jesus' friendship and intimacy with women, including his trust of Mary Magdalene to be the first to receive and bear witness to his resurrection. We need to listen deeply to each other for how sexism has harmed and limited everyone. And we need our imaginations to be open to the Holy Spirit so we can become, together, a church where sexism—and the corresponding reality of women's subordination—is unthinkable.

## Equality, Complementarity and Subordination

Bringing this commitment to imagine a church healed of all sexism, I turn to the metaphor at the center of the

theological answer offered by Dulles (and others) for restricting ordination to men. Defenders of an all-male clergy insist that women and men stand together before God and that unjust discrimination against women must be fought and overcome. Women are not excluded from ordination because of sexism, they argue, but because of the nature of the Eucharist itself. The priest, Dulles argues, not only conveys the words of the Eucharist as a messenger, but stands *in persona Christi*—an icon of Christ himself, the bridegroom, turned toward his bride, the church, in love. Only a male person, Dulles writes, can fittingly be this icon.

This explanation stumbles for two reasons. It takes a beautiful biblical metaphor and constrains it by making it literal. Further, it reinscribes the subordination of women and the superiority of men, even as the broader tradition has taught with increasing clarity the full equality of all human beings before God.

## Metaphorical Language and God

In the famous phrase of St. Augustine of Hippo, "If you have understood, then what you have understood is not God" (*"si comprehendis non est Deus"*). The image Dulles and others use to demonstrate that the restriction of ordination to men is fitting is that of Christ the bridegroom turned toward the church, his bride, which is a metaphor. Jesus was never a bridegroom. He was no one's lover. This is not a problem to be overcome, but the condition of humanity speaking of God. We reach, but we do not grasp. No image, icon or metaphor; no human word, even the most ancient and revered, bypasses this limitation.

The metaphor of the bridegroom and bride as an image of the divine-human encounter is ancient. The prophet Hosea uses it, and many interpretations of the Song of Songs cast God or Christ as the bridegroom and the church or human beloved as the bride. We find the image in Ephesians and across the medieval European monastic tradition. Pope John Paul II favored it in his speaking and writing about women, marriage and the church. This metaphor powerfully illuminates the intimacy, passionate love and longing that characterizes God's love for God's people, Christ's love for the church and the human need for God. But it is and remains a metaphor.

Metaphorical language works in the movement between similarity and difference for the purpose of seeing something in a new way. Christian tradition uses the metaphor of lovers to explore the longing the human soul has for God and the desire of God for us. Yet, as Susan Ross has argued in **America** ("Can God Be a Bride?")



and elsewhere, this metaphor relies on an image of male and female relations in which the female person is profoundly subordinated to the male; the bridegroom gives and the bride receives. In a theology of the divine-human relationship, it is right to imagine the creature as utterly dependent on the Creator for her life. For example, in his sermons on the Song of Songs, St. Bernard of Clairvaux explored this image of lover and beloved. He understood that Christ was the lover who called, and the human being was the beloved who responded.

The point here is that the rich metaphor of the bridegroom and bride resonates because it breaks open our imaginations in fresh ways. God is not far from us but disarmingly near. God seeks us, calling our names. The depth of our longing will be more than answered by our Creator. It does not mean that God is a *man* and human beings are all *women*, and it does not mean that women and men have separate natures (whereas God and human beings do).

### **Illuminating a Mystery**

The argument that men can be an icon of Christ in the Eucharist and women cannot because of their different natures comes dangerously close to dividing men and women from each other and separating women from Christ, whose “male” nature women do not share. If we take this image literally—as prescribing reality concretely instead of illuminating, fragmentarily, a mystery—we might imagine that women and men are on different sides of some great divide. In a wider history that teaches women’s

subordination and in a culture where women’s work and dignity is often undervalued or denied, this danger is real. Yet such a separation that would put women outside the saving embrace of the incarnation is, and has always been, contrary to the faith.

With St. Paul, and in faith, women can and do say: “I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me” (Gal 2:19). The bodies of women are part of the body of Christ. Christian history and tradition is full to bursting with women who are luminous with the light of Christ. The great company of saints bears witness to this.

Christ, through the Holy Spirit, is in this moment healing our broken hearts and accompanying us as we struggle to undo the legacies of sexism (among the many other evils we must resist). For theology and practice of ordination and ministry to be credible, then the work Dulles endeavored to do—to understand more deeply the mystery of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist—must continue. But that work must illustrate at every turn the full humanity of every person. Arguments that fail to interrogate the ways the Christian tradition has been distorted by sin or that rely on images that reinforce women’s subordination are inadequate to the evangelical work to which we are all called.

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*Julia Brumbaugh is an associate professor of religious studies at Regis University in Denver, Colo.*

# WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT WOMEN'S HEALTH

*Better sexual education can help uphold the dignity of women and diminish damaging stigmas*

By Greer Hannan

“Do you have any physical defect that would prevent you from having marital relations?”

There was an uncomfortable pause when my parish priest reached this item in our prenuptial questionnaire. After all, as he jokingly pointed out, we were not supposed to know the answer yet. And despite being in our mid-30s and coming from very different religious traditions, we didn't. We laughed ruefully at this memory as we passed the parish office on a walk around our neighborhood the evening before the eight-month anniversary of our wedding. The true answer turned out to be discouraging.

I had been suffering all the symptoms of endometriosis for 20 years by the time I was married, but I had believed them to be nothing more than symptoms of being female,

rather than of having a significant chronic disease. Like many Catholic girls, my sex education consisted of lectures on the theology of the body, natural family planning and “*Humanae Vitae*.” All the information I received about human sexuality from my parents, my parishes and my Catholic college education had been filtered through a prism of narrowly interpreted Catholic sexual ethics. In fact, I only began to suspect something was wrong when, sometime after deciding to propose to my husband, I bought a copy of *The Vagina Bible*, by the obstetrician and gynecologist Jen Gunter, and slowly realized that the pain I had considered normal for two decades was a cause for real concern.

My vague uneasiness turned to panic and then to despair in the weeks following our tiny pandemic wedding. We were married on a blazing hot day in June in front of 14 guests, almost all immediate family. We did not have a reception, a honeymoon or even wedding rings, but we were deliriously happy to have publicly celebrated our commitment to each other and to be able to start our life together, which we hoped would soon include children. Instead, we began an arduous journey of simply trying to make the mechanics of sex work. Because they didn’t.

After weeks of failure, I started making appointments with gynecologists. I felt enraged every time they recorded “dyspareunia” on my charts, because the problem was not pain during sex; the problem was that sex was physically impossible. The cause of this failure was apparently the agonizing cramps I had been suffering from for three days a month since I was 13, a pain that no amount of ibuprofen or hot water bottles could quell. Now doctors explained to me that my recurring pain had tortured the muscles of my pelvic floor, which were now primed to respond with tension and pain to any stimulus, unable to relax on their own.

I embarked on an all-consuming, multipronged campaign to undo the damage: weekly pelvic floor physical therapy, daily exercises at home, a three-month course of acupuncture and Chinese herbs and a rigorous anti-inflammatory diet that demanded that I give up dairy, gluten, sugar, alcohol, coffee, tea, processed foods, artificial preservatives and certain fruits and vegetables. I grieved hard.

My predicament is not unique. Researchers believe that around 10 percent of women suffer from endometriosis. It is estimated that 10 to 20 percent of women endure dyspareunia. Women can experience a host of medical conditions throughout their life cycle, from painful fibroids to miscarriage, which while widespread, are treated as taboo

subjects. Too many girls and women experience the symptoms of these afflictions but do not receive the early diagnosis and interventions that could prevent further harm. Despite collapsing in public from my pelvic pain on multiple occasions, including while serving Mass as a teenage acolyte, I had never received medical attention for it until I was married. It was my husband’s concern for my suffering that finally empowered me to get help.

What troubles me now as much as the pain itself is the realization that the Catholic culture I grew up in contributed to my lack of diagnosis and treatment. Stigma about women’s embodied experience, the tendency to treat women’s bodies as a source of sexual temptation, and an excessive focus on sexual purity left me with an overwhelmingly negative attitude toward my own body and the possibility of my physical well-being. The exclusive use of patriarchal divine imagery undermined my sense of self-worth. I was made to feel that I should suffer silently and that doing so was somehow redemptive—or at least that doing otherwise would be shameful. Confronting all of this, along with feelings of failure as a new wife, has been an essential part of my healing.

I do not share this painful journey to take a side in the internecine controversies over the theology of the body, N.F.P. and “*Humanae Vitae*.” Rather, I am offering practical recommendations for how the church can better educate and serve women and girls in order to uphold the dignity of women’s embodied existence and diminish damaging stigmas. My hope is that these are beliefs and practices that Catholic parents, educators and ministers can embrace regardless of their ideological stances.

First, girls deserve to be given accurate biological information about their bodies from an early age. Girls should be taught the difference between their vulva and their vagina by parents and educators who can use those terms without blushing or flinching. If girls are to accurately report pain or other problems they are experiencing, they need the vocabulary to do it, without shame attached. Nursery terms for female genitalia serve only to protect adults from their own embarrassment.

Sex education should address the embodied existence of women in its fullness, not limited to intercourse, reproduction and fertility. Information should be provided on issues like breast health, chronic conditions like endometriosis and health issues that disproportionately affect women or are under-studied in women. Women need this information to be alert to challenges they may face, from



troubling symptoms to a lack of medical data due to the under-representation of women in medical studies.

Second, girls and women deserve to be treated and talked about as independent persons whose dignity and well-being matter in their own right, not dependent on their bonds to others. The sexual health information that girls and women receive should not be limited to what pertains to bearing children or pleasing a spouse. Likewise, Catholic parents and educators need to avoid the unfortunate tendency to treat girls and women as if they do not have a pelvis until they are married; age-appropriate sex education at all stages of development is crucial. Sacramental preparation for marriage should address human sexuality in a holistic way, not limiting its discussion to the injunction to practice natural family planning. Vowed women religious deserve easy access to women's health care, including routine screenings.

Speaking to and about women and girls as independent persons goes beyond health information and access to services. Catholic ministers should speak about vocation with a broader understanding of women's contributions and possible life paths, not limited to marriage vows, bearing children or religious vows. The worth of a woman's life and her growth in holiness is not dependent on making vows in a religious order or with a spouse; and her well-being, including her sexual health, matters for her own sake.

Third, girls and women deserve to hear positive theological reflections on their embodied existence as women. Catholic ministers ought to avoid repeating what I heard from some Sunday school and high school teachers—flawed patristic and medieval interpretations of the Genesis account of the Fall that suggest that pain in childbirth, and thus somehow all pain specific to women, is

a just punishment for original sin. Likewise, soteriologies that focus on participating in the suffering of Christ should not be used to discourage women from voicing their experiences of pain and seeking help. "Offer it up!" should not replace warranted medical attention.

As theologians have argued, scriptural stories of women should be more extensively incorporated into the three-year Lectionary cycle, so that the roles of women in salvation history are not treated as inconsequential or subordinate. Moreover, Catholic ministers should regularly include feminine imagery of God and scriptural invocations of God as mother in public prayer, faith sharing and spiritual direction. Drawing on the richness of divine feminine images embedded in the Scriptures reinforces that, even as God has no biological sex or gender, women's embodied experiences are as worthy of use for analogical speech about God as men's. Women and men are equally made in the image and likeness of God.

What has helped me most in my journey of healing has been the willingness of other women to meet my vulnerability with their own stories of struggle. Too often, their stories also included delayed diagnosis and lack of treatment options due to inadequate education and stigma about women's health. I am saddened to know that so many have suffered in silence for so long. But I am inspired by their openness and their own efforts to improve awareness and access to information for the next generation. That, and the unconditional love of my husband, gives me faith that the future can be better than the past.

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*Greer Hannan works in homeless services in Louisville, Ky. She holds a master's degree in nonprofit administration and a master of divinity degree.*

# LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO: IGNATIAN LEGACY FELLOWS

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## *Revelation and Healing: A Father and Son Reunion*

*Revelation and Healing: A Father and Son Reunion* recounts the author's slow journey from an adoption that left him longing for his biological mother and wondering about his biological father. Discovering, while in high school, his mother's identity, years later he found that of his biological father, Lionel Durand (1920-1961), a Black man born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Suddenly the author realized the source of his own immediate empathy as a boy with Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement he led. The author shares the often-shocking details of his adoption, and the therapies that brought him healing, therapies helpful not only to adoptees but to all who need healing from emotional suffering and losses of all kinds. With filial admiration, the author traces the life of his beloved father, Lionel Durand, friends with Gaullie and Picasso, an internationally acclaimed newsman and journalist, who fought in the French Resistance during World War II, twice imprisoned, twice escaped, and whose struggles for peace and justice mirror those of our own day. Welcome to this reading journey and its wondrous surprises.



Morgan Zo Callahan graduated from a Jesuit high school and then served nine years as a Jesuit scholastic. Through networking with other former Jesuits and Jesuits, Morgan discovered the support he needed to discover his biological father after a years-long search, and the help he needed to tell his story of trauma, loss and healing in this book.

Paperback and Kindle editions available at [www.amazon.com/Revelation-Healing-Father-Son-Reunion/dp/B0976276FC](http://www.amazon.com/Revelation-Healing-Father-Son-Reunion/dp/B0976276FC)

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## *Drawn from the contemplative Catholic tradition and Evans's own parenting experience, Rewilding Motherhood*

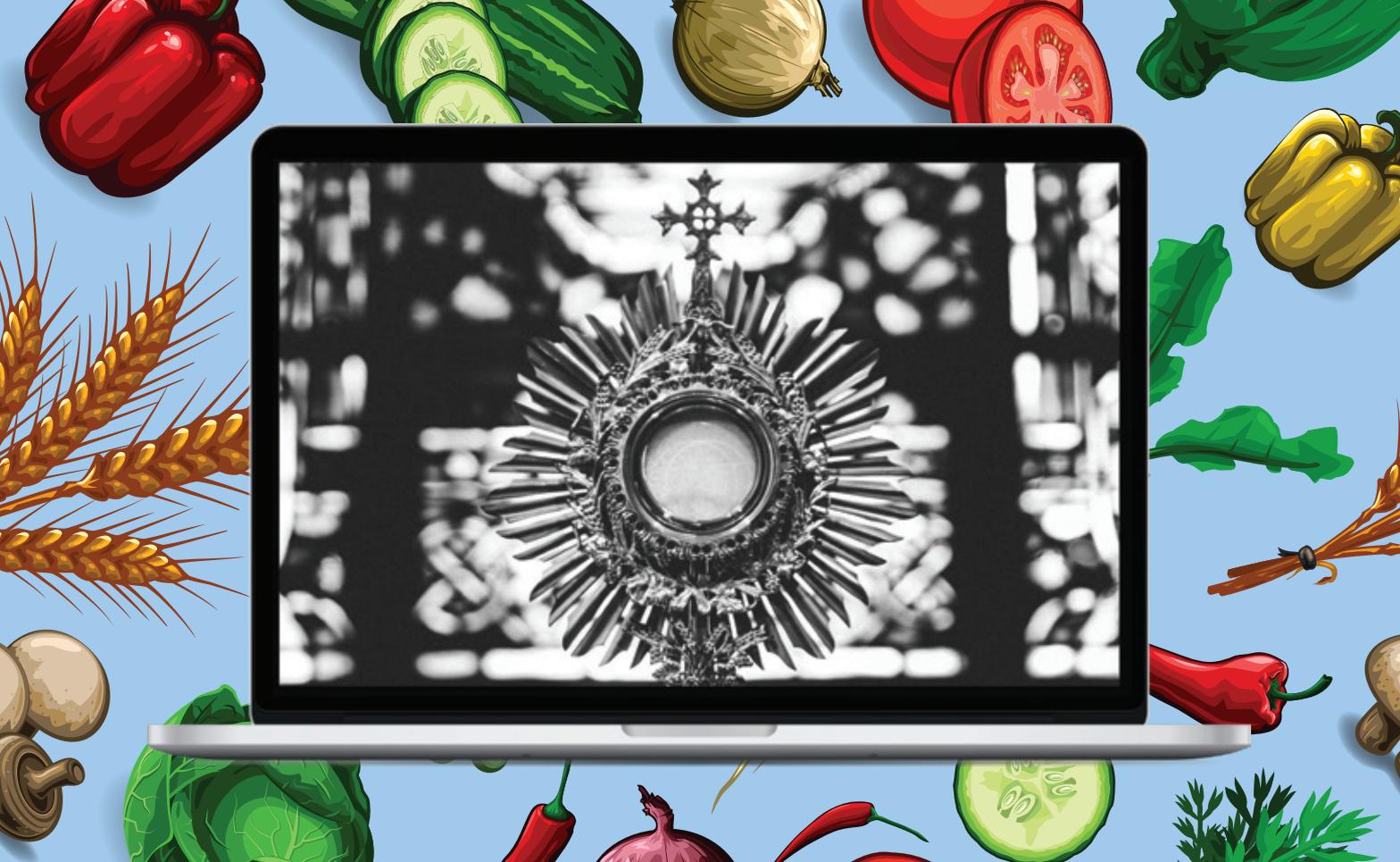
helps women deepen their connection to God through practices inherent to the life they're living now. Shannon encourages women to see motherhood as an opportunity to discover a vibrant feminine spirituality and a deeper knowledge of God and self.



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# HUNGRY HEARTS

By Alicia Torres

I won ‘Chopped.’ But my ministry focuses on a deeper hunger.

“She’s a minor celebrity,” one of the sisters joked as she introduced me to the man who would valet our car. It was the feast of St. Francis, 2016, and a benefactor was treating us to steaks at Ditka’s Restaurant. My heart was grateful, yet I often felt as if I were walking around the city with a sign hung around my neck. “Are you the nun who won ‘Chopped’?” people would ask. I was charmed by those encounters, but deeper down an inner friction left me unsettled.

Ultimately my vocation is about a far deeper encounter than a TV show about food can offer, and years later I discovered one of the most profound manifestations of this among children before the Bread of Life himself.

On Nov. 9, 2015, the Food Network premiered “Thanksgiving Soup-er Stars,” a special edition of “Chopped” that highlighted the work of chefs who serve the poor. I was cast to compete and won for my overall creative work with four

mystery ingredients—turkey, potatoes, cranberries and green beans. I put together a Mexican appetizer, a Mediterranean entree, a good old-fashioned dessert pancake with cocoa nib sauce and ended up in the winner’s circle.

Winning “Chopped” helped bring much attention to the Mission of Our Lady of the Angels, where my community and I serve on Chicago’s West Side. It also deepened my own sense of God’s providence. I entered our community, the Franciscans of the Eucharist of Chicago, in 2009 to live a life of prayer centered on daily Mass, eucharistic adoration and serving the poor. I never imagined that very ministry would land me on the front page of The Chicago Tribune.

Yet God’s providence goes far beyond me, the talents he has given me or even the fact that in winning the show’s competition I earned \$10,000 to help feed the hungry on the West Side and made connections in the food industry

that have led to literally tons of food donations.

Providence extends to all of us. We all have gifts we can share to help end the scandal of hunger in our nation, whether it be with our time, talent or treasure. But the deeper question is this: How do we respond to that hunger of the human heart to be known and loved?

My answer is woven into the fabric of my identity as a religious sister in the church, and I find it revealed to me in a very particular way when I am among the children I teach at a poor, inner-city Catholic school.

The 2020-21 school year posed unique challenges because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Knowing things would remain uncertain for the students throughout the year, I wanted to offer something that would be grounding for the children. I chose to lead the entire school, kindergartners through 8th grade (both in-person and online students), in a modified version of St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises. The main point of this retreat, which has been offered since the 16th century, is simple: to come to know, love and serve Jesus by letting Jesus know, love and serve us.

As we made our adventure through the Spiritual Exercises, I saw the children's love and devotion for Jesus deepen. I was especially touched by the humble assent of the youngest children to the mystery of the Eucharist. They were captivated by the Last Supper and Jesus' passion and death, and understood that he did it "for me." Throughout the retreat, they kept going back to the Eucharist. In some of their drawings, they would even write "Jesus" in the host to remember it is really he.

As I saw their love for the Eucharist kindled, I had a growing desire to share eucharistic adoration with them. Many years ago I truly met Jesus for the first time in adoration. In the daily holy hours that I have made for over a decade, I have come to experience a deep friendship with him that has become my spiritual lifeblood.

While driving to Mass in May of this year, the thought flashed across my mind: virtual adoration. An hour later I opened my laptop and found adoration live-streaming from the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd in Singapore. At school that morning, I told our 5-year-olds that we were going to do something very special: We were going to spend time with Jesus in adoration.

I showed them a map of the world, and we discovered it would take us at least a whole day by airplane to get to Singapore! Through technology, we could join the people in that cathedral so far away who were spending special, quiet time with Jesus. I told the children they could sit or kneel; but, most important, they should be very still inside, talk

to Jesus from their own hearts and let him speak to them.

I could feel the humidity of grace heavy in the air as the children went down on both knees, looking up at Jesus, truly present. It was as if there were only one heartbeat in the classroom—or rather, that all of our hearts were beating in union with Jesus' own heart. It was like I was living in the Acts of the Apostles, where "the community of believers were of one mind and heart." I felt as if I were no longer a teacher among students, but a disciple among disciples.

We remained silent for five minutes, many children bowing their heads, their little bodies so still. One classmate struggled with the stillness and quiet. But later he drew a beautiful picture of the Eucharist revealing that he, too, had been very aware of Jesus in his own heart. In first grade, after we finished, one of the boys placed his hands over his heart as he exclaimed, "My heart was on fire!" Many children said they wanted to tell Jesus, "I love you."

A few weeks later, during our final meditation, the children drew what they wanted to give to God. One of the girls showed me her drawing. "It is the Eucharist," she said with a big smile. She wanted to give to God the greatest treasure she knew. Another child explained her drawing to me: "I am giving Jesus the Eucharist and my heart."

A mother of several small children once told me that she viewed her home as a monastery, where Jesus invited her to pray with her children every day. In a kindergarten classroom in late April, in the midst of a global pandemic, I discovered the depths of what she meant. When I sensed my religious call many years ago, I thought I was giving up the gift of having children. But Jesus has shared many, many children with me as a religious sister, and our monastery this year was our classroom. Gathered there as a little community of believers around the Eucharist, a deeper dimension of my identity was revealed to me.

I am not alone in my desire to know, love and serve Jesus. By sharing the treasure of the Eucharist with these little ones, I have discovered a wealth far beyond a \$10,000 prize and minor celebrity status. I have discovered that the kingdom of heaven truly belongs to little children, and how blessed am I to find my place among them!

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*Alicia Torres is a member of the Franciscans of the Eucharist of Chicago. She works at the Mission of Our Lady of the Angels on Chicago's West Side and serves as a religion teacher in an inner-city Catholic school. Her writing has appeared in First Things, Catholic News Service and Living City.*



# Faith in the Field

By Marie Coronel

**I lost my baby and my father. But not my trust in God.**

In 2010, after years of witnessing my father's declining health, I learned just three months prior to my wedding that he had a progressive nuclear disorder called supranuclear palsy. As an only daughter, I adored my father. It was painful to watch him lose the ability to swallow, eat, breathe, walk and even talk. We were told my dad would not be able to attend my wedding, and he had only a few months to live. But my dad refused to accept that fate. Instead, he did what my parents had always taught me: Move forward; rely on our faith; trust in God. Not only did he make it to my wedding, he walked me down the aisle and, with my mom's help, danced with me at the reception.

My dad has always been a model of faith for me, and my family and my faith are inextricably intertwined. I grew up attending Catholic school, and my father was a stickler for making sure we attended Mass every Sunday. My parents instilled in me the lesson that no matter what life threw at me, God would always be there to guide me. I did not always appreciate this advice while growing up, but as an adult it became vital to my survival.

While raising young sons, I worked as an early morning television news reporter for my hometown station in San Diego. At the same time, I served as a caregiver to my dad. It was not always easy, but with the help of my mom,

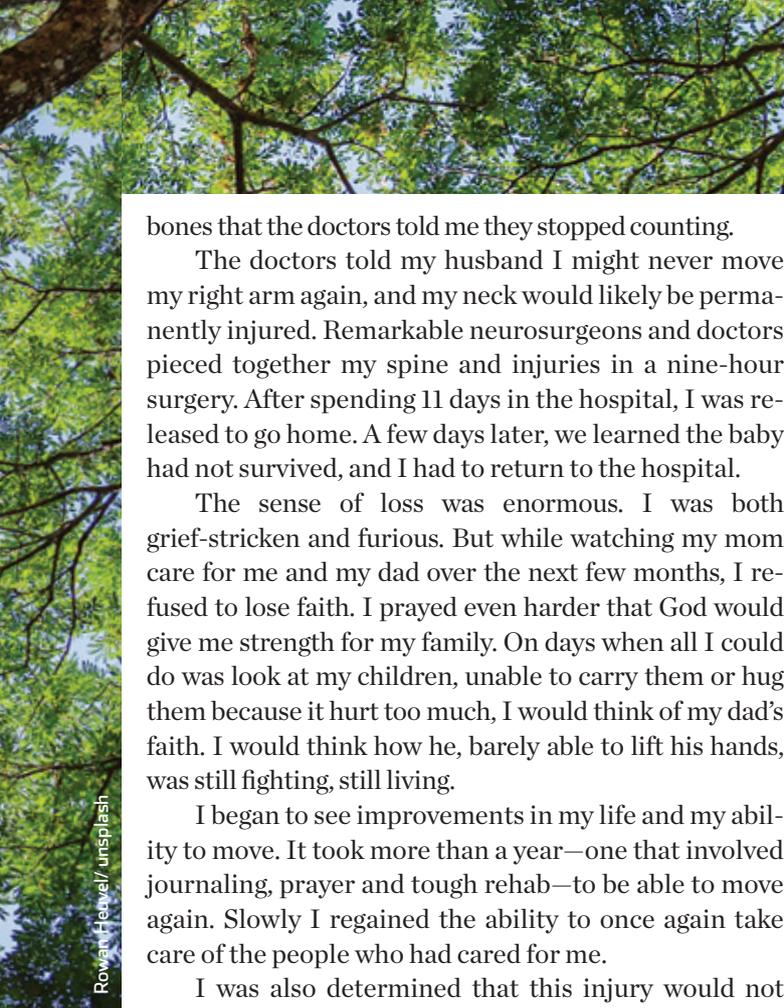
we were moving forward and letting our faith lead the way.

Our lives would change again in 2016 when I became pregnant. In the early weeks, the only sign of pregnancy was my St. Gerard medal, the patron saint of expectant mothers, hanging from my neck.

Not long after we learned about the pregnancy, a bad storm hit San Diego. As a reporter, I instinctively knew I would be out in the field the very next day, but I had a strange feeling in the pit of my stomach. As I got ready for work, I was oddly afraid, despite the fact that I had covered hurricanes and snowstorms before. In addition to my St. Gerard medal, that morning my mom pinned my father's miraculous medal on me.

The photographer and I headed out to report on downed trees. I got through one live report and was preparing to do my next live shot, but it never happened. Seconds before I was going to report live, a tree fell on me and my photographer. I was knocked unconscious, buried under tree branches, and first responders had to dig to find me.

I vaguely remember being in the ambulance looking for my mom and telling the E.M.T.s I was pregnant. In the intensive care unit, I wore a neck brace, and my arms were tied down in an attempt to stabilize me. I had suffered a concussion, was bleeding from my head and had so many broken



Rowan Feivel/unsplash

bones that the doctors told me they stopped counting.

The doctors told my husband I might never move my right arm again, and my neck would likely be permanently injured. Remarkable neurosurgeons and doctors pieced together my spine and injuries in a nine-hour surgery. After spending 11 days in the hospital, I was released to go home. A few days later, we learned the baby had not survived, and I had to return to the hospital.

The sense of loss was enormous. I was both grief-stricken and furious. But while watching my mom care for me and my dad over the next few months, I refused to lose faith. I prayed even harder that God would give me strength for my family. On days when all I could do was look at my children, unable to carry them or hug them because it hurt too much, I would think of my dad's faith. I would think how he, barely able to lift his hands, was still fighting, still living.

I began to see improvements in my life and my ability to move. It took more than a year—one that involved journaling, prayer and tough rehab—to be able to move again. Slowly I regained the ability to once again take care of the people who had cared for me.

I was also determined that this injury would not keep me from returning to the job I loved. When I eventually went back to work, my nerves were frayed. But once again, I thought of the advice of my parents: Pray to God, trust in God, and he will help you through it.

Then in 2020, my faith was once again tested: My father, whose inner spirit and faith I channeled while recovering from my injury, was dying. How could I wrap my mind around losing the person who had been my inspiration—the man who had lived 10 years longer than predicted, long enough to meet his three grandsons, Joseph, Patrick and Christopher.

I had to dig deep in my heart and pray with all I had that God would help me get through this goodbye. As I held his hand in the hospital, I was reminded of my own time in a similar hospital room, unable to move. I thought about all we had overcome together as a family. It took a lot of prayers, meditation and soul-searching to get to the point where I could tell my father it was O.K. for him to rest; I reassured him that we would see each other again. At the end of his life, I found myself giving my father the very advice he had always given me: Move forward, have faith and trust that God will guide you.

Marie Coronel is a reporter for ABC 10 News in San Diego, Calif.

## Trauma Studies

By Angelica Esquivel

Tears rush forth from  
a jagged chasm  
and we study them under  
a microscope to determine exactly  
what kind of weeping  
this is. I seek  
an unknown

grandfather, research genetics and  
epigenetics,  
rest in the simple

reasons for this desire of mine to  
stop, lay down and sigh me  
asleep.

My father made and he makes  
impossible promises to sober up  
and I forgave and I forgive him  
because I can walk the path

of his pain all the way

back to 1492, observe it in an  
anthropological kind of way.  
I've made a habit of quietly shaping

myself around the melancholy  
minds of others, the how and  
the why and  
at what moment  
they first felt

the ancient wound, an anemic smile  
cut to the tune of a man locked away  
in a log cabin, alone for the winter and  
maybe forever. Blank

snow, stark branches,  
sharp wind—it's rude, how  
the days sing

of our trauma without first asking if  
we'd like to discuss it. You sing to me  
and I am healed  
and undone.

Angelica Esquivel is a Xicana writer and embroidery artist from Ohio. Her work has appeared in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Lunch Ticket*, and *Chestnut Review*.





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# ‘I am Very Grateful I Taught Girls’

Mary Muldoon on teaching theology at a Jesuit school for young women

By Erika Rasmussen

*Editor’s Note: Erika Rasmussen graduated from Regis Jesuit High School in Denver, Colo., in 2016. Regis Jesuit is the only Jesuit high school in the United States that offers single-sex education for both boys and girls. She interviewed her high school theology teacher, Mary Muldoon, for *America*. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

*Regis Jesuit High School teaches both boys and girls, but they’re taught separately. This is very rare for a Jesuit school. How did you find your way to this unique place?*

The short answer is God, or something like that. Karma. God. When my family moved to Denver in 2000, Regis Jesuit was building a school for girls, scheduled to open in three years. We drove by and looked at the school—and this is weird—but I told my husband Tom, “I’m going to teach there in three years.” I had a spiritual director who was a Franciscan nun; she loved the Jesuits. The year before the girls’ school was going to open, she said, “You should go volunteer at the boys’ school. You need to get your foot in the door.” So I went to Father Sidney, and he put me in Sister Pat Dunphy’s classroom as a volunteer.

The next year, I applied to the boys’ school—and I got a rejection letter. They didn’t need a theology teacher. Then the girls’ school called me. I just feel like it was where I belonged. Sometimes it just seems like we get what we need.

Maybe the Jesuit school needed me, but I sure needed the Jesuits. It gave me a home, because I feel at home with the Jesuit spirituality.

*Share with us a memory from the beginning of your time teaching girls in the girls division?*

We did everything. We were just a small staff and a small school, and we were building something new. It was exciting to build a girls’ school and to participate in every level of it.

*What first surprised you about teaching all girls?*

Well, I’ve never done anything else. I stayed home with my kids, and before that, I was a director of religious education, and before that I was a Benedictine nun. I came to be very grateful that I taught girls, because it was a time for girls rising, claiming who they were and being strengthened by good academics and good spirituality. We gave the girls a very good experience, and the girls rose to it. Look at you

all: You were hungry for that kind of experience.

*What do your students teach you?*

Well, over the years, hard things have happened in Denver, starting with Columbine. These years of the 21st century have been really difficult from 2000 until now, with all these school shootings, with our environment, with contentious elections, with identity and now Covid. But what I see is a real hunger for spirituality. My students teach me about true spirituality. They teach me about God. Some of them don't believe in God, and they still teach me about God. My students are very much examples to me. They're very loving these days, very accepting, very kind. I'd say I get more out of teaching than I give in many, many ways.

*What do your students teach you about God?*

That God is big, and not to be contained in my ideas.

*Regis Jesuit is obviously a Catholic school, but people come from all sorts of different backgrounds, including myself. Have you seen interfaith dialogues blossoming between different understandings of the world in the girls you're teaching?*

The number-one class girls take senior year is "God Concepts," which focuses on world religions. They're very open to talking to each other about their faith. The trouble is, and this is kind of controversial, but the Catholic Church can also polarize people these days, right? **America** had that article about how to dialogue with opposing viewpoints in the church. And I think we need more of that.

When I asked my students which of the beatitudes they identified with, they said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." They're tired of all this combat. They're hungry for dialogue.

*High school for me was both very wonderful and very painful, and I know I'm not alone in that. From your perspective as a teacher, what is it like to be a teenage girl in 2021?*

I think each student has a very unique experience depending on many, many, many factors. Your experience, Erika, differentiated you. And then there are teenage girls of color who have a different experience. There are L.G.B.T.Q. girls who have a different experience. This is where *cura personalis* comes in. I hate to say anything about high school girls generally—except that it would be important to listen to each one and not lump them together, because each one comes to the table with such unique experiences.

*It has been noted that single-gender education works really well for girls, and maybe not as well for boys. Would*

*you have any insight there?*

That's a dilemma, isn't it? I think Regis is more aware now that we can't have such separate schools. We have been doing more and more together, while still preserving [the single-sex model]. Some people criticize that we do too much together and some people criticize that we don't do enough together. I think Regis is trying. I believe we have really good administrators and really good teachers who keep in mind that they want to do the best for everybody involved.

*How do you think Ignatian spirituality uniquely intersects with a high school girl's experience?*

The whole thing of becoming more of who you're meant to be: Ignatian spirituality gives you permission to do that, to see God in anything that you want to do, anybody you want to be. To realize that God is part of that can give high school girls a great freedom. Jesuit educators believe in thinking for yourselves: not teaching you what to think, but *how* to think. That's a great Jesuit gift.

Jesuit spirituality really rejoices in the human, the human who is not perfect. I think that can help girls with their spirituality, that they can rejoice in just being human.

*When I was in high school, I believed a slew of really terrible things about myself that aren't true. And I'm still learning how to see myself clearly. Are there things that girls at Regis Jesuit believe about themselves that aren't true, in the way that God loves them? What do you hope for them and for those beliefs?*

If I would define God as anything, it would be love. God loves what God has created. That's what prayer is. It's just letting yourself really be loved by God, and not beating yourself up. Sometimes there are things we do that aren't good for ourselves, but that's not God beating us up. God just wants our joy and our happiness.

I have a great spiritual director who always leads me to the love of God. And when I leave him—he is a Jesuit—I always feel that sense of God really loving me, and loving the world, and loving the people in the world, and nature and animals. My director helps me to see that.

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Erika Rasmussen is a former Joseph A. O'Hare fellow at America Media.

*Jesuit School Spotlight is a monthly feature focusing on Jesuit middle and secondary schools from around the country. It is underwritten in part by Jesuit high schools of the USA East Province of the Society of Jesus.*



# *Chris Thile Writes Psalms for the Doubting*

By Elyse Durham



AP Photo/Ann Helsenfelt

Chris Thile's religious arc can be traced through his decades of songwriting.

Long before the arrival of Covid-19, faith leaders were wringing their hands over another rapidly spreading phenomenon: the nones. Not to be confused with women religious, the term refers to the growing demographic of those who, when taking surveys, report their religion as “none.” In July, the Public Religion Research Institute found that nearly a quarter of Americans identify as nones, and that a large portion of this group (36 percent) are young adults.

Statistics like these are a mixed blessing. At best, they inspire conversations about reaching the unchurched. At worst, they provoke apocalyptic consternation over the coming collapse of organized religion, for which our pagan youth are to blame. In both cases, statistics alone miss the complexity and nuance of individual experience. Anyone seeking to understand the nones, old and young alike, might begin by listening to actual people.

And by listening, perhaps, to “Laysongs,” the new solo album by the singer-songwriter Chris Thile. Raised as a fundamentalist evangelical but now a self-described agnostic, Thile first sang about his faith in his teens, when he fronted the Grammy Award-winning Americana trio Nickel Creek.

Today, at 40, Thile is best known for two things: being the world's pre-eminent mandolinist (a feat that has won him platinum records, collaborations with master musicians like Yo-Yo Ma and a MacArthur “genius” grant) and leading the Punch Brothers, a bluegrass ensemble with a penchant for nautical balladry, sharp political

satire and dizzying virtuosity. But in “Laysongs,” Thile lays theatrics and sea captains aside and sings simply and honestly about his struggle to believe.

Thile's religious arc can be traced through his decades of songwriting. Nickel Creek's early offerings contained both explicit references to Christian faith (“The Hand Song”) and the seeds of doubt. In “Doubting Thomas,” 19-year-old Thile expresses both a desire “to be used to help others find truth” and fear that he'll “find proof” that his faith “is a lie.” Young Thile chides himself for these worries. “O me of little faith,” he sings in a voice as earnest as it is youthful.

Over a decade later, Thile's voice sounds as youthful as ever, but his Punch Brothers lyrics reveal a man who has left faith behind. In “Familiarity” Thile laments to his lover that he “doesn't know where we'll go/ To worship more than what we know.” Though now churchless, Thile still feels a pull to belong to something larger than himself. But where to find it?

This feeling of rootlessness is part of what led Thile to create “Laysongs.” Recorded in a decommissioned church during the lockdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, “Laysongs” is Thile's attempt to recreate the feeling of oneness that comes from gathering together, even as the pandemic kept everyone apart. Thile also imagined “Laysongs” as a collection of hymns for the churchless.

Mercifully, “Laysongs” sounds less like a Unitarian Universalist songbook and more like the Psalms. In a deft nine tracks, it spans the



# On ‘Laysongs,’ it is startling to hear Thile declare with fervor that ‘the naked God did live.’

entire emotional range captured by the prophet David: doubt, despair and even ecstatic outpourings of praise. For people of faith, “Laysongs” also provides an opportunity to glimpse inside the religious longings of those outside the church.

Bookended by the hymnlike “Laysong” and “Won’t You Come and Sing for Me” (a Hazel Dickens cover), “Laysongs” extols the value of community. Gathering together brings comfort, catharsis and shared wisdom to the afflicted.

And yet Thile laments the disorientation of the post-religious landscape, where “our souls are untethered/ And nothing’s sacred or profane,” a state that has left everyone “out of breath” (“Laysong”). Humans are “a species at war/ With itself since the day it was born” (“Dionysus”). Death is ever-present and greatly feared (“Salt (in the Wounds) of the Earth”), and the narrator of “Won’t You Come and Sing for Me” yearns for an afterlife, “where there’s no more sad parting.”

For all his doubts, Thile has no problem acknowledging the presence of evil. On “Laysong,” he urges the congregation to “drown out the enemy,” crying wearily that he has “had enough of him for the week.” In “Salt

(in the Wounds) of the Earth,” Thile’s three-part rumination on C. S. Lewis’s *The Screwtape Letters*, modern-day demons seek to demolish their charges’ faith. As is always the case with evil, there is nothing novel about the demons’ tactics; their chief argument against religion is the hypocrisy of all believers. The faithful weaponize religion as “a torch for the saved to bear/ Over all the sinners there” and “[Rub] salt in the wounds of the earth/ In the name of a savior,” seeking to boost their own egos rather than reach the lost. By the song cycle’s end, the demons celebrate a triumph: They have rendered the faith of the tempted “soul-crushingly weak.”

Thile’s formidable musical chops are on display in “Salt (in the Wounds).” As the demons reach a frenetic crescendo, so does he. His voice rasps and his playing becomes strident and urgent. There is a desperation to his tremolos and plucks; he plays as if he believes that if he could just strum hard and fast enough, he would silence his own demons once and for all. There is much more at stake here than singing a song.

But “Laysongs” also expresses Thile’s ache to encounter the divine. In the plaintive and tender “Dionysus,” he begs to be led “to some holy

place,” offering in return worship that is at once playful and sincere (“I’ll sing you what I see, Lord/.../ I’ll dance you what I hear”). The song’s title and second verse, with their references to imbibing, invite an alternate reading of “Dionysus” as a paean to hedonism. (As any Punch Brothers fan knows, Thile is fond of penning odes to alcohol.) But the vulnerability of “Dionysus” makes me think that it is more than a drinking song. Thile’s exuberance evokes someone who recognizes (rightly) that he has been given many gifts and wants to give back in kind—though he may not know to whom.

Taken as a whole, “Laysongs” poses urgent questions about matters of faith, the kinds of questions all of us encounter at one point or another: Can one acknowledge the reality of evil and death without succumbing to despair? Can hypocrisy exist in the presence of truth? How can we congregate without villainizing those outside the fold? And how can anyone see all these tensions and still dare to believe?

These questions, if not answered, are given a surprising response in the album’s ecstatic zenith, “God Is Alive Magic Is Afoot.” An effervescent reimagining of a folk song recorded by Buffy Sainte-Marie in 1969, “God Is Alive” displays Thile’s virtuosity at its finest. He matches the energy of “Salt (in the Wounds)” and then flies past it. He plays (and sings) like he has found the news the world has always waited for.

“God Is Alive” is the closest “Laysongs” comes to a declaration of faith. Its lyrics were penned by the late Jewish singer and poet Leonard Cohen, who was fond of referring to Christ in his work. In mystical, twisting language, Cohen tells of foolish

unbelievers (“Though mountains danced before them/ They said that God was dead”) and the resiliency of faith (“Though his death was published/ Round and round the world/ The heart did not believe”), of God’s purposes persisting in spite of the hypocrisy of those who “locked their coffers.” Most surprising of all, Cohen writes—and Thile sings—of the reality of the Resurrection: “Though his shrouds were hoisted/ The naked God did live.”

This summer, at the Punch Brothers’ second concert since the lockdown, I heard Chris Thile sing “God Is Alive” to a rapt outdoor audience in Indianapolis. There, as in “Laysongs,” it was startling to hear him declare with fervor that “the naked God did live.” Thile himself may not believe these words, but they are still true. And he still sang them, and they resonated through the amphitheater and into the minds of all who heard.

In the Gospel of Luke, Christ says that if the faithful should fall silent, the rocks would cry out to God in praise. Eyeing the nones’ rising numbers, those prone to apocalyptic imaginings would tell you that the rocks are warming up their voices. Don’t believe them. A day may come when all the faithful will have faded to dust. A day may come when the rocks will begin their solemn song. But if “Laysongs” is any indication, that day is not upon us—not yet.

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Elyse Durham is a fiction writer and essayist. Her work has appeared in *Image*, *The Cincinnati Review* and elsewhere. She lives in Indiana.

## The Year I Was Conspicuous

By Jennifer L. Freed

How eyes would track me on the street, in the store.  
How people would pause, double take,  
a cluster of faces looking on as I asked  
for apples or air mail envelopes.

Sometimes a cautious hand reaching out  
to touch my arm, my hair.  
Sometimes, a crowd  
surrounding me, mouths open, fingers pointing.

Sometimes, one or two in the crowd forgot  
that behind my blue eyes, the high bridge of my nose,  
my tongue with its failure to speak  
as they spoke, I  
was there,  
looking back.  
Those times, their stares  
were the stares of people watching TV.  
When I gestured, smiled, tried words I knew  
were their own,  
they startled, drew away.

I learned the weight  
of being watched.  
I grew tired.  
By the end of the year, I was brain-heavy,  
stone-faced.

But it was only  
one year.  
And the eyes on me were only  
curious.

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Jennifer L. Freed’s work appears or is forthcoming in *Atlanta Review*, *Comstock Review*, *The Worcester Review* and others. She was awarded the 2020 Samuel Washington Allen Prize. Her work can be found at [jfreed.weebly.com](http://jfreed.weebly.com)

# What's a Heaven for?

The fresco of "Christ the Redeemer in Glory With the Heavenly Host," by Niccolò Circignani (Il Pomarancio) (1588), in the Basilica of Sts. John and Paul in Rome.

The afterlife is having a moment.

In the past two years, no fewer than three well-publicized books by prominent intellectuals have explored the history and ethics of heaven and hell. While David Bentley Hart sought to challenge the justice of eternal damnation in *That All Shall Be Saved* and Bart Ehrman argued in *Heaven and Hell* that Christianity invented its afterlife with scant help from Jesus, Catherine Wolff's new book *Beyond* is a gentler and more personal journey. In it, she mixes well-written impressionistic summaries of various religious perspectives with personal anecdotes to answer the age-old question of what lies beyond the grave.

This book is not for anyone who wants to understand what a religious group thinks or believes about the afterlife. For that you will need a small library. It does hold promise, however, for the non-linear reader who wants

to dip into a set of beautifully curated vignettes about particular thinkers or topics. For example, if you wanted to learn in roughly three pages what Islam really says about jihad and the "seventy-two virgins" mentioned in the Quran, Wolff has you covered.

More than anything else, Wolff is a reassuring guide for the spiritually curious Christian. She often relies upon anecdotes and conversations with friends and colleagues, which is not necessarily a weakness, as her coterie is filled with impressive scholars and thought leaders. A talented curator, Wolff has synthesized, organized and summarized these key thinkers and perspectives into easily digestible small chapters.

Though it is not a history of the afterlife, *Beyond* is chronologically organized. Beginning with Neanderthals and what Wolff calls "primitive" religion, we learn about shamanic and in-

digenous beliefs. From there we move to "Ancient Religion," the eternally popular theories of the Egyptians and Mesopotamians regarding the afterlife, then on at breakneck speed through Judaism to Christianity, and then Islam. Hinduism and Buddhism find themselves as bedfellows in part six. Part seven melds science, psychedelics, transhumanism and near-death experiences into a tidy final section about our current age.

The scope of the book is audacious but not Promethean, as this is well-trodden ground. The Afterword tells us what Wolff herself knew from the beginning: "There are no definitive answers" and we should be open to the many potential ways of experiencing the divine. Whether that encounter is through prayer, meditation, ritual or hallucinogenic substances is up to us.

At the heart of this book is an admirable desire to demonstrate that the

**Beyond**  
How Humankind Thinks About Heaven  
By Catherine Wolff  
Riverhead  
352p \$28

secular and the spiritual do not have to be sharply divorced from one another. Christians do not have to be afraid of the religious and spiritual inquiries of others. Science is not the proverbial bogeyman. Even the Eleusinian mysteries, banned by the Christian emperor Theodosius I in 392 C.E., are presented as friendly attempts to answer eternal questions. The open, ecumenical spirit of the book is infectious and engaging. The non-Christian, the simply spiritually curious, the cafeteria Catholic and the smorgasbord Lutheran will have much to think and talk about.

While the personal anecdotes that punctuate the work provide refreshment from Wolff's eloquent but rich summaries of various arguments and thinkers, they also dilute the quality of the material. Wolff makes a conscious choice to "rely on believers" over scholars, but some precision and detail has been lost along the way. Though erudite, the book often lapses into broad generalizations.

I teach classes about life after death every year, and I tell my students that ideas about the afterlife tell us more about the hopes, fears and priorities of those speaking than they do about heaven and hell. In this respect, Wolff is no exception. While she protests that this is not a history, she organizes her discussion of various theories on the afterlife as if it were and has made revealing choices about what to include and when.

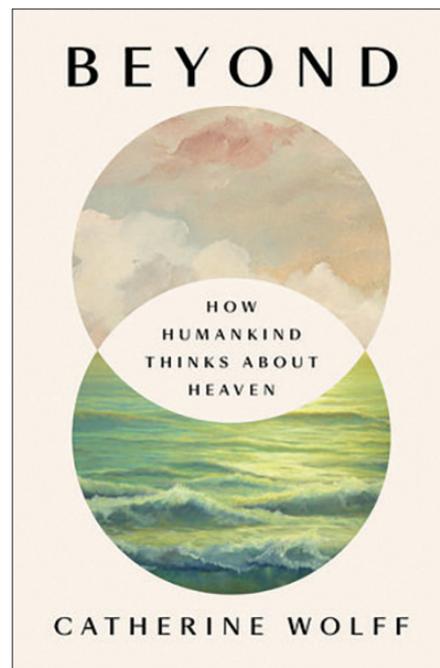
For instance, the section on Christianity is almost twice as long as any other section and remains a touchstone throughout the book. (To

her credit, Wolff is honest about her Christian bias.) Indigenous religions garner only a few paragraphs at the very beginning of the book alongside a discussion of "primal people." We progress in an intellectual ascent toward modern science, bypassing the ancient philosophers who had also asked scientific questions about cosmology and the afterlife.

The truth is that humans of every age have believed that they stood on the cusp of uncovering the secrets to eternal life. We are not so special.

It is perhaps because of this that I selfishly wish that Wolff could have tackled the oppressive structural hierarchies at play in descriptions of the afterlife in a more systematic fashion. While she briefly discusses Muslim theories about the moral inferiority of women, she does not mention the early Christians, some of whom also wondered if women would have to "become male" to enter the kingdom of God (e.g., *Gospel of Thomas* 114). Similarly, her brief discussion of Swedenborg's idea of women as heavenly childcare providers does not acknowledge that this expands and mirrors something dark and patriarchal: In the Latin Vision of Ezra, women are condemned for failing to breastfeed the children of strangers.

Gender, disability, race, identity and power have recently been the subject of important books about the afterlife by Meghan Henning and Taylor Petrey. (Full disclosure, I myself have also written about disability and the eradication of identity in heaven.) Ideas about the hereafter can inflict harm as well as provide comfort, so it



is disappointing that Wolff does not think about the kinds of lives, experiences and bodies implicitly devalued in her presentation of her own vision of heaven. Though Wolff's book is more of a quest than a historical account, every pilgrim should be aware of the environmental costs they incur on behalf of others in their journey.

Missed opportunities, however, are surely not the fault of Wolff—who writes clearly and has done enormous amounts of research—but are due to the scope of the project. If the truth of what happens when we die is unknowable, then documenting that truth in 300 pages is impossible. Fortunately, Wolff suggests, we have an eternity to explore its complexities.

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*Candida Moss is the Edward Cadbury Professor of Theology at the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom, and an award-winning author of five books, including Bible Nation: The United States of Hobby Lobby. She is also a frequent news commentator for CBS and CNN.*

# Danielle Evans brutally parodies bad apologies, and she satirizes the growing apology-P.R. industry. ●●

## Sorry Is All That You Can Say

In “Alcatraz,” a story from Danielle Evans’s collection *The Office of Historical Corrections*, the narrator gets a tattoo of William Faulkner’s famous maxim: “The past isn’t dead. It isn’t even past.” By the time we meet her, she already views this tattoo with wry dismay—it is a reminder of how thoroughly her life has been shaped by her mother’s project of restoring the reputation of a long-dead Alcatraz prisoner.

The meaning of a tattoo shifts with time as the person who gets it slowly becomes the person who has to live with it. A tattoo is itself an attempt to make something *stay* true. It is an attempt to stay the kind of person that you are. Therefore its meaning will always change as boast becomes confession, delight becomes discipline, hope is chastened and truth is stretched to cover our uncertainties. The Faulkner tattoo is true—but it can be true as a warning or as hope.

Evans has noticed how many of our current conflicts center on how to understand, heal from, punish, honor or make amends for past actions, from “cancel culture” to the freelance demolition of Confederate memorials to the #MeToo movement. In this collection, we meet a white girl who “goes viral” after posing in a bikini with a Confederate flag pattern,

an artist who may have realized that shifting cultural sands have turned him from lothario into abuser, and two Black women who take opposing approaches to the rectification of public historical falsehoods. These are stories of forged IDs and dubious death certificates, of the aggression lurking in apologies and the truth hidden in disproven accusations. If they sometimes seem a touch too blatantly ripped from the headlines, that is likely because the headlines nowadays reflect Evans’s own concerns.

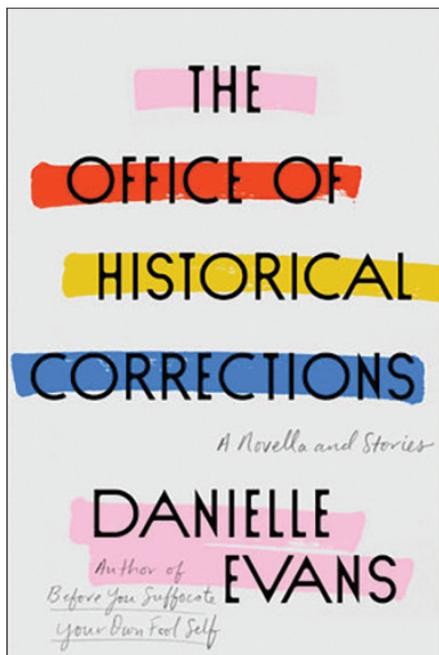
Evans’s previous collection, *Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self*, published in 2010, mixed slice-of-life stories with more exaggerated tales of moral choice. Her talents seem to lie in this heightened realm. In the new collection, my own favorite is the most allegorical entry, “Why Won’t Women Just Say What They Want.” In this tale of iconic figures, like “the Former Personal Assistant” and “the On-Again Off-Again Ex of His Wayward Youth,” a man called “the artist” apologizes. He apologizes to all of the women in his life—via pop-up galleries and billboards and phone games, shameless public acts of what might be self-abasement or self-promotion. This public making of amends has unpredictable private consequences: Some women feel vindicated, others bereft. One is inspired to make her own amends to somebody else and is rebuffed, while another becomes “The Girl So Stunned by Her Apology That

It Sent Her to Therapy Because She Had No Recollection of Meeting Him, Let Alone Having Sex With Him.”

Evans brutally and deliciously parodies bad apologies, and she satirizes the growing apology-P.R. industry. But unlike some expressions of the contemporary backlash against apologies, this parable lacks self-righteousness. Evans knows how insufficient apologies are—and how often we long for them anyway—whether we are receiving them or making them. She writes, “*Why are you like this?*” the Daughter wanted to ask everyone involved, but she sensed on some level that the question would be hypocritical, that she too was like something, and just didn’t know what yet.” The story’s final twist suggests that the artist himself underestimated how much his apologies might cost him.

At times Evans shows a deft comedic touch, as when she describes a woman alone with another woman’s boyfriend as “doing the dance of the seven red flags.” Her writing can also be gut-wrenching, as when she describes a Black woman forced to watch as the Black men she loves learn to hold themselves so carefully; men learn fear and women helpless sorrow, “how to watch a man worry about his body and the conditions under which someone might take his any gesture the wrong way.”

In “Boys Go to Jupiter,” the Confederate-bikini story, she emphasizes the way grief can isolate a person and make her cling to her isolation out of pride. “Claire’s anger has always been her own,” the narrator notes. Claire, the white undergraduate facing a clamoring tribunal of her peers, has not received much guidance in life and has not asked for any. She lashes out. She defends herself to the point



### The Office of Historical Corrections

By Danielle Evans  
Riverhead  
288p \$27

of willingly becoming a caricature, a living falsehood (she even affects a Southern drawl). This is a kind of character familiar to fans of Young Adult media, though mostly reserved for boys: Think Severus Snape or Logan Echolls. Evans lets the story play out until you are miserably certain there is no way back for Claire, neither forgiveness nor repentance—and then stops the story with an abruptness that might have appeared cheap in less-skilled hands, but here seems like the only way of preserving any possibility of a different outcome.

The final story is even less confident in the possibilities of reconstruction. Cassie, a Black woman who nowadays might get called an “institutionalist” (she loves Brutalism!) or a “normie,” works for the Institute for Public History, a government of-

fice dedicated to correcting historical misinformation. She is sent to rural Wisconsin to investigate an old but still remembered atrocity. In 1937, the white citizens of Cherry Mill burned down a Black newcomer’s home and business. They also assumed they had killed him. The first records of this violence were searing, moral and totally opposed: reports in Black newspapers versus a commemorative lynching photo for the perpetrators’ family albums. But times changed, and the town put up a plaque acknowledging its racist history. Cassie’s professional rival, a driven radical named Genevieve, wants to modify the plaque to list the names of the killers, many of whom have descendants still living in the town.

As controversy over Genevieve’s plan rises, new evidence suggests that the town’s Black victim may have escaped the mob. But the reasons behind his sojourn in this American Sodom—a burning city of the plain, defined for posterity by its merciless violence toward outsiders—threaten to expose more secrets, stranger and wider-reaching shames. Both white and Black townspeople have hidden their true histories. They had different reasons for their betrayals. Does that change their guilt?

In some stories, like the posthumous-pardon drama “Alcatraz,” Evans suggests that indefatigable commitment to historical truth may warp and damage us, but it can also cleanse some wounds. Maybe, for some people, hope is not lost; it has just been deliberately misfiled. But in this final story Evans gives no solace. (The names here are important: Cassandra, our narrator; Minerva, the victim’s sister, the goddess of wisdom whom

we always meet too late.) Evans does not stop the narrative before the full catastrophe. She stops where we are now: inside the catastrophe itself.

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Eve Tushnet is the author of *Gay and Catholic: Accepting My Sexuality, Finding Community, Living My Faith; and Punishment: A Love Story*.

### Longing for Transcendence

Sinéad O’Connor’s new memoir, *Rememberings*, is a revelation, full of beauty and spiritual vitality with flashes of humor and sheer irreverence. From fans in the 1990s, like me, who sang their hearts out to every line of every song in the album “I Do Not Want What I Haven’t Got,” to those who only vaguely know her name from the controversy that ensued in 1992 after she ripped up a photograph of Pope John Paul II during her performance on “Saturday Night Live,” there is something in *Rememberings* for everyone.

What may stand out most to readers of *America* is the fact that despite O’Connor’s reputation, arguably the heartbeat of the memoir is her sense of transcendence and her longing for it, as well as the depth of her religious imagination since childhood. She is famously hard to place religiously—a critic of institutional religion and a recent convert to Islam. But her memoir shows that her religious eclecticism is not the stuff of the lighter “spiritual but not religious” fare that is standard in consumer capitalism, with its predictable heroes and villains. Hers is made of serious stuff, tough stuff.

O’Connor doesn’t hide much of her story. She describes her child-

# Sinéad O'Connor presents as a confident seeker of transcendence answering to a higher calling. ♪♪

hood with a pious, devout but horrendously abusive mother, as well as time spent in a convent with Catholic nuns—some of whom were kind to her, encouraging her as a musician, and others predictably cruel (she calls her Irish upbringing as growing up in a “theocracy”). She also writes of the occasional sweet priest who offered her forgiveness as a child when she stole, lied or ran away.

As an adult artist, she took matters of the spirit into her own hands. Her first two albums are shot through with thoughts about death, while her later albums center on healing and forgiveness. Most religiously significant is her 2007 work “Theology,” an album, she tells us, “that I had wanted to make since I was seven years old...” She writes, “When I go out in a coffin it is the only album I am bringing with me.”

We learn that “Theology” was created after she spent the year 2000 studying theology at a university. There she was particularly taken with a priest who taught her the Hebrew Bible; he was able to “bring God off the page,” she writes. He encouraged O’Connor to do the same with her songs. So she transcribed her favorite lines from various books of the Hebrew Bible, rearranged them, made some adjustments for rhyming and created a full album from them.

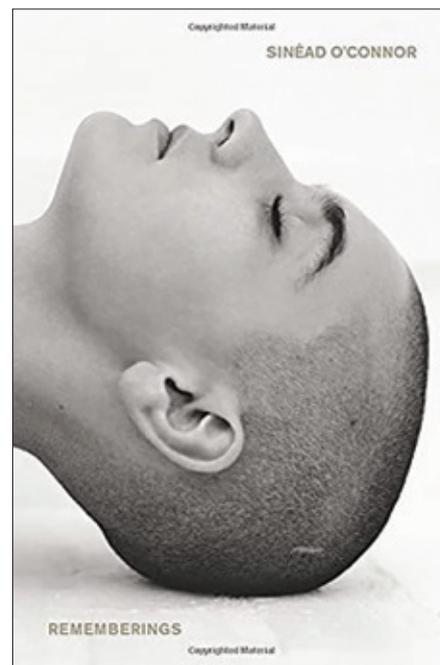
The most beautiful songs on “Theology” include “Whomsoever Dwells,” based on Psalm 91, and “33,” based on Psalm 33. (One can see wonderful vid-

eos of her singing these songs live on YouTube). It was the psalms, as she put it, that “let everyone see the humanity of God, the vulnerability, the moodiness, the emotionality.”

But in the process of writing her life story, O’Connor realized that beyond the obviously religious “Theology,” she had written other songs with familiar themes. “There’s an awful lot of songs about belief in the spirit world,” she writes. “There are songs that are concerned with the idea that the Gospels are indeed such, and the Scriptures of old are true. And that there is no such thing as death, which is what all God’s messengers have told us, no matter what religion they come from.”

The world had no narrative, no frame of reference in which to place a theologically sophisticated rebel, especially this part of her. We can hardly call her a Christian rocker—there is nothing cheesy in her songs, and nothing is scrubbed out in the cause of some moral narrative arc. She doesn’t relish her suffering either. She is unabashed about the role marijuana plays in her life, and despite her traumas, she *celebrates* her life and joys and even her body. There are many songs and reminiscences about her lovers, about how good she feels with her makeup looking nice, her shaved head, her “boobs upright,” and her unadulterated love of her four babies, now grown children (while admitting she wasn’t always the world’s perfect mother).

Hers is the story of a confident



## Rememberings

By Sinéad O'Connor  
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt  
304p \$28

seeker of transcendence answering to a higher calling, a nonconformist who refused to surrender to the role of the sexy pop artist or the pious singer-songwriter. When “Theology” appeared in 2007, dismissive, mocking reviews like this in Rolling Stone were typical: “How awesome is it being God? Not only do you get Sinéad to praise you in her reggae hymn ‘The Glory of Jah,’ you get a bonus acoustic version! Damn, Jah—that’s a heck of a lot of glory!”

They simply did not get it or her. Looking back, looking at old video clips and pictures of O’Connor wearing a priest’s collar, crosses or, now, a hijab, it wasn’t a mockery but a reclamation of language and symbols that have been central to her life all along.

Regarding the fact that she ripped

up the photo of Pope John Paul II 30 years ago, O'Connor says she has no regrets. That photograph had multiple layers of meaning for her: Her abusive mother had it on her wall for years; O'Connor also said she had read a book about the pope's knowledge of sex abuse crises. And she found his performative love of Ireland phony. (She writes about how horrendously abused and neglected so many Irish children are.)

She had planned to destroy this image that for her signified abuse and authoritarianism at many different levels for years. She did so on "Saturday Night Live" without telling anyone beforehand. But now the world could, at last, shuttle her into a familiar narrative: angry and totally nuts.

But the memoir has no hard feelings, and she admits there were times in her life that *were* truly crazy. There are producers, lovers and collaborators who steered her in the absolute wrong directions, but there are many more people in the book whom she loves and lavishly praises. Despite her abusive mother and difficult upbringing, she assures her father in a postscript that her mistakes and faults are her own and her parents are not to blame: "Please know," she writes in her characteristic humor, "that your daughter would have been as nutty as a fuckin' fruitcake and as crazy as a loon even if she'd had Saint Joseph and the Virgin Mary for parents and grown up in the Little House on the Prairie."

There is much trauma in the story of her life, but O'Connor doesn't wallow in it or ground her authority as an artist in it. There is more light, beauty and brilliance than their opposites. At this stage in her life, O'Connor tells us, she is in Ireland training to be a chap-

lain or health care assistant, inspired by the hospital staff in the United States and Ireland who have helped her over the years. The book is dedicated: "With love to all staff and patients at St. Patrick's University Hospital, Dublin."

Sometimes Catholic media seems to make a big deal out of the "Catholic imagination" in artists who happened to be raised Catholic, looking for theological substance when in all honesty there just is not much there. But not in this case, not with O'Connor. There is so much theological richness in *Rememberings* that it is almost overwhelming (and some truly wild stories too, including one involving Prince). You'll have to read for yourself. You won't regret it.

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Brenna Moore is a professor of theology at Fordham University in New York and the author, most recently, of *Kindred Spirits: Friendship and Resistance at the Edges of Modern Catholicism* (University of Chicago Press, 2021).

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## A Family's Saving Grace

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In 2009, Kirstin Valdez Quade published an arresting story in *The New Yorker* about a man named Amadeo Padilla, who was seeking redemption for his ne'er-do-well life by portraying Jesus in his New Mexico community's annual *penitente* procession and crucifixion ritual. In her second book and first novel, *The Five Wounds*, Valdez Quade returns to that story and expands it into a tale of five generations of a Catholic family in New Mexico during the year of their fleeting overlap. While the short story dazzled with its humor, verve, bold use of Catholic imagery and shocking

action, the novel settles in, lets the virtues and contradictions of its characters unfurl and offers profound insights about how the stability of even a tension-filled family can serve as a saving grace for each member.

When the book opens, Amadeo is 33, soon to carry the cross a mile up the "Calvario," and he learns he is about to become a grandfather. Valdez Quade writes that he is "no silky-haired, rosy-cheeked, honey-eyed Jesus, no Jesus-of-the-children, Jesus-with-the-lambs. Amadeo is muscled, hair shaved close to a scalp scarred from teenage fights, roll of skin where skull meets neck." As a teen, he fathered a daughter named Angel whose upbringing he scarcely participated in. But she shows up during Holy Week, 15 years old and pregnant, at the door of Amadeo's mother's house in the fictional town of Las Penas. It is a town steeped in traditions and family history, where you find "the same few surnames: Padilla, Martínez, Trujillo, García. Marriage and intermarriage like shuffling the same deck of cards."

Amadeo has shirked his parenting duties; his driver's license is suspended from multiple arrests for driving under the influence; he has earned no education beyond high school; and he has scarcely held a job. Yet his mother Yolanda loves him through all his transgressions, and she supports him with her government job in Santa Fe. Valdez Quade never portrays Amadeo as a callous lug, however. He is sensitive and introspective, if stubborn and undisciplined, knows exactly how badly he has screwed up his life and always yearns to embark on a more fruitful path. He moves through his days in a welter of good intentions that are never quite fulfilled. To give Amadeo

some direction, Yolanda has asked her uncle, Tío Tíve, to accept Amadeo into the *hermandad*, the brotherhood of men who prepare for their Holy Week re-enactment of the crucifixion through prayer and self-flagellation at the *morada*, a secret, sacred empty lot that was once the site of a gas station.

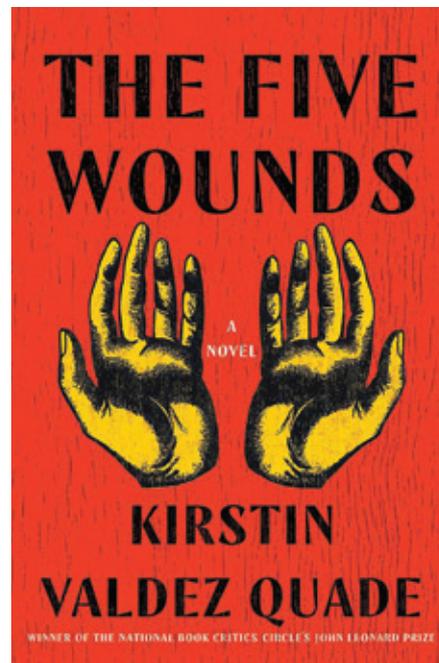
Amadeo takes his role seriously. At first he is annoyed that Angel has turned up now, when he is focusing all his concentration on the physical trial ahead. In Valdez Quade's original short story, the climax comes when Amadeo asks for the nails to be driven into his hands on Good Friday. In the novel, this pain is just the prelude. Amadeo hoped this dramatic act would transform his life somehow; Valdez Quade suggests that the dramatic moments in life merely set the stage for the hard, quotidian work of dealing with their aftermath with purpose and without despair. Although this performance gave Amadeo "a pureness of feeling that he can't recapture," it did not provide the redemption that he must instead earn through consistent support of his daughter and new grandson.

Yolanda has served as the clean-up specialist for the family her whole life. She protected Amadeo from her abusive husband, she loves Angel unconditionally, she financially supports everyone and she takes care of the cooking and cleaning. But near the beginning of the novel, Yolanda learns she has a life-threatening brain tumor. Yolanda thinks of a woman she knew who never revealed her cancer or accepted treatment for it: "But though her mother had a friend who approached cancer like that, to save her family the pain, and though this seems both admirable and courageous, and smacks appealingly of martyrdom,

Yolanda understands that she is afraid and she will get professional support, because her need to talk to someone about what is happening to her is stronger than her need to avoid it." Still, although Yolanda secretly seeks treatment, she does not disclose her condition to Angel or Amadeo, and the reader cannot help but cringe as they focus only on themselves and fail to perceive Yolanda's suffering.

Angel is the character who infuses the family with energy and hope. She is enrolled in a program for teen mothers called Smart Starts! with a teacher she idolizes, and she follows all its recommendations religiously. Angel has been longing for attention her whole life, a yearning at the root of why she became pregnant and why she had a disagreement with her mother that prompted her to decamp to Yolanda's house. Angel is a wonderful character: typically disciplined, cheerful and studious, but occasionally switching into a darker mode and becoming impulsive like the teenager she is. Angel always seeks justice and understanding, while Yolanda keeps history and tradition in mind. Angel thinks it is insane that Amadeo asked to have nails driven through his hands. Yolanda tells her, "I don't know what to tell you. It's an important part of who we are, and it keeps the men out of trouble."

The secrets these characters keep from each other accrue throughout the novel until they emerge in a series of explosive moments, after which the family members must determine just how strong they can be for each other. In the end, Amadeo realizes, "The procession isn't about punishment or shame. It is about needing to take on the pain of loved ones. To take on that pain, first you have to see it. And see how you inflict it."



### The Five Wounds

By Kirstin Valdez Quade  
W. W. Norton  
419p \$26.95

*The Five Wounds* is a story about living with the consequences of choices and actions. The novel cycles around luminous moments of connection its characters experience when they commit fully to one another. Yolanda's whole life was dedicated to commitment. As the story plays out, her more fickle family members finally begin to see the purpose of maintaining such steady grace. Each member of the family embodies human weaknesses yet remains worthy of love, and Valdez Quade shows they are stronger together than any of them is alone.

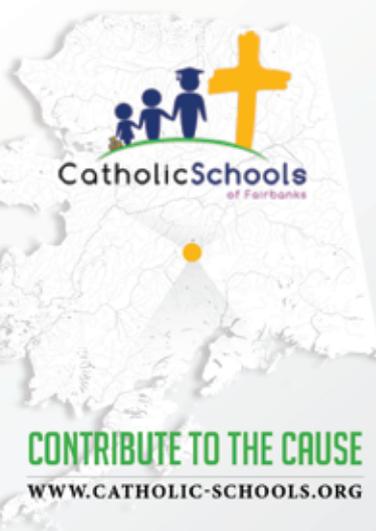
Jenny Shank's story collection *Mixed Company* won the George Garrett Fiction Prize and will be published by Texas Review Press in October 2021. She teaches in the Mile High MFA program at Regis University in Denver.

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## A Family Affair

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), OCT. 3, 2021

READINGS: GN 2:18-24; PS 128; HEB 2:9-11; MK 10:2-16

Today's readings offer reflections on humanity's relationship with God, the animal world and one another. The readings show an evolution of thoughts on relationships, and they remind us that some social and cultural ideals require reinterpretation for different contexts.

The first reading from Genesis includes one of the accounts of creation of humans and animals. Caution and care are needed, as this story has been misinterpreted to assert human domination over nonhuman animals and women's subordination to men. These skewed readings reflect the interpreter's biases more than the text's intent.

This creation story affirms divine creative power, connection to and care for all creation. Depicting God crafting the first human and animating human life with divine breath highlights the intimate connection between creator and creature. The creation of the second human from the rib of the first similarly shows humans in close relation to one another, not in a hierarchical relationship but rather in a partnership as both are united by their shared status as creatures of God. The creation of other living creatures in between the creation of male and female human beings situates animal life with humans, affirming interconnections in the work of the world. By calling on the human to name the animals, humans participate in the direction and life of animals, receiving some authority but also responsibility for animals.

The Gospel from Mark also reflects on relationships: husband-wife and adult-child. The longer Lectionary reading should be preferred. As

happens elsewhere in the Gospels, the Pharisees attempt to corner Jesus into saying something unfavorable about Jewish law, but Jesus does not fall into the trap. When questioned about divorce, Jesus asks what the law says. They affirm that a husband can divorce a wife, an interpretation of Dt 24:1-4 that gave men power to divorce women and made it difficult for women to initiate divorce. In response, Jesus reinterprets the purpose and meaning of the law in a few ways: 1) Jesus states that the divorce law was needed when given because of the Israelites' "hardness of heart." 2) Jesus interprets the divorce law in light of the creation account from the first reading. 3) Jesus interprets the divorce law and second marriages in light of the commandment against adultery.

Jesus' methods of interpretation offer an example for how to read Scripture. Jesus situates the law in its historical context and states its purpose for its original audience. Jesus then uses the larger Scriptural tradition to reflect on human unions, and he affirms relationships while radically reimagining their power dynamics.

In ancient Israel, adultery had a narrow meaning that applied to a man having a sexual relationship with a married woman. Adultery was an offense against the woman's husband, not against the husband's wife. Any offense against the woman was considered of lesser import than the violation of a man's control over a wife's sexual activity. While today adultery is thought of as an infidelity against one's spouse, this understanding is not the premise of the ancient commandment against adultery.

*'Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.'*  
(Mk 10:15)

### Praying With Scripture

What can you do to strengthen your relationships?

What should someone do if they are in an unhealthy relationship?

Do you carefully read Scripture, especially mindful of biases and assumptions you might bring to the texts?

Jesus' interpretation broadens the scope of what constitutes adultery, and it includes women as possible adulterers. While that might sound negative, it is a transformative vision of women within the marriage as equal partners, and by extension equal offenders and equally offended. Jesus places more emphasis on the violation within the union than on one man's violation of another man's rights.

At the end of the reading, the hierarchical relationship between adults and children is reimagined, as Jesus encourages children to be brought into his midst. Jesus affirms the value of children as equal to adults, as all are invited to hear the Gospel and be blessed. Moreover, Jesus recognizes children in their own right and calls on adults to be like them in order to receive the kingdom of God.

## Wisdom and Service

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), OCT. 10, 2021

READINGS: WIS 7:7-11; PS 90; HEB 4:12-13; MK 10:17-30

Scripture can challenge our ways of thinking and living. It calls on us to grapple with the world, and it can inspire good and bad actions with its diverse texts. The first reading and the Gospel should prompt appreciation and action, emphasizing the value of wisdom and the need to serve the poor.

The first reading comes from the Wisdom of Solomon, one of the books from the Greek canon of the Old Testament that is included in Catholic and Orthodox Christian Bibles. As in the book of Proverbs (see Nov. 8, 2020 Word column), Woman Wisdom is prominent in the book of Wisdom. Today's reading depicts a person praying for the arrival of Woman Wisdom, as she is more valuable and more loved than power, riches, health and beauty. The text reminds us to appreciate and seek knowledge and understanding, embracing wisdom in order to live rightly.

The Gospel from Mark reminds us to serve people who are poor, and it challenges us to live selflessly. In the Gospel, Jesus encounters a devout man who asks him what it takes to inherit eternal life. Jesus highlights five of the Ten Command-

ments: prohibitions against murder, adultery, stealing and bearing false witness and the affirmation to honor parents. According to Mark, Jesus also includes a prohibition against defrauding. This inclusion, which is lacking in Matthew or Luke's account, might have in mind the law against coveting a neighbor's possessions (Ex 20:17, Dt 5:21). It could be influenced by a law against withholding earned income (Dt 24:14), and it might reflect a problem of defrauding within Mark's community.

Jesus affirms Jewish laws and adds to them, insisting to the man: "Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." The interest in care for the poor is foundational to the Gospel. Jesus connects this action to the selfless love that he models through his ministry and through his sacrifice on the Cross. Moreover, he requires his followers to live with others in mind, emphasizing service, action and sacrifice. Note that Jesus tells the person to sell his items and *then* return to him, suggesting that the selfless action precedes entry into

*'Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor.'*  
(Mk 10:21)

### Praying With Scripture

Do you value wisdom and prudence, even if it challenges you?

In what ways can you help communities that are poor and vulnerable?

How can you increase your service to others?

the faith community.

This Gospel is another reminder of putting faith into action. Sometimes this message is visible through Jesus' healing and service ministry, but today we hear of self-sacrifice as an aspect of full participation in faith in Christ. How do we respond to this command? The man in the Gospel is shocked and sullen over the command to give up his possessions. The disciples are astonished and consider this to be almost an impossibility. Difficult or not, the Gospel is clear in its insistence on care for the poor.

## Suffering Servants

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), OCT. 17, 2021

READINGS: IS 53:10-11; PS 33; HEB 4:14-16; MK 10:35-45

In the first reading and the Gospel, we hear about the importance of service, which builds on themes from last Sunday's readings. Today we are prompted to reflect on ways that we can serve one another. We are also challenged to address suffering in our midst.

The first reading is from one of the

servant songs in the book of Isaiah. It describes God choosing someone to suffer for the sake of others. The servant's suffering shares similarities with purification offerings, which were typically animal sacrifices made at the sanctuary for purification or forgiveness of sin. Although the servant suffers, he finds relief in knowing that his

suffering helps others. Because of the language of suffering and the image of people being redeemed, this text and the other servant songs have been interpreted in light of Jesus' suffering and death.

Beyond that explicitly Christological reading, the servant song offers a complicated reflection on suffer-

ing. For Isaiah, the suffering servant may have been a specific person, the prophet himself or the community of Jewish exiles living in Babylon. The prophecy offers hope that those who suffer “shall see his descendants in a long life...[and] shall see the light in fullness of days.” It calls on sufferers to be future-oriented and recognize potential relief and positive impacts down the road. Yet we should not take this to mean that people should simply suffer in hopes of eventual favorable outcomes. Scripture also calls on us to relieve suffering, not only cope with it.

The Gospel for today highlights this point with its emphasis on service. The Lectionary offers a long or short option, with the longer text

giving more background and context for Jesus’ interaction with the disciples. James and John ask Jesus how they can be seated on his right and left, suggesting they want an elevated status and authority. Jesus insists, “Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all.” Jesus then expresses that he serves and gives his life for many, echoing the language found in the first reading.

Again, we hear the necessity of service to others. Both readings are clear that selfless service can require suffering, and Jesus goes further by calling on the disciples to serve, affirming that true leadership requires service.

*‘If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.’ (Mk 9:35)*

### *Praying With Scripture*

What can you do to alleviate suffering in your local community, country and the world?

What do you expect of your leaders?

Do you look for ways to serve others?

## Inclusive Healing

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), OCT. 24, 2021

READINGS: JER 31:7-9; PS 126; HEB 5:1-6; MK 10:46-52

Today’s readings focus on healing. They highlight God’s care and power to heal, and they remind us to pray for what requires healing in our lives. Within these texts, we are also reminded to recognize the value and worthiness of all people and to avoid ableist thinking.

Although much of Jeremiah describes hardship and suffering surrounding the Babylonian exile, in the first reading we hear a vision about a time after exile. The vision not only describes people returning home but returning restored. Their sadness and distress are replaced with joyful songs of praise. Their corrupt behavior is improved, with God helping the people not to stumble. When describing who comes back, the text insists that peo-

ple of Israel and Judah will return, including those who have difficulty seeing and walking and women who are pregnant and in labor. Why list these groups separately? The text highlights people who are often overlooked, disregarded and devalued, sadly in antiquity and in the present. Jeremiah stresses the inclusivity of God’s care as he names these oft-ignored groups. Moreover, Jeremiah helps the larger group be more attuned to the diversity within the community and to recognize all people as equal participants in God’s restoration.

Similarly, healing is at the forefront of the Gospel from Mark. As Jesus, his disciples and a large crowd leave Jericho, a blind person cries out multiple times requesting com-

*‘Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me.’ (Mk 10:47)*

### *Praying With Scripture*

When have you felt disregarded and ignored?

Do you overlook people because they look or act differently than you?

What healing do you need in your life?

passion and mercy. Despite the many healings Jesus had already performed in his ministry, his followers scold the man and disregard him and his request. Jesus, however, models the proper response. He has his followers reach out to the man, correcting their

behavior. Jesus then asks the man what he wants, and the man names his desire: “I want to see.” By making the request, the man shows his faith in Jesus’ compassionate healing power, which Jesus affirms by saying, “Your faith has saved you.”

Unfortunately, there is much suffering in the world, and many are in need of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual healing. Today’s readings remind us to pray for healing, being specific and intentional in what is requested. Likewise, the readings should

inform how we think about people with ailments and disabilities. We must see them, acknowledging their presence and contributions, including them and honoring their needs.

## Living and Dead

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), OCT. 31, 2021

READINGS: DT 6:2-6; PS 18; HEB 7:23-28; MK 12:28-34

The word *triduum* is often used at the end of the Lenten season to refer to the period of three days that begins on the evening of Holy Thursday and culminates on Easter Sunday. The liturgical calendar includes another triduum that begins today, although it is less commonly referred to in this manner.

The Solemnity of All Saints is celebrated on Nov. 1 and in conjunction with All Hallows’ Eve (Oct. 31) and All Souls’ Day (Nov. 2) forms another triduum. For a host of reasons, All Hallows’ Eve (Halloween) has largely become a secular holiday, but its historical connection to All Saints’ and All Souls’ Day is significant. This sacred triduum remembers the dead, including saints, martyrs and finally all those who have died.

Today’s Gospel is especially instructive when read in light of this time of prayer and remembrance of the dead. The reading comes near the end of Jesus’ ministry in Mark, after he has entered Jerusalem (on Palm Sunday) and before the Last Supper. Jesus’ death is imminent in the Gospel narrative, and his final days are spent teaching on topics such as his forthcoming death and resurrection.

In one of his conversations with the scribes, Jesus is asked which commandment is first, and he gives a three-part answer drawing from Dt 6:4-5 and Lv 19:18. From Deuteronomy, Jesus quotes the *Shema Yisrael* (Hear, O Israel), the Jewish prayer that expresses communal faith in God and the oneness of God. He then expresses the need to love God with one’s whole self. From Leviticus, Jesus stresses the importance of loving one’s neighbor.

At different points in Matthew and Luke, Jesus also proclaims the importance of these laws. In Matthew, Jesus affirms, “The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments” (Mt 22:4). In Luke, Jesus tells the parable of the good Samaritan, insisting that a neighbor shows mercy to a person in need. In Mark, the conversation ends with a realization that by following these commandments a person is near the kingdom of God, a conclusion that has an eschatological tone.

As we remember those who have died, we can reflect on how their lives and sacrifices influence and inspire our lives. We can also use this time to assess how we are living. By living out devo-

*‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’  
(Mk 10:34)*

### Praying With Scripture

What do you do to commemorate the dead?

How do you show your love of God and neighbor?

How can praying for and with the dead enrich your spiritual life?

tion to God and to neighbor, we ultimately draw nearer to God’s kingdom.

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

# The Pandemic Mirror

*We saw ourselves, not our neighbor*

By Gloria Purvis



When Cardinal Wilton Gregory of Washington, D.C., announced in March 2020 that the Mass would be closed to the public because of Covid-19, I was not angry. His concern for my physical health was prudent. He did not use spiritual bromides to lull us into believing our bodies are impervious to the effects of the world or tell us that defying public health orders in an effort to attend Mass is a true witness of our devotion to God.

The Mass was not cancelled and was still being celebrated by priests, even if the mode of participation by the laity changed. It was available online for those who wanted to watch it, and bishops issued dispensations so we incurred no sin by not attending in person. But some clergymen were angry with what they perceived as bending the knee to the state. They said public health was not within the purview of bishops, who should only care for our souls.

I was told I was fearful because I obeyed the bishop and followed lockdown directives, and that if I were a true believer I would be doing all I could to get to the Holy Mass. To some, the pandemic was a demonic force that overtook the world with the express purpose of separating the people of God from the Eucharist. Obedience to our bishop and public health directives were thus evidence of our excessive fear. Reckless behavior was characterized as holy courage.

Still, I could not forget the desperate news from Italy in early 2020, which warned the world to take the virus seriously. Italians endured so many deaths and long lockdowns, but they grew creative in their isolation. They opened their windows and sang together, and some even played tennis between apartments. They craved contact with others but remained inside in order to protect others. Love your neighbor as yourself, Christ commanded. The pandemic certainly offered plenty of opportunity to do that.

Sadly, the fear of dwindling church donations and a downturn in the economy led some to suggest that the vulnerable should be on lockdown but the rest of us should be free to live as we had before the pandemic. Why should we be penalized for our good health or youth? Why should we suffer poverty or risk being poor? The inability to operate businesses as usual infuriated more people than I expected. Clergy and laypeople who normally defend the life of the weak among us, especially preborn children, were agitated that they might taste economic hardship because of lockdowns—lockdowns undertaken for the common good.

We who enjoin women in crisis pregnancies to voluntarily accept poverty, to jettison their previous lifestyle and to forgo whatever interferes with mothering for the sake of their child's life did not heed our own advice. How could we complain about sacrifice un-

dertaken for the common good, for the love of neighbor, for the protection of the vulnerable?

The pandemic lifted up a mirror, and what was reflected back was not the image of a loving God but craven, self-centered humanity. As soon as we were given a chance to kiss the mantle of poverty and self-sacrifice, we rebelled. As soon as we were offered the cross, we ran.

More than anything, this pandemic should push American Catholics to recall what we believe about the human person and the defense of human life. Let us recall Christ's example of sacrifice. Let us recall the suffering of the holy martyrs. We may not suffer as the martyrs did, but we can witness to our faith by embracing the restrictions of the pandemic for the love of God and neighbor. Let us not just be preachers or hearers of the word, but doers of the word. The message we Catholics give to those who are considering choosing death for their preborn children should be the message we heed in our own lives. Choose life! Our neighbors' lives are worthy of protection too.

Gloria Purvis is host of "The Gloria Purvis Podcast" from America Media.  
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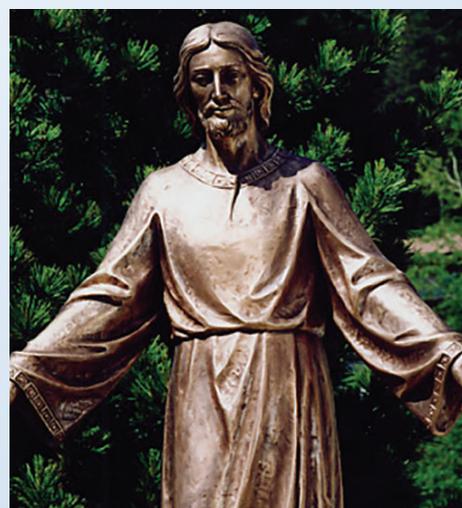
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